

**ENGLISH TRAINING AND LITERARY WORK CREATION FOR
VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS OF SMK NEGERI 1
SITUBONDO**

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Abstract

In the context of vocational education, equipping students with both English proficiency and creative expression skills is essential for enhancing their employability and personal development. This community-based project, conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Situbondo, Indonesia, aimed to strengthen students' foundational English skills and promote creative literacy through a dual-focus approach: communicative English training and guided literary writing. Utilizing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), and experiential learning frameworks, the program provided students with practical speaking exercises and mentorship in producing English-language poems and short stories. These works were curated and published in a collaboratively designed school wall magazine. The findings reveal that interactive instruction and creative output fostered student engagement, confidence, and linguistic competence. Moreover, the program functioned as a catalyst for promoting school-based literacy culture. This study highlights the pedagogical value of integrating language instruction with creative production in vocational settings and advocates for scalable, context-sensitive community engagement models to support English learning in under-resourced schools.

Keywords: communicative english teaching, creative writing, literacy promotion

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, English proficiency is no longer a mere advantage, but a crucial foundational skill. This ability is not only a prerequisite in the job market but also a key to accessing global information and knowledge (Graddol, 2006). Therefore, strengthening English language competence from an early stage is essential, particularly for students of Vocational High Schools (SMK) who are being prepared to enter the professional world directly (Ditjen Vokasi, 2024).

However, the implementation of English language instruction at the SMK level often encounters various challenges, both pedagogical and psychological. Preliminary observations at SMK Negeri 1 Situbondo revealed that the majority of students have a low level of English proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing skills. Contributing factors include the use of conventional teaching methods, limited engaging media and learning resources, and students' lack of confidence in using English actively.

In addition to English language instruction, the development of creative writing skills—such as composing poems or short stories in English—has yet to receive sufficient attention in the school environment. In fact, literary writing activities not only sharpen language skills but also stimulate students' imagination, emotional sensitivity, and critical thinking abilities (Sayogha & Rahmaputri, 2023). One effective approach to support the development of these skills is through school wall magazines (*majalah dinding*), which can serve as a platform for students to express themselves and promote a culture of literacy in schools (Pratama et al., 2022).

In response to these issues, we initiated a community service program involving basic English training and creative writing guidance, with the students' works to be published through the *mading* platform. This activity is designed to improve students' basic English language skills, build their confidence in expressing themselves using a foreign language, and create a creative, interactive, and enjoyable learning environment. Our approach focuses not only on cognitive aspects, but also on affective and psychomotor domains, through hands-on practice, collaboration, and appreciation of students' works. It is hoped that this activity will not only equip students with additional knowledge and skills but also motivate them to learn English and embrace literacy as an integral part of daily school life.

Previous studies have proven the effectiveness of practical English training programs in enhancing students' competence at the secondary level. In line with this, research by Ishom et al., (2024) on *English for Job* training for students at SMK Murni 1 Surakarta emphasized English language skills in a professional context, including writing job applications, creating CVs, and practicing job interviews. As a result, students not only acquired practical skills but also experienced increased confidence in using English professionally.

A creative approach to language training was also explored by Silalahi et al., (2024) through English speaking assistance and Canva design training at SMK Negeri 2 Balige. By integrating verbal communication and visual design skills, this program provided broad opportunities for students to learn interactively and visually, proving effective in enhancing students' learning enthusiasm and presentation quality.

Finally, the study by Citrayasa et al., (2024) highlighted the importance of English speaking training through a game-based, discussion-oriented, and hands-

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on approach within socio-religious contexts. Conducted at Paroki Kotabaru Yogyakarta, this program successfully improved students' confidence and fluency in speaking English among junior and senior high school/vocational school students. These findings further reinforce the idea that communicative and participatory learning approaches are crucial for improving English skills among adolescents.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Based on observations and direct interactions with students at SMK Negeri 1 Situbondo, several key issues were identified that hinder the improvement of their English language skills. First, the lack of fundamental English proficiency, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, and writing skills—emerged as a major obstacle. Most students displayed low confidence when required to speak or write in English, which ultimately affected their participation in the learning process.

Second, the learning method, which tended to be teacher-centered and one-directional, made students less actively engaged in class. The lack of variation in instructional media also resulted in monotonous lessons, leading to decreased motivation to learn. This problem was further exacerbated by the absence of practical, real-life, or workplace-related approaches, making it difficult for students to relate English learning to their actual needs.

Third, the school environment did not yet provide sufficient space for students to express and explore their creativity using English. Creative writing activities in a foreign language—such as composing poems or short stories—had not become part of regular instruction. Yet, literary writing can be an effective tool for developing critical thinking, linguistic aesthetics, and the courage to express ideas and emotions.

As a solution to these challenges, we designed a community engagement program focused on two strategic approaches. First, basic English training was delivered through interactive learning methods that actively involved students. The materials were structured progressively and tailored to students' proficiency levels, including pronunciation drills, self-introduction, simple dialogues, and vocabulary enrichment. The methods applied were communicative and participatory, so students were not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in the learning process. Second, a creative writing mentorship program was implemented to help build students' confidence in writing and to channel their creativity. The literary works produced were showcased through a school wall magazine (*majalah dinding*) as a form of appreciation for students' efforts. Beyond serving as an outlet for expression, the wall magazine also functioned as a literacy medium that supports a reading and writing culture within the school environment. It is hoped that this combination of language training and literary production will have a lasting impact on improving the quality of English learning at the school.

METHOD

This community service activity was carried out using a participatory approach and experiential learning method. This approach was chosen to ensure that students not only understand the material theoretically but also gain meaningful learning experiences through active involvement in every stage of the activity. Additionally, this program was guided by two instructional models that support the effectiveness of the training process: Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as proposed by Bell, (2010) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as defined by Richards, (2006). PjBL was implemented through a literary writing project and the creation of a school wall magazine (*majalah dinding*), encouraging collaboration, creativity, and student responsibility. Meanwhile, CLT was used during basic English training by emphasizing communicative and contextual use of the language in everyday interactions.

In general, the program consisted of five main stages: preparation, English training implementation, literary writing mentorship, media production, and evaluation.

1. Preparation Stage

The initial stage involved coordination with the school, especially with supervising teachers and the principal, to obtain approval and align the program's objectives with students' needs. Target classes were identified, tenth and eleventh-grade students—who had more flexible learning schedules. This stage also included syllabus development, material planning, and the preparation of teaching tools and media to be used throughout the training and mentoring sessions.

2. Basic English Training Implementation

The training sessions were delivered as interactive classroom learning activities, using a communicative and contextual approach. The materials covered self-introduction, basic vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple speaking practice. The sessions employed the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), encouraging students to actively participate in conversations and language exercises related to daily life. Instructional methods included short lectures, Q&A sessions, small group discussions, dialogue simulations, and educational English-based games. The training was conducted over several sessions and adjusted to fit the school's schedule.

3. Creative Writing Mentorship

After gaining a foundational understanding of the English language, students were guided in writing simple literary works in English, such as poems and short stories. The mentoring process involved several stages: brainstorming ideas, drafting, revising, and finalizing the pieces. This activity aimed to improve writing skills, stimulate imagination and expression, and boost students'

confidence in using English creatively. In this context, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) was concretely applied, as students were fully engaged in the planning, creation, and completion of literary products as learning outcomes. University students served as facilitators and mentors throughout this process.

4. Production and Arrangement of the Wall Magazine

As one of the program's final outputs, a wall magazine (*majalah dinding*) was prepared with the students to showcase their literary works. This process included purchasing materials, designing the layout, creating decorations, and organizing the display. The activity was conducted collaboratively to foster a sense of ownership and involvement among students in building their own creative space at school. The wall magazine was displayed in the school library as a form of appreciation and a motivational tool for other students. The PjBL approach was clearly visible in this stage, as students contributed to producing a tangible product that could be enjoyed by the entire school community.

5. Evaluation and Documentation

Evaluation was conducted qualitatively through direct observation, reflections with students and teachers, and brief interviews to assess the activity's impact on students' motivation and confidence in learning. The activity was also documented through photographs and written reports as a form of accountability and as a reference for developing similar programs in the future.

This implementation method was specifically designed to align with the characteristics of vocational high school students, who tend to be more responsive to practical and project-based learning. The integration of experiential learning, CLT, and PjBL is expected to provide not only short-term improvements in students' English proficiency but also long-lasting and meaningful learning experiences within the school environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The English training and literary writing mentorship activities conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Situbondo have shown positive and tangible impacts on students' improvement, both in linguistic and affective aspects. During the language training process, students demonstrated enhanced abilities in understanding and using basic vocabulary, introducing themselves, and pronouncing words correctly. This improvement is closely linked to the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes direct and participatory communication practice. Through activities such as dialogues, light discussions, and educational games, students were encouraged to actively use English in natural contexts. These findings align with those of Citrayasa et al., (2024), who reported that game- and discussion-based approaches significantly increase students' confidence and fluency in speaking English.

Based on writing skills perspective, the program provided students with opportunities to express themselves through poems and short stories in English. The mentorship process was carried out in stages—from idea generation, drafting, to final revisions. This reflects the practice of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which focuses not only on the end result but also on the learning process itself. Students were actively involved in creating original works, which were later published through a wall magazine (*majalah dinding*). Their involvement throughout the entire process nurtured a sense of confidence and pride in their work. This finding resonates with the study by Silalahi et al., (2024), which combined speaking training with the use of graphic design tools like Canva. Although the methodological focus differs, both initiatives highlight the integration of language skills and visual expression as a strategy to enhance student interest and engagement.

A unique aspect of this program lies in the use of the school wall magazine as a literacy medium. The wall magazine not only served as a platform for creative expression but also functioned as a tool for appreciation and motivation. The process of organizing and decorating the magazine was done collaboratively, reinforcing teamwork and student ownership of the learning process. This added value goes beyond activities that solely emphasize academic content. In this context, the program offers a more comprehensive approach compared to the study by Ishom et al., (2024), which focused more on English training for practical workplace needs, such as creating CVs and conducting interview simulations. While both programs are designed for vocational high school students, this activity emphasizes the enhancement of literacy, creativity, and holistic character development.

This activity also proves that experiential learning (Kolb, 2015), learning through direct experience can provide broader impacts for students. Not only did their cognitive skills improve, but also affective aspects such as confidence, learning motivation, and the courage to express themselves. Students did not merely receive material passively but experienced firsthand how to learn, create, and witness their work being appreciated in the school environment.

Thus, it can be concluded that this community service activity significantly contributes to the creation of meaningful and sustainable English learning. Compared to previous studies that focused on a single skill (such as speaking or job-related writing), this activity offers an integrated approach that combines language learning, creativity development, and school literacy. Such an approach is highly relevant for vocational high schools, where a balance between practical skills and character formation is essential.

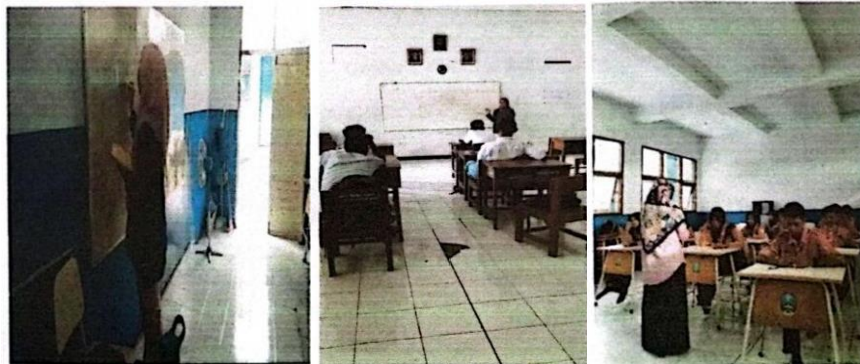


Figure 1. Teaching activities in Grade 10 and 11 classrooms.



Figure 2. The Process of Creating Literary Works.



Figure 3. Documentation of several school activities.

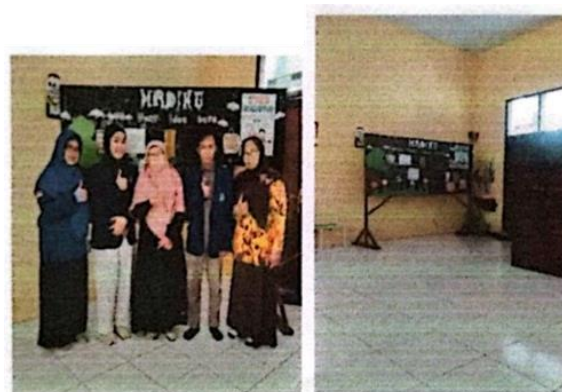


Figure 4. Placement of the wall magazine in the school library.

CONLUSSIONS

Based on the implementation of the English training and literary writing mentorship activities at SMK Negeri 1 Situbondo, it can be concluded that the program has successfully delivered a positive impact on improving students' basic English language skills while also creating space for them to express themselves creatively. The application of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has encouraged students to become more active in the learning process, particularly in practicing basic speaking skills. Students who were previously passive and lacked confidence began to speak up, engage in dialogue, and use English in classroom settings.

Meanwhile, through the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach, students not only learned how to write but also participated in the process of creating and publishing their literary works in the form of poems and short stories, which were displayed on the school's wall magazine. This activity also reflects the principles of experiential learning as developed by Kolb, in which students actively learn through real experiences, reflection, and direct application within their school environment. Compared to previous studies that focused more on functional competencies such as writing job-related documents or using digital applications, this program offers a more comprehensive approach by emphasizing skill development, affective growth, aesthetic appreciation, and literacy all at once.

Alongside the outcomes achieved, several suggestions can be made for the development of similar future programs. First, the duration of the activity should be extended to allow for longer-term mentoring, as language development requires continuous practice. Second, collaboration with English teachers is essential to align the service program with the school's learning objectives and to potentially integrate it into extracurricular activities. Third, the use of wall magazines as a literacy medium should continue to be developed—not only as a platform for appreciating student work but also as a dynamic and sustainable educational space. Lastly, similar programs are highly recommended to be replicated in other schools, especially those with limited access to creative learning methods. University students and higher education institutions have a strategic role in bridging these needs through well-planned community service initiatives that focus on the holistic empowerment of students.

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