

IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS OF CHILDREN AT SEKAR PENGHARAPAN ORPHANAGE THROUGH PEN PALS

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ABSTRACT

Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage is located on Jalan Veteran, Buduk, Mengwi, Badung, Bali. There were problems faced by children in the Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage related to problems of writing letters in English because of difficulties in understanding of grammatical structures in English and the structure of letters. This project was aimed to improve the ability to write children's letters in Sekar Pengharapan orphanage related to grammatical structures in English and correct letter structures. Improving the ability to write letters was done through the teaching process using pen pals. The method used was interviewed, teaching with pen pals to children, and also giving pretest and posttest. The result that the children have been able to improve their ability to write letters in English. This was seen from the results of the pretest and posttest which have increased. There was a percentage increase from the pretest to posttest result of 19.4%. Moreover, there was output in the form of handbooks to help children understand English letters and grammar well.

Keywords: writing, improving, grammar, structure, and pen pals.

1. Introduction

Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage is located on Jalan Veteran, Buduk, Mengwi, Badung, Bali. This orphanage was established in 2010 and started operating in 2011. It was built by Koreans and assisted by three officers in the administration, spirituality, and consumption sectors. There are 11 rooms in this orphanage, such as office, study room, library, kitchen and dining room, place of worship, seven bedrooms for children and officers. Nowadays, there are fifteen children in this orphanage. It consists of one child in elementary school, four children in junior high school, six children in senior high school, three children in university, and one child who will continue her studies in the university next year.



Figure 1. Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage

The children in the Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage usually make a letter to express their gratitude or to establish good relations with their sponsors. Their sponsors come from abroad, so they have to make a letter in English. However, the results of interviews with partners said that the children at the junior high and senior high school levels had difficulty in writing a letter in English. It is still an ability that is difficult for children to understand. It is due to difficulties in understanding grammatical structure in English and the structure of writing correct letters. Therefore, the problem faced by children in the Sekar Pengharapan orphanage is related to the ability to write letters to their sponsors. First, it is related to the problem of writing a good letter in English. The children have difficulty in writing letters, due to lack of understanding of grammatical structures in English. The grammatical problems faced by children are related to the use of verbs in accordance with tenses on present tense, continuous tense, perfect tense, and future tense. Second, it is related to the structure of writing correct letters. The children do not know the structure of the letter.

Based on the problem above, pen pals are used as a means to improve writing skills in English for the children at the Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage. There is the purpose of this project. First, the children are able to write letters with the correct grammatical structure in English. Second, the children are able to write letters with the correct structure consisting of addresses, dates, salutations, opening, body, and closure, complimentary, and signature. Therefore, the children can improve their writing skills in English and communicate with their sponsors through letters using the grammatical structure and correct structure of the letter.

2. Solution and Target Output

In overcoming the problems faced by children in the Sekar Pengharapan orphanage, then there are solutions that have been implemented to solve this problem. The solutions implemented by providing teaching processes to the children. The teaching processes about English grammar and structure of letter through pen pals. The use of pen pals because pen pals is interesting, fun, and informal letter. The author can tell about their experiences, self-introduction, thanks, and so on. Writing a pen pal can provide a valuable learning experience for children. This can give children not only language skills but also social skills. Through the pen-pals, children learn more than just writing in English; they learn various functions of language, grammar, and vocabulary.

Moreover, it is also given a pretest and posttest to see the shortcomings and improvement of children's abilities. This is used as a measuring tool to see children's improvement in the learning process. Moreover, this project also provides a handbook to children. This handbook provides a quick learning solution about English grammar and letter structure.

3. Method

Based on the description above, the problems faced by children in English were known from the interview process with the caretaker of the Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage. Therefore, the method used was teaching by using pen pals to improve their writing skills in English. The subject used was children in the Sekar Pengharapan orphanage at the junior and senior high school levels for a total of nine children.

Table 1. Personal Data of Children

No	Name	Place/Date of Birth	Grade
1	Naftali Maria Amanda Kamlasi	Tabanan, 04/03/2005	7 th grade
2	Susanti Yewangu	Sumba, 13/12/2005	8 th grade
3	Efrian Yedija Sitanggang	Pangkalan Bun, 01/04/2005	8 th grade
4	Putu Tiara Carolina Kris P. A.	Denpasar, 21/07/2003	8 th grade
5	Paulina Dada Gole	Sumba, 20/06/2002	9 th grade
6	Indriani Ina Yewangu	Sumba, 02/03/2003	9 th grade
7	Ni Luh Ayu Kumala P. D.	Denpasar, 26/05/2004	9 th grade
8	Ni Komang Indriani Dewi	Kasimbar, 26/06/2003	10 th grade
9	Kadek Kezia Natali Kris P. A.	Denpasar, 26/12/2005	11 th grade

There were several activities carried out in the Sekar Pengharapan orphanage which will be carried out of fifth times. First, self-introduction and gave a pretest to children at Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage in the fourth week of October. The pretest was given in the form of making pen pals. The children make a pen pals letter of thanks to their sponsor. Moreover, they also told about their experiences and hopes in the letter. This was done to find out the deficiencies faced by children in the structure of English grammar. Second, the process of teaching English grammar to children was held in the first week of November. The teaching of grammar was given related to the use of verbs in accordance with tenses, such as present tense, continuous tense, perfect tense, and future tense. Moreover, it is related to the use of personal titles and contractions. The mistakes made by children in orphanages were seen when they were doing the pretests that have been given in October. Third, the process of teaching about the structure of writing pen pals to children. The structure of the letter consists of address, date, salutation, introduction, body, closure, and signature. Furthermore, the children were also given several expressions related to salutation, introduction, body, and closure expressions that are usually used in letters. It was held in the second week of November. Fourth, the discussion session with children. In the discussion session, the children can ask questions about what they don't understand from grammatical and letter structures. Moreover, it was given the practice of making letters. This was done in the third week of November. Fifth, it gave a posttest to children in the fourth week of November. The giving of the posttest is also the same as the pretest. The posttest was given in the form of a pen pals letter about thanks to their sponsor.



Figure 2. Learning Process

Furthermore, there were several formulas used to find out the improvement of children's learning process through the results of the pretest and posttest. Improved children's learning processes were measured through the average results at the pretest and posttest and also through the percentage data. The formula for calculating the average/mean and percentage of data is as below.

Mean Formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

Remarks:

\bar{x} = The mean of the children

$\sum x$ = The total score

N = The number of children

Data Percentage Formula:

$$\frac{\text{mean posttest} - \text{mean pretest}}{\text{mean pretest}} \times 100 \%$$

4. Result and Discussion

Based on the objectives and activities carried out in the teaching process given to children at Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage, the results of this teaching process can be seen through the pretest and posttest. Pretest and posttest are used as a measure of children's learning progress, through pretest as a preliminary test and posttest as a final test. Firstly, pretest was given to children in the form of making a pen pals letter to their sponsor. The children make a pen pals letter of thanks to their sponsor. Moreover, they also told about their experiences and hopes in the letter. Based on the results of the pretest, there are grammar errors and also the structure of making a letter. The grammar errors made consist of the using of personal titles, verb based on tenses, and contractions. Therefore, the teaching process given was related to problems faced by children to improve their ability to write letters in English. There are two learning topics; they are grammar and letter structure. First, the teaching of grammar is related to present tense, continuous tense, past tense, perfect tense, and future tense. Furthermore, it was related to the use of personal titles and contractions. Second, teaching of pen pals letter structure. It is consisting of addresses, dates, salutations, opening, body, and closure, complimentary, and signature. Moreover, there are also some forms of expression that can be used in letters. Secondly, the posttest was given after the learning process for five times. In the posttest, the children returned to making a pen-letter to their sponsor. Based on the results of the posttest, it is known that the children experienced an improving in grammatical understanding and correct letter structure. This can be seen in Figure 1 as one of the results of the pretest and posttest of children at Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage.

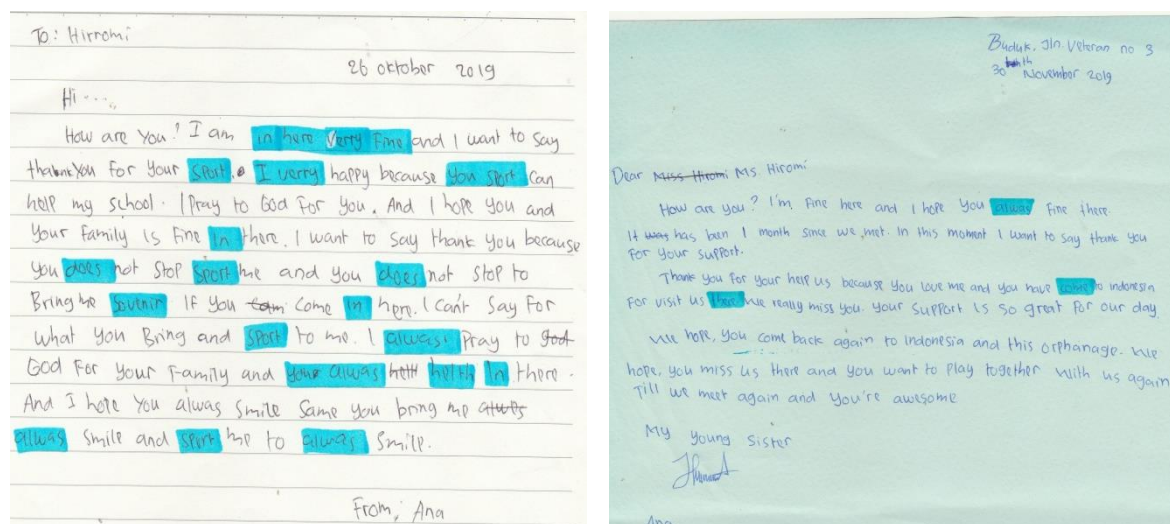


Figure 3. Pretest and Posttest

On the figure above, it can be seen that there was a reduction in grammar errors from pretest to posttest. It means that the children have experienced improved understanding of grammar in English. Furthermore, the children have made a letter with the correct letter structure at the posttest. The improving of Pretest and Posttest can also be seen from the results of the assessment in table 1.

Table 2. The List of Pretest and Posttest Values

No	Name	Pretest	Posttest
1.	Paulina Dada Gole	65	80
2.	Indriani Ina Yewangu	70	90
3.	Susanti Yewangu	70	85
4.	Ni Luh Ayu Kumala P. D	85	90
5.	Efrian Yedija Sitanggang	75	85
6.	Naftali Maria Amanda Kamlasi	50	80
7.	Ni Komang Indriana Dewi	70	90
8.	Putu Tiara Carolina Kris P. A	80	85
9.	Kadek Kezia Natali Kris P. A	80	85

The children's pretest and posttest results were assessed based on two criteria, such as the use of grammar in English and the structure in the letter. Based on this table, the average/mean pretest result of children is 71.7 and the average/mean posttest result of children is 85.6, so there is an average increase of 13.9. Moreover, there was a percentage increase of 19.4%.

This project also provides outputs in the form of handbooks. This handbook consists of the structure of writing letters, expressions in letters, tenses in English, contractions, and personal titles. This can help children understand letters and grammar English well.



Figure 4. Front and Back Cover of Handbook

5. Conclusion

The teaching process of writing letters in English grammar and the correct letter format with pen pals media has been achieved. The children experience an improving in letter writing skills. This can be seen from the results of the pretest to posttest. There was an improving in the results from pretest to posttest for children by 13.9. Moreover, the target output of this project has also been achieved. The target output is the handbook. The handbook contains of the format of writing letters, expressions in letters, tenses in English, contractions, and personal titles. This was given to the children of Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage as a guide in making letters.

However, the children at Sekar Pengharapan Orphanage also have other problems related to English vocabulary. This is known when children write letters, which they still experience obstacles in vocabulary.

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