

## **Exploring College Students' Experiences and Speaking Confidence in an English Immersion Program at Australian Village**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates the lived experiences of students in the English Immersion Program at Australian Village, focusing on the enhancement of their speaking confidence. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design, the research involved six students from UNISKA MAB Banjarmasin who participated in a one-week immersion program, selected through purposive sampling to reflect diverse initial levels of speaking engagement. Data collection was achieved via semi-structured interviews and field observations, analyzed through thematic analysis. Key findings indicated that the immersive, English-only setting and structured activities—such as professional meetings, debates, seminars, and speeches—greatly aided language habituation and mitigated speaking anxiety. Participants benefitted from active peer interactions and supportive facilitators, which helped them conquer their fear of making mistakes, enhance fluency, and increase confidence in spontaneous expression. The outcome confirms that the immersion program successfully converted passive engagement into active involvement, greatly increasing EFL learners' speaking confidence. In order to develop students' oral communication abilities, the study advises educational institutions and EFL teachers to incorporate immersion-based models and English-speaking environment efforts into their curricula.

**Keywords:** *English Immersion Program, Australian Village, Speaking Confidence, EFL Learners, Qualitative Descriptive.*

## **A. Introduction**

Speaking is one of the crucial parts of language learning alongside with other skills such as listening, writing, and reading (Mitasari, 2023). In Indonesia, many learners did not have much confidence in speaking English because it is considered as foreign language (Mustafari et al., 2022). It is not used that much on everyday life except on academic purposes. Which means, speaking English is not pushed onto students' daily life which is causing them not having any confidence in showcasing their skills.

Among the various programs designed to improve speaking skills, one of them is English Immersion program. The immersion program encourages students to communicate directly, utilize real language, and take part in a spontaneous communication activity, in contrast to standard educational settings (Jafarova Ilqar, 2025, p. 87). One type of English immersion program that offers a setting where students are encouraged to utilize English in their everyday activities is the Australian Village. Through exercises like role-plays, group discussions, presentations, interactions with tutors, and everyday communication tasks, the program aims to foster an English-speaking environment. It will be expected that this setting will boost learners' confidence when speaking English. Previous studies have focused on English immersion programs' effectiveness on speaking skills, confidence, and motivation, but research on the specific program at Australian Village is limited.

Taken together, these previous studies indicate that English immersion programs can positively influence learners' speaking skills, confidence, willingness to communicate, motivation, and overall English learning experiences. The studies by Knell and Chi (2012), Hengki et al. (2017), and Liu et al. (2017) demonstrate the relationship between immersion, speaking development, confidence, and motivation. Meanwhile, Stegall (2021) and Rohman et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of examining learners' actual experiences, including their emotional, social, and personal responses to an immersion environment. Studies conducted in Indonesia, particularly those by Supriyono et al. (2022), Pratiwi (2023), and Pratiwi et al. (2024), further demonstrate the relevance of English Village and immersion programs in the Indonesian EFL context. Despite these findings, there is still a research gap concerning the specific English immersion program at Australian Village. Existing studies have mainly investigated other immersion settings, such as Kampung Inggris Pare, university-based immersion programs, and English dormitory or camp environments. In addition, although previous research has examined speaking confidence as an outcome, relatively little attention

has been given to how learners themselves describe the development of their speaking confidence throughout a particular immersion program. Therefore, the present study focuses on learners at Australian Village and seeks to explore their actual experiences, particularly their perceptions of how participation in the program influences their confidence in speaking English. By focusing on learners' experiences, this study is expected to provide a more contextualized understanding of how the Australian Village immersion environment supports or challenges learners' speaking confidence. There is also a lack of insights into learners' actual experiences, especially concerning the program's influence on their speaking confidence.

For this reason, this study aims to explore the learners' experiences during the Australian Village program and to understand more on how these experiences help them develop greater confidence when speaking English in general.

## **B. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive is a methodological approach that provides a comprehensive summary of events or experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). This method is suitable since the study's primary goal is to explore and describe students' experiences during Australian Village's English Immersion Program, especially when it comes to their confidence in speaking the language. The focus of qualitative descriptive research is on understanding meanings, processes, and experiences. The study aims to explore how students utilize spoken English in daily interactions such as informal conversations, group discussions, role-plays, and presentations. It investigates their perceptions of the immersion environment and the impact of these experiences on their speaking confidence (Ariani, 2025).

Additionally, without much interpretation or theory testing, the researcher may clearly and simply convey the results thanks to this research method. Clearly describing the participants' experiences during the program is the main goal.

The intentional process of choosing environment, resources, or participants who share particular characteristics that are relevant and have the ability to address the question concerning the phenomenon of interest is known as purposive sampling (Epp & Otnes, 2021). Purposive sampling will be used in this study to choose participants who were considered to be useful of information and relevant to the study's goals (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Purposive sampling techniques generally stay clear of random sampling in order to ensure that particular

types of situations that may be included are included in the research study's final sample (Campbell et al., 2020).

One of the most popular techniques for examining qualitative data is thematic analysis, which provides an organized yet adaptable strategy for finding, examining, and summarizing patterns or themes within a collection of data (Ahmed et al., 2025). The focus should be on key aspects relevant to these questions rather than aiming to identify all potential themes (Jansen, 2021). The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis that includes transcribing interview data, reducing irrelevant data, categorizing themes, and interpreting themes related to speaking confidence.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Results**

In the Australian Village English Immersion Program, where debates, speeches, seminars, and everyday interactions provided plenty of possibilities for English usage, participants' varied learning experiences were highlighted in the study. The English-only policy first caused pressure and worry in many, but over time, these feelings gave way to ease and confidence. Participants used a variety of techniques, including body language, broken English, Google Translate, as well as peer support, to overcome language obstacles. The encouraging atmosphere created by mentors and peers greatly reduced anxiety and increased participation. In the end, regular exposure to English and constructive interactions improved participants' self-esteem, communication abilities, and readiness to use English in a variety of settings.

The findings indicate that the Australian Village English Immersion Program provided participants with a supportive environment that encouraged them to use English continuously and meaningfully. The availability of activities such as debates, speeches, seminars, and everyday conversations created frequent opportunities for participants to practice speaking English in both formal and informal situations. These activities were important because participants were not only learning English as a subject but were also required to use it as a means of communication. As a result, English became part of their daily interactions, allowing participants to practice expressing ideas, asking questions, responding to others, and maintaining conversations.

One of the important findings was the change in participants' emotional responses to the English-only policy. At the beginning of the program, many participants experienced pressure, nervousness, embarrassment, and anxiety because they were required to communicate in English. Some participants were afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes and felt uncomfortable when they could not immediately express what they wanted to say. This situation suggests that the English-only environment initially created a considerable challenge for learners, particularly those who had limited confidence in their speaking ability. However, these negative feelings gradually decreased as participants became more familiar with the environment and had more opportunities to practice English.

The gradual reduction of anxiety suggests that repeated exposure played an important role in developing speaking confidence. At first, participants may have focused heavily on their mistakes and their limitations in vocabulary or grammar. However, after repeatedly communicating with mentors and peers, they became more accustomed to using English despite making errors. This process helped participants understand that effective communication did not necessarily require perfect English. Instead, they learned that they could communicate their meaning by using the language resources available to them. Therefore, the immersion environment appeared to shift participants' attitudes from being afraid of making mistakes toward being more willing to take risks and communicate.

The participants also demonstrated various strategies for overcoming communication difficulties. When they did not know the appropriate English words or expressions, they used body language, simple or broken English, Google Translate, and assistance from their peers. These strategies show that participants were active problem-solvers rather than passive learners. For example, using gestures allowed them to communicate meaning when they lacked vocabulary, while Google Translate provided immediate support when they encountered unfamiliar words. Peer support also enabled participants to continue conversations instead of stopping when they experienced linguistic difficulties. These strategies helped participants maintain communication and gradually develop greater confidence in using English.

Another significant finding concerns the role of mentors and peers. A supportive social environment appeared to reduce participants' anxiety and encourage greater participation. When mentors and peers responded positively to participants' attempts to speak English,

participants felt more comfortable making mistakes and trying again. This supportive atmosphere was important because fear of negative judgment can prevent learners from participating in speaking activities. In contrast, encouragement and constructive interaction can create a sense of safety in which learners are willing to experiment with English. Therefore, the findings suggest that speaking confidence was influenced not only by the amount of English exposure but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships within the program.

The results also indicate that the benefits of the program extended beyond improvement in English-speaking ability. Through regular interaction, participants developed greater self-esteem and became more willing to communicate in English. Their increasing confidence allowed them to participate more actively in discussions, presentations, and everyday conversations. This development suggests that confidence and speaking ability may reinforce each other: as participants gained more opportunities to speak, they became more confident, and increased confidence encouraged them to participate in more speaking activities.

Furthermore, the participants' experiences suggest that the Australian Village program helped them become more prepared to use English in different contexts. The combination of structured activities, such as debates and speeches, and spontaneous communication during everyday interactions exposed participants to different communicative demands. Formal activities required them to organize ideas and present them clearly, whereas informal interactions required them to respond spontaneously and negotiate meaning. Experiencing both types of communication enabled participants to develop flexibility and greater readiness to use English beyond the program.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the Australian Village English Immersion Program contributed to participants' speaking confidence through a combination of continuous English exposure, frequent opportunities for communication, supportive relationships, and strategies for overcoming language difficulties. Although the English-only policy initially created anxiety and pressure, sustained practice gradually helped participants become more comfortable with using English and less concerned about making mistakes. The findings therefore suggest that speaking confidence develops progressively through repeated communication experiences in a supportive environment. The Australian Village program was not simply a place for participants to practice English; it also provided an environment in which

they could overcome their fear of speaking, develop greater self-esteem, and become more willing to communicate in English in various situations

## **2. Discussion**

During the English Immersion Program at Australian Village, students reported varied experiences, finding the program both entertaining and beneficial as it allowed them to practice English in real-life situations (Samiad, 2024). Participants engaged in discussions, presentations, and debates, which enhanced their comfort level in using English. While some felt pressure and anxiety during formal activities like debates, casual interactions fostered bonding and eased social difficulties. Emotional responses varied, with some expressing anxiety due to language barriers and adaptation challenges, while others were excited about making new friends and improving their English skills. Ultimately, despite initial struggles, most students became more confident in using English in everyday conversations, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in enhancing language learning through real-world interaction. Students' got to experience the learning process themselves rather than just classroom theory (Hargraves, 2021)

Participants in an immersion program reported a significant increase in their confidence in speaking English. Initially, many students felt nervous about speaking due to fears of making mistakes, but exposure to consistent practice reduced their anxiety. By the end of the program, students felt more comfortable speaking publicly. Scheduled exercises, including debate sessions, improved their confidence as they understood their messages were still conveyed despite language limitations. Daily improvisation practices enhanced their fluency and reduced public speaking fears. Activities like professional meetings, speeches, and self-introductions contributed to a positive shift in their perceived speaking abilities, aligning with a confidence framework that emphasizes the relationship between communication experience and language proficiency (Jafarova Ilqar, 2025).

The findings revealed that several factors contributed to students' confidence in the immersion program, with an encouraging learning atmosphere being crucial. Participants felt at ease speaking English due to the non-judgmental support from peers and committee members, which reduced their nervousness and motivated continuous improvement (Ayiz & Tauchid, 2024). Techniques for overcoming communication issues included seeking help from friends, using translation tools, and employing gestures, despite challenges like limited

vocabulary and social pressures. Ultimately, strong social support, meaningful activities, and consistent language exposure were key in enhancing speaking confidence, aligning with prior research on collaborative environments in language learning (Alqarni, 2021).

In other words, the findings revealed that several factors contributed to students' speaking confidence in the English immersion program, with an encouraging learning atmosphere emerging as one of the most important factors. Participants reported feeling more comfortable speaking English when they received non-judgmental support from peers and committee members. This supportive environment reduced their nervousness and fear of making mistakes, allowing them to participate more actively in English communication. Rather than focusing primarily on grammatical accuracy, participants became more willing to express their ideas and take risks when speaking. This finding suggests that psychological safety is an important condition for developing speaking confidence because students are more likely to use a language when they feel that their mistakes will not result in embarrassment or negative judgment. This finding is consistent with Ayiz and Tauchid (2024), who emphasized the importance of a supportive learning environment in encouraging learners to participate in English communication.

The supportive relationships among participants also appeared to create a sense of belonging within the immersion program. Students were not learning English individually; instead, they were constantly interacting with peers who experienced similar difficulties. This shared experience may have helped students realize that making mistakes is a normal part of language learning. When participants saw their peers attempting to communicate despite having limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge, they were encouraged to do the same. Consequently, peer interaction functioned not only as a means of practicing English but also as a source of emotional support. This finding reinforces the idea that collaborative learning can create opportunities for learners to develop both communicative competence and confidence.

Another important finding was the use of strategies to overcome communication problems. Participants reported seeking assistance from friends, using translation tools, and employing gestures when they could not find the appropriate English words. These strategies demonstrate that students actively attempted to maintain communication despite their linguistic limitations. Instead of avoiding communication when they encountered difficulties, they used alternative resources to convey their intended meanings. This behavior is significant because



it indicates that speaking confidence does not necessarily depend on having perfect vocabulary or grammar. Rather, confidence can develop when learners realize that they have different ways of solving communication problems.

The use of translation tools, for example, provided participants with immediate assistance when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary. Although excessive dependence on translation tools may potentially limit independent language production, their strategic use in an immersion setting can help learners continue conversations and reduce communication breakdowns. Similarly, gestures and body language allowed students to communicate meaning when verbal resources were insufficient. These strategies demonstrate participants' willingness to take communicative risks and their ability to adapt to challenging situations. Over time, successfully overcoming such communication difficulties may strengthen learners' belief in their own ability to communicate in English.

Limited vocabulary was identified as one of the major challenges affecting students' speaking confidence. When students did not know the words needed to express their thoughts, they sometimes experienced hesitation or anxiety. Social pressure could further increase these difficulties, particularly when students felt that others were expecting them to speak English fluently. However, the immersion environment encouraged them to continue communicating despite these limitations. Through repeated exposure, students gradually became more familiar with frequently used expressions and vocabulary. This suggests that consistent language exposure may help reduce the gap between students' perceived inability to speak English and their actual ability to communicate.

Meaningful activities also played an important role in developing students' confidence. Activities such as discussions, debates, speeches, seminars, and everyday conversations gave students practical reasons to use English. These activities differed from mechanical language exercises because students had to communicate real ideas, respond to others, and express their opinions. As a result, students could directly experience the purpose and usefulness of English. The more they participated in these activities, the more familiar they became with speaking in front of and interacting with other people. This repeated practice may have gradually transformed speaking English from a stressful activity into a more natural form of communication.

The findings further suggest that confidence developed progressively rather than immediately. At the beginning of the program, students experienced nervousness because they

were unfamiliar with communicating in an English-only environment. However, continuous exposure and repeated interaction gradually reduced their anxiety. Each successful communication experience provided evidence that they were capable of expressing themselves in English. These small successes may have strengthened their self-belief and encouraged them to participate in subsequent activities. Therefore, the development of speaking confidence can be understood as a gradual process in which repeated practice, positive feedback, and successful communication experiences reinforce one another.

The role of peers and committee members is particularly important in this process. Encouragement from others provided students with positive feedback and motivation to continue practicing. When students received assistance rather than criticism, they were more likely to view communication difficulties as temporary challenges rather than evidence of failure. This finding is consistent with Alqarni (2021), who highlighted the importance of collaborative and supportive learning environments in language learning. In a collaborative environment, learners can receive assistance, exchange knowledge, and learn from one another, which can create greater opportunities for participation and language development.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the immersion program influenced more than students' linguistic abilities. The combination of social support, meaningful activities, and continuous exposure appeared to contribute to students' personal development, particularly their self-esteem, independence, and willingness to communicate. As students became more confident in dealing with communication problems, they also became more prepared to use English in unfamiliar situations. This is an important outcome because speaking confidence is not limited to performing well in classroom activities; it also involves having the courage to initiate and maintain communication in real-life contexts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' speaking confidence in the immersion program was shaped by the interaction of environmental, social, and individual factors. An encouraging atmosphere reduced fear of making mistakes, peer and committee support provided emotional and practical assistance, meaningful activities created authentic opportunities to speak, and continuous exposure allowed students to become more familiar with English communication. At the same time, students' use of communication strategies helped them overcome linguistic barriers and remain engaged in conversations. These findings support previous research suggesting that collaborative and supportive environments are valuable for language learning (Alqarni, 2021; Ayiz & Tauchid, 2024). More importantly, the

findings suggest that improving speaking confidence requires more than simply increasing students' exposure to English. Learners also need a safe social environment, opportunities to communicate meaningfully, and encouragement to take risks and learn from their mistakes. In the context of the Australian Village English Immersion Program, these factors worked together to help students move from initial nervousness toward greater confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

#### **D. Conclusion and Suggestion**

According to the research findings, the Australian Village's English Immersion Program provided valuable educational opportunities and promoted ongoing English communication through exercises such as speeches, self-introductions, professional meetings, debates, and daily conversations. Most participants reported increased confidence in speaking due to a supportive environment that reduced anxiety. However, they also faced challenges like limited vocabulary, grammar issues, anxiety, and adjustment to an English-only setting. Certain activities, particularly public speaking exercises, were more effective in boosting confidence and fluency. Overall, the program significantly contributed to students' language skills and personal development.

To enhance students' comfort and confidence in speaking English at Australian Village, a supportive environment is essential, characterized by continuous encouragement and cooperation. Updating teaching materials and incorporating interactive activities will better engage students, particularly shy participants, while vocabulary-building and grammar support are recommended to improve language skills. Students are encouraged to practice English outside the immersion program to build confidence through conversation and community engagement. For future researchers, studies should involve larger participant groups and contrast different immersion environments to assess their impact on speaking confidence, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Related areas such as speaking anxiety and communication strategies should also be explored.

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