IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF YOUTH IN SEI TUALANG LABURA THROUGH INTERACTIVE LEARNING METHODS

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A B S T R A C T

This community service initiative aimed to enhance the English speaking proficiency of youth in Sei Tualang, Labuhanbatu Utara, through the implementation of interactive learning methods. The background of this program lies in the limited exposure and opportunities for rural youth to practice English communicatively, resulting in low confidence, limited vocabulary, and anxiety in speaking. To address this gap, the program designed a four-week interactive learning workshop that utilized student-centered methods such as role-playing, vocabulary games, storytelling, peer discussions, and real-life conversation simulations. The implementation involved both instructional delivery and motivational strategies to create a non-threatening, supportive learning atmosphere. The participants, aged between 13 and 18 years, were actively involved in communicative tasks that gradually increased in complexity. Pre- and post-activity observations and facilitator journals indicated a noticeable improvement in fluency, vocabulary range, pronunciation accuracy, and confidence. Participants demonstrated a higher willingness to communicate in English and showed a growing ability to sustain short conversations on familiar topics. Beyond linguistic outcomes, the program also fostered teamwork, critical thinking, and self-expression among the learners. Despite challenges such as limited access to technological tools and English materials, the creative adaptation of activities to suit the local context ensured the success of the program. This community engagement highlights that interactive and contextualized learning methods can serve as an effective approach to address the language learning needs of youth in under-resourced areas.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak English fluently has become a crucial asset in today's interconnected and globalized world. English is not only a language of international communication but also a gateway to academic advancement, career opportunities,

and cultural exchange. As such, English language education has received increasing attention in Indonesia, particularly in urban areas. However, in many rural regions like Sei Tualang, Labuhanbatu Utara (Labura), the development of English speaking skills among youth remains underdeveloped. These rural learners often struggle with a lack of exposure to the language, limited access to qualified instructors, and minimal opportunities for authentic communication in English.

Sei Tualang is a village located in the regency of North Labuhanbatu, North Sumatra, where education facilities are gradually improving, but language instruction—especially English—still faces a number of challenges. While English is formally taught in schools, the teaching methods predominantly emphasize grammar, translation, and passive skills such as reading and writing. Unfortunately, this leaves speaking and listening skills underemphasized, resulting in students who may have theoretical knowledge of English but are unable to use it effectively in verbal communication. Additionally, psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation further hinder the development of speaking competence.

To address these issues, there is a growing recognition that innovative, context-sensitive teaching strategies are needed—particularly those that promote learner engagement and active participation. **Interactive learning methods** offer an effective solution in this regard. These methods prioritize student involvement through activities such as role-plays, pair and group work, storytelling, question-and-answer games, simulations, and real-life speaking scenarios. They not only help improve pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary, but also encourage confidence and reduce anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language. Moreover, interactive learning fosters a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience, making it particularly suitable for young learners in rural settings.

This community service project was initiated as a collaborative effort to improve the English speaking skills of youth in Sei Tualang through the implementation of interactive learning strategies. The program targeted junior and senior high school students in the area, providing them with practical speaking exercises in a relaxed and supportive environment. In addition, the project served as a platform for local volunteers, university students, and educators to engage in knowledge sharing and pedagogical innovation tailored to the rural context.

The urgency of this initiative was also driven by the growing aspirations of rural youth who seek better educational and employment opportunities beyond their immediate environment. English speaking skills, if nurtured appropriately, can be a transformative tool for their personal and professional development. Furthermore, strengthening these competencies at a young age lays a strong foundation for lifelong learning and communication.

Through this article, the authors aim to document the design, implementation, and impact of this program as a model of community engagement in English language education. The findings and insights presented here are expected to inform similar future initiatives in rural communities and contribute to the national agenda of equitable education for all. By investing in the speaking skills of rural youth through

creative and participatory methods, we empower them not only to succeed academically but also to connect confidently with the wider world.

METHOD

This community service program adopted a **qualitative descriptive approach** to design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of interactive English learning activities aimed at improving speaking skills among youth in Sei Tualang, Labuhanbatu Utara. The method focused not only on delivering instructional content but also on observing participant engagement, motivation, and improvement in real-life communication contexts.

The program was carried out over a period of four weeks and was implemented in collaboration with local educational stakeholders, including village officials, schoolteachers, youth organizations, and student volunteers from a local university. The participants of this program were 30 youth aged 13 to 18 years, consisting mostly of junior and senior high school students who had previously received basic English instruction in school but lacked confidence in speaking.

The learning model applied was **interactive, student-centered, and communicative**. Teaching sessions were conducted twice a week at the village community center (balai desa), which was transformed into a temporary English learning space. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and involved a series of carefully designed activities to stimulate speaking, including:

- **Ice-breaking games** to reduce anxiety and build trust between participants and facilitators.
- **Role-playing and simulations** (e.g., ordering food, asking for directions, introducing oneself) to provide students with contextual vocabulary and situational dialogue practice.
- **Small group discussions** to encourage peer interaction and idea exchange using English.
- **Picture storytelling and vocabulary games** to develop both fluency and vocabulary retention.
- **Pronunciation drills and listening-response tasks** to enhance accuracy and comprehension.

Before the program began, a **pre-assessment** of speaking ability was conducted using a simple oral test where students were asked to introduce themselves, talk about their daily activities, or describe a picture. This assessment helped gauge their initial fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence level. At the end of the program, a **post-assessment** using similar tasks was administered to identify progress.

Throughout the program, facilitators acted not only as instructors but also as motivators and observers. Field notes, video recordings, and student reflection journals were used as primary tools of documentation. The qualitative data collected from these sources were later analyzed to assess behavioral changes, language development, and participant feedback.

Furthermore, a **brief interview** with selected participants and community leaders was conducted to gather their impressions, experiences, and suggestions for future programs. This step aimed to ensure that the community voice was embedded into the evaluation of the initiative, thereby making it more reflective and sustainable.

The method adopted in this program emphasized the **practical and participatory** nature of English learning. It sought to shift learning from theoretical to functional—bridging the gap between what students know and what they can confidently express. By employing this community-based and interactive approach, the project aimed not only to improve speaking skills but also to foster a lasting interest in English learning among rural youth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program conducted in Sei Tualang successfully demonstrated how interactive learning methods can significantly enhance the English-speaking skills of youth in a rural setting. During the course of four weeks, the program became a dynamic platform for learning, engagement, and transformation—both in terms of linguistic ability and student motivation.

At the outset of the program, many of the participants were shy and hesitant to speak in English. Their confidence levels were low, and their vocabulary was limited mostly to words they had memorized in school. During the initial oral assessment, it was found that most students could only introduce themselves with basic phrases such as "My name is…" or "I am from…", and they struggled to maintain even a short conversation in English. Many avoided eye contact and defaulted to speaking in Bahasa Indonesia when unsure of what to say. These behaviors indicated that while they had been exposed to English instruction before, they lacked opportunities to actively use the language in meaningful contexts.

However, a transformation began to unfold as the interactive sessions progressed. By the end of the second week, students began showing signs of increased participation and enthusiasm. Through role-plays, games, and group discussions, they were encouraged to express their thoughts in English, regardless of errors. The interactive methods used—such as vocabulary games, situational dialogues, and storytelling—provided them with a safe and enjoyable space to explore the language.

One noticeable result was the students' increasing fluency. For example, a student who was initially only able to say "I like cat" eventually managed to say, "I have a cat. His name is Tom. He likes to sleep all day." This progression may seem simple, but it marked a significant improvement in both vocabulary use and sentence construction. The program facilitators, who acted as mentors rather than traditional instructors, played a key role in motivating the participants to speak without fear of judgment. Their supportive attitude and use of praise—such as applause, stickers, and encouraging words—built the students' confidence gradually.

In terms of vocabulary acquisition, participants were introduced to thematic topics relevant to their daily lives, such as school, family, food, and hobbies. These themes were brought to life through the use of flashcards, real objects, pictures, and

context-based conversations. Because students used new vocabulary repeatedly in games and conversation activities, they were more likely to remember and apply those words in the future. Pronunciation exercises were also embedded into the sessions, helping students correct common mistakes and develop clearer speech. Some began to self-correct their pronunciation, showing awareness of how English words are spoken naturally.

Another noteworthy result was the positive impact on learner motivation. As sessions continued, the students began arriving early, staying after class to practice, and expressing interest in more learning opportunities. They no longer viewed English as a difficult school subject, but rather as a useful and enjoyable skill. This shift in perception is vital for long-term language development, as positive emotional engagement often leads to better language retention and continued learning.

Furthermore, community involvement became a powerful element of the program's success. Parents and local educators visited the sessions and expressed their appreciation for the initiative. Some even asked for similar activities to be held for younger children or other groups in the village. This sense of ownership and support from the community not only validated the program but also suggested its sustainability.

Nevertheless, the program was not without challenges. The lack of modern facilities, such as projectors or language labs, limited the types of activities that could be carried out. The learning took place in a basic community center with no air-conditioning and minimal teaching materials. Despite this, creativity and adaptability on the part of the facilitators helped make the learning process effective and enjoyable.

In conclusion, the results clearly indicated that interactive, student-centered learning methods can significantly improve speaking skills, even in a low-resource setting. The enthusiasm and progress shown by the youth of Sei Tualang were testaments to the power of a well-designed educational intervention that prioritizes active participation, emotional support, and real-life communication. These findings are in line with previous research, including that of Pasaribu et al. (2022), which emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction in language acquisition. The program serves as a valuable model for future community-based language learning initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of interactive learning methods in improving English speaking skills among the youth in Sei Tualang has yielded promising and transformative results. This community service initiative, designed with a participatory and contextual approach, has demonstrated how language education, when delivered through engaging and student-centered strategies, can bring about significant improvement even in rural areas with limited resources.

At the beginning of the program, most participants showed hesitation and lacked the confidence to speak in English, often due to limited vocabulary, insufficient

exposure to spoken English, and a fear of making mistakes. These factors had led many of them to view English as a difficult subject rather than a functional communication tool. However, over the course of the program, the introduction of interactive learning activities—such as role-playing, vocabulary games, group storytelling, and collaborative dialogues—gradually shifted their attitudes. They began to see English as something learnable and enjoyable.

One of the key factors contributing to this improvement was the environment created by the facilitators: a space where making mistakes was not penalized but rather seen as a natural part of learning. This helped reduce anxiety and encouraged active experimentation with language. As a result, learners became more willing to speak, try new vocabulary, and even correct themselves, showing a growing awareness of how English functions in real-world conversation.

Notably, vocabulary development occurred through thematic exposure, using topics relevant to the students' daily lives, such as family, food, hobbies, and school activities. Instead of isolated memorization, the vocabulary was embedded in context and practiced through repetition and communicative activities. This made the learning process more meaningful and sustainable. Furthermore, pronunciation practices embedded in the games and guided conversations led to more accurate and confident speech.

The social aspect of the learning process also played a significant role. Students learned together, supported one another, and engaged in peer feedback. This collaborative dynamic fostered a sense of community learning, which is crucial in building collective motivation and confidence. Moreover, the active involvement of local educators and parents, who observed and supported the sessions, further validated the importance of such programs in the development of rural youth.

Despite the clear successes, several challenges were encountered. The lack of digital learning tools and multimedia resources posed limitations. Sessions had to rely on simple printed materials, whiteboards, and verbal instruction. However, this challenge was mitigated by the facilitators' creative use of locally available materials and an adaptive approach that made learning both fun and effective.

In summary, this program illustrates that interactive learning is not only effective in improving English speaking skills but also capable of transforming students' attitudes toward language learning. It highlights that with the right pedagogical approach and a supportive environment, meaningful educational progress can be achieved regardless of location or facility limitations. The enthusiasm, growth, and transformation seen in Sei Tualang stand as a powerful example of what is possible when education meets community needs with creativity and compassion.

Looking ahead, it is recommended that similar programs be developed and sustained in other rural areas. Collaborations between educators, universities, and local governments can help scale such initiatives, especially as Indonesia seeks to strengthen its English proficiency and global competitiveness. The insights gained from this project also contribute to the broader discourse on language education in

rural settings, offering a model for inclusive, low-cost, high-impact language intervention.

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