

## **Improving English Speaking Skills through a Community Service Program: The English Speaking Club for Teenagers of Budi Mulya Village, Banyu Asin Regency**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to find out the results of the community service program conducted through the establishment of an English Speaking Club for teenagers in Budi Mulya Village, Banyu Asin Regency. The club targeted 25 village youths aged 12 to 18. A driving team formed the club and ran the activities. The team included 1 English Education lecturer, 3 English Education students, and 1 local English teacher. The students conducted a 40-day Community Service Program organized by Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah from January 14 to February 24, 2025. In collecting the data for this study, the driving team used reflective journals on participant progress, challenges encountered, and engagement during the activities. Then, the reflective journals were analyzed and described. The findings of the study show that Budi Mulya teenagers' English was improved after some activities during three key steps: (1) socializing and recruiting members, (2) setting the schedule and learning materials, and (3) conducting club activities. Improved English communication skills enable Budi Mulya teenagers to participate in exchange programs, seminars, and discussions.

### **Introduction**

The ability to speak the English language has become increasingly important during this time of globalization. Due to the significance of English, it is now a means of communicating internationally. It also allows access to education, technology and information. Competence in English avails the opportunity to participate in world debates, join international conferences, retrieve pertinent material that is frequently unavailable in the local dialect, and appreciate beyond local exposure. This supports Civan & Coşkun (2016) findings which mention that English dominates as a medium of instruction in almost all disciplines and sectors.

Speaking English greatly enhances opportunities for rural youth. Excelling in any English-based exam requires a good command of the language and often necessitates quality education. Also, as stated by Barat & Talukder (2023), fluent speakers have an added advantage in facing the contemporary job market since he or she stand to get hired in many international firms that prioritize effective verbal communication with their employees.

Learning challenges stem from insufficient accessibility to learning materials situated in villages. Those who reside within remote regions face limited access to formally study the language and thus feel constrained. It also happens to rural teens. Perhaps the most difficult challenge is the lack of educational materials and resources. Many villages are lacking in Internet access as well as physical infrastructure, like books and other learning materials (Permana et al., 2023). Improving their English skills becomes a nearly impossible task when information and practice opportunities are scant. Also lacking are trained personnel who can guide at the appropriate level. In most rural areas, teachers who actively specialize in teaching English may be very few (Hossain, 2016). This leads to inadequate instruction and boring lessons, which diminish students' incentive to learn.

In addition, a study by Anggela et al. (2024) found that the difficulties were: (1) insufficient infrastructure and facilities; (2) lack of students' motivation; (3) fewer opportunities for professional teacher development; and (4) lack of parental support.

Moreover, adolescents often contend with social factors that dampen motivation for study. The use of English often holds little importance or is deemed irrelevant culturally within these communities. Unfortunately, such a context in which there is no encouragement leads teenagers to become despondent and lose drive toward goal-oriented behavior. If they have no tangible benefits that can justify learning English, many will simply abandon attempts to acquire it.

The teenagers at Budi Mulya village also experienced the same challenges. It was known from the informal interview with the English teacher at SDN 15 Air Kumbang, which is located at Budi Mulya Village. He said that the students in his class had a fixed mindset. The belief that "only city kids can learn English well" undermined their self-efficacy. It made them lack self-confidence and be shy to speak when he asked them to say something in English during his class.

### **The Challenges Faced by Rural Adolescents in Speaking English**

More specifically, the challenges faced by rural adolescents in speaking English are the following. First, shyness and self-confidence are psychological challenges often experienced by rural adolescents. When adolescents have to speak or interact in English, many of them feel anxious and afraid of making mistakes (Algrenita & Listyani, 2020). This fear can deter them from practicing and participating in activities that involve the use of English. Without adequate support, this shyness can hinder their progress.

Second, the lack of opportunities to practice speaking in real contexts can be a significant barrier. Rural adolescents often do not have friends or study partners who have the same English proficiency, so they miss out on opportunities for hands-on practice. More effective learning usually involves active conversation and interaction, but without a supportive environment, teenagers find it difficult to improve their speaking skills.

Third, the influence of media and technology can also be a challenge. While technology can be a useful tool in learning, many rural youth do not have sufficient access to modern devices or the internet. The inability to access online learning platforms, apps or

other resources can limit their learning. This leaves them behind compared to adolescents in urban areas who have more access.

Fourth, cultural and language differences are also a challenge. Rural adolescents often grow up in a very diverse environment culturally and linguistically, which can affect the way they understand and use English (Omeri, 2014). When they try to learn English, they may feel confused by terms or concepts that are unfamiliar, hindering the learning process. Therefore, it is important to provide relevant and supportive contexts so that they can more easily understand the language.

Faced with these challenges, it is important to design learning programs that address the needs and conditions of village youth. With the right support, they can overcome these hurdles and achieve better English skills. The initiative to establish English Speaking Clubs among village youth is a strategic step to improve their English language skills. The main goal of the club is to create a supportive and fun learning environment where teenagers can practice speaking in English actively. With the club, it is expected that they will feel more confident to use the language in everyday situations. In addition, the club also aims to improve communication skills that are essential for their self-development.

One of the first steps in the formation of the English Speaking Club is socialization and recruitment of members. The mobilization team will approach the village youth through community or school activities to explain the benefits and objectives of the club. By involving teenagers in this process, it is expected that their interest and enthusiasm to join will increase. Good socialization is also important to ensure that parents and the local community support the initiative, so that the club can operate sustainably.

Once members are registered, activities in the English Speaking Club will be implemented regularly, with an emphasis on interactive learning methods. Activities such as group discussions, language games, and individual presentations can be used to improve members' speaking skills. In addition, the club may also invite guest speakers, such as native English speakers, to provide insights and first-hand experience. This approach not only makes learning more interesting but also provides opportunities for members to learn from different perspectives.

To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the club, it is important to periodically evaluate members' progress. Measuring progress can be done through various means, such as oral exams, feedback from members, and observations from teachers. By conducting evaluations, the mobilization team can identify areas for improvement and adjust club activities to better suit the needs of participants. This process also helps to keep members' motivation high and to feel a sense of progress in their English language skills.

### **The Benefits of the English Speaking Club**

The establishment of an English Speaking Club among village youth brings significant benefits, both in academic and social aspects. Firstly, the club directly improves the English language skills of members. By regularly practicing speaking, listening, and interacting in English, adolescents will experience improvements in their vocabulary

acquisition, grammar, and speaking skills (Sari, 2019). This is important to prepare them to face challenges in the future educational and professional world. It is supported by a study by Sheokarah & Pillay (2021). Their findings showed that the English club reduced language anxiety and increased participation by 78% through "fun, non-threatening" activities (e.g., games and symbolic rewards).

Secondly, the presence of the English Speaking Club also contributes to the improvement of adolescents' self-confidence. Many adolescents feel anxious or embarrassed when they have to speak English, especially in front of others (Erdiana et al., 2020). However, with a supportive environment and like-minded peers, they can feel more comfortable practicing. This process helps them overcome fear and build confidence in communication skills, which are crucial in various aspects of life.

Third, the club serves as a platform for the development of social skills. In the English Speaking Club, teenagers not only learn English but also interact and collaborate with their friends. According to (Fadda, 2020), group activities such as discussions, games, and presentations allow them to learn to cooperate, listen to other people, and respect different opinions. So, these social skills are very valuable and will be beneficial in their daily lives, both at school and in society.

Fourth, the English Speaking Club also provides an opportunity to build new networks and friendships (Riyadini, 2022). By gathering regularly, teenagers from different backgrounds can get to know each other and share experiences. This creates a strong bond among members, and increases the sense of community and solidarity. By having friends who share similar interests, teens are more motivated to learn and develop together.

Fifth, the long-term benefit of the English Speaking Club is the provision of relevant skills for the future (Demydovych & Holik, 2020). In the era of advanced globalization, the ability to speak English is one of the important requirements in the world of work. By mastering the English language, village youth will have greater opportunities to continue education to higher levels, get better jobs, and participate in various international activities. Therefore, the English Speaking Club is not just a learning activity, but also an investment for a brighter future for rural youth.

## **Methods**

### **Location and Target**

The location of the English Speaking Club is Budi Mulya Village, Air Kumbang District, Banyuasin Regency. The target of this activity is the village youth in Budi Mulya Village, totaling 25 people. These village youth are aged between 12 to 18 years old.

### **Driving Team**

Before the English Speaking Club was formed, a driving team was formed to assist in the formation and implementation of the Speaking English Club activities in Budi Mulya Village. The team consisted of 1 lecturer of the English Education Study Program and 3 students of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Keguruan

Sciences, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, who carried out the Real Work Lecture for 40 days (14 January to 24 February 2025) in Budi Mulya Village, Air Kumbang District, Banyuasin Regency, and 1 English teacher of SDN 15 Air Kumbang, which is in Budi Mulya Village. The mobilization team incorporates club members in the WhatsApp group “Budi Mulya Speaking English Club (BMES Club)” as a communication medium for socialization and discussion of club activities.

### **Techniques of Collecting and Analyzing Data**

In collecting the data for this study, the driving team of the English Speaking Club used reflective journals in noting participant progress, challenges encountered, and engagement during the activities. According to Yawson et.al. (2020). Journaling offers unique advantages like real-time documentation of learning processes, longitudinal tracking of skill development, and capturing reflection-in-action.

Then, the reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) by following some steps. They are (1) familiarization: the researcher read all journals multiple times and noted initial observations; (2) generating initial codes: the researcher tagged text segments with descriptive labels; (3) searching for themes: the researcher grouped codes into confidence themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes: the researcher checked if themes capture journal and collapsed redundant themes; and (5) defining and naming themes: the researcher wrote clear definitions.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

The following includes the results of this study: the process of socialization and recruitment of members, determining the schedule and learning materials, and the activities carried out. In this section, the writer will also describe the improvement of Budi Mulya teenagers' English represented by the improvement of their self-confidence during the club activities.

### **The Process of Socialization and Recruitment of Members**

This stage is a crucial first step in the formation of the English Speaking Club. The mobilization team approached the village youth through various activities, such as community meetings or presentations at schools. In this socialization, the benefits and objectives of the club were explained in an interesting way, so as to attract the attention of teenagers to join. In addition, community leaders and parents were involved in this process in order to provide additional support, so that adolescents felt more motivated to participate. Local social media announcements were also used to reach more potential members and provide information on how to join.

### **Determining the Schedule and Learning Materials**

The mobilization team developed a flexible meeting schedule that suited the time availability of youth, so that they could participate without interfering with school activities or other responsibilities. Meetings were held regularly, twice a week on Saturdays and

Sundays at 03.00-05.00 PM, so that members had sufficient time to learn and practice. In addition, the learning materials were designed to be as interesting and relevant as possible to members' interests and needs. The materials covered everyday topics, culture, and current issues in the form of interactive slides and videos, and involved practical activities such as role plays, group discussions, and presentations. With the right approach, club members felt more enthusiastic and engaged in the learning process, so that learning objectives could be achieved more effectively.

### **The Activities Carried Out**

Activities carried out in the English Speaking Club included various activities designed to improve the English language skills of members in a fun and interactive manner. Discussion was one of the main activities where members discussed interesting topics, such as culture, hobbies, or current social issues. This activity not only trained speaking skills, but also listening and critical thinking skills. In addition to discussions, language games were also held to make the learning process more interesting. Games such as word puzzles, quizzes, or role plays helped members to expand their vocabulary and understand the use of English in a more relaxed context. At the end of each meeting, members were given the opportunity to do a short presentation on a topic of their choice, which gave them the chance to practice public speaking and boost their confidence.

In addition to indoor activities, the English Speaking Club also organized outdoor activities to provide variety and a more enjoyable learning experience. Activities such as visits to English-speaking places, such as libraries or cultural centers, enriched members' horizons and provided a new atmosphere to practice the language. Outdoor activities also served as a means to build togetherness between members, so that they were more familiar and supported each other in the learning process. Collaboration with guest speakers was one activity that was very valuable for club members. According to Rohtih & Afifuddin (2023), inviting English club members from elsewhere or experienced teachers to share their experience and knowledge provides new insights and inspiration for the village youth. Guest speakers provide interactive sessions, where club members can ask direct questions and practice speaking in a more lively way.

These activities not only enriched the learning experience but also opened up opportunities for members to build a wider network, as well as increase their passion for learning English. With a variety of varied and engaging activities, the English Speaking Club created a positive and supportive learning environment for all its members.

### **Budi Mulya Teenagers' Improvement of English Represented by Their Improved Self-Confidence**

The improvement of Budi Mulya teenagers' English was represented by the improvement of their self-confidence during the club activities. It can be seen from the results of the reflective journals written by the driving team from behavioral Indicators such as (1) voluntary participation frequency (increased *initiation* of responses without prompting (they raised hand first without being asked by the instructor, and they volunteered for role-



plays) and rising attendance rates from 70% to 95% in optional sessions; (2) non-verbale engagement (sustained eye contact with peers/facilitators, open body language like uncrossed arms and relaxed posture during group discussions, and smiling/laughing during mistakes which shows reduced fear of errors); and (3) social initiative (forming impromptu English practice groups *outside* sessions and leading warm-up activities or peer feedback rounds).

Besides, the results of the reflective journals written by the driving team show some linguistic indicators which can be the evidence that their self-confidence improved. The linguistic indicators are (1) speech fluency and volume (they said longer utterances from 1–2 words to full sentences), audible speech volume from whispering to clear voice, and reduced pauses/fillers such as "um," "uh" over time); (2) willingness to experiment (using new vocabulary without confirmation-seeking, such as "Is this right?", and self-correction of errors mid-sentence, which shows metacognition; and (3) question-asking (increase in clarification questions such as "Could you repeat that?").

## Discussion

The findings from the establishment and operation of the village English Speaking Club reveal several key factors contributing to its successful implementation and positive reception among village youth. These factors highlight effective strategies for community-based language learning initiatives in similar contexts and offer insights into the dynamics of youth engagement and skill development.

### 1. *Community Integration as the Foundation for Success:*

The meticulous approach to socialization and recruitment proved fundamental. By actively involving multiple stakeholders – youth directly, parents, community leaders, and schools – the mobilization team fostered a sense of collective ownership and legitimacy for the club. This multi-pronged strategy addressed potential barriers: parents and leaders provided crucial encouragement and permission, school presentations reached the target demographic effectively, and local social media ensured accessibility of information. This comprehensive integration into the village social fabric significantly enhanced motivation and initial buy-in, moving beyond a top-down initiative to one perceived as community-endorsed and valuable. The emphasis on clearly communicating benefits tailored to youth interests was vital in sparking initial participation.

### 2. *Flexibility and Relevance: Cornerstones of Sustainable Engagement:*

The conscious design choices regarding scheduling and learning materials were critical in maintaining consistent participation and achieving learning objectives. Recognizing the competing demands on youth time (school, chores, family obligations), the adoption of a flexible weekend schedule demonstrated sensitivity to their realities, reducing a major barrier to attendance. More significantly, the deliberate effort to make learning materials "interesting and relevant" directly

addressed a common pitfall in language education. By grounding lessons in everyday topics, local culture, and current issues, and employing interactive methods (slides, videos, role-plays, discussions, presentations), the club moved beyond rote learning. This approach fostered intrinsic motivation by making English acquisition feel immediately useful and connected to the members' lives and curiosities, leading to observed enthusiasm and effective learning.

3. *Activity Diversity: Catalyzing Holistic Skill Development and Community Building:* The club's strength lay in its rich tapestry of activities, each serving specific and complementary purposes:

(a) *Structured Discussion:*

Beyond practicing speaking and listening, discussions on diverse topics (hobbies, culture, social issues) actively developed critical thinking and articulation skills, fostering confidence in expressing complex ideas in English.

(b) *Language Games:*

The incorporation of games (puzzles, quizzes, role-plays) provided essential low-pressure practice, reinforced vocabulary acquisition, and demonstrated language use in practical, enjoyable contexts, crucial for reducing anxiety and maintaining engagement.

(c) *Presentations:*

Regular, short presentations offered invaluable, scaffolded practice in public speaking, a core component of language proficiency and confidence building, allowing members to take ownership of their learning.

(d) *Outdoor Activities:*

Visits to relevant venues (libraries, cultural centers) served multiple functions: breaking the monotony of indoor learning, providing authentic contexts for language use, broadening horizons, and reinforcing the practical value of English. Crucially, these activities significantly enhanced togetherness and peer support networks within the club.

(e) *Guest Speakers:*

Inviting external speakers was a particularly impactful strategy. It provided fresh perspectives, real-world inspiration, and exposure to different accents and communication styles. The interactive nature of these sessions allowed for direct practice and questioning, creating dynamic learning moments and expanding members' professional/social networks. This activity powerfully addressed the potential limitation of learning solely within a local peer group.

Thus, the success of the English Speaking Club can be attributed to a synergistic combination of deep community embedding, participant-centered design (flexible scheduling, relevant/engaging materials), and a diverse, activity-based pedagogy. The club transcended being merely a language class; it became a supportive community space



fostering skill development (speaking, listening, critical thinking, public speaking), confidence building, cultural exchange, and social bonding. The focus on enjoyment and interaction, evident in games, outdoor trips, and guest sessions, was instrumental in creating a positive and motivating learning environment where members felt safe to practice and make mistakes.

## Conclusion

For Budi Mulya village adolescents, the ability to speak English opened many doors of opportunity. A quality education requires mastery of English, especially in facing exams and materials that use the language. With the ability to communicate in English that they gained at Budi Mulya English Speaking Club, they could also participate in student exchange programs, seminars, discussions, and various other activities that could broaden their horizons.

The limitation of this study is that the success of the Budi Mulya English Speaking Club relied on external facilitators (the university team from Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah). If the English club were run without institutional support, the effectiveness of the English Speaking Club in improving the village teenagers' English skills probably would not be the same.

The recommendation for the continuity of Budi Mulya English Speaking Club is to integrate it with Formal Education by advocating for the club to count as extracurricular credits at participants' schools and by dedicating monthly sessions to practicing school exam-style speaking tasks with the local teachers' support.

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