

Strengthening Literacy through Interactive Learning: A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Orphanage Children.

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Abstrak

Akses terbatas terhadap pendidikan berkualitas masih menjadi tantangan besar bagi anak-anak yang tinggal di panti asuhan, khususnya yang berada di daerah terpencil. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman nyata anak-anak jenjang sekolah dasar di Panti Asuhan Mustika Tama yang mengikuti program penguatan literasi melalui metode pembelajaran interaktif. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana anak-anak memaknai dan mengalami proses pembelajaran, serta dampaknya terhadap motivasi, kepercayaan diri, dan keterampilan literasi dasar mereka. Delapan siswa dari kelas 3 hingga kelas 6 dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling, berdasarkan keterlibatan aktif mereka dalam program, kemampuan komunikasi verbal, serta keterwakilan jenjang kelas. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan catatan reflektif fasilitator, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi esensi dari pengalaman belajar anak-anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran interaktif menumbuhkan rasa senang, percaya diri, dan motivasi pada para peserta. Anak-anak menggambarkan proses belajar sebagai sesuatu yang lebih personal dan menyenangkan dibandingkan dengan pengalaman mereka di sekolah formal. Program ini tidak hanya meningkatkan keterampilan literasi dasar mereka, tetapi juga berkontribusi pada pembentukan citra diri positif dan motivasi belajar yang lebih kuat. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan literasi yang inklusif dan humanistik bagi kelompok rentan serta mendukung pencapaian Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs) melalui penyediaan pendidikan yang adil dan berkualitas bagi semua.

Keywords: literasi, pendidikan inklusif berkelanjutan, pembelajaran interaktif, pengalaman belajar.

Abstract

Limited access to quality education remains a major challenge for children living in orphanages, particularly those in remote areas. This study explores the lived experiences of elementary-aged children at Panti Asuhan Mustika Tama who participated in a literacy enhancement program utilizing interactive learning methods. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research aims to understand how children perceive and experience the learning process, and how it affects their motivation, confidence, and foundational literacy skills. A total of nine students from grades 3 to 6 were selected through purposive sampling, based on their active involvement in the program, verbal communication ability, and representation across grade levels. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and reflective notes from facilitators, then analysed using thematic analysis to identify the essence of the children's learning experiences. The findings reveal that interactive learning fostered a sense of joy, confidence, and motivation among participants. The children described the learning process as more personal and engaging compared to their experiences in formal school settings. The program not only enhanced their basic literacy skills but also contributed to building a positive self-image and stronger motivation to learn. This study emphasizes the importance of inclusive and humanistic approaches in literacy education for vulnerable groups and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting equitable and quality education for all.

Keywords: literacy, inclusive sustainable education, interactive learning, learning experience

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Access to quality education for all children is a major challenge facing every country, especially for children in orphanages. Several contributing factors include financial constraints, limited facilities and infrastructure, and the mental and social challenges resulting from the loss of a parent. If left unaddressed,

this situation will lead to learning gaps, particularly in basic skills such as literacy. According to PISA 2022 data, Indonesia ranked 68th out of 80 countries. This ranking indicates that literacy, as the foundation for other academic fields, requires serious attention from various parties.

Conventional, monotonous, teacher-centered learning methods require careful consideration, as they are no longer relevant to the needs of today's children. Today's children are more accustomed to technology and student-centered learning, so the use of conventional methods risks causing boredom and a lack of motivation, which can impact their learning outcomes and cognitive development.

Interactive learning methods can be an appropriate option to address the issues described above, through teaching methods that actively engage students. These methods have also been shown to encourage two-way communication between teachers and students, between students, or through learning media. In his book "Mind in Society" (1978), Vygotsky explained that interactive learning activities such as dialogue, collaboration, and guided problem-solving can foster students' cognitive development. Students' interactions with peers and teachers can foster cooperative knowledge building, deepening their understanding through social interaction. Interactive learning is not merely a methodological choice but also a theoretical mechanism linking social engagement to students' cognitive growth. Similarly, Bandura, with his Cognitive Theory (1997) on self-efficacy, emphasizes a similar principle: self-efficacy is formed primarily through observing others (vicariously), receiving encouragement from others (verbal persuasion), and experiencing shared success. Therefore, the interactive dimension of learning serves as a self-efficacy builder that contributes to sustained motivation and persistence in learning. The goal is to enhance students' understanding of the material, motivation, and literacy skills through enjoyable and challenging interactions. This, in turn, supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing equitable and quality education for all.

This study explores the lived experiences of elementary school children at the Mustika Tama Orphanage who participated in a literacy strengthening program through interactive learning methods. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study aimed to understand how the children interpreted and experienced the learning process, as well as its impact on their motivation, self-confidence, and basic literacy skills.

RESEARCH METHODS

Methods

This research is a qualitative study that uses the phenomenology method. This method allows researchers to understand a phenomenon in a certain situation (Musfiqon, 2012). The researcher can understand, explore, interpret, and give meaning to the real experiences of elementary school children at Mustika Tama Nursing Home who follow the literacy strengthening program through interactive learning methods. This is also supported by Creswell's theory (2015:51) which states that phenomenology provides meaning to the life experiences of a number of people about a concept or phenomenon,

including self-concept. All data collection activities are done with the approval of the orphanage through signing a confidentiality agreement.

Data Participation

Eight students were selected through a purposive sampling technique with criteria; actively involved during learning, able to communicate well, and able and willing to reflect on the interactive learning experience. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and facilitator's reflective notes.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns of children's learning experiences, as Taylor et al, (2012) explained that thematic analysis can be used in analyzing qualitative data that requires a search of all data to identify, analyze, and describe patterns of children's learning experiences.

The results of the recorded interviews were translated, then the initial coding of the data was done, the grouping of codes into broader themes and sub-themes, after being interpreted and then reviewed by supporting data by the facilitator, observation data during learning, so that a pattern was found that represented an interactive learning experience. Finally, the findings are then refined with in-depth analysis with theories and relevant research results so that the research results are representative and implicative in the world of education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Activity Description

This learning activity is carried out for one week at the Mustika Tama Nursing Home, with various activities designed to present a fun and exploratory learning experience for the children. This activity is carried out for one full week in the afternoon outside of school hours, so as not to disturb the formal learning process of the participants. Each activity is given an interesting and easy-to-remember name, with the aim of fostering children's curiosity and preventing boredom or boredom when following a series of activities. Every day, the children are involved in different activities, as seen in the table below!

Table 1. Learning Activities at Mustika Tama Orphanage

Activity Name	Activity Steps
Pet Adventure Sensory Play: Multisensory training	• Children make various shapes of animals from clay or playdough. • Play "Guess Who I Am?": guess the sounds, physical characteristics, food, and breeding methods of animals made. • Children tell the results of their work as a storytelling exercise.
Flashcard Fun: Magic Letters & Words	• Recognize letters and syllables using letter cards. • • Play "What letter am I?" or "Missing Syllables".

	• Writing activity: "Write words based on pictures" to strengthen the visual relationship between sounds and words.
Exciting Stories & Discussions	• Read illustrated stories from the learning module. • Group discussion "I remember this part the most" to deepen the understanding of the story. • Children make a summary of the story in the form of pictures / 3 simple sentences.
Puzzle Story Time: Compiling and Telling Puzzles	• Listen to popular fairy tales that are presented based on the order of puzzle pictures. • Children put together a puzzle while guessing the story line. • Connecting the pieces of the story into one whole flow.
Art & Story Craft Studio: The Art of Painting and Storytelling	• Paint with watercolors or make a collage using colored paper. • After the work is finished, the child makes a short story about the picture he made. • Activities emphasize creativity + the ability to explain ideas.
Cool Posters & Mini Stages	• Make a poster with the theme of living environment or future ideals. • Practice speaking in front of friends: a simple presentation about the meaning of the poster. • Improve self-confidence and public speaking.
Science Boom! Mini Experiment	• Simple experiments like "volcanic eruption" using baking soda and vinegar. • Light discussion: "What happened?" and "Why can it be like that?". • Children repeat the steps of the experiment in their own language.
English Discovery Play: Increase Vocabulary	• Know the names of objects in English using flashcards. • Play "Color Hunt" (search for certain colored objects in the room). • Light word games to introduce vocabulary naturally.
Action English Charades: Guess the English Style	• Charades game: children perform words, friends guess. • Chain Words Game: connect the last word into a new word. • Develop speaking and vocabulary in a pleasant atmosphere.
Sentence Builder Challenge: Making Words	• Learn to compose simple sentences with word cards. • Game "Random Words Become Sentences". • Children present their sentences with pleasant expressions.

Result

Based on the analysis of the collected data, several themes emerged that underlie the research findings. Based on in-depth interviews, direct observation, and direct observation by the facilitator, several themes

were identified that represent the learning experience of students through the literacy strengthening program.

Enjoyment

Happiness is seen as the dominant security, which is experienced by the children of the orphanage during the activities. Learning activities that are designed based on games (play based learning), multi-sensory exploration, and collaborative experiences, produce an atmosphere that is not monotonous but still meaningful.

Activities such as Pet Adventure Sensory Play, Puzzle Story Time, and Science Boom! The Mini Experiment provides multisensory stimuli (visual, kinesthetic, tactile) that make children feel "the sensation of playing, while learning", as expressed by the children, as seen in the following interviews:

"I enjoy being able to work on projects with my friends, sis. It's not boring and it's fun."
(Participant 1)

"I understand things quickly because of the experiment, sis. It's also fun because I can play at the same time." (Participant 2)

"If I learn while playing educational games like before, it feels like I'm playing but still learning, so it's more fun." (Participant 3)

Through the experience of making animals out of clay, the game of guessing animal sounds, putting together a puzzle, or seeing "Mount Meletus", children experience the novelty effect, which is a new experience that triggers curiosity and excitement.

The use of media such as "Flashcard Fun" cards and English Discovery Play also shows the same pattern, games such as "Aku huruf apa?", Color Hunt, or "Chain Words", make academic material fun and easy.

In the perspective of phenomenology, "joy" is not just a positive emotion, but a meaningful experience that changes the child's perspective on learning. Learning is no longer a boring activity, but an activity that entertains and makes them actively involved naturally.

Self Confidence

A sense of self-confidence appears when children feel they have a comfortable space to ask questions, try, and the freedom to express ideas without fear of being wrong. Several activities are specifically designed to give children the opportunity to perform, express their opinions, and tell the story of their work.

Interactive activities such as Cool Posters and Mini Stages give children the opportunity to express their ideas and tell them in front of their friends. Through the Sentence Builder Challenge, children are asked

to compose sentences and deliver orally, as well as the Art & Story Craft Studio which allows children to create visual works, and tell the story with their own version.

In this situation, the facilitator does not give a rigid right-wrong assessment, but provides support, validation, and positive encouragement, which is in line with the quote below,

"Now I'm not embarrassed to ask questions, sis. If I don't understand, I can just ask the teacher."
(Participant 4)

"I'm no longer afraid of making mistakes, because even if I do, the teacher still encourages me."
(Participant 5)

This approach is in line with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, small success experiences (mastery experiences) and positive feedback increase children's self-confidence in their academic abilities. Children who do not receive individual attention in their daily lives experience that their voices deserve to be heard and appreciated.

Motivation

Motivation grows as a result of a combination of joy, small successes, and growing self-confidence. Action involvement, the opportunity to take on a role, as well as the presence of concrete activities, naturally foster children's motivation to learn.

Activities such as Science Boom arouse curiosity, which raises the question: What's going on bro? Why is that? Other interesting activities such as Action English Charades provide the experience of active play, guessing, and moving to make language learning enjoyable. Storytelling & Exciting Discussions allow children to feel in control of the storyline and their opinions are valued. This is illustrated in the interview excerpts from the children below:

"I'm more enthusiastic about learning now, sis." (Participant 6)

"Learning from educational games like this makes me more enthusiastic about learning because it's not boring." (Participant 7)

One day, I will be a scientist (Participant 8)

The results of this research show that the interaction, novelty, and relevance of activities encourage intrinsic motivation in children.

Strengthening Literacy Skills

The entire learning network, deliberately supports aspects of strengthening basic literacy, such as: phonology, vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal expression through interactive and fun activities.

Through Flashcard Fun media, strengthen the sounds of letters, words, through game activities and writing words from pictures. Sentence Builder Challenge helps children understand basic sentence structure. Storytelling, Puzzle Story Time, and Art & Story Craft reinforce story understanding, sequencing, and retelling skills. English Discovery Play and Charades enrich vocabulary contextually. *This is illustrated in the interview excerpts from the children below:*

"The media is very beautiful, I'm learning new vocabulary." (Participant 6)

"From this game, I'm learning new vocabulary." (Participant 7)

Quotations from Participant 6 and 7 show that interactive media encourages the acquisition of new vocabulary in a fun and meaningful way. This is in accordance with Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, which explains that information is more easily stored when connected to concrete experiences. This program also strengthens expressive literacy, such as children learning to explain ideas through poster presentations, telling artworks, and discussing stories.

DISCUSSION

The literacy strengthening program with interactive learning implemented at the Mustika Tama Orphanage resulted in an interesting learning experience for the children at the Orphanage.

Joy (Enjoyment)

Children describe interactive activities such as watching videos, playing educational games, discussing, making projects, doing experiments as something exciting, real, and enjoyable. As the theory of constructivism (Piaget, J. ,1972) and Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) which emphasizes the importance of active involvement of children in developing children's knowledge through real experiences. In addition, according to the theory of flow from Csikszentmihalyi M. (1990), the joy felt by students is immersed in activities that are both challenging and exciting, so that learning feels like playing. In line with the research of Pratiwi et al. (2022) who mentioned that, the use of interactive media such as educational games proved capable of creating a pleasant learning atmosphere.

Self-Confidence

Interactive learning has also been shown to foster self-confidence in children. From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which states that self-confidence emerges when the need for competence is met. Children feel competent when given the opportunity to answer questions or express opinions, thus fostering confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, non-judgmental but encouraging teacher support aligns with the concept of scaffolding in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, where support from adults or peers helps students move beyond their comfort zones. Self-confidence can also be understood through Broaden-and-Build

Theory (Fredrickson, 2001), where the positive emotions children experience while learning broaden their thinking patterns and build psychological resources, including the courage to perform and believe in themselves. This finding aligns with research by Hariani et al. (2020), which found that project-based learning boosts students' self-confidence because they feel their contributions are real and meaningful. Similarly, Tia and Wangid (2022) reported that interactive learning that provides space for students to ask questions and discuss increases their confidence and courage in expressing themselves. Furthermore, Dweck, C.S. (2006) also emphasized that when mistakes are seen as part of the learning process, not something to be feared, students become more confident and active.

Motivation

In addition to building self-confidence, interactive learning experiences have also been shown to foster learning motivation in children. Theoretically, children's learning motivation in this context can be explained through Intrinsic Motivation Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Children are motivated not solely by external stimuli, but because the learning activity itself provides a sense of enjoyment, challenge, and meaning. Interactive learning with educational games, for example, provides them with a flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a state in which students become enthusiastically immersed in learning activities because the challenges presented match their abilities. Furthermore, ARCS Theory (Keller, 1987) is also relevant here. According to Keller, motivation can grow when learning is designed to capture attention (Attention), be relevant to students' needs (Relevance), instill confidence (Confidence), and provide satisfaction (Satisfaction).

Interactive learning involving educational games fulfills all four of these aspects, so it's natural for students to feel more motivated. This finding aligns with several previous studies. Winatha, K. R., & Setiawan (2020) found that game-based learning increases intrinsic motivation in elementary school students because the learning environment becomes more enjoyable and challenging. Pratama (2019) also reported that students' active involvement in group discussions and interactive activities makes them more enthusiastic and focused on understanding the material. Meanwhile, Hidayat (2023) emphasized that giving students greater learning responsibility fosters motivation and learning independence.

Strengthening Literacy Skills

The activities presented in interactive learning not only create a more lively and enjoyable learning environment but also naturally strengthen children's literacy skills. Theoretically, this finding can be linked to Multimodal Literacy Theory (Kress, 2010), which emphasizes that literacy develops not only through written text but also through a combination of various media, including visuals, audio, and interactions. The use of interactive media and educational games provides a rich multimodal context, allowing children to expand their vocabulary and understand word meanings more contextually. Furthermore, according to Vygotsky (1978), children's language and literacy development are heavily influenced by social interaction. Through discussions, group collaboration, and play-based activities, children have the opportunity to actively use language, which strengthens their literacy skills. This study's findings align with Restiyanita's (2025) findings that elementary school students' literacy improves when

learning uses digital interactive media because they are more actively engaged. Rahmawati et al. (2023) also demonstrated that game-based learning strategies have been shown to improve students' vocabulary skills, as a fun learning environment encourages both emotional and cognitive engagement. Meanwhile, Fitriana, D., Suhendra, & Juandi, D. (2020) emphasized that literacy can develop more optimally if learning is designed with attention to children's real-life contexts.

V. Conclusion

This study shows that the interactive learning program at the Mustika Tama Orphanage provides a more meaningful learning experience than formal learning at school. Four important points can be drawn from the findings. First, interactive learning fosters a sense of enjoyment through varied activities such as educational games, experiments, group projects, and interactive media, making learning a positive and enjoyable experience. Second, these activities foster children's self-confidence, as they are given space to ask questions, answer questions, and express ideas without fear of making mistakes. Third, active and contextual learning fosters higher learning motivation, making children more enthusiastic and feeling responsible for their learning process. Fourth, this entire series of interactive activities directly contributes to strengthening literacy skills, particularly in enriching vocabulary and making literacy a natural, personal, and relevant process to everyday life.

These findings not only strengthen children's basic literacy skills but also contribute to the formation of a positive self-image, sustained motivation to learn, and the development of the children's potential at the orphanage. Thus, this program reflects the importance of an inclusive, humanistic, and experiential learning approach.

When linked to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) point 4 on Quality Education, these findings confirm that interactive learning plays a significant role in supporting equitable, inclusive, and quality access to education for vulnerable groups such as children in orphanages. This program addresses the challenge of educational equity by providing equal learning opportunities, fostering 21st-century skills, and building their readiness for the future. This means that practices like this can serve as an alternative educational intervention model that helps the government and society achieve the SDG target of equitable, quality education for all children, without exception.

VI. Practical Implications, Policy Recommendations and Limitation Research

The results of this study indicate that interactive learning not only strengthens the basic literacy skills of children in orphanages but also fosters enjoyment, self-confidence, and motivation to learn. These findings underscore the importance of providing an inclusive, humanistic, and experiential learning approach.

For teachers and facilitators, interactive strategies such as educational games, group projects, and digital media need to be integrated into daily learning. Orphanages can make interactive literacy programs a sustainable activity, while schools can adopt them to support students from vulnerable backgrounds. The

government is also expected to develop this model as an alternative intervention for educational equity through teacher training, the provision of interactive tools, and cross-sector collaboration.

Thus, this program directly contributes to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education) by providing equitable and quality education for all children, and supports SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by reducing educational disparities for vulnerable groups.

This study has several limitations. First, the program lasted only one week, so changes in children's behavior or abilities were more short-term and may not reflect sustainable impacts. Second, the number of participants was limited, and the program took place outside of school hours, so children's experiences could be influenced by fatigue levels, environmental conditions, or variations in their daily activities. Third, observations focused primarily on the dynamics of children's activities and expressions during the program, so further research with more systematic instruments is needed to measure literacy improvements in greater depth. Nevertheless, this activity provides a strong initial picture of the potential of interactive learning to increase children's motivation, creativity, and participation in literacy activities.

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