IMPLEMENTING HUMANISTIC LEARNING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AMONG TENTH-GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract:
This mini research aims to implement humanistic learning theory in English language instruction at Al Jumhuri Senior High School in Blitar. This research is dedicated to improving learners' inner drive by utilizing a student-centered methodology grounded in humanistic principles and enriched by local cultural values. The approach, inspired by theorists such as Rogers and Maslow, underlines the necessity of emotionally responsive teaching, personal growth, and nurturing the whole person within a caring academic setting. The qualitative descriptive strategy guides the study, where the teacher-researcher collects insights through active observation in the classroom, reflective writings, and ongoing field documentation. The findings indicate that contextual implementation of the humanistic approach, blended with local values such as the culture of greeting, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), tolerance, and consensus-based decision-making (musyawarah) has a positive impact on student engagement and enthusiasm. As learners become more engaged, articulate their views more easily, and grow in their confidence using English, this approach proves effective.In parallel, it advances the Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity (4Cs) of 21st-century learning, fostering not only intellectual development but also the building of strong character and cultural sensitivity.

Thus, the study confirms that combining humanistic learning theory with local wisdom can serve as an effective strategy to enrich foreign language education in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and empowering both academically and socially.

Keywords: *Humanistic theory, learning motivation, English language, local wisdom, 21st-century learning.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of global and digital forces has created new educational demands. The current educational model calls for the development of the 4Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—while emphasizing the formation of students' personal and moral identity (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Education now must foster empathy and prepare students to thrive in diverse cultural settings, not just deliver academic content. In an increasingly interconnected world, students must be equipped with the ability to understand and respect different perspectives in order to collaborate effectively across cultural boundaries. A humanistic perspective has become increasingly applicable, as it recognizes learners as active individuals whose identities, values, and lived experiences are central to the learning process (Miller, 2011).

Indonesia's cultural wealth, including practices such as gotong royong, tolerance, and musyawarah, offers a meaningful context for supporting this humanistic model. These local customs help form emotional and social bonds that deepen students' classroom involvement (Utami, 2022). Student engagement is a crucial factor in academic success, intrinsic drive, and the development of interpersonal skills (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Therefore, the integration of local wisdom with constructivist, sociocultural, and humanistic educational frameworks may promote more comprehensive and impactful learning. In the current curriculum, local wisdom is positioned as an essential component for character development and contextualized learning, enabling students to connect academic knowledge with real-life values, cultural heritage, and community practices.

The importance of research on humanistic learning strategies is evident in previous studies. Research by Ainiyah (2018) shows that a humanistic approach can foster an enjoyable learning atmosphere and improve student participation. The research by Hidayati and Wahyudi (2020) demonstrates that embedding indigenous values in learning fosters closer social ties and promotes a stronger cultural affiliation among students. Correspondingly, Jannah (2021) confirms that learner-centered pedagogies improve communication and collaborative skills in the classroom. However, there remains a scarcity of research specifically examining the implementation of humanistic learning strategies that incorporate local wisdom in the context of secondary education particularly in tenth-grade high school settings.

Given the importance of humanistic learning strategies contextualized with local culture, this mini research was conducted to explore how such strategies can be implemented in 21st-century learning to increase active engagement among tenth-grade students. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by combining modern pedagogical approaches with local values, fostering a transformative and meaningful educational experience.

METHOD

Participants

This study was conducted at Al-Jumhuri Senior High School in Blitar, with the research subjects being 20 students from class X-B. This class was selected due to its diverse student backgrounds and the school's support for implementing innovative learning methods. The selection of participants was purposive, based on the consideration that this class would be a representative sample for examining the effectiveness of humanistic learning strategies integrated with local wisdom values.

Instruments

Multiple tools were employed to obtain rich and comprehensive data for this research. Student engagement was monitored using observation sheets, which focused on three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive.

Semi-structured interviews with several students offered detailed personal insights into their learning experiences. Reflection journals maintained by students and records of classroom activities were also reviewed to understand learners' responses to the educational approach.

Procedure

Conducted over a three-week period, the study consisted of three cycles, each featuring planning, execution, and reflection phases. The planning phase involved creating lesson plans based on humanistic education and infused with local cultural elements such as gotong royong and musyawarah. During implementation, the teacher took on a facilitative role, emphasizing empathy, providing opportunities for student voices, and cultivating an inclusive learning atmosphere. Reflection sessions at the end of each cycle allowed for evaluation by both teacher and students of the process and outcomes related to student engagement.

Data Analysis

A qualitative descriptive approach guided the data analysis. Engagement observations were grouped into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive categories. Thematic analysis was applied to reflection journals, interviews, and classroom documentation to identify trends and shifts in student involvement and attitudes. The goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the humanistic learning approach and how local wisdom values strengthened its impact.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementing Humanistic Learning Strategies to Enhance Active Student Engagement

The implementation of humanistic learning strategies yielded significant results in boosting active participation among tenth-grade students. Throughout the learning process, the teacher cultivated positive interpersonal relationships with students using a personal and empathetic approach. One consistently applied practice was individually greeting students and allowing

them to share their feelings or personal stories at the start of class. This helped create a warmer and more open classroom atmosphere.

Core learning activities were centered around group work and discussions, enabling students to actively participate. The teacher acted as a facilitator rather than the central source of knowledge, giving students a sense of autonomy and responsibility in their learning. Within this environment, values such as mutual respect and active listening were emphasized as essential components of the learning process.

Observations recorded an increase in participation rates from 60% in the first cycle to 85% at the study's conclusion, reflecting the benefits of an inclusive classroom environment. This finding suggests that when students feel respected, supported, and provided with equal opportunities to engage, their willingness to participate and contribute meaningfully improves considerably (Klem & Connell, 2004). The significance of this increase lies in the well-established relationship between participation, motivation, and deeper learning, indicating that participation contributes not only to comprehension but also to improved confidence and engagement with peers (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Classroom participation is central to the development of communication and collaboration skills, which are essential to active learning processes and to preparing students for broader social interaction beyond academic settings (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010).

From a theoretical perspective, the finding aligns with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which asserts that learning emerges through social interaction, dialogue, and participation in shared activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It also corresponds to principles of humanistic education, which maintain that emotional safety and a sense of belonging are critical to stimulating intrinsic motivation and engagement (Noddings, 2013). An underlying assumption of this finding is that participation is shaped not solely by cognitive ability, but by classroom climate and the quality of teacher–student relationships, suggesting that inclusive pedagogical practices can significantly influence both academic and socio-emotional learning outcomes.

Integrating Local Wisdom Values into Humanistic Learning

One of the key elements of this strategy was the integration of local wisdom such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), musyawarah (consensus-building), and tolerance aligned with humanistic learning principles. For instance, when students worked in groups, they were encouraged to share responsibilities fairly, complete tasks collaboratively, and make decisions collectively through deliberation. These activities not only boosted participation but also fostered a strong sense of community and social responsibility among students. The increase in participation suggests that culturally grounded pedagogy enables students to experience learning as meaningful and connected to their lived realities, rather than as an abstract academic obligation (Supriyadi, 2010). This finding is important because incorporating local cultural values into instruction promotes intrinsic motivation and strengthens socio-emotional bonds within the classroom community (Noddings, 2013). It reflects the assumption that participation is influenced not only by cognitive ability, but also by students' emotional engagement, sense of belonging, and recognition of cultural identity within the learning environment (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Including these familiar cultural values allowed students to emotionally connect with the learning process and perceive learning as relevant to daily life rather than just academic requirements.

Interview responses supported these observations, with many students reporting increased comfort and enthusiasm because the learning experiences were connected to their personal realities, aligning with contextual learning approaches that stress relevance between learning content and students' experiences.Indeed, reinforcing the idea that relevance and cultural connection significantly shape participation and engagement in diverse classroom settings (Gay, 2010).

The Impact of Humanistic Learning Strategies on Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

The implemented learning strategy impacted not only students' behavior but also their emotional and cognitive engagement. Emotionally, students became more confident, felt more valued, and showed greater enthusiasm throughout the learning process. They sensed that their opinions and feelings were genuinely acknowledged by both their teacher and peers, reinforcing the role of emotional safety in promoting engagement. This finding suggests that when the learning environment affirms students' identities and offers psychological security, learners are more willing to participate actively and take intellectual risks, which is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of supportive climates in fostering intrinsic motivation and engagement (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2016). The importance of this finding lies in its implication that learning is not merely a cognitive process but a holistic experience shaped by emotional connection, social interaction, and relational trust, echoing humanistic education principles that emphasize educating the whole person (Noddings, 2013). The assumption underlying this perspective is that meaningful learning requires students to feel respected, safe, and emotionally invested, rather than being passive recipients of information.

Cognitively, students demonstrated growth in critical thinking, articulating arguments, and connecting lesson content to real-life contexts. For example, when asked to write a descriptive text, students found it easier to develop ideas when describing familiar people or places from their surroundings. This suggests that blending humanistic approaches with local wisdom encourages deeper reflection and creativity. This indicates that integrating humanistic approaches with locally grounded values enables deeper reflection and creativity by situating learning within culturally meaningful contexts, supporting findings that culturally relevant pedagogy enhances higher-order thinking and creativity by linking school tasks to students' lived experiences (Gay, 2010; Wuryaningrum, 2018). This also aligns with sociocultural theory, which asserts that learning is most effective

when it occurs through meaningful participation in authentic cultural practices (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Further, the reflections recorded in student journals further demonstrated positive developments, with many students reporting increased enjoyment because they did not feel pressured or fearful of making mistakes, highlighting the importance of a secure emotional setting to support optimal cognitive engagement. This reinforces the assumption that emotional well-being and cognitive engagement are mutually reinforcing, and that reducing anxiety and performance fear is essential for optimal learning outcomes (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). Therefore, blending humanistic and culturally responsive elements creates conditions that enhance both academic and personal development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the interpretation of the qualitative evidence gathered through observation, reflective documentation, and student interviews, a theoretically grounded conclusion can be drawn: the implementation of humanistic learning strategies has proven effective in enhancing the active engagement of tenth-grade students at SMA Al-Jumhuri. This student-centered pedagogical orientation, characterized by sustained attention to learners' emotional states, individual needs, and personal learning experiences demonstrably contributes to the creation of a more positive, empathetic, and participatory classroom climate.

Student engagement increased across three main dimensions. First, behavioral engagement was evident through students' active participation in class discussions and collaborative group activities. Second, emotional engagement improved as students developed a greater sense of comfort, motivation, and enthusiasm toward learning. Finally, cognitive engagement strengthened, shown by enhanced critical thinking, clearer expression of ideas, and the ability to connect lesson content with their personal experiences.

Local wisdom values such as musyawarah (deliberation) and gotong

royong (mutual cooperation) further strengthened the humanistic approach by making learning more contextual, relevant, and meaningful to students. This suggests that adapting these approaches to local cultural contexts is an effective alternative for promoting holistic education in today's world.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be offered to strengthen future educational practices. First, continuous teacher training programs grounded in humanistic values—such as unconditional positive regard, empathetic facilitation, and reflective pedagogy—should be consistently provided by schools and education authorities. These training initiatives are essential to prepare educators to effectively support diverse learners and cultivate inclusive classroom environments. In parallel, the systematic integration of local wisdom should be prioritized. Local cultural values such as collaboration, consensus-building, and tolerance need to be incorporated through structured modules or thematic syllabi, ensuring they serve as foundational pillars for contextual learning that enhances students' cultural identity and strengthens the relevance of academic content.

In addition, curriculum design should increasingly emphasize learning processes and reflection rather than focusing solely on final products. Allocating time for both individual and group reflection at the end of each learning competency allows students to evaluate their personal growth, recognize challenges, and develop strategies for improvement. This reflective approach fosters deeper learning and empowers students to become self-regulated learners.

Thus, learning spaces should be designed to be flexible and collaborative, incorporating adjustable seating arrangements, interactive tools such as whiteboards, and designated discussion zones to facilitate communication and creativity. A dynamic environment reinforces the principle of "freedom to learn," encouraging students to engage confidently in collaborative activities. Finally, schools should adopt engagement-based monitoring and assessment systems that move beyond conventional tests. Instruments such as participation rubrics, emotional journals, and project

portfolios allow teachers to evaluate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement more holistically, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of a humanistic classroom climate.

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