



Creative English Teaching as a Pathway to Student Empowerment and Language Growth in Primary Classrooms

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Abstract

This community service initiative explores how creative and innovative teaching methods can serve as a means of empowering elementary school students in English language learning. Through a practice-based action approach, the service provider implemented storytelling, role-playing, interactive games, and multimedia tools over six weeks to promote not only language acquisition but also student development in terms of confidence, participation, and self-expression. Data were collected through classroom observations, student feedback, reflective journals, and teacher-student interactions. The findings show that creative methods significantly increased student engagement and motivation while enhancing their ability to use English in meaningful, real-life contexts. These methods fostered a sense of agency among students, enabling them to take more active roles in their learning process. Moreover, the reflective cycles within the action approach allowed ongoing refinement of strategies to meet individual student needs. In conclusion, integrating creative teaching approaches contributes to the linguistic and personal empowerment of elementary school learners, supporting their broader educational and social development.

Keywords:

Creative teaching methods;
English language learning;
empowerment; elementary
education; student development

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Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris Kreatif sebagai Wadah Pemberdayaan Siswa dan Pertumbuhan Kemampuan Bahasa di Sekolah Dasar

Abstrak

Pengabdian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana metode pengajaran kreatif dan inovatif dapat menjadi sarana untuk memberdayakan siswa sekolah dasar dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Melalui pendekatan pengabdian berbasis praktik, penulis menerapkan metode seperti bercerita, bermain peran, permainan interaktif, dan alat multimedia selama enam minggu untuk mempromosikan tidak hanya perolehan bahasa tetapi juga perkembangan siswa dalam hal kepercayaan diri, partisipasi, dan ekspresi diri. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, umpan balik siswa, jurnal reflektif, dan interaksi guru-siswa. Hasil pengabdian menunjukkan bahwa metode kreatif secara signifikan meningkatkan keterlibatan dan motivasi siswa serta meningkatkan kemampuan mereka menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam konteks nyata yang bermakna. Metode ini juga membangun rasa agen di antara siswa, memungkinkan mereka untuk mengambil peran yang lebih aktif dalam proses pembelajaran mereka. Selain itu, siklus reflektif dalam pengabdian memungkinkan penyempurnaan strategi yang berkelanjutan untuk memenuhi kebutuhan siswa secara individual. Kesimpulannya, mengintegrasikan pendekatan pengajaran kreatif berkontribusi pada pemberdayaan linguistik dan personal siswa sekolah dasar, serta mendukung perkembangan pendidikan dan sosial mereka secara lebih luas.

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of learning English at an early age has become increasingly pronounced in today's globalized world. Proficiency in English serves as a crucial asset for communication across diverse contexts, including business, education, and cultural exchanges. Early exposure to English can



foster cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving skills and enhanced creativity. Research indicates that young children who engage with a new language early in their educational experience show advanced cognitive development, leading to better performance in both their native language and the new language later on (Chen et al., 2020).

Moreover, as globalization continues to progress, the ability to communicate in English opens various doors to cultural understanding and social opportunities, allowing learners to participate in a more interconnected world (Pransiska, 2017). Children who learn English early may find themselves possessing greater adaptability and broader career prospects as adults (Hu, 2021).

Additionally, the social benefits of early English learning are noteworthy. Through language acquisition, children can develop important social skills by engaging with peers and forming friendships across linguistic boundaries (Prawiro & Anggrarini, 2019). This fosters inclusivity and promotes empathy and understanding in a multicultural society, effectively preparing young learners for future interactions in a diverse world (Pratasik, 2022). Early language exposure, therefore, does not only enrich cognitive development but also builds bridges between different cultures, creating a foundation for stronger societal cohesion in the long run.

However, the cognitive and social advantages of early English learning can be tempered by several challenges that educators and students face within traditional English language teaching frameworks. One significant challenge in conventional English language teaching is maintaining student motivation. Many students view English solely as an academic subject rather than an engaging tool for communication and connection (Asmalı & Sayın, 2021). This lack of intrinsic motivation can result in disengagement, especially when teaching methods are overly focused on grammar and rote learning (Cahyati & Madya, 2019).

Furthermore, traditional classroom settings often rely heavily on monotonous lesson structures and textbooks, which may not cater to the interactive needs of young learners (Copland et al., 2013). Rigid lesson plans can stifle creativity and limit the scope for engaging activities that promote active language use and collaboration among students. Teachers also report difficulties in managing an English-only environment, where students' reliance on their mother tongue might hinder their learning progress (Copland et al., 2013). In practice, a singular focus on English can neglect the multilingual realities that many students inhabit, leading to frustration and resistance to the learning process (Cahyati & Madya, 2019).

At SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan, a public elementary school located in a suburban area of East Java, the teaching of English faces unique challenges rooted in both pedagogical and contextual limitations. Despite the growing emphasis on early English education, classroom observations revealed that students often showed low engagement and confidence when participating in English lessons. Teachers primarily relied on textbook-centered instruction, leaving little room for interactive or student-centered activities. As a result, English was perceived as a difficult and disconnected subject, rather than a meaningful tool for communication. The school's students—many of whom come from families with limited exposure to English outside the classroom—were particularly in need of methods that could spark interest, reduce anxiety, and encourage active participation. This study emerged from the urgent need to create a more engaging and empowering English learning experience in this context. By integrating creative methods such as storytelling, games, and role-play, the research sought to transform the learning environment and address the specific motivational and developmental needs of students at SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan.

To counter these issues, it is essential to adopt more dynamic, contextually relevant teaching



methodologies that incorporate culturally rich materials and interactive pedagogies, allowing greater flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs (Maqsood et al., 2024). These methods can provide a more holistic approach to language learning, one that goes beyond traditional methods by integrating students' diverse cultural backgrounds and promoting active participation. Such strategies are crucial in making language learning more relevant and engaging, especially for young learners in multilingual environments.

In recent years, the importance of adopting creative, interactive, and student-centered teaching strategies has gained recognition in the field of English language education. These methods are designed to engage learners by stimulating their imagination, emotions, and cognitive capabilities, fostering a deeper connection to the language and enhancing the overall learning experience. As students participate in activities that encourage exploration and creativity, they not only grasp vocabulary and grammatical structures but also develop a genuine interest in language use (Fontecha & Ryan, 2023).

Creative teaching methods, which might include storytelling, role-playing, and games, serve to make learning more memorable, allowing students to relate their English language skills to real-life situations (Lin, 2011). The advantages of utilizing creative techniques in the classroom are manifold. For instance, these methods significantly improve student motivation by transforming language learning from a mundane task into an engaging adventure. When students find pleasure in learning, they are more likely to actively participate and retain new information, which leads to better language acquisition and proficiency (Aguillon et al., 2020). Furthermore, creative approaches facilitate a more enjoyable educational environment, where learners feel free to express themselves and take risks without the fear of making mistakes (Deni & Fahriany, 2020). This emotional and experiential engagement fosters a sense of belonging and can lead to a lifelong love for the language (Zein et al., 2020).

SERVICE METHOD

This activity was carried out as a community-based action service at SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan, a public elementary school in a semi-rural area of Bangkalan Regency, East Java. The goal was to address the specific challenge faced by both students and teachers in making English a more engaging and meaningful subject in the classroom. The service activity used an empowerment model, where students were not just recipients of knowledge but also active participants in the learning process. The participants were 25 fourth-grade students, aged 9-10 years, who had low motivation, hesitated to speak English, and had limited involvement in class activities. Many of them came from families with little exposure to English, and their learning environment was mostly based on memorization and textbook exercises. Early observations showed that students rarely volunteered to speak, and some felt anxious about participating in English activities (Schön, 1983).

To address these challenges, the researcher implemented a three-phase empowerment strategy, combining participatory teaching, creative intervention, and continuous reflection, in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The process ran over six weeks, with two classroom sessions per week.

Table 1. Creative Teaching Activities Applied

Technique	Description
<i>Storytelling</i>	Students listened to and retold short stories in English, helping them practice speaking naturally
<i>Role-playing</i>	Students acted out real-life scenarios (e.g., shopping, greetings), encouraging active language use
<i>Interactive games</i>	Word-matching, memory games, and group competitions reinforced vocabulary in a



	fun way
Multimedia tools	Short videos and songs with visuals helped increase understanding and retention

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning and Preparation

The planning and preparation phase began not just with lesson plans, but with listening—listening to how students reacted during regular English classes, how they grew silent when asked to speak, and how even the most enthusiastic learners seemed unsure when facing English words. These early observations deeply influenced how the lessons were designed. At SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan, the students—mostly aged 9 to 10—were bright and curious, but English felt foreign and intimidating to many of them. Recognizing this, the creative methods chosen—storytelling, role-playing, and interactive games—were not selected randomly, but with the intention of meeting them where they were: playful, imaginative, and eager for connection.

Each lesson was carefully tailored to include familiar contexts and themes the students could relate to. For instance, in a role-play activity about buying snacks at a canteen, students laughed and interacted enthusiastically—because it mirrored their own daily lives. Vocabulary and grammar were embedded naturally into these activities, allowing students to “use” English instead of just “study” it. The teacher worked closely with the researcher to align these activities with the official curriculum, while also making space for spontaneity and fun.

This phase proved more than just preparation—it became the foundation for trust between students and the learning process. When the children realized that English class could mean standing up to act out a story or competing in a team game, their body language changed. They sat up straighter, raised their hands more, and—even when unsure—were willing to try. That shift, small but meaningful, marked the first signs of empowerment through creative education.

Teaching and Interaction

When the creative teaching methods were introduced in the classroom, there was a clear shift in how students engaged with English. The atmosphere, once quiet and hesitant, was now filled with energy and excitement. Students eagerly joined in storytelling activities, taking turns to act out characters and adding their own ideas to the narrative. In one particular session, a group of students jumped at the opportunity to create their own stories, showing off their growing confidence in using English outside of a textbook context.



Figure 1. The teacher is practicing pronouncing some words in English.

Interactive games, such as word relays or vocabulary matching games, further contributed to this positive shift in classroom dynamics. They provided a non-pressured, enjoyable setting where students practiced their language skills. Through these activities, students could relax and learn without fear of making mistakes, an essential aspect of language acquisition.

The increase in student participation and engagement confirmed that creative methods, by tapping into students' natural interests and developmental needs, significantly reduced the barriers to learning. Research supports the idea that creative activities like role-playing not only enhance language proficiency but also boost motivation and decrease language anxiety (Wang & Chang, 2011). The classroom transformed into a space where students not only learned English but enjoyed doing so, breaking down the walls between “academic work” and “fun.”



Figure 2 & 3. Teachers use teaching aids to make the class more fun.

Reflection and Adjustment

After each lesson, reflection sessions became a cornerstone of the teaching process. These moments were not just about evaluating what went well, but also about being honest with ourselves as educators. During the early lessons, it was clear that the students loved the role-playing activities. Their energy and excitement filled the room, and it was a joy to see them step into their roles with enthusiasm. However, a recurring challenge emerged: while the students excelled in the dynamic, interactive parts of the lessons, they struggled to retain the vocabulary introduced during storytelling activities.

In one of the reflection meetings, the teacher and researcher discussed this issue. It became evident that the lack of visual support was a major factor contributing to this struggle. The students, who were accustomed to associating words with objects or actions in their everyday lives, had difficulty keeping the new vocabulary in mind when it was presented abstractly through text alone. To address this, the researcher began introducing more visual aids into the storytelling sessions. Flashcards with images, story-related pictures, and even simple drawings became powerful tools to help students connect words to visuals. This adjustment allowed the students to engage with the new vocabulary in a more meaningful way, reinforcing their learning by linking words with images.

Another adjustment involved incorporating peer feedback into the process. After each storytelling session, students were encouraged to work in pairs or small groups to share their stories and give each other constructive feedback. This not only created a more collaborative learning environment but also helped students reflect on their own language use in a supportive setting. The process of students teaching each other and correcting one another brought a sense of ownership to their learning, making them more engaged and invested in the lesson.

This reflective cycle—assessing, adjusting, and reflecting again—was vital in ensuring that the methods remained responsive to students' needs. The change in strategy was grounded in the

understanding that visual learning plays a key role in vocabulary retention (Chik, 2014), and that peer feedback enhances language skills by providing opportunities for real-time application and correction. This adaptive approach reflects the essence of action research—a continual process of learning and improving teaching practices (Schön, 1983). By actively adjusting the methods based on what students needed, the researcher ensured that the teaching process was not just static, but evolving. This flexibility allowed the learning experience to meet the diverse learning styles and needs of the students at SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan, ensuring that the creative methods truly made an impact.

Adaptation for Future Lessons

After reflecting on the early lessons, the subsequent classes at SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan showed a clear improvement in student performance and engagement. The introduction of visual aids, such as flashcards and story-related images, made a noticeable difference in vocabulary retention during storytelling activities. Students who had previously struggled to remember new words now found it easier to make connections between the vocabulary and the visuals presented in the lesson. Moreover, incorporating peer feedback into group work allowed students to practice language skills in a collaborative setting. This not only helped reinforce their understanding but also encouraged them to be more confident in speaking English, as they received constructive input from their classmates in a safe, non-judgmental space.



Figure 4. Students practice reading in front of the class to increase self-confidence.

The adjustments made during the study were crucial in refining the teaching methods to better suit the students' learning needs. As highlighted by Hattie and Timperley (2007), providing timely feedback and fostering collaborative learning can significantly improve student outcomes. By integrating these elements, the researcher was able to create a more dynamic and supportive learning environment, where students felt encouraged to take risks and learn from one another. This process of continual reflection and modification reflects the essence of action research (Schön, 1983), which emphasizes ongoing adaptation to improve teaching practices and meet students' evolving needs.

Continuous Practice and Observation

Over the course of the six-week program at SDN Pejagan 1 Bangkalan, the researcher witnessed noticeable improvements in both student engagement and language acquisition. Students became more confident in using English during lessons, frequently volunteering to speak and participate in creative activities. What was particularly striking was how the students' enthusiasm for language use grew as the lessons became more interactive and dynamic. The researcher recorded in their reflective journal how students, once hesitant, started taking risks by using new words and phrases, even in casual conversations outside the classroom exercises. This shift was especially evident during group activities, where students engaged with one another in English, demonstrating that the language was becoming



more integrated into their daily interactions.

This phase underscored the value of consistent exposure to creative teaching methods. The repeated use of techniques like role-playing, storytelling, and peer collaboration not only reinforced language skills but also helped build a stronger connection to English. As students became more comfortable and confident, their intrinsic motivation grew, encouraging them to continue using the language beyond the confines of structured lessons. Research by Zein et al. (2020) supports the idea that fostering a fun, engaging, and safe learning environment is essential for promoting language acquisition. The positive outcomes observed in this study align with findings from Deni and Fahriany (2020), who emphasize the importance of interactive, student-centered approaches in cultivating long-term language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of creative teaching methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, and language games, in elementary school classrooms has led to significant improvements in student engagement and language acquisition. These interactive strategies encouraged students to actively use English in practical contexts, boosting their confidence and motivation. Through reflective practice and continuous adjustments, the methods evolved to better meet students' needs, creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment. As students engaged in these creative activities, their language skills and positive attitudes towards learning grew. This approach highlights the importance of fostering an engaging, student-centered classroom where creativity and reflection contribute to more effective and enjoyable language learning experiences.

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