

**Gamification and Communicative Language Teaching
in an English Program for Underprivileged Children**

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Abstract

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This study examines the implementation and its impact of Communicative *Language Teaching* (CLT) approach and strategies with the EFL students' perception towards English language learning. This study was conducted in the English language teaching program for children at the Imanuel Palangka Raya Orphanage, Central Kalimantan. The limited number of competent English teachers in the orphanage environment is the main background for the implementation of this educational intervention program. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through participatory observation, informal interviews, and documentation during five meetings involving 20 participants from the elementary and junior high school levels. The results showed that the integration of CLT and gamification effectively increased participants' engagement, motivation, and courage to communicate in English. Game elements such as activity card challenges, guess the picture quizzes, and singing competitions between groups have been proven to be able to create a fun, interactive, and conducive learning atmosphere for the development of participants' English skills. This study confirms that the game-based interactive learning approach is very relevant to be applied in non-formal education environments, especially for groups of children who have had minimal access to quality and equitable English language teaching.

Kata Kunci:

*Pengajaran Bahasa
Berbasis Komunikasi,
Bahasa Inggris,
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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi dan dampak *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) dengan persepsi siswa EFL terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini dilakukan dalam program pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk anak-anak di Panti

asuhan.

Asuhan Imanuel Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah. Keterbatasan jumlah guru bahasa Inggris yang kompeten di lingkungan panti asuhan menjadi latar belakang utama pelaksanaan program intervensi pendidikan ini. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara informal, dan dokumentasi selama lima pertemuan yang melibatkan 20 peserta dari tingkat sekolah dasar dan sekolah menengah pertama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi CLT dan gamifikasi secara efektif meningkatkan keterlibatan, motivasi, dan keberanian peserta untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Elemen permainan seperti tantangan kartu aktivitas, kuis tebak gambar, dan kompetisi bernyanyi antar kelompok terbukti mampu menciptakan suasana belajar yang menyenangkan, interaktif, dan kondusif bagi pengembangan keterampilan bahasa Inggris peserta. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa pendekatan pembelajaran interaktif berbasis permainan sangat relevan untuk diterapkan di lingkungan pendidikan non-formal, terutama bagi kelompok anak-anak yang memiliki akses minimal terhadap pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang berkualitas dan merata.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak English today has become a basic need that cannot be ignored, especially in the face of the increasingly rapid flow of globalization. English serves as a gateway to access science, job opportunities, and communication networks between nations. However, the reality on the ground shows that access to quality English language learning is far from equal, especially for groups of children living in vulnerable environments such as orphanages. Children raised in orphanages generally face complex structural limitations, ranging from a lack of trained learning companions to limited exposure to Input foreign languages consistently, a condition that ultimately becomes a serious obstacle to the development of their linguistic competence, including mastery of *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) (Pramesty et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, the gap in the distribution of English language teachers, especially in non-formal educational institutions and remote areas, remains an unresolved problem. The lack of qualified teachers, weak infrastructure, and lack of motivation to learn are the main challenges in learning English in an environment with limited resources (Mariyam et al., 2025). A similar condition was found at the Imanuel Palangka Raya Orphanage, Central Kalimantan, where elementary and junior high school children admitted that they had never received adequate English teaching due to the absence of competent teachers. One of the children even said directly that the English learning activity had not been carried out because the orphanage was still looking for a new teacher. These field findings confirm the urgency of educational interventions that are real, structured, and responsive to the needs of marginalized groups (Indriyani, 2025).

In an effort to respond to these gaps, the *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) was implemented as an alternative that has been empirically proven to be able to encourage active involvement of students in the language process. CLT emphasizes the use of language as a real means of communication in a meaningful social context, not just the memorization of grammatical rules. This approach is considered very relevant for the context of orphanage children who require confidence in verbal communication, not just theoretical academic skills. The CLT approach has been shown to significantly improve students' speaking abilities through the creation of an interactive learning environment, where learners engage directly in communicative tasks that reflect everyday life situations (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).

In addition to CLT, the gamification is also adopted as a complementary strategy in this program. Gamification refers to the application of game elements such as challenges, *reward*, and feedback in the context of non-game learning with the aim of increasing learners' motivation and learning engagement. Learning English vocabulary wrapped in gamification elements has been proven to produce *outcomes* learning, motivation, and satisfaction that are much higher than conventional learning (Yu, 2023). Gamification in EFL/ESL learning has consistently been able to increase students' intrinsic motivation, learning interest,

and language performance, so that the combination of CLT and gamification offers a holistic approach that is relevant to be applied in the context of English language teaching for children who have experienced limited access to education. (Zhang & Hasim, 2023).

Although considerable research has been done on CLT and gamification in EFL learning, there is a significant *Gap* in the existing literature. Very few studies have specifically examined the application of a combination of these two approaches in nonformal settings, especially in the context of orphanage children (underprivileged children) in Indonesia. Most of the research has focused on formal schools at both the primary and secondary levels, so the learning experience in non-formal settings such as orphanages has almost escaped academic attention. *Novelty* of this research lies in efforts to fill the gap, namely by documenting and analyzing qualitatively how the integration of CLT and gamification is implemented and accepted by orphanage children in a program that lasted for five meetings at the Imanuel Palangka Raya Orphanage (Numaningsih & Malik, 2024).

Based on the above explanation, this study formulates the following research questions: What is the students' perception towards the implementation of CLT and gamification in the non-formal English learning? Based on the formulation of the problem, this study aims to describe the implementation of CLT and gamification in English teaching programs in non-formal environments, as well as analyze the involvement and response of participants during the activity. Practically, this research is expected to provide benefits in the form of an English learning model that can be adapted by other non-formal educational institutions, especially those that serve children from disadvantaged groups. Theoretically, these findings are expected to enrich the treasures of the study *English Language Teaching* (ELT) in a non-formal context in Indonesia as well as opening up a wider space for scientific discussion on the importance of academic attention to language education for groups underprivileged (Pramesty et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell, 2007), which is considered most appropriate to answer research questions that focus on the implementation process and participants' responses to the learning program. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to produce a deep and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon that occurs naturally in a given social context, without manipulating variables or applying experimental treatments. The research lasted for five meetings, starting from March 9 to May 4, 2025, with a schedule of implementation every Sunday at 4 p.m. The researcher understands that five sessions may be considered a short period of time. However, the primary objective of this study was not to measure long-term behavioral changes, but rather to describe students' perceptions and indications of behavioral changes that emerged during the program's implementation. In qualitative research, the quality and depth of data are prioritized over the length of the intervention period. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation at each session, providing a sufficient picture of students' experiences and responses to the implementation of CLT strategies with gamification.

The subjects in this study were 20 children living in the Imanuel Orphanage, consisting of participants from the dominating elementary school (SD) level and part from the junior high school (SMP) level. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively, namely based on the consideration that the elementary and junior high school age groups were considered the most relevant to the program objectives, namely the introduction of basic English vocabulary and phrases in daily life. Elementary and junior high school-aged children are at a stage of cognitive development that is very open to new learning approaches that are interactive, playful, and communicative, making them an ideal group to receive programs like this.

Data collection in this study was carried out through three main techniques, namely participatory observation, informal interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation is carried out during each learning session, by directly

recording the level of involvement, enthusiasm, and verbal response of participants to each designed activity. The interview technique used is an informal or unstructured interview, which is conducted briefly with children and the orphanage management to gather information about the condition of English learning before the program takes place and the participants' experiences during the activity. Informal interviews were chosen because they were more in line with the characteristics of the research subjects who were children, where the relaxed and natural atmosphere of conversation actually produced more authentic and honest information than formal interviews (Ruslin et al., 2022). The documentation in the form of activity photos, field notes, and teaching modules is used as supporting data to strengthen the results of observations and interviews.

The learning materials used in this program are compiled in a simple module entitled "English for Daily Life", which covers five main themes, namely Self-Introduction, Daily Routines, English Through Songs, Describing Places, and Giving and Receiving Compliments. Each meeting is designed with a consistent structure, beginning with a joint prayer, ice breaking, lighter questions, vocabulary introduction, game- or song-based activities, and ending with a brief reflection. The gamification method is applied predominantly through various activities such as activity card challenges, guess the picture quizzes, singing competitions between groups, and giving rewards for active participants.

Data analysis was carried out descriptively following three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by sorting out relevant information from observations, field notes, and informal interviews, then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative that described the learning dynamics in each meeting. The validity of the data is ensured through triangulation techniques, which involve comparing information obtained from observations, informal interviews, and documentation, and cross-referencing to ensure consistency and credibility of findings. This approach is in line with the principles of qualitative research in non-formal education settings, which emphasize the importance of context, flexibility, and direct involvement of

researchers in the data collection process to produce a rich and meaningful picture of the phenomenon being studied (Octavina et al., 2024).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Gamification Approaches in English Language Teaching Programs

The English teaching program at the Imanuel Palangka Raya Orphanage was carried out for five meetings using the *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) which is combined with gamification strategies as the main pedagogical foundation. The developed learning module is titled "*English for Daily Life*", covering five main themes relevant to the participants' daily lives, namely *Self-Introduction*, *Daily Routines*, *English Through Songs*, *Describing Places*, and *Giving and Receiving Compliments*. The selection of these themes is based on the consideration that material that is close to the participants' daily experience will be easier to absorb and practice, as well as build their confidence in using English functionally. The CLT approach was chosen because it encourages the use of authentic language in real communication situations, rather than just grammatical exercises that are mechanical and theoretical in nature. Each meeting is designed with a consistent structure, beginning with a joint prayer and *Ice Breaking*, followed by a spark question, vocabulary introduction, game-based communicative activities, and ended with a brief reflection. CLT implementation through an approach *Playful* proven to be able to improve students' speaking skills while creating a more lively and participatory learning atmosphere (Safitri et al., 2025).

At the first meeting held on March 9, 2025, the *Self-Introduction* delivered with a participant-centered oral approach. Children are trained to introduce themselves using simple sentences in English, including names, ages, regional origins, and hobbies. Although most of the participants had never had structured English instruction before, their enthusiasm was observed to be quite high from the first session began. This reflects that a friendly and communicative approach is able to reduce the initial psychological barriers that usually arise in learning a foreign language. CLT has been shown to be effective in improving students' speaking skills

through the creation of an interactive and stress-free learning environment, so that participants feel more comfortable participating orally (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).



Figure 1. Meeting Atmosphere 1: *Self-Introduction Material*

Entering the second meeting on March 16, 2025, the theme *Daily Routines* delivered with an activity card-based learning strategy (*Activity Card Challenge*). Participants were divided into three groups, each of which received a card with pictures of daily activities along with descriptive sentences that had been randomly arranged. Their task is to rearrange sentences orally into the correct order according to the image displayed, for example from "go to school I at seven o'clock" become "I go to school at seven o'clock". This activity trains skills *Reading aloud*, understanding the context, and the elaboration of sentence structure in an exploratory manner. The learning atmosphere at this meeting felt much more dynamic than the first meeting, indicating that participants began to adapt to the communicative approach applied. The children seemed very enthusiastic in participating in the series of activities, especially because of the game elements inherent in the card activity, so that the learning process felt like playing but still contained meaningful learning substance. CLT emphasizes authentic communication and interactive pedagogy aimed at improving speaking and listening skills simultaneously in meaningful contexts (Ringo et al., 2025).



Figure 2. Meeting Atmosphere 2: *Daily Routines Material*

The third meeting on March 23, 2025 raised the theme English Through Songs Using songs "*Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*" as a learning medium Multimodal which combines auditory, visual, and kinesthetic aspects simultaneously. Learning begins with activities listening and movement, where participants listen to a song while practicing movements that match the lyrics. At the end of the session, participants were divided into two groups that competed to sing the song in its entirety without audio assistance, and the best group received appreciation in the form of small gifts. The combination of the CLT approach with visual and audio media has been proven to significantly increase participants' interest and engagement in English communication (Budiarti et al., 2025). This meeting was the session with the highest level of participation compared to the previous two meetings, which indicates that the elements of competition and games are able to bring out an extraordinary collective spirit among the participants.



Figure 3. Atmosphere of the Encounter 3: *English Through Songs*

Application of Gamification Strategy in Increasing Participant Motivation and Engagement

Gamification strategies are predominantly applied in the program, covering about 70% of the overall learning time in each meeting. Gamification in the context of learning refers to the application of game elements such as challenges, competitions, Reward, and direct feedback into non-game learning situations, with the primary goal of increasing participants' intrinsic motivation and active engagement. In this program, gamification is realized through various activities such as Activity Card Challenge, guess the picture quiz, singing competitions between groups, and small prizes for participants who are active and able to answer correctly. Gamification has been empirically proven to improve students' motivation, vocabulary mastery, and language proficiency while creating an immersive, anxiety-free learning environment that encourages independent learning (Ringo et al., 2025).

The fourth meeting on April 13, 2025 raised the material Describing Places with a focus on the introduction of public places such as School, Market, park, and hospital. Students use location drawing cards accompanied by simple descriptive sentences as the main medium, then invite participants to play guess the place, a guessing place game that combines verbal descriptions and visual illustrations. This activity spurs participants to understand context, associate images with the function of place, and practice descriptive skills in simple yet meaningful spoken sentences. The gamification element in the form of small prizes for participants who actively answer proved to be a very effective motivational trigger at this meeting. Gamification is consistently able to increase students' intrinsic motivation, interest in learning, and language performance in the context of *EFL/ESL*, making it a highly relevant holistic approach to language learning for groups with minimal access to education (Zhang & Hasim, 2023).



Figure 4. Atmosphere of the Meeting 4: *Describing Places*

The fifth meeting as well as the closing session on May 4, 2025 raised the theme Giving and Receiving Compliments. Participants were invited to copy and practice simple praise sentences such as "*You look great!*", "*Good job!*", and "*Thank you!*", then take an English equivalent guess quiz from a praise sentence in Indonesian spoken by the teacher. This quiz activity creates a learning atmosphere that is both competitive and fun, and is a meaningful conclusion to the entire series of programs. Grants Reward In the form of small gifts to active participants function as extrinsic reinforcement which in the early stages of learning is needed to build confidence. As the program progresses, participants' motivation is no longer solely driven by prizes, but also by curiosity, excitement of competition, and personal satisfaction when they successfully deliver sentences in English correctly, signaling a transition from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation (Tsai, 2024).



Figure 5. Meeting Atmosphere 5: *Giving and Receiving Compliments*

Responses, Participation, and Challenges During the Program

Overall, the participants' response to the program was very positive and showed a progressive progression from the first meeting to the last. Visual evidence in the form of photographic documentation taken during each meeting also strengthens the findings of this observation. The photos of the activities show a different dynamic of each meeting, where in the first meeting the sitting position of the participants still looked stiff and separated, but in the subsequent meetings the atmosphere seemed much more fluid and familiar, which visually reflected the increased openness and involvement of the participants in the learning process. At the first meeting, most of the participants still seemed hesitant and tended to be passive. One participant even openly said that English learning activities had not been carried out because the orphanage was still looking for new teachers, an acknowledgment that underscores how important intervention programs like this are for groups of children who have been neglected academically. Language anxiety is a significant barrier for learners *EFL*, and gamification approaches that create a safe environment to try and fail (*safe-to-fail*) proven to be able to reduce such anxiety effectively (Amnouychokanant, 2025).

Entering the second and third meetings, the increase in participant participation began to be noticeable. Children who were previously reluctant to speak began to dare to pronounce vocabulary and phrases in English even though they were still with imperfect pronunciation. The courage to speak despite these limitations is a very meaningful achievement in the context of learning a foreign language, because it signifies a decrease in affective barriers that have been hindering them. Gamification has been shown to increase learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement while providing hands-on feedback that strengthens the overall learning process (Afifah & Priyana, 2024). At the fourth and fifth meetings, the participation rate of the participants reached its peak, characterized by the children's initiative to answer questions without having to be asked first, as well as their ability to use the vocabulary they had learned in the previous meeting in a new context (Juárez & Patiño, 2025; StuRat (2025)).

The challenges encountered during the program also need to be noted as an important part of the study's findings. First, the very diverse level of ability of participants is an obstacle in designing activities that can accommodate all participants equally. Participants from the junior high school level tend to absorb material faster than elementary school participants, so flexible grouping is needed. Second, the fluctuating attendance due to the internal activities of the orphanage caused some participants to not be able to attend all meetings in order, so the material was designed in a modular manner so that participants could still follow without losing context. Third, the limitation of teaching tools at the beginning of the program had become a technical obstacle that was overcome by the handover of whiteboards and stationery by the student team before the program started. Despite these challenges, the combination of CLT and gamification in this program has succeeded in creating a meaningful learning experience that has a positive impact on the development of the English language skills of orphanage children. The program was closed with the distribution of gifts and a photo session with all participants and orphanage administrators as a form of appreciation for their active involvement during the five meetings (Wafa & Kusumaningtyas, 2026).



Figure 6. Group Photo of Participants and Administrators of the Imanuel Orphanage

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that students responded positively to the implementation of CLT and gamification in an informal learning environment for English language learning. The method helped make classes lively and interesting through active participation, and made students more motivated to learn.

The study also found that using both approaches together was effective in increasing students' involvement and confidence in using English, which was not only used to add the various variations learned. The *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) based English language teaching program combined with gamification strategies at the Imanuel Palangka Raya Orphanage was successfully implemented effectively for five meetings involving 20 participants from elementary and junior high levels. The findings of the study show that the integration of the two approaches is able to create an interactive, fun, and conducive learning environment for the development of English skills of children who have had minimal access to foreign language education. Participant participation increased progressively from meeting to meeting, characterized by the growth of the courage to communicate orally, the increase in mastery of basic vocabulary, and the reduction of language anxiety which was previously the main obstacle. The "English for Daily Life" module developed has proven to be relevant and adaptive for non-formal learning contexts, and can be used as a reference for similar institutions in developing language education programs for disadvantaged groups of children.

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