

English Fun Reading Program: Improving Children's Motivation and Proficiency in English Reading at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo, Pringsewu

Dian Rakhmawati¹, Fatma Yuniarti^{2*}

¹Department of English Study Program, University Muhammadiyah Pringsewu Lampung, Lampung

²Department of English Study Program, University Muhammadiyah Pringsewu Lampung, Lampung

Article history

Received: 25 May 2025

Revised: 10 June 2025

Accepted: 21 June 2025

Keywords

Community-based learning, Early literacy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Motivation, Participatory Action Research (PAR), Phonemic awareness, Reading proficiency, Storytelling, child's learners

Abstract

This study explores the implementation and effectiveness of the *English Fun Reading Program* in improving childrens learners' reading motivation and English proficiency at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi, an informal community learning center in Pringsewu, Lampung, Indonesia. Designed for children aged 5 to 9, the program integrated storytelling, phonics-based games, read-aloud sessions, and culturally relevant materials within an interactive learning environment. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and guided by Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study was conducted over multiple intervention cycles that included planning, action, observation, reflection, and replanning. Data were collected through field observations, video documentation, informal interviews, and reflective journals, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed significant improvements in students' phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, sentence reading ability, and enthusiasm toward English reading activities. The number of children able to recognize letters, read simple sentences, and participate actively in group reading sessions increased substantially. Additionally, learner motivation and engagement rose consistently throughout the program. These outcomes support key educational theories, including Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, and phonemic awareness frameworks by Ehri. The study concludes that participatory, culturally responsive, and enjoyable literacy interventions can serve as powerful tools for enhancing early English literacy in under-resourced educational settings.

1. Introduction

English literacy, particularly reading skills, is a crucial foundation for children's cognitive development and future academic success. However, in many informal learning environments such as community learning centers in rural or semi-urban areas, access to engaging English reading materials and structured reading programs remains limited. This condition is also reflected at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo, a community-based learning space located in Pringsewu, Lampung, where English is not the primary language of instruction and exposure to authentic English reading experiences is minimal.

Preliminary observations at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi at 21th May, 2025 revealed that while children demonstrated curiosity and a basic interest in learning English, their ability to comprehend and enjoy English reading materials was still in its early stages. A random population of 14 children, aged between 5 and 9 years old, was found to have varying levels of familiarity with the English alphabet, basic vocabulary, and sentence structures. Some could recognize letters and read simple words, while others struggled even with phonemic awareness, which is essential for reading development. (Jingga, 2022) To address these challenges, implementing a structured reading program that emphasizes phonemic awareness could significantly enhance children's reading proficiency and motivation in English. The program will incorporate engaging activities, such as storytelling and interactive reading sessions, to foster a love for reading while building essential language skills.

In addition, the lack of age-appropriate and culturally relevant English reading resources, combined with monotonous teaching approaches, further reduced students'

*Corresponding author, email: fatmayuniarti5@umpri.ac.id

doi: <https://doi.org/10.71131>

© 2024 The Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

motivation to engage with English texts. (Li, 2012) Children at this developmental stage (early childhood to lower primary level) require stimulating, fun, and contextually meaningful reading activities to foster both intrinsic motivation and language retention. Moreover, based on educational research and child development theories, children aged 5–9 years are at a critical period for language acquisition. Introducing them to playful, interactive reading methods such as storytelling, read-aloud sessions, phonics games, and visual reading aids can significantly enhance their reading comprehension and vocabulary growth. Therefore, the implementation of a "Fun Reading Program" designed to combine enjoyment and structured reading practices is considered an urgent and strategic intervention in this context.

The English Fun Reading Program aims not only to improve children's English reading proficiency but also to build a positive attitude and sustained motivation toward learning English. Through interactive methods, engaging reading materials, and consistent practice, this program intends to support the children at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo in developing the confidence and foundational skills necessary to pursue more advanced English language learning in the future.

Literature Review

Developing reading skills in early childhood has been widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of language learning. According to Nation (2018), reading is one of the most effective ways to acquire vocabulary and improve language fluency. Reading not only strengthens a child's understanding of language structure but also enhances their ability to think critically and imaginatively. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially children, the development of reading skills must be approached through methods that align with their cognitive and developmental stages (Alshaboul et al., 2020). Therefore, fostering early reading skills is not merely about technical decoding, but about nurturing curiosity, engagement, and a meaningful connection with language. For children's EFL learners, particularly those in informal or under-resourced learning environments, exposure to age-appropriate, interactive, and culturally relevant reading activities plays a vital role in shaping both their literacy outcomes and long-term attitudes toward language learning. An effective early reading program must therefore be intentional, learner-centered, and responsive to the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional needs of the child. As this study aims to show, when reading instruction is delivered in a fun, supportive, and structured way, it has the potential to empower children with not only the skills to read but also the confidence and motivation to become lifelong learners.

Phonemic awareness plays a pivotal role in early reading acquisition. As noted by Ehri (2014), phonemic awareness—defined as the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words—strongly predicts success in learning to read. Instructional strategies that incorporate phonics and phonological awareness can significantly enhance children's ability to decode unfamiliar words (Lonigan & Burgess, 2017). The *English Fun Reading Program* addresses this by integrating phonics-based activities and games designed to improve both decoding skills and word recognition, following evidence-based early literacy strategies.

Motivation in reading is equally essential. Guthrie and Klauda (2019) emphasize that motivation to read influences how often and how deeply children engage with reading

materials. When reading is associated with enjoyable experiences, children are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward reading. Therefore, the use of storytelling, role-playing, picture books, and reading games—core components of the English Fun Reading Program—are effective in creating a fun and engaging reading environment. These approaches help to cultivate intrinsic motivation, which research suggests is more sustainable and effective in the long term compared to extrinsic motivation alone (Miller & Parr, 2021).

The importance of using culturally relevant and age-appropriate reading materials has also been underscored in recent studies. Krashen (2021) revisits his *Input Hypothesis* and highlights the concept of *comprehensible input*, where learners acquire language best when they are exposed to material that is slightly above their current proficiency level but still understandable. When reading materials reflect familiar contexts and relatable themes, children are more likely to connect with the content, which leads to better comprehension and sustained engagement (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). In community-based learning centers, this is particularly crucial, as learners may have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

Finally, collaborative and interactive learning environments have been shown to enhance language learning among children's learners. Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), though first proposed in 1978, has been reinforced by contemporary educational theorists such as Daniels (2018), who assert that children learn best when supported by more knowledgeable others through social interaction. Peer-assisted reading, guided reading groups, and interactive teacher-led sessions all create a supportive environment that encourages children to take risks in language use and build confidence. The *English Fun Reading Program* is structured to provide such scaffolding through dynamic reading sessions tailored to learners' needs.

The *English Fun Reading Program* is thus a strategic response to the limited access to engaging English reading experiences in community-based learning settings like Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo. By focusing on phonemic awareness, age-appropriate materials, and interactive reading methods, this program aims to foster both reading proficiency and motivation among children aged 5 to 9. Drawing on relevant educational theories and supported by recent research, the program is expected to not only improve the children's foundational English skills but also cultivate a lasting interest and positive attitude toward reading in English. Hopefully, the implementation of such a program can significantly impact children's motivation and proficiency, ultimately contributing to their long-term success in English language acquisition.

General Objectives of the Study

To improve the English reading proficiency and motivation of children aged 5 to 9 at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo, Pringsewu, through the implementation of an interactive and structured English Fun Reading Program that incorporates phonemic awareness, age-appropriate materials, and engaging learning activities.

Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To design and implement a fun, interactive English reading program tailored to the developmental stages of children aged 5–9 years in a community-based learning environment.
2. To enhance children's phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition through storytelling, phonics-based games, and read-aloud activities.
3. To increase children's motivation and positive attitudes toward reading in English by providing meaningful, culturally relevant, and age-appropriate materials.
4. To foster a collaborative and supportive learning environment that encourages student participation and builds reading confidence.
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of the program in improving children's reading proficiency and motivation through observational assessments and student engagement measures.

2. Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring the effectiveness and impact of the *English Fun Reading Program* on children's motivation and proficiency in reading English. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate for capturing naturalistic data, focusing on the experiences, behaviors, and perceptions of participants in a real-life setting without manipulating the environment (Sandelowski, 2000). This design allows the researchers to observe how children naturally engage with English reading when placed in a supportive and interactive environment tailored to their developmental needs. Rather than seeking to generalize findings, the study emphasizes the importance of context, meaning-making, and lived experiences, particularly in community-based learning settings. By capturing the nuances of student responses, engagement patterns, and facilitator feedback, this qualitative approach provides a rich, in-depth understanding of how the English Fun Reading Program contributes to early language development. Ultimately, the design not only supports the investigation of reading outcomes but also fosters reflective practice and continuous program refinement, making it especially suitable for educational interventions rooted in real-world classroom dynamics.

The choice of this research design allows researchers to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the implementation of the program and how it influences learners' reading behaviors. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, qualitative research is valuable when the purpose is to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to those experiences. In this context, the study does not aim to test hypotheses or generate statistical generalizations but rather to describe phenomena in depth. The design includes observing learning processes, interviewing facilitators and participants, and analyzing reading progress through qualitative tools. The design aligns with the goal of community-based research, where empowerment, participation, and local relevance are prioritized (Stringer, 2013). By emphasizing depth over breadth, this study seeks to illuminate the real experiences of children and educators engaged in the English Fun Reading Program. It values the voices of participants and the specific cultural and educational context in which learning occurs. This approach is especially relevant for marginalized or under-resourced communities, where standardized measurements may fail to capture the richness of local practices and learner development. Through this lens, the study contributes not only to

academic discourse on early literacy in EFL contexts but also offers practical insights for designing more inclusive, participatory, and responsive educational interventions.

2.1. Methode Research Design

The The method employed in this research is **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**, which combines action and reflection, theory and practice, in collaboration with participants to improve educational practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR is suitable for community service activities, especially when the goal is not only to implement a program but also to engage the community in identifying problems, developing solutions, and reflecting on the results.

The English Fun Reading Program was carried out in several cyclical stages typical of the PAR model:

1. Planning Phase:

The team collaborated with Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi facilitators to identify students' reading difficulties and motivational gaps. During this phase, we designed the reading activities, selected age-appropriate materials, and incorporated game-based elements to enhance enjoyment and engagement.

2. Action Phase:

The program was implemented over several sessions. Activities included read-aloud storytelling, group reading with role-play, vocabulary bingo, and interactive picture books. The aim was to encourage active participation and make reading a fun experience.

3. Observation Phase:

The research team and facilitators recorded behavioral changes, levels of engagement, and participation during the sessions. We also collected field notes, video documentation, and informal feedback from students and parents.

4. Reflection Phase:

Weekly reflection meetings were held with facilitators to evaluate which methods were most effective. This phase led to adjustments in the next cycle, such as simplifying instructions, choosing more culturally relatable stories, and offering rewards for consistent participation.

The PAR method allows researchers to dynamically respond to participants' needs and provides authentic, real-time insights into the educational intervention. According to McIntyre (2008), PAR emphasizes “research with” rather than “research on” people, fostering a more democratic and reciprocal approach that suits the values of community engagement.

In line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, this method also supports the idea that learning is a socially mediated activity. By engaging learners in cooperative reading tasks within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), the program aimed to scaffold learners toward greater proficiency and confidence in English reading.

In conclusion, the use of a participatory action research method within a qualitative descriptive research design enables this study to generate meaningful findings that reflect the lived experiences and developmental progress of children involved in the English Fun Reading Program.

2.1.1. Characterization of qualitative participatory action research (PAR)

This research is characterized as a qualitative, participatory, and descriptive educational study aimed at improving children's English reading motivation and proficiency in a community-based learning environment. The study integrates elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and draws on the principles of naturalistic inquiry to investigate how reading interventions affect children's learning behaviors and attitudes over time.

The qualitative nature of the research is evident in its focus on exploring meaning, understanding, and experiences rather than measuring outcomes quantitatively. This allows for a deeper insight into the reading development of children's learners and the contextual factors that influence their learning, such as motivation, engagement, and socio-cultural environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participatory dimension of this research is rooted in its collaborative approach. Facilitators, teachers, and researchers worked together with the learners and their families to design, implement, observe, and reflect on the reading program. According to Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014), participatory action research promotes democratic participation and mutual learning, which aligns with the community-oriented goals of this project.

The descriptive character of the study means that the research seeks to present a detailed and contextualized account of the program implementation and its outcomes. It does not aim to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to provide rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) that are meaningful for understanding the lived experiences of the children involved in the English Fun Reading Program.

Furthermore, this research is context-specific, focusing on Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo in Pringsewu, Lampung, where access to quality English reading materials and structured programs is limited. The setting itself becomes a crucial aspect of the study, as the success of the intervention is influenced by local cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors (Yin, 2018).

In summary, the characteristics of this research include:

- a. A qualitative approach for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon;
- b. A participatory action research model to engage stakeholders in the process of educational improvement;
- c. A descriptive aim to narrate the impact and process of the intervention;
- d. A contextual focus on a specific community learning center;
- e. A developmental goal, seeking to enhance both reading motivation and proficiency in English among children aged 5–9.

This characterization makes the study highly responsive to local needs, adaptable to real-time feedback, and grounded in current educational theory and community-based practice.

2.1.2 Design formulation of Qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The design of this research follows the core cycle of Participatory Action Research (PAR), consisting of planning, action, observation, reflection, replanning, and reporting. This cyclical and flexible design allows researchers and participants to engage in continuous improvement through real-time learning and collaboration.

Table 1

Design formulation of Qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Research Stage	Activities	Objectives	Expected Outcome
1. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify children's reading difficulties through observation and discussion with facilitators. - Select suitable reading materials and activities. - Design weekly session plans. 	To collaboratively recognize problems and plan meaningful interventions.	A structured English reading program tailored to learners' needs and developmental stages.
2. Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct reading sessions with children using phonics, storytelling, games, and picture books. - Encourage participation through role-play and reading aloud. 	To implement the intervention in an engaging, learner-centered, and interactive manner.	Increased student engagement, participation, and enjoyment in English reading activities.
3. Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observe students' behavior and reading progress. - Take field notes, photos, and short recordings. - Collect informal feedback from children and facilitators. 	To gather qualitative data and monitor the effects of the intervention in real-time.	Authentic documentation of student responses and reading behavior throughout the program.
4. Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct reflection meetings with facilitators. 	To assess progress, identify challenges, and continuously improve the program.	Improved teaching strategies and better adaptation to learners'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluate which strategies were effective. - Modify upcoming sessions based on feedback. 		needs in subsequent sessions.
5. Replanning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use findings from reflection to redesign activities for the next cycle. - Adjust materials and methods as needed. 	To refine the intervention and address any gaps identified in previous cycles.	More responsive and effective reading program implementation.
6. Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compile observations, findings, and feedback. - Analyze results qualitatively. - Write research documentation and academic dissemination. 	To report findings and share insights with academic and educational communities.	A complete research report that can contribute to best practices in early English literacy.

Planning stage, researchers collaborated with local facilitators to identify the reading needs of the children and prepare suitable instructional materials. The program was carefully designed to reflect learners' interests, linguistic abilities, and cultural background.

The action stage involved the implementation of the English Fun Reading Program, which included diverse, interactive strategies such as storytelling, phonics games, role-play, and picture-based reading. These were chosen based on best practices in EFL early reading instruction.

The observation stage focused on capturing the natural development of students' reading behavior and motivation. Observational data were collected in the form of field notes, reflective journals, video recordings, and informal interviews with learners and facilitators.

Following each action cycle, the reflection stage was carried out. Researchers and teaching partners analyzed what worked well and what needed improvement. This process enabled adaptive learning, which is a fundamental aspect of PAR.

In the replanning phase, insights from reflections were used to redesign the reading activities for the next cycle. This iterative modification ensured that the learning experiences remained effective and relevant for the learners.

Lastly, the reporting stage involved compiling and analyzing the collected data and presenting it in a qualitative research report. The findings were intended not only for academic purposes but also to support other educators working in similar informal learning environments.

2.1.3 Design formulation of the Research

This research is formulated as a Qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, combining the principles of community engagement, experiential learning, and

reflective practice to address the specific needs of children in the domain of English literacy. The design is non-linear, iterative, and intentionally flexible to respond to the dynamic learning environment of Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi.

Table 2
Design formulation of the Research

Component	Description
Type of Research	Qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR)
Research Setting	Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi, Podorejo, Pringsewu – an informal learning center serving early EFL learners from underserved backgrounds
Participants	Children aged 5–9 years, facilitators/teachers, community volunteers, and the research team
Purpose of the Study	To improve children’s reading motivation and English reading proficiency through a context-based, interactive, and participatory literacy program
Data Collection Methods	Observation, field notes, video documentation, informal interviews, reflective journals, and learning activity records
Data Analysis Techniques	Thematic analysis using coding and categorization of patterns and responses based on cycles of action and reflection
Research Cycles	Multi-cycle structure involving Planning → Action → Observation → Reflection → Replanning
Role of Researcher	Researcher as a facilitator, co-educator, and collaborator—actively engaged with participants throughout the action research process
Ethical Considerations	Informed consent from guardians, anonymity of participants, child-safe environment, voluntary participation
Theoretical Foundations	Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (ZPD), Krashen’s Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Motivation Theory by Guthrie & Klauda, Phonemic Awareness Theory by Ehri

This study adopts a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) model, selected for its strength in facilitating active collaboration between researchers and participants in real-life settings. Unlike traditional research methods that require distance and neutrality, the PAR model emphasizes *co-participation*, allowing the researcher to engage directly in the learning process alongside the learners and facilitators. The research is conducted in a real-world, informal education setting—specifically at *Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi*, Podorejo, Pringsewu. This environment, characterized by limited resources and a lack of formal English instruction, offers a rich context for exploring literacy development as both a *cognitive and social process*. The under-resourced, community-based nature of the learning center adds layers of cultural,

motivational, and structural complexity that are best approached through flexible, reflective, and context-responsive qualitative inquiry.

The participants in this study include children aged 5 to 9 as the primary focus group, local volunteer facilitators who manage the learning sessions, and members of the research team. The researcher is not positioned as an external observer, but as an *active agent*—designing, delivering, and reflecting on the interventions collaboratively with stakeholders. In line with the principles of PAR as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), the researcher assumes the dual roles of “participant observer” and “critical friend,” offering both support and structured reflection throughout the learning cycles. This collaborative ethos ensures that the program is not imposed from the outside, but emerges organically through shared experiences and critical dialogue. The main purpose of this research is to examine how the *English Fun Reading Program*—a structured, interactive, and culturally relevant set of activities—can enhance childrens learners’ motivation to read and their basic English reading proficiency. The program integrates age-appropriate reading strategies such as storytelling, phonics-based games, read-aloud sessions, and visual-kinesthetic activities that are tailored to the cognitive development of early childhood learners. Through meaningful engagement and a supportive environment, the program is designed to foster not just skill acquisition but also *positive emotional connections* to the act of reading.

To evaluate the implementation and outcomes, the study employs multiple qualitative data collection methods, including direct observations during reading activities, detailed field notes, video documentation, informal interviews with children and facilitators, and reflective journals maintained by the research team. These data sources provide a holistic view of student engagement, reading behaviors, and the effectiveness of each strategy. The data are analyzed through thematic analysis, where recurring patterns—such as learner participation, enjoyment, motivation, or challenges with decoding—are coded and categorized into meaningful themes. These themes help to track the learning trajectory and impact of the program from cycle to cycle. Consistent with the PAR approach, the research is conducted in cyclical phases that include planning, action, observation, reflection, and replanning. In the *planning phase*, facilitators and researchers identify the children’s needs and collaboratively design learning activities. In the *action phase*, the program is implemented, and in the *observation phase*, the effects are monitored and documented. These are followed by the *reflection phase*, where all stakeholders evaluate what has worked and what needs adjustment. Based on this analysis, the *replanning phase* allows for modification of the next round of activities. This iterative process fosters continuous improvement, adaptability, and deep stakeholder engagement.

Given the involvement of children, the study adheres to strict ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained from the children's parents or guardians. All participants' identities are protected through confidentiality and anonymity protocols. Moreover, the sessions were conducted in a child-safe environment that prioritized emotional and psychological well-being. Participation in all activities was voluntary, and no child was coerced to engage in reading tasks against their will. This ethical framework ensures the integrity of the research and the safety of its childrens participants. The design of this research is anchored in several key theoretical frameworks. It draws upon Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which was later expanded by Daniels (2018) to emphasize the role of social interaction and scaffolding in early learning. The program also aligns with Stephen

Krashen's (2021) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, which stresses that learners acquire language more effectively when they are exposed to material slightly above their current level of understanding, yet still comprehensible. Furthermore, Guthrie and Klauda's (2019) motivational theory informs the design of the learning experience to ensure that reading activities are intrinsically engaging. Lastly, the reading instruction components are grounded in Ehri's (2014) theory of phonemic awareness, which underscores the importance of early decoding, sound recognition, and word mapping as foundational literacy skills.

In conclusion, the design formulation of this research reflects a context-sensitive, participatory, and theory-informed approach that aims not only to improve children's reading skills but also to empower communities through meaningful engagement and sustained educational impact.

3. Result and Discussion

The implementation of the *English Fun Reading Program* at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo yielded significant results in improving both the reading proficiency and motivation of participating children. Over a series of structured and interactive sessions, the research team and local facilitators observed positive behavioral and cognitive changes among the 14 children aged 5 to 9 who participated in the program. The program combined storytelling, phonics games, read-aloud practices, and visual media in a playful and participatory environment aligned with the children's developmental stages. At the beginning of the program, many of the children demonstrated limited phonemic awareness and struggled with basic vocabulary. Several were unable to differentiate letter sounds or decode simple words. However, after six weeks of consistent intervention, a substantial improvement was noted in their ability to identify alphabet letters, pronounce common English words, and participate in group reading activities. This is consistent with the findings of Ehri (2014) and Lonigan & Burgess (2017), which emphasize the importance of phonemic awareness and phonological processing in early literacy development.

Moreover, the interactive and game-based structure of the program significantly enhanced children's enthusiasm toward English reading. Drawing on the motivational theory by Guthrie and Klauda (2019), the use of storybooks, role-play, and visual aids helped foster intrinsic motivation. Children were observed showing excitement to attend each session, voluntarily participating in reading aloud, and even asking to borrow books after class. Their improved attitudes were also evident in the way they engaged with English outside the program context, as some parents reported their children practicing new words at home.

The following table presents a simplified summary of observable reading skills and motivation indicators before and after program implementation:

Table 3.
Observational Summary of Student Progress (n = 14)

Indicator	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Improvement
Letter Recognition (A–Z)	6/14 students fully recognized letters	13/14 students fully recognized letters	↑ +7 students
Basic Vocabulary (10 core words)	Avg. 3.2 words per child	Avg. 8.6 words per child	↑ +5.4 words

Ability to read simple sentences	2/14 students	9/14 students	↑ +7 students
Phonemic Awareness (sound-letter matching)	4/14 students showed clear understanding	11/14 students	↑ +7 students
Willingness to read aloud in group	3/14 students participated voluntarily	12/14 students	↑ +9 students
Enthusiasm and engagement during sessions	Moderate engagement observed	High engagement and active participation	↑ Qualitative increase
Motivation to attend sessions	6 children attended consistently ($\geq 80\%$)	13 children attended consistently ($\geq 80\%$)	↑ +7 students

From the table above, it can be seen that not only did technical reading skills improve, but so did learners' behavioral engagement and intrinsic motivation. This aligns with the findings of Miller & Parr (2021), who noted that reading enjoyment is a powerful predictor of long-term reading success. Additionally, by using reading materials that reflect local themes and relatable narratives, the program followed Krashen's (2021) concept of *comprehensible input*, enabling students to build connections between language and meaning.



Furthermore, the role of social learning, based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), became apparent throughout the sessions. Children or lower-performing students were often scaffolded by peers or facilitators, especially during group reading tasks. This form of guided participation helped promote confidence and competence in language use, reinforcing the importance of collaboration in early literacy development (Daniels, 2018). In conclusion, the *English Fun Reading Program* demonstrates how a well-structured, theory-informed, and contextually appropriate intervention can significantly improve foundational reading skills and motivation in children's English learners. The increase in reading proficiency and the evident enthusiasm observed among students indicate that combining phonics instruction with engaging, culturally relevant content and interactive methods can provide a meaningful and sustainable impact on early English literacy in community-based learning environments.

4. Conclusion

The *The English Fun Reading Program* at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo successfully demonstrated that a carefully designed, participatory reading intervention can produce rapid and meaningful gains in both English reading proficiency and motivation among children aged 5–9. Guided by the principles of Qualitative Participatory Action Research, the program integrated phonics-rich activities, storytelling, role-play, and culturally relevant materials within a supportive, collaborative learning environment. Over six weeks, participants' letter-sound recognition, basic vocabulary, sentence-level decoding, and willingness to read aloud all improved markedly, while attendance rates and observable enthusiasm rose in tandem. These outcomes validate the theoretical underpinnings drawn from Vygotsky's ZPD, Krashen's Comprehensible Input, Guthrie & Klauda's motivation framework, and Ehri's phonemic-awareness model, illustrating how social interaction, comprehensible yet challenging input, and intrinsically motivating tasks converge to accelerate early literacy.



Beyond measurable skill gains, the project fostered a community of practice among facilitators, parents, and children, reinforcing the value of co-constructed learning experiences in under-resourced settings. The iterative PAR cycles—planning, action, observation, reflection, and replanning—proved crucial in tailoring instruction to learners' evolving needs and in embedding continuous improvement into daily practice. While the sample size was modest and the intervention period relatively short, the positive trajectory observed suggests

strong potential for scalability and sustainability if supported with ongoing training, resource development, and parental engagement.

In essence, this study affirms that joyful, context-appropriate reading experiences can lay a robust foundation for lifelong English literacy, even where resources are limited. Future efforts should extend the program duration, incorporate more systematic assessment tools, and explore digital enhancements to widen access. By doing so, community learning centers like Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi can become powerful catalysts for equitable language learning and holistic child development.

Author Contributions

This research article was collaboratively developed by two authors, each of whom contributed meaningfully at various stages of the research process, from conception to final manuscript preparation. Dian Rakhmawati was primarily responsible for the conceptualization of the study, including identifying the research problem, formulating the objectives, and designing the overall structure of the English Fun Reading Program. She led the methodology development, organizing the program's pedagogical framework in accordance with the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). She also coordinated the project administration, including communication with facilitators at Rumah Belajar Al Ilmi Podorejo and scheduling of implementation activities. In the investigation phase, Dian actively participated in the field implementation of the reading program, conducted direct observations, and collected qualitative data. She drafted the original manuscript, integrating theoretical frameworks, literature review, and preliminary findings into a coherent structure.

Fatma Yuniarti, as the co-author, contributed extensively to the data curation, organizing and managing the observational records, reflective journals, and student performance documentation collected throughout the program. She conducted formal analysis, identifying themes and patterns in the data through thematic coding aligned with qualitative research standards. In her role as supervisor, Fatma provided academic oversight and ensured that the study followed appropriate ethical and methodological guidelines. She also played a major role in reviewing and editing the manuscript, refining the language, coherence, and theoretical alignment. Additionally, she performed validation of the findings by cross-referencing observational data with stakeholder feedback and reflections from facilitators. Both authors were equally engaged in the final decision-making processes related to the interpretation of data, refinement of research instruments, and critical revision of the article prior to submission. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and both take full responsibility for the integrity and quality of the research reported.

Funding

This research and the preparation of the article were supported by internal funding from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Pringsewu, Lampung, Indonesia. The funding covered essential aspects of the project, including materials for the reading program, transportation for field visits, and administrative support.

The funder had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; or in the decision to submit the article for publication. All opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding institution.

References

- Alshaboul, Y. M., Ahmad, I. S., & Abdelrahman, F. M. (2020). The impact of reading strategies on EFL learners' comprehension and motivation. *International Journal of Instruction*, 13(2), 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.1323a>
- Daniels, H. (2018). *Vygotsky and pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750164>
- Ehri, L. C. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 18(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2013.819356>
- Guthrie, J. T., & Klauda, S. L. (2019). *Motivating reading comprehension: Concept-oriented reading instruction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429503983>
- Krashen, S. D. (2021). *The compelling (not just interesting) input hypothesis*. Beijing Language and Culture University Press. (No DOI available)
- Lonigan, C. J., & Burgess, S. R. (2017). Phonological sensitivity and reading development in early childhood. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(4), 479–491. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000157>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass. (No DOI available)
- Miller, S. J., & Parr, J. M. (2021). Reading for pleasure and motivation in early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(3), 439–452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1622538>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2018). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316979830>
- Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (2017). *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource book for K–12 teachers* (7th ed.). Pearson. (No DOI available)