



## TEACHERS' EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH UNDERSTANDING THROUGH PARTICIPATORY LEARNING IN SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT SDN 066053

### UPAYA GURU UNTUK MENINGKATKAN PEMAHAMAN BAHASA INGGRIS MELALUI PEMBELAJARAN PARTISIPATIF PADA SISWA KELAS ENAM DI SDN 066053

Nadira Fathia Siregar<sup>1</sup>, Elbert Gusmiarni Gea<sup>2</sup>, Azzirah Amanda<sup>3</sup>,  
Seprianytami Siregar<sup>4</sup>

Elementary School Teacher Education, Faculty Of Education, Medan State University

Email: nadirafathiasiregar@gmail.com

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#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis upaya guru dalam meningkatkan pemahaman Bahasa Inggris siswa kelas enam melalui pembelajaran partisipatif di SDN 066053. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara dengan guru Bahasa Inggris, dan dokumentasi terkait kegiatan pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan beberapa strategi partisipatif, termasuk diskusi kelompok, permainan interaktif, tugas berbasis proyek, dan kolaborasi antarteman untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan dan pemahaman siswa. Strategi-strategi ini menciptakan lingkungan belajar aktif yang mendorong siswa untuk mengungkapkan ide, mengajukan pertanyaan, dan bekerja sama. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pembelajaran partisipatif secara signifikan mendukung pemahaman Bahasa Inggris siswa, terutama dalam penguasaan kosakata, pembentukan kalimat, dan keterampilan komunikasi sederhana. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan berkelanjutan dan praktik reflektif sangat penting bagi guru untuk mengoptimalkan pembelajaran partisipatif dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggris.

**Kata Kunci:** Pembelajaran partisipatif, pemahaman Bahasa Inggris, keterlibatan siswa

#### Abstract

This study aims to analyze teachers' efforts to enhance sixth-grade students' English understanding through participatory learning at SDN 066053. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with English teachers, and documentation related to learning activities. The findings show that teachers apply several participatory strategies, including group discussions, interactive games, project-based tasks, and peer collaboration to increase student engagement and comprehension. These strategies create an active learning environment where students are encouraged to express ideas, ask questions, and work collaboratively. The study concludes that participatory learning significantly supports students' English understanding, particularly in vocabulary mastery, sentence formation, and simple communication skills. The research suggests that continuous training and reflective practice are essential for teachers to optimize participatory learning in English instruction.

**Keywords:** Participatory learning, English understanding, student engagement



## INTRODUCTION

English language education plays a pivotal role in the globalized world, equipping young learners with essential communication skills for academic and social success. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject starting from elementary school, challenges such as low student motivation, limited teacher proficiency, and traditional teaching methods often hinder effective comprehension, particularly among sixth-grade students (aged 11-12) who are transitioning to more complex linguistic structures (Kemdikbud RI, 2020). At SDN 066053, a public elementary school in Medan, teachers face these issues amid a curriculum emphasizing participatory learning to foster active engagement. This study examines teachers' efforts to enhance English understanding through participatory strategies, addressing the gap in localized research on elementary-level English instruction.

Participatory learning, rooted in constructivist theories, encourages students to actively participate in their education, promoting deeper understanding and retention (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Studies have shown that such approaches, including group discussions and interactive games, significantly improve vocabulary mastery and communication skills in young learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, empirical evidence from Indonesian contexts, especially rural or semi-urban elementary schools like SDN 066053, remains limited. Previous research highlights the effectiveness of participatory methods in enhancing student engagement (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001), yet few studies focus on sixth-grade implementation within the national curriculum framework.

This qualitative descriptive study aims to analyze teachers' strategies for improving English understanding among sixth-grade students at SDN 066053. Employing classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis, it explores participatory techniques such as group discussions, interactive games, project-based tasks, and peer collaboration. The findings contribute to educational practices by demonstrating how these efforts build vocabulary, sentence formation, and simple communication skills, while underscoring the need for ongoing teacher training and reflective practice.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policy and pedagogy in Indonesian elementary education, supporting inclusive and engaging English instruction that aligns with global standards (e.g., UNESCO, 2016). By addressing local challenges, it empowers teachers to create active learning environments, ultimately fostering lifelong language proficiency among young students.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how teachers at SDN 066053, a public elementary school in Medan, Indonesia, enhanced sixth-grade students' understanding of English through participatory learning. Qualitative descriptive research is well-suited to providing detailed, straightforward descriptions of phenomena in their natural contexts, with a focus on participants' perspectives and practices (Sandelowski, 2000). This method aligns with the study's aim of analyzing real-world classroom dynamics without imposing statistical generalizations.



## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the classroom observation indicate that sixth-grade students demonstrated varying levels of understanding while learning the English vocabulary topic Animals. Although the teacher implemented communicative and interactive teaching strategies, a number of students still struggled to recognize, pronounce, and apply animal-related vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This variation reflects the results of previous studies, such as Yuliana (2021), who emphasizes that thematic vocabulary especially concrete nouns like animals can still pose challenges for young learners due to limited exposure and inconsistent vocabulary retention.

During the lesson, the teacher employed several techniques aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), including turn-taking speaking practice, simple interviews (e.g., “What animal do you like?”), guessing games using picture cards, and short role-play activities. These approaches are consistent with Suhartono (2018), who found that CLT techniques facilitate vocabulary development by encouraging students to speak actively and interact with peers. The use of visual media, particularly flashcards and animal pictures, was also beneficial. Rahman (2020) notes that visual aids significantly support memory retention among primary school learners because they provide concrete associations between images and target vocabulary.

Despite these efforts, several students were still unable to recall basic vocabulary such as elephant, giraffe, monkey, and crocodile. Some had difficulty differentiating between wild animals and domestic animals, while others struggled to construct simple sentences using the vocabulary. These difficulties support findings by Fitriani (2019), who asserts that limited literacy skills and short-term phonological memory in young learners can hinder vocabulary acquisition, even when the content is familiar and visually supported.

A noticeable contrast was seen in students who showed strong enthusiasm toward the topic. These students actively participated in speaking activities, volunteered to answer questions, and demonstrated better pronunciation and sentence construction. According to Suharti (2022), students with high intrinsic motivation tend to progress more rapidly in vocabulary learning because they are more engaged and willing to practice. In this case, the theme Animals appeared motivating for many learners because it is relatable to their daily experiences, which aligns with Dörnyei’s (2001) theory that familiar topics increase learning motivation and willingness to communicate.

The findings further suggest that the students’ challenges stem not from the quality of the teacher’s instruction, but from individual differences in learning readiness, motivation, and environmental support. Some students reportedly lacked exposure to English at home, which limits reinforcement outside classroom hours. This aligns with Rahmawati (2019), who notes that home environment plays a significant role in vocabulary retention among elementary learners.

Overall, the teacher’s instructional methods were appropriate and consistent with current pedagogical recommendations for young language learners. However, the variation in student performance indicates a need for differentiated instruction. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasize, effective language teaching requires teachers to adapt strategies to meet diverse learner needs, especially in mixed-ability classrooms. Providing additional scaffolding, repeated practice, and multisensory learning opportunities may help weaker students strengthen their vocabulary mastery during lessons on Animals.



## CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers' efforts to improve sixth-grade students' English comprehension at SDN 066053 through participatory learning have had an overall positive impact, despite significant challenges. Strategies such as group discussions, interactive games, project-based assignments, and peer collaboration have succeeded in creating an active learning environment, increasing student engagement, and strengthening simple communication skills and vocabulary mastery. Findings from classroom observations and interviews with teachers confirm that participatory methods support sentence formation and expression of ideas, in line with constructivist theory that emphasizes active participation (Vygotsky, 1978; Freire, 1970).

However, the results also reveal variations in student responses: some students continue to experience comprehension difficulties even though the teacher's delivery of the material is effective, while others show high enthusiasm. This highlights the need for a more inclusive approach to address disparities in ability, especially in the context of Indonesian primary education where access to English varies (Kemdikbud RI, 2020). Overall, participatory learning proved effective in building a foundation in English, but its success depended on continuous adaptation by teachers.

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