


Exploring English Teaching Practices in Orphanages:
A Qualitative Study Using the Narrative Inquiry Approach

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: July 25, 2025 Revised: August 20, 2025 Accepted: August 21, 2025 Published: August 30, 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Keywords: Narrative Inquiry, Teaching Experience, Orphanage, English Language Teaching, Non-Formal Education.</p>	<p>This study investigates English language teaching practices in orphanages, highlighting the lived experiences of volunteer educators in non-formal settings. Using a narrative inquiry approach at Mutiara Insan Orphanage, Banyuwangi, East Java, the research uncovers emotional, pedagogical, and contextual complexities in teaching under social and resource constraints. Data were gathered through participatory observation, narrative interviews, visual documentation, and literature review. Findings reveal that non-professional volunteers primarily use gamification to engage learners of diverse ages and proficiencies. Despite challenges such as limited resources, time, and inconsistent learner backgrounds, volunteers demonstrated adaptive, empathetic, and inclusive teaching practices. Notably, children showed gains in both basic English skills and socio-emotional confidence. This research offers a novel lens on English instruction in marginalized, under-researched contexts and underscores the urgent need for sustained pedagogical support and reflective practice in orphanage-based education.</p> <p><i>This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i></p> <div></div>
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INTRODUCTION

The process of teaching and learning English in Indonesia generally takes place in formal educational settings, such as schools and universities, where students are introduced to the four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This learning process often incorporates various methods, including communicative approaches, digital media integration, and collaborative learning, to enhance students' language proficiency and engagement. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of English instruction still varies depending on factors such as teacher competence, learning environment, and access to resources. In the context of globalization, the role of English has become increasingly significant, prompting the younger generation to prepare themselves to face global challenges. English functions not only as an international language that facilitates cross-cultural communication but is also increasingly integrated into various sectors of life—such as

education, technology, economics, and diplomacy. Consequently, the mastery of English in Indonesia, particularly within the education sector, has become a crucial focus in efforts to enhance the nation's human capital. Optimizing English language education is essential for developing a generation that is globally competitive and responsive to the demands of the times.

This aligns with the view of Khomsin & Rahimmatussalisa (2021), who emphasized that English has gained prominence in the modern era, especially in relation to technological progress, knowledge dissemination, and economic development. Furthermore, English education is recognized as a strategic tool for shaping human resources that are adaptable and ready to compete on a global scale (Abbas et al., 2025). Through language, students not only understand linguistic structures but are also exposed to the culture, values, and perspectives of other societies. Thus, mastering English indirectly fosters tolerant attitudes, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding (Suparmini et al., 2023). Implementing it from an early age can optimize integrated learning. However, the reality of education in Indonesia still shows significant inequality, especially in terms of access to quality education. One example is the group of children in orphanages who are affected by this inequality. This occurs because of one external factor, namely the economic condition of orphanages in meeting the needs of children, including education. Some children receiving formal education were found to have very basic English proficiency levels, regardless of whether they were at the primary, secondary, or high school level. Not only in terms of economics, they also face limitations in learning facilities, limited access to technology, and low intensity of individual guidance. This situation aligns with the findings of Cao & Huo (2025) research, which identified that schools in vulnerable or rural areas often lack technical educational resources and struggle to retain qualified teachers. In the context of English language learning, the challenges faced by children in orphanages are becoming increasingly complex due to limited access to technology, teaching materials, learning spaces, and competent educators, which in turn exacerbates the academic challenges faced by marginalized groups. Guzmán Rincón (2025) emphasizes that geographical barriers, limited access to the internet and hardware, and poor educational quality are the main factors hindering the sustainability of quality education in marginalized communities. Even when there is assistance from volunteers, these volunteers often lack formal educational backgrounds, and learning activities are only temporary and inconsistent (Khoirunnisa et al., 2023). As a result, this impacts the low quality of students' understanding of the material. This situation highlights the importance of serious attention to the education of vulnerable groups, particularly through contextual and inclusive teaching strategies. For example, educational teaching methods based on games are considered effective by some educators for developing students' language skills. Therefore, English language teaching practices in orphanages need further examination to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities that can be strengthened through equitable educational interventions.

English language learning in orphanages has unique characteristics that distinguish it from teaching processes in formal schools or language courses. Available resources are highly

varied and often limited, in terms of teaching staff, teaching materials, and learning media. The results of this study are that English language teachers in orphanages are generally volunteers, caregivers, or KKL/internship students with varying levels of competence. Additionally, children in orphanages come from diverse age groups and educational levels, ranging from kindergarten to high school, with varying abilities and motivations for learning. This requires flexible and adaptive teaching methods to ensure all children benefit equally from the learning process. The limited environment of orphanages also makes it difficult for children to practice their English skills directly outside of learning sessions. Limited interaction and practice slow down the internalization of learning materials. A similar phenomenon was observed in Muzingili et al. (2025) study in rural areas, where insufficient resources and a lack of supportive learning environments hinder academic mastery, particularly in the context of technology and foreign languages. However, children in orphanages generally show high motivation to learn because they realize the importance of English for their future. In this regard, character education also plays a role in shaping the resilience and self-confidence of children in orphanages to continue learning despite their limitations (Halimah & Nizan, 2020). Therefore, understanding the social and emotional context of English language learning is crucial for designing an appropriate approach.

The selection of orphanages as the location for Field Study (KKL) is a strategic and humane step. This activity is based on concern for marginalized groups who have not had equal access to quality education. Children in orphanages often experience gaps in terms of attention, academic guidance, and educational rights that have not been fully fulfilled. This situation aligns with global findings that educational disparities are commonly experienced by vulnerable groups living in resource-limited environments, lacking sustained learning support, and facing restricted learning environments (Cao & Huo, 2025; Muzingili et al., 2025). Through direct involvement, education students can gain a real understanding of the conditions, challenges, and needs faced by these children. The presence of students can also contribute meaningfully through teaching, learning support, and acting as agents of change in the social environment that requires it. This activity is not merely about delivering educational content but also about reinforcing values of social justice and inclusivity in the field of education (Nurawaliyah & Syafiudin, 2025). In addition, the direct involvement of students in orphanages encourages contextual learning processes that bridge the gap between the educational theories they learn on campus and the realities in the field. This is in line with Guzmán Rincón (2025) view that it is important to emphasize empathy-based interventions and responses to local contexts in addressing educational challenges among marginalized groups. Orphanages serve as reflective spaces for aspiring educators to cultivate empathy, social sensitivity, and a sense of responsibility as part of the broader educational community. Therefore, teaching experiences at orphanages should be viewed as an integral part of the process of shaping educators' identities that align with values of humanity and justice.

In an effort to uncover English teaching practices in orphanages, narrative inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate research method. This approach focuses on the stories or

narratives revealed by the research subjects, in this case teachers, volunteers, or students involved in teaching. Narrative inquiry is considered effective because it is able to capture subjective experiences and personal meanings that cannot be captured through quantitative data. In the context of orphanages, where social and emotional conditions significantly influence the teaching and learning process, this approach provides space to explore complex and layered experiences. As demonstrated by the research of Choi et al. (2025), narratives enable educators to systematically reflect on their activities or experiences, aiming to uncover the dynamics between professional and emotional aspects and create space for identity transformation as educators. Teachers or educators often face various challenges, including material limitations, time constraints, and inconsistent interactions with students. Their stories reflect strategies for survival, innovation, and valuable reflections for the development of inclusive education. Narratives can also reveal the values and worldviews of educators, which have rarely been addressed in mainstream educational research. As highlighted by Choi et al. (2025), a narrative approach enables participants to build collaborative learning communities through reflective experiences, taking into account the affective dimensions and professional identities that develop through participation. Therefore, narrative inquiry not only describes what happened but also why and how those experiences shaped the educational practices they engaged in (Anggih et al., 2021). As such, this approach is highly relevant for studies that focus on the human dimension in the world of education.

The objectives of using narrative inquiry in this context are to:

1. Explore authentic experiences of teachers in teaching English in orphanages or similar institutions.
2. Understand the emotional and cognitive dynamics they experience during the teaching process.
3. Identify adaptive practices and innovative strategies used in dealing with limitations.
4. Provide space for teachers' voices to be recognized as a valid source of knowledge in the development of inclusive and equitable education.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that uses an individual's experiences and life stories as the primary data source in a study. This method explains and examines how and why an experience can shape that individual's understanding of educational events. Narrative inquiry is highly relevant to educational learning, especially in contexts with limitations such as teaching in orphanages. According to Zhang (2021), narrative inquiry is a way to "relive experiences in a rich social and cultural context." This is because narrative inquiry captures the affective, social, and professional aspects that shape teachers' experiences in orphanages. The stories told by teachers or volunteers not only provide information but also provide in-depth reflection on coping, creativity, and identity transformation as educators. According to Choi et al. (2025), narrative approaches can help teachers create reflective learning communities that recognize the importance of personal experiences in creating inclusive educational practices.

This method provides participants with the opportunity to convey their principles and perspectives on the world, which are often underrepresented in conventional research methods. Narratives allow for the emotional and social dimensions of teaching experiences to be expressed in ways that traditional methods cannot always capture, as Zhang (2021) explain, “narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience.” This is particularly important for marginalized education, where field experiences are often not documented through statistical data. Therefore, narrative inquiry is an ideal approach for this research, which aims to study English teaching methods in orphanages, which are fraught with social and emotional complexities.

With this approach, the results of this study are expected to not only describe what happens in the field but also provide rich insights into the human dimension of the learning process in challenging social contexts. This aligns with the concept developed by Choi et al. (2025), namely heterarchical communities of practice, which are forms of equal and reflective collaboration that create space for identity growth, academic courage, and dynamic knowledge exchange.

The cognitive, emotional, and social development of children is greatly impacted by the teaching methods used in orphanages. Children in orphanages experience particular difficulties that may have a detrimental effect on their future if they do not receive parental and family assistance (Katisi et al., 2019). Children in such environments may find it challenging to socialize because they lack the attachments and behavioral patterns that characterize a family context. This can make it difficult for them to develop communication skills, form trustworthy relationships, and adjust to society (Abdulla & Kasese-Hara, 2020). Lack of resources, a lack of tailored techniques, a lack of skilled people, and a lack of emotional support are major problems. According to Cheney & Ucembe (2019), children in orphanages frequently lack solid, trustworthy relationships, which are essential to their psychological and emotional development.

According to a different study, kids thought that teachers were the most helpful people in their lives because they helped them learn academic skills, offered them emotional support and encouragement, and helped them feel better about themselves (Kaukko et al., 2022). According to Schroeter et al. (2015), children and adolescents who were raised in foster care or foster families also saw their teachers as a source of help for the development of self-regulation abilities. According to adolescents raised in foster care systems, having good relationships with their instructors improved their academic performance, increased their involvement in class, and strengthened their sense of community and belonging (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Foster children were able to grow intellectually and receive assistance in finishing their studies by establishing positive relationships with their teachers (Abdulla & Kasese-Hara, 2020). Teachers can help kids feel more confident about their own abilities by encouraging them, which subtly helps them acquire the skills they need to succeed in school (Kaukko et al., 2022).

Effective support and intervention programs cannot be developed without a comprehensive awareness of these concerns. These initiatives must take into account the individual requirements of every child and seek to establish a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere (Kibachio & Mutie, 2018). These kids may have serious learning challenges if they don't receive the right help, which could harm their academic achievement as well as their chances for future education and employment. Additionally, they could struggle to build and sustain positive interpersonal relationships and deal with social adjustment challenges (Gomera & Mutambara, 2020). It is also essential to help orphaned youngsters develop healthy self-esteem (Kaukko et al., 2022). Children who lack stable emotional support and positive role models frequently experience low self-esteem and inferiority complexes (Moffa et al., 2019). Depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses may result from this, making it challenging to interact with others and fit in with society (Kibachio & Mutie, 2018). The literature highlights the value of all-encompassing programs that address gender concerns, psychosocial difficulties, and educational training, among other facets of orphan development. The lack of effective aftercare, the limited impact of gender-sensitive approaches, and the lack of individualization of support programs are among the gaps in the literature that call for more study and better socialization programs for kids living in residential institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative research design using the narrative inquiry approach. The study was conducted to explore the authentic experiences of English language teaching in an orphanage setting, focusing on the personal narratives of educators and student-teachers. This method was chosen to capture the depth and complexity of the participants' teaching journeys, particularly in a non-formal educational environment marked by limitations in resources and access.

The research was carried out at Mutiara Insan Orphanage located in Banyuwangi, East Java, during May 2025. The activities spanned over two months, with the first two weeks allocated to observation and data collection, followed by data analysis, documentation, and reporting in the subsequent weeks. The participants were volunteer teachers and student-teachers involved in English instruction at the orphanage.

The data collection procedures included: (1) In-depth narrative interviews with educators, which encouraged participants to share their teaching experiences, motivations, methods, challenges, and reflections; (2) Participant observation during English lessons to gain contextual insight into classroom dynamics, student engagement, and teaching practices; and (3) Field notes, which recorded significant moments, behaviors, and interactions observed throughout the teaching sessions.

The interview guide was designed to be open-ended and flexible, allowing stories to unfold naturally. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with verbal consent. The data collected were then transcribed and analyzed using a cross-case narrative analysis technique, as outlined by (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). This approach

enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns, themes, and divergent experiences among the participants, thereby creating a comprehensive understanding of the teaching practices in this context.

The data acquired included interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documented classroom activities. The narratives focused on the teachers' pedagogical choices, emotional responses, classroom strategies, and their perceptions of student progress. The researchers reconstructed each story by connecting events in time and place, highlighting the meaningful ways educators adapted to their unique teaching environment.

The findings were further interpreted by relating them to existing literature on inclusive education, character-based teaching, and English language pedagogy in marginalized communities. This approach allowed for both personal and theoretical insights, reinforcing the study's validity through triangulation of methods and perspectives.

In summary, the narrative inquiry approach provided a nuanced and human-centered lens to understand the realities of teaching English in an orphanage. By combining interviews, observation, and reflective analysis, the research successfully documented how teachers navigated educational challenges, applied creative strategies, and contributed to a more inclusive learning environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Educational Background of Orphanage Children and Basic English Skills

Observations and interviews during the field study program at the Mutiara Insan Orphanage revealed that most of the children living there have uneven formal educational backgrounds. Some are still attending elementary and junior high school, while others have not continued their education consistently. Their basic English skills are very limited, with many lacking basic vocabularies such as the names of colors, numbers, or body parts. This is due to minimal prior exposure to English, both at school and in their local communities.

These limitations are further exacerbated by a lack of in-depth academic experiences. Many of these children lack learning support outside of school hours, and their motivation to learn fluctuates. As Katisi et al. (2019) noted, children in orphanages generally face cognitive development challenges due to the absence of structural support from their families. Furthermore, traumatic experiences and limited social interactions make them vulnerable to learning obstacles, including developing foreign language communication skills (Abdulla & Kasese-Hara, 2020).

Educators' Experiences in Developing English Language Learning Strategies

The volunteer teachers involved in teaching English at the orphanage generally come from non-educational backgrounds and lack formal teaching training. However, through repeated involvement and reflection on the teaching process, they have been able to develop an adaptive approach tailored to the characteristics and needs of the children at the orphanage. Initially, the teaching sessions proceeded without a structured plan. However, over

time, the educators began utilizing gamification methods to increase student participation and engagement.

The use of simple learning media such as flashcards, “Simon Says” games, and worksheets has helped create a fun learning atmosphere.

Although there is no set curriculum, teachers are able to adapt their approach based on the children's responses each session. Teachers' reflections indicate that this teaching experience has strengthened their social and emotional sensitivity. They recognize that teaching children from vulnerable backgrounds is not just about transferring knowledge, but also about building relationships, empathy, and patience.

This approach aligns with narrative inquiry, which, according to Fauziah et al. (2025), is the process of reconstructing experiences within the context of time, place, and social interaction. In the context of this KKL, teachers shape their professional identities through daily stories of facing limitations, which also serve as a reflective space for educational practice.

English Learning Outcomes for Children in Orphanages (Academic, Emotional, and Social)

After attending several learning sessions, the children at the orphanage showed positive changes in three key dimensions: academic, emotional, and social. Academically, although basic vocabulary development is still slow, some children have begun to respond to simple English instructions and have shown courage to try using new words. While their abilities are not yet uniform, the process of repetition through play and interaction has proven effective as a learning stimulus.

Emotionally, children appeared more confident and enthusiastic during each learning activity. They expressed joy while participating in language games, although their focus was sometimes more on the play aspect. This positive response indicates they felt comfortable and safe in a supportive learning environment. The literature also confirms that supportive teachers can increase children's self-esteem and confidence in alternative care settings (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018; Schroeter et al., 2015).

Socially, this interaction-based learning provides a space for children to build positive relationships with teachers and peers. This process fosters a sense of connectedness, belonging, and a spirit of cooperation. A study by Gao et al. (2021) showed that strengthening self-esteem and healthy interpersonal relationships are essential foundations for the psychosocial development of orphaned children. Without such support, they are at risk of prolonged social isolation and anxiety (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018).

Result interview

1. Email

Answer : ivonie676@gmail.com

2. Name

Answer : IVONIE GUNAWAN

3. Years

Answer: 22

4. Latest education

Answer : Bachelor of Education

5. How long have you been teaching at the Mutiara Insan orphanage?

Answer : 6 months

6. What motivated you to teach at an orphanage?

Answer: There are several reasons that motivated me to teach at an orphanage. Since I was a teenager, I have been interested in children, and I have always dreamed of helping them, especially those in orphanages. I realise that apart from financial assistance, what they need is educational support. Children in orphanages will eventually enter the real world and be required to compete with other children who have been educated by their parents, from prestigious schools to tutoring in every subject. In my personal opinion, this is one of the educational gaps and injustices they face. Therefore, I decided to help them with my expertise in English.

7. What teaching method do you use most often when teaching at the orphanage?

Answer: Gamification

8. Why do you think this method is effective for children at the orphanage?

Answer: Because at the orphanage where I teach, the children have a wide range of ages, but overall, they are at an average A1-A2 level. Their ages also range from primary to secondary school, and at this stage they are very interested in games. Therefore, to capture their attention, I chose this method.

9. Do you utilise any specific teaching media or tools? If so, what media or tools do you use and how do you utilise them?

Answer: The media I use most frequently are laptops and flashcards. I enjoy using online games for the learning process, such as Wordwall, Game to Learn English, Quizizz, and others. Flashcards, in my opinion, are also one of the basic and essential media; there are many variations of games that can be done using this medium.

10. What is the biggest challenge you face when implementing this teaching method at the orphanage?

Answer: In my opinion, the biggest challenge is the limited availability of devices, such as laptops. Currently, I only have one laptop, and the children take turns using it. This is one of the biggest challenges I face when implementing gamification.

11. What are the advantages and disadvantages you feel about this method, especially in the context of orphanages?

Answer:

- Advantages: it can attract students' attention, increase their enthusiasm, and create a less stressful environment for them.
- Disadvantages: it requires extra energy, a lot of promotion and media, and sometimes students focus more on the game without paying attention to the linguistic elements being taught.

12. How do you overcome the challenges you face when teaching?

Answer: I create a rotation schedule for playing and design additional activities to keep them occupied while waiting for their peers. I also combine this method with others for their post-tests.

13. Do you teach a specific age group, or do you teach children of various ages?

Answer: I teach children of various ages.

14. What are your impressions/experiences of teaching at the Mutiara Insan orphanage?

Answer: I have learned a lot from teaching here. With children of different ages and levels, I have been trained to create lessons that are suitable for all of them. Moreover, I am very happy to have this opportunity, and I feel very happy when I see their progress.

15. Has teaching at the orphanage had any impact on your motivation or interest in learning English?

Answer: Of course. The challenges I face have motivated me to learn even more, as I realise that the knowledge I possess is still very limited.

Discussion

The findings from this Field Study Program demonstrate that the English learning process in an orphanage is complex and cannot be fully understood through formal pedagogical approaches alone. Teaching takes place under very limited conditions: minimal facilities, diverse student ages, and unequal educational backgrounds. However, it is precisely within these limitations that pedagogical creativity emerges, particularly through the use of gamification approaches to create a fun and interactive learning environment.

From the perspective of non-formal education theory, this situation demonstrates the relevance of a learner-centered and context-sensitive approach. Children who lack a consistent learning structure tend to respond better to flexible and engaging strategies. Similarly, the narrative inquiry approach is important because reflectively recounting the experiences of teachers and students opens up a space for understanding how learning occurs not only academically but also emotionally and socially (Meegan, 2021).

Furthermore, the role of teachers in this context appears to function not only as instructors, but also as caregivers and motivators. The literature supports these findings. Kaukko et al. (2022) and Hass & Hartmann (2018) show that children in alternative care rely heavily on the relationships they build with teachers for their sense of security and motivation to learn. In addition, Novitasari & Rahman (2020) reported that the EFL preservice teacher played role as careprovider for solving students' problem. Therefore, education in orphanages must be understood as a transformative practice, requiring social sensitivity and the ability to build emotional connections.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of professional development for teachers and volunteers working in non-formal educational institutions such as orphanages. When formal training is unavailable, firsthand experiences, reflected narratively, can be a valuable learning tool. This is where the urgency of integrating pedagogical theory and field

experience becomes apparent, particularly for English Language Education students, who are required not only to master the teaching material but also to possess strong social empathy and reflective capacity.

Thus, the results of this field study program reinforce the urgency that non-formal education should not be viewed merely as a complement to formal education, but as a primary space that can bring humanitarian values to life in the learning process. As prospective teachers, students need to be trained to read context, adapt strategies, and respond to students' needs holistically, especially in vulnerable and marginalized environments.

CONCLUSION

The Field Study Program (KKL) activity held at the Mutiara Insan Orphanage has provided real-world experience for students in understanding the practice of teaching English in a non-formal environment. Through a narrative inquiry approach, students successfully explored the personal experiences of the teachers and directly observed the dynamics of the learning process taking place under limited conditions.

Some important points that can be concluded from the results of this KKL activity include:

1. English teaching practices in orphanages are informal, generally guided by volunteers who are not professional teachers but have a high level of concern for children's education.
2. Gamification methods are becoming a key strategy for attracting the learning interest of students from diverse age ranges and educational backgrounds.
3. Teachers face various challenges such as limited resources, time, and students' psychosocial conditions, but they are able to handle them with creativity, empathy, and adaptation of teaching methods.
4. Students gain a deep understanding of the social and cultural context of marginalized education, and recognize the importance of educators' role as agents of change oriented towards justice and inclusivity.
5. This KKL activity has strengthened students' professional competencies, both in terms of teaching skills, reflective thinking, and conducting narrative-based qualitative research.

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