



Outdoor learning based on discovery learning to increase motivation to learn English for students

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65881/creative.v1i1.14>

ARTICLE INFO

History:

Submit: 30-12-2025

Revision: 06-01-2026

Accepted: 07-01-2026

Publish: 10-01-2026

Keywords:

outdoor learning;
english games;
speaking practice;
discovery learning;
learning motivation.

ABSTRACT

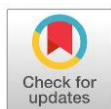
Purpose: to describe the implementation of outdoor learning through English games and speaking practice based on discovery learning, and to examine its effectiveness in increasing students' motivation and activeness in learning English in an Islamic boarding school context.

Method: this activity used a participatory action learning system (PALS) approach involving 27 ninth-grade R4 students at Nurul Jadid Islamic boarding school in Probolinggo, East Java. Data were collected through observation sheets, motivational questionnaires (pre-test and post-test), field notes, and short interviews, and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Findings: the results showed a significant improvement in students' learning motivation and activeness. The outdoor learning environment encouraged greater engagement, confidence, and enthusiasm in English learning activities.

Conclusions: discovery-learning-based outdoor activities with English games and speaking practice have been proven effective in increasing the motivation and activity of ninth-grade R4 students at an Islamic boarding school.

Contributions: this activity can serve as an effective alternative to increase motivation and engagement in learning English in an Islamic boarding school environment.



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Introduction

English learning in the Islamic boarding school environment often faces its own challenges, especially regarding students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. Students who are in the status of students have a busy schedule, ranging from early childhood activities and memorization to daily worship obligations. The density of these activities often leaves students physically and mentally fatigued when entering formal classroom learning, including English subjects. This condition is evident in low student

participation; some look sleepy, unresponsive, and even fall asleep during the learning process. This situation shows that monotonous, classroom-based learning is not always practical for students at Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, learning innovations are needed to increase student energy, participation, and motivation. One alternative increasingly used is outdoor learning, which uses the environment outside the classroom as a learning resource. Several studies in the last five years have also confirmed that a varied learning environment can increase students' attention and learning readiness (Al-Maskari et al., 2024; Ji et al., 2022; Sarfraz et al., 2022). Thus, outdoor learning has the potential to be a real solution to deal with the problem of students' passivity in language learning.

Outdoor learning has been proven to provide a fresher, more contextual, and more fun learning experience, helping overcome boredom and increase student motivation. Research by Salma et al. (2025) shows that learning outside the classroom can increase students' focus and enthusiasm by up to 30% higher than indoor learning. This is also confirmed by Umar & Masnawati (2024), who found that students feel freer and more confident to interact when activities are conducted in an open space. The outdoor environment allows students to move, collaborate, and observe real objects, making the learning process feel more natural. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the use of outdoor learning is becoming increasingly relevant, as students accustomed to routines in closed spaces need a variety of learning environments to re-stimulate their enthusiasm for learning. In addition, hands-on experiential learning allows students to understand language concepts more concretely. Based on these findings, English learning outside the classroom can be an effective strategy to reactivate students' learning motivation, which tends to decline due to the busy routine in Islamic boarding schools.

In addition to the choice of learning place, the type of learning activity is also very influential in increasing student participation. English games and speaking practice are two strategies that have proven effective in building students' activeness and confidence in using English. Research by Annisa et al. (2025), shows that the use of games can increase cooperation, courage to speak, and student initiative. Meanwhile, a study by Asnishalina (2025) revealed that speaking practice in an informal context can reduce language anxiety and encourage students to be more spontaneous in communicating. When both strategies are combined with Outdoor Learning, the learning process becomes more dynamic as students interact not only with each other but also with the surrounding environment. This approach can be strengthened through discovery learning, in which students are guided to discover language concepts and structures through hands-on experience. Recent research by Nurishlah et al. (2023) and Malay et al. (2025) also indicates that discovery-based activities increase students' understanding of language materials and strengthen their intrinsic motivation.

These studies show that actively designed, creative, and experience-based English instruction can positively impact students' motivation and learning performance. However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, research combining outdoor learning, English games, and speaking practice remains very limited. In fact, Islamic boarding school students have unique needs that require a flexible and adaptive learning approach to their physical and psychological conditions. Preliminary observations of regular grade IX students showed that they were much more responsive, enthusiastic, and cooperative when learning took place outside the classroom. They stated that they prefer to study in an open atmosphere because it feels freer, less boring, and easier to interact. This phenomenon aligns with

research by Muthmainnah et al. (2023), which found that open environments can increase students' emotional engagement in language learning.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of outdoor learning in improving students' motivation, focus, and participation (Barrable et al., 2022; Mann et al., 2023; Salma et al., 2025; Umar & Masnawati, 2024). However, most of these studies were not specifically conducted in the context of Islamic boarding schools, which have unique characteristics, such as busy schedules, physical and mental exhaustion, and religious routines that differ from those of general schools. Previous studies tended to examine outdoor learning alone partially (Kiviranta et al., 2024), or English games alone (Hao & Lee, 2021), or speaking practice alone (Yahrif et al., 2022), or discovery learning (Eriza et al., 2023). However, there is limited research that integrates these three approaches simultaneously in a single, comprehensive learning design for community service activities.

This activity aims to implement and assess the effectiveness of outdoor English learning, combined with English games and speaking practice, using the discovery learning approach, to increase engagement and motivation among regular grade IX students in an Islamic boarding school environment. Specifically, this activity is expected to serve as an alternative learning solution for English teachers in Islamic boarding schools to address boredom, fatigue, and low student participation. Provide examples of applicable and easy-to-implement learning models, especially in conditions of limited time and energy of Islamic boarding school students. Help students increase courage and confidence in speaking English, foster intrinsic motivation in learning, and experience more enjoyable, active, and meaningful learning. Encourage the creation of a more humanistic, student-centered learning environment. In general, this activity is expected to make a real contribution to the development of contextual, innovative English learning, to be in accordance with the characteristics of Islamic boarding school students, and to serve as a reference for further educational practices.

Method

This community service uses a participatory action learning system (PALS), which emphasizes participants' active involvement in the learning process. This design incorporates elements of mentoring, hands-on practice, and evaluation to increase students' engagement and motivation to learn English. The activity was carried out as training-based outdoor learning, combined with English games, speaking practice, and discovery learning, across two meetings. This community service is carried out at the Nurul Jadid Islamic boarding school, in an outdoor area that supports outdoor activities. The subject of the activity is students in grade IX Regular 4 who are active. The participants were 27 female students who previously showed passive tendencies and were less motivated to learn English in the classroom.

This activity was conducted for students in grade IX Regular 4 with student status, a total of 27 students, at Nurul Jadid Islamic boarding school, Paiton, Probolinggo. Core activities in the outdoor area (courtyard, field, and the Islamic boarding school area, which are usually used for student relaxation) are safe and conducive to learning. This research was conducted in two core meetings, each lasting 90 minutes (+ briefing session and post-test/questionnaire). The implementation span is 2 weeks. Both meetings are designed to provide a new, more enjoyable learning experience and encourage full student engagement.

Research steps: (1) Planning: coordination with teachers, preparation of game and speaking scenarios, provision of observation instruments, questionnaires, and equipment. (2) Pre-test & initial observation: filling out the initial motivation questionnaire and observation of basic activeness. (3) Implementation of meeting 1 (English games): ice breaking, vocabulary relay, treasure hunt, group discussion, brief reflection, observation. (4) Implementation of meeting 2 (speaking practice): discovery walk, pair/group speaking, mini role play, presentation, reflection, observation. (5) Post-test & evaluation: filling out a post-activity motivation questionnaire, compilation of observation sheets, photo/video documentation, and reflective discussion with teachers. (6) Reflection & recommendations: a teacher-led analysis of the sustainability of the program.

The instruments for this study are the activeness observation sheet (scale 1–5) for the following aspects: participation, response, courage to speak, cooperation, enthusiasm, initiative, and focus. Motivation questionnaire: 10 items (Likert 1–5) pre- and post. The documentation consists of field notes and brief interviews with several students. The data analysis technique in this study uses quantitative methods to calculate the average score of the pre- and post-questionnaires, perform a simple difference test (paired t-test) or a percentage increase calculation if the sample size is small, analyze the observation score by aspect, and visualize the results in a graph. Qualitative analysis was conducted on the content of field notes and interviews to describe the process of change in activity. Success criteria an increase in the average motivation of at least 10 points (scale 10–50) and an increase in the activity score of at least 20% from baseline.

Results and discussion

Initial observations showed that most students in class IX R4 had low motivation during English instruction. Of the 27 students, about 70% appeared passive, unresponsive to the teacher's instructions, and showed signs of boredom, such as drowsiness, reduced participation, and a lack of courage to speak. This is in accordance with the findings of Suryani et al. (2024), who stated that Islamic boarding school students often experience mental fatigue due to busy routines, so classical learning is ineffective in increasing motivation and activity. The results of the motivation pre-test showed an average score of 27–30 out of a maximum range of 50, indicating a moderate-low motivation category. Meanwhile, initial observation of activeness shows that only about 20% of students are actively involved in discussions or speaking practice in class. This condition serves as the basis for implementing interventions using the Outdoor Learning method, based on English Games and Speaking Practice. This strategy was chosen based on the research of Wang et al. (2022), which affirmed that learning outside the classroom has been shown to stimulate focus and enthusiasm and to increase students' social interaction in the context of language learning.

In the first meeting, the activity focused on outdoor English games. The activity began with the ice breaker "find someone who..." to stir up the atmosphere and break the awkwardness. After that, students participated in the "vocabulary relay" and "treasure hunt" games, which required them to move, work together, and find vocabulary within specific categories. This activity engages both physical and mental activity, so students become more active, enthusiastic, and are more willing to ask questions. Based on the observation sheet, there was a significant increase in the aspect of activeness: students who were actively involved increased from 20% to 65%. The outdoor atmosphere makes them more expressive

and confident, according to Thurairasu (2022) findings, which show that language games increase participation. Many students who were previously reluctant to speak are now more open to pronouncing the vocabulary they have learned. Field records show that they feel more "lively," less sleepy, and more excited when learning outside of the classroom. Thus, the first meeting serves as an important foundation for increasing motivation, especially extrinsic motivation through fun and challenging learning experiences.

The second meeting focused on speaking practice using the discovery learning approach. The process begins with the "Discovery Walk" activity, in which students observe objects in the outdoor area and then describe them in English. Next, they work in small groups to draft spontaneous dialogues based on each other's findings. This activity encourages students to discover new vocabulary independently, in line with the principle of discovery learning, which places students at the center of the knowledge construction process (Azizah & Mardiana, 2024). The core part of the activity is Mini Role Play, where each group performs in front of their peers. Based on observations, students' speaking courage increased from 30% at the first meeting to 75% after the second meeting. The students seemed more confident, cooperative, and able to use new vocabulary more fluently. This aligns with Research by Ayende & Bleza (2022), which shows that discovery learning can improve vocabulary retention and speaking fluency by allowing students to learn through hands-on experience. Many students stated that studying outside of class made them more courageous to speak because "it does not feel like they are taking an exam, but rather doing activities like playing, and it is a lot of fun.

Based on the motivation post-test results, the average increase was from an initial score of 27–30 to 38–50 after two outdoor meetings. An average increase of 10–12 points (± 30 –35%) shows that outdoor learning has a strong influence on increasing students' learning motivation. The motivation increase graph shows that all students experience improvement, with 80% in the high motivation category after the intervention. Active learning showed similar development: the activity observation score increased from 2.1 (low category) to 5.0 (high category) on a scale of 1–5. Physical activity, freedom of movement, a natural environment, and game-based learning make students more focused and enthusiastic about completing tasks. These results support the findings of Hasanah & Putri (2022), who found that motion-based activities and collaboration increase engagement by up to 60%. In addition, field records show that students feel more comfortable learning outside the classroom because the atmosphere is "lighter and less stressful. Overall, the intervention through these two meetings succeeded in increasing students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as their activity and courage in speaking English.

Table 1 motivation and enthusiasm

Nu.	Variables	Before	After	Explanation
1.	Motivation	Low	Height	Increasing
2.	Enthusiasm	Low	Height	Increasing

Source: primary data, processed

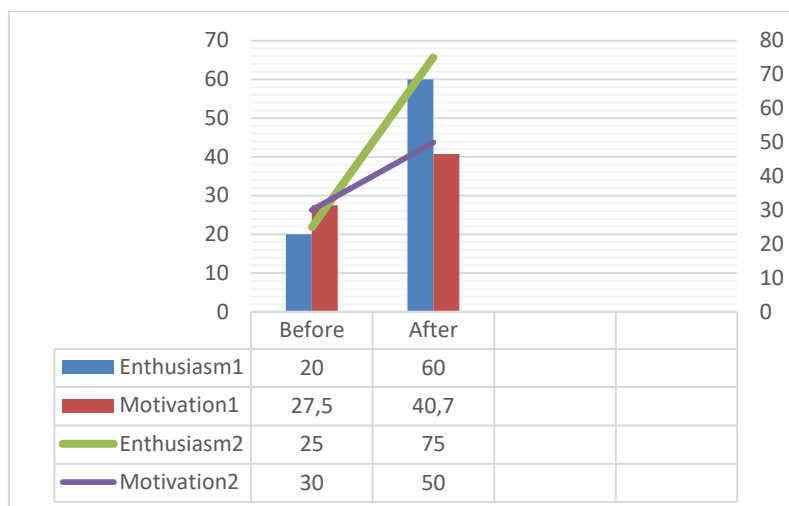


Figure 1 motivation and enthusiasm

Source: primary data, processed

Figure 1 and Table 1 confirm a positive change in student motivation and enthusiasm, from low to high. Factors such as freedom of movement, a natural setting, social interaction, and game-based learning and hands-on experience were key to this intervention's success. This aligns with Kumar et al. (2025), who stated that collaborative, movement-based activities can significantly increase student engagement in learning. Overall, the results of this activity indicate that English learning designed in an active, contextual, and enjoyable manner through outdoor learning, English games, and discovery-based speaking practice can address the problem of low motivation and engagement among Islamic boarding school students. This approach is highly relevant for implementation in Islamic boarding school environments, which require learning models that are adaptive to students' physical and psychological conditions.

Conclusions

Community service activities that implement outdoor learning through English games and speaking practice based on discovery learning have been proven to positively increase motivation and engagement in English learning among grade IX R4 students in the Islamic boarding school environment. Through two systematically designed meetings, the students showed significant improvements in participation, courage to speak, involvement in activities, and enthusiasm for learning. Learning that has been considered monotonous and less interesting in the classroom turns into a fun and meaningful activity when carried out in an open space. These findings show that the learning environment has an important role in building a conducive learning environment for students.

In addition, observation data and questionnaire results indicate that the learning model outside the classroom has increased the learning motivation score from the low to the high category. This increase is not only seen in intrinsic motivation but also in extrinsic motivation, such as the willingness to follow instructions, the spirit of teamwork, and the courage to perform in front of friends. Games and speaking practices integrated with the discovery learning approach allow students to discover language concepts independently and collaboratively, making the learning process more meaningful and aligned with adolescents' learning characteristics.

The entire community service process also shows that constructivist approaches such as discovery learning are relevant to the context of Islamic boarding schools, especially when combined with outdoor learning. Students who previously tended to be passive and lacked confidence can show a significant increase in their speaking activity and the ability to work together. The environment outside the classroom provides more space for movement and a more relaxed atmosphere, allowing students to be freer to express and interact. Thus, Outdoor Learning can serve as an innovative alternative to overcome learning boredom and improve the quality of English instruction. Overall, this activity succeeded in achieving the primary goal of community service, which is to provide learning innovations that are effective, relevant, and adaptive to the condition of students in Islamic boarding schools. Increasing motivation and activity through English games and speaking practice demonstrates that creative learning methods can bring about real change in a relatively short time. This activity can serve as a model for other teachers to develop innovative learning strategies that better meet students' needs.

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