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SMART TALK: FOSTERING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH A COMMUNITY-BASED GUIDANCE PROGRAM IN KARANGDORO

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Abstract

English has become an essential skill in the era of globalization and digital transformation. Early exposure to English is therefore considered a strategic step in preparing younger generations to face global challenges. This article reports a community service program that provided English learning guidance for children through a community-based approach. The program, entitled SMART Talk, was conducted by lecturers and students of the English Education Department at Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafa'at (UIMSYA) as a form of educational social contribution. It was implemented in Karangdoro Village, Banyuwangi, over three months (November 2025–January 2026) with four meetings per week. The findings showed positive outcomes. Students developed more positive attitudes toward English learning, demonstrated by punctual attendance, active participation, and responsibility in completing tasks. Their motivation increased as they showed enthusiasm and willingness to engage in activities. The friendly atmosphere also reduced English anxiety, enabling students to speak more confidently. In addition, students' vocabulary mastery and basic speaking ability improved, as they were able to recall expressions, construct simple sentences, and perform short dialogues. The program indicates that community-based learning effectively supports English learning in rural contexts.

Keywords: Community-Based Learning, English Language Learning, SMART Talk

Abstrak

Bahasa Inggris telah menjadi keterampilan penting di era globalisasi dan transformasi digital. Paparan awal terhadap bahasa Inggris karena itu dipandang sebagai langkah strategis dalam mempersiapkan generasi muda menghadapi tantangan global. Artikel ini melaporkan program pengabdian kepada masyarakat yang memberikan bimbingan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris bagi anak-anak melalui pendekatan berbasis komunitas. Program yang berjudul SMART Talk ini dilaksanakan oleh dosen dan mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafa'at (UIMSYA) sebagai bentuk kontribusi sosial di bidang pendidikan. Program ini dilaksanakan di Desa Karangdoro, Banyuwangi, selama tiga bulan (November 2025–Januari 2026) dengan

frekuensi empat kali pertemuan setiap minggu. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan dampak yang positif. Siswa menunjukkan sikap yang lebih positif terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, yang ditunjukkan melalui kehadiran tepat waktu, partisipasi aktif, dan tanggung jawab dalam menyelesaikan tugas. Motivasi belajar mereka meningkat, dan suasana belajar yang suportif berhasil mengurangi kecemasan berbahasa Inggris sehingga mereka lebih percaya diri dalam berkomunikasi. Selain itu, penguasaan kosakata dan kemampuan berbicara dasar siswa juga meningkat, terlihat dari kemampuan mereka mengingat ungkapan, menyusun kalimat sederhana, serta melakukan dialog pendek. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis komunitas efektif dalam mendukung pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di konteks pedesaan.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Berbasis Komunitas, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, SMART Talk

INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as a global language and serves as a primary means of communication worldwide (Ghaniy, 2023; Laili & Rizkiyah, 2024). Its role is particularly significant in international communication and academic contexts, where it functions as the dominant language of instruction, research publication, and scholarly interaction. Consequently, English proficiency plays a crucial role in supporting international academic mobility, including student exchange programs, overseas study opportunities, and cross-border academic collaboration (Li, 2024; Crystal, 2019). For this reason, early exposure to English is important, as it helps students develop the linguistic and social readiness needed to adapt to broader learning environments, making English an essential component of global academic competitiveness.

However, the teaching and learning of English continue to face serious challenges, especially in rural educational settings. Teaching English as a foreign language presents unique challenges in rural settings, where exposure to English is minimal (Resmayasari, et. al, 2024). Furthermore, one of the major and ongoing problems encountered by English teachers in these areas is the poor condition of educational buildings and infrastructure, which limits the availability of a supportive and enabling learning environment (Amelia, 2022). In addition, several interconnected difficulties further hinder effective English instruction, including inadequate facilities, low student motivation, limited opportunities for teachers' professional development, and insufficient parental support (Anggela et al., 2024). These constraints not only affect the quality of English education but also reduce students' readiness to engage in broader academic and

international opportunities, thereby reinforcing educational disparities between rural and urban contexts.

This community service was implemented in Karangdoro Village, Tegalsari District, Banyuwangi Regency, where access to non-formal English language learning remains relatively limited, particularly in terms of facilities and availability of qualified instructors. These limitations have contributed to a noticeable gap in foreign language proficiency between children in rural areas and those living in urban settings, especially due to limited exposure to English and low confidence in using the language. In response to this situation, the program was initiated through collaboration between the Head of Karangdoro Village and lecturers from the English Education Program (TBIG) of Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafa'at (UIMSYA) to address the lack of non-formal learning activities for children in the local community. The program was designed as an inclusive, educational, and interactive learning platform, employing approaches tailored to the characteristics and needs of rural children. Through this initiative, children are expected to gradually become familiar with English, develop confidence in speaking, and build sustained motivation to learn, as the primary challenges identified include monotonous teaching methods, limited exposure to English, and low self-confidence in using a foreign language.

To foster an environment more conducive to learning, it is essential to implement strategies that not only reduce anxiety but also spark interest in English (Resmayasari, et. al, 2024). a contextual and participatory community-based guidance approach is essential to ensure that English learning activities are relevant to the needs and real-life experiences of students in rural communities. This approach emphasizes the importance of learning programs that are enjoyable, communicative, and closely connected to students' everyday lives, with a strong focus on increasing learning interest through interactive, communicative, and supportive activities. Such learning environments help students feel comfortable using English and reduce anxiety related to making mistakes. As an innovative alternative solution within community service initiatives, the SMART TALK program was implemented and tutored by students of the English Education Program (TBIG) under the supervision of lecturers.

SMART Talk is a community-based English learning program aimed at improving the English skills of children in rural areas. It introduces basic vocabulary and

everyday expressions through enjoyable activities such as games, songs, and simple conversation practice in a supportive environment. The sessions are facilitated by students from the English Education Program under the supervision of lecturers, with university students serving as tutors who guide and assist participants during learning activities. The program seeks to increase students' interest and motivation in learning English, build early enthusiasm for the language, and improve their confidence in using simple expressions. In addition, it provides free learning opportunities for children with limited educational resources while simultaneously promoting university students' involvement in community service and educational empowerment.

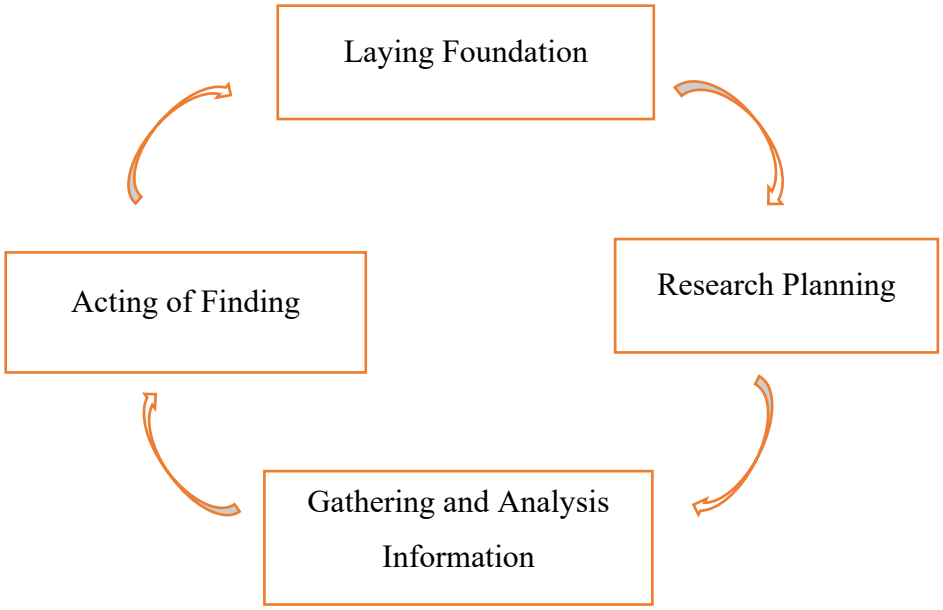
In the short term, the program is expected to increase students' enthusiasm and active participation in English learning through a fun and supportive learning environment. In the long term, it aims to raise students' awareness of the importance of English for their future educational and social opportunities, thereby encouraging sustained motivation to continue learning the language. Additionally, the program strengthens the role of higher education in community service by demonstrating how university–community collaboration can help address local educational needs and support community empowerment.

METHOD

The Community Service Program (*Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*/PKM) is implemented using a Community-Based Research (CBR) approach that emphasizes active community involvement and the development of collaborative partnerships. This approach reflects the principles of transformative research, which integrates two key dimensions: the construction of knowledge and the enactment of social action within the community. By engaging community members as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries, CBR ensures that the program addresses real local needs while simultaneously generating meaningful insights that contribute to both academic understanding and social change (Hanafi, Mohammad, Naily, & Salahuddin, 2015).

In applying the CBR approach, the service team carried out four interconnected stages, namely (1) laying the foundation, which focuses on establishing shared principles, values, and basic concepts with community stakeholders; (2) research planning, which involves collaboratively designing the community service activities; (3) information gathering and analysis, encompassing the systematic collection and interpretation of data

and community input; and (4) action on findings, which translates research results into concrete and responsive actions within the community (Hanafi et al., 2015). These stages are designed to be implemented in a continuous and integrated cycle to ensure the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of the community service program.



Preparation and Coordination Stage

Before the implementation of the program, the organizing team consisting of students from the English Education Program of Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafa'at (UIMSYA) carried out a series of internal and external preparations to ensure the smooth execution of the activities. Internally, the team conducted coordination meetings to distribute teaching responsibilities, arrange the learning schedule, and design instructional materials. Externally, socialization activities were conducted with the Karangdoro Village community, particularly involving community leaders and parents of prospective participants, to obtain support and permission for the program. The team also conducted a site survey at Musholla Nurul Huda to ensure the readiness and suitability of the learning venue. In addition, learning aids such as whiteboards, markers, visual media, and student worksheets were prepared, while participant registration was conducted informally through direct engagement with children and their parents. Effective coordination among

students, village officials, and community leaders became a key factor in supporting the successful implementation of the program.

Schedule

The program was carried out over a three-month period, from November 2025 to January 2026, with a frequency of four meetings per week. Each session lasted approximately one hour. Teaching and learning sessions were held in the evening on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. This schedule was designed to allow sufficient time for habituation, repetition of materials, and gradual practice, enabling students to develop their English skills in a consistent and supportive learning environment.

Teaching Material

The learning materials were designed based on the basic needs of village children, most of whom had limited prior exposure to English. The students were exposed to language content which is commonly used in their daily lives.

Week	Core material	Objective
1-2	Introducing oneself	Students are able to introduce themselves in simple English by stating their name and basic personal information.
2-3	Alphabet and number	Students are able to recognize and pronounce the English alphabet and numbers correctly in basic learning activities
4	Daily vocabulary (Family, color, animals, things around you)	Students are able to identify and use basic daily vocabulary related to family, surrounding objects, colors, and animals.
5-7	Simple Expression (greetings, expressing likes/dislikes, constructing question expression)	Students are able to use simple English sentences for greetings, asking names, and expressing likes and dislikes.

8	Singing English song	Students are able to sing English children's songs and demonstrate basic understanding of the words used.
9	Educational Games	Students are able to participate in English educational games to reinforce vocabulary and simple expressions.
10-12	Speaking English practice in pairs	Students are able to practice basic spoken English through simple and guided conversations with peers

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Positive attitude toward English Learning

Based on observations conducted during the implementation of the Community-Based Guidance program, students demonstrated a noticeably positive attitude toward the activities. This was reflected in their punctual attendance, as most participants consistently arrived on time and often came a few minutes before the session began. Attendance records showed that only a small number of absences occurred throughout the meetings, and several students reminded their peers about the schedule of the program. In addition to the students, parents also expressed supportive attitudes by accompanying their children to the learning venue and waiting until the activities were completed. Short informal conversations with parents revealed that they believed the program was helpful for their children's confidence and communication skills, indicating trust in the program and willingness to support their participation in this activitiy.



Furthermore, students' positive attitudes were evident in their sense of responsibility toward assigned tasks. The majority of participants completed and submitted their worksheets during each meeting, and some even asked the tutors to check their answers immediately after finishing. Documentation of student work showed that most learners attempted all questions rather than leaving them blank, and several students practiced writing simple vocabulary lists in their notebooks at home. During the learning process, students listened carefully to instructions, followed activity rules, and waited for their turns during games and role-play. These behaviors indicate not only participation but also developing learning discipline.

Students also showed active engagement. At the beginning only a few students were willing to respond to questions, but in later sessions more participants raised their hands and volunteered to perform short dialogues. They practiced greetings, self-introductions, and simple daily conversations such as asking names and hobbies in front of their peers. In several sessions, classmates applauded and encouraged those who performed, and hesitant learners gradually became more willing to speak. These observable changes provide evidence that the program did not merely attract students' interest but also strengthened engagement, responsibility, and motivation in learning English.

2. Increased student motivation

Students appeared to be more encouraged and motivated to participate in the learning activities throughout the program. This increased motivation was reflected in their consistent attendance and their readiness to engage in each

session. Many students arrived early and immediately showed curiosity about the day's activities, indicating that they were looking forward to learning English rather than perceiving it as a difficult or intimidating subject. It is proven by one of students comment when the tutor asked

"*Pembelajaran seperti ini membuatku merasa senang dan memberi semangat untuk belajar Bahasa inggris terus. Karena teman-teman dan tutornya baik semua*"

Their enthusiasm was also visible during classroom interactions. Students actively participated in songs, games, and guided speaking practices, and several of them voluntarily raised their hands to answer questions, repeat vocabulary, or perform short dialogues in front of their peers. Even those who were initially shy gradually became more confident, attempting to pronounce new words and imitate simple expressions. The supportive and enjoyable learning environment helped reduce their anxiety and encouraged them to use English without fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, students demonstrated a positive emotional response toward the learning process. They appeared happy, relaxed, and willing to continue participating in the activities until the end of each session. Their smiles, laughter, and active involvement suggested that the program successfully created a friendly atmosphere that fostered both comfort and engagement. Overall, these observations indicate that the program effectively increased students' willingness and interest in learning English.

3. Reduce English Anxiety

The informal and friendly learning environment reduced students' anxiety in using English. The sessions were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere where students sat in small groups, interacted freely with tutors, and participated in games, songs, and role-play activities rather than formal classroom instruction. Unlike typical school settings, students were not evaluated through grades or strict correction, which helped them feel safe to experiment with new words and expressions. Observation during the early meetings showed that several students

tended to remain silent, avoided eye contact, and relied on their peers to answer questions, indicating initial hesitation and language anxiety.

As the program progressed, noticeable behavioral changes began to appear. Students started responding to simple questions such as greetings, self-introductions, and daily expressions without being prompted repeatedly. They attempted to pronounce unfamiliar vocabulary even when unsure of accuracy and often laughed at their own mistakes instead of withdrawing from participation. Tutors also applied supportive feedback, emphasizing encouragement rather than direct criticism, which helped learners perceive errors as a natural part of learning. This supportive interaction gradually reduced fear of negative evaluation and allowed students to participate more actively in speaking practices.

By the later sessions, students showed significantly higher confidence in communicating in English. Several participants volunteered to perform short dialogues in front of the group, initiated conversations with tutors, and used English expressions spontaneously during games and ice-breaking activities. Informal interviews indicated that students felt English was no longer "scary" but "fun and possible to learn." These changes suggest that the low-pressure environment played a crucial role in transforming students' emotional responses to language learning, enabling them to communicate more freely and develop self-confidence in using English.

4. The improvement of English skill

Students' ability in dealing with vocabulary and speaking showed noticeable improvement throughout the program. At the beginning, many participants had very limited vocabulary and often struggled to recall basic English words, which made them hesitant to speak. However, through repeated exposure to simple expressions, games, and guided practice, students gradually expanded their vocabulary and became more familiar with commonly used words and phrases. This improvement was evident when students were able to recognize and use previously learned vocabulary during subsequent sessions without extensive prompting from the tutors.

The development of vocabulary knowledge also contributed to progress in students' speaking skills. Initially, most students could only produce isolated

words or short responses, but over time they began to construct simple sentences and combine vocabulary into meaningful expressions. Students were observed forming basic statements and questions, such as introducing themselves, asking simple personal information, and responding appropriately to their peers. Although their sentences were still simple and sometimes grammatically inaccurate, they demonstrated growing awareness of sentence structure and communicative intent.

Furthermore, increased vocabulary mastery and repeated speaking practice helped students gain confidence to speak in front of the class. Several students who were previously reluctant to participate gradually became willing to perform short dialogues or answer questions aloud. While their speech remained limited, their willingness to speak publicly represented a significant improvement compared to their initial condition. These changes indicate that the program effectively supported gradual development in both vocabulary acquisition and speaking ability, enabling students to communicate in English at a basic but increasingly confident level.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the Community-Based Guidance program indicate that students developed positive attitudes toward the learning activities, as reflected in their punctual attendance, active participation, and willingness to complete assigned tasks. Parents also showed supportive behavior by accompanying their children and waiting until the sessions were finished, suggesting community acceptance of the program. These observations are consistent with previous research showing that English training programs tend to generate generally positive perceptions among participants (Resmayasari et al., 2024). The positive reception from both students and parents demonstrates that the program was not only educationally relevant but also socially valued within the local context.

Furthermore, the program successfully encouraged students' motivation and engagement in learning English. Students showed enthusiasm during songs, games, and communicative activities, and many voluntarily participated in answering questions and practicing dialogues. This outcome supports the notion that learning materials aligned with learners' specific needs create a meaningful learning experience that strengthens

motivation and retention (Dewi, Surya, & Susanta, 2019). The use of familiar topics, daily vocabulary, and enjoyable activities made the learning process less intimidating and more accessible to rural children who previously had limited exposure to English. In addition, the non-formal learning environment contributed to increased motivation, as non-formal education is known to enhance learner engagement and improve learning outcomes while providing flexible and supportive instructional settings (Inna, 2025).

Another important finding was the reduction of English learning anxiety, as during the initial meetings many students were reluctant to answer the tutor's questions, depended on their peers to respond, indicating fear of making mistakes and low confidence; however, as the program progressed and activities were conducted in a supportive, friendly, and non-threatening environment, students gradually became more comfortable participating in learning tasks, began attempting to pronounce new vocabulary, responded more spontaneously, and showed willingness to perform short dialogues and role-play in front of the group. It aligns with previous studies reporting that participation in English training programs can enhance learners' language skills and motivation (Resmayasari et al., 2024).

Furthermore, improvements were observed in both the children's speaking ability and vocabulary mastery. At the beginning, they could only pronounce a few simple words, but gradually their vocabulary expanded and they were able to produce short phrases and simple sentences. This growth in vocabulary directly increased their confidence in speaking; the students became more willing to answer questions, respond to instructions, and even ask questions in front of the class. The communicative, relaxed, and enjoyable learning atmosphere helped students feel comfortable and encouraged them to use English more actively. These findings are consistent with Octaberlina and Muslimin (2022), who found that collaborative learning through enjoyable methods can improve speaking ability while strengthening vocabulary mastery.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the Community-Based Guidance, SMART TALK program, effectively created a positive learning experience for children, as reflected in their consistent attendance, punctuality, task completion, and active participation, while parental support further strengthened the implementation by encouraging children's involvement and trust in the program's benefits. Throughout the sessions, students

became more engaged and disciplined, showing responsibility in completing tasks and interacting with tutors and peers. The enjoyable learning atmosphere through games, songs, and guided speaking practice increased students' motivation, making them view English as interesting rather than difficult, and gradually helped shy learners gain confidence to participate more actively. Moreover, the informal and non-threatening environment reduced English anxiety because students felt safe to try new vocabulary without pressure from grades or strict correction, leading them to volunteer for dialogues and perceive English as enjoyable. In addition, students' English skills improved, particularly in vocabulary and basic speaking ability, as they were able to recall expressions, form simple sentences and questions, and speak in front of the class.

For the sustainability and further development of the program, several recommendations are proposed. The activities should be implemented on a regular basis to ensure continuous practice and reinforcement of students' English skills. Advanced learning materials also need to be introduced for participants who have attended the program from the beginning so that their learning progresses in a structured and gradual manner. In addition, wider collaboration is recommended, for instance through more frequent involvement of volunteers or native speakers to enrich students' exposure to authentic language use. It is expected that this program may serve as a model for similar initiatives in other villages and stimulate greater enthusiasm for foreign language learning within rural communities.

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