

No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication

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ABSTRACT

Keterampilan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris sering menjadi tantangan utama bagi mahasiswa dan pelajar sekolah menengah, bukan karena keterbatasan tata bahasa atau kosakata, melainkan karena hambatan psikologis seperti rasa takut melakukan kesalahan dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat “No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication” dirancang untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut dengan mengalihkan fokus dari kesempurnaan tata bahasa menuju komunikasi yang bermakna. Program ini dilaksanakan melalui workshop interaktif, percakapan berpasangan, permainan berbasis kepercayaan diri, simulasi komunikasi nyata, serta pendampingan dalam lingkungan belajar yang suportif. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa refleksi peserta, observasi, dan diskusi. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan keberanian berbicara, penurunan kecemasan, serta peningkatan kelancaran dan kepercayaan diri peserta. Selain itu, peserta mulai memandang kesalahan sebagai bagian dari proses belajar. Program ini menegaskan pentingnya pembelajaran kolaboratif dan praktik nyata dalam meningkatkan kompetensi komunikatif serta menjembatani kesenjangan antara teori dan praktik.

Speaking is widely considered one of the most challenging skills for both university and high school learners, not primarily due to limited grammar or vocabulary, but because of psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence. This community service program, entitled “No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication,” aims to address these challenges by shifting learners’ focus from grammatical perfection to meaningful communication. The program was implemented through interactive workshops, peer conversation sessions, confidence-building games, real-life communication simulations, and mentoring activities to create a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment. A qualitative approach was employed to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and mindset changes during the program. Data were collected through participant reflections, observational notes, and informal discussions. The findings reveal that participants demonstrated increased willingness to speak, reduced speaking anxiety, and improved fluency and confidence in expressing ideas. In addition, learners developed a more positive attitude toward making mistakes, recognizing them as part of the learning process. Overall, the program highlights the importance of collaborative learning and experiential practice in fostering communicative competence. It also contributes to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-life communication, while promoting learner autonomy, sustained motivation, and adaptive communication skills.



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INTRODUCTION

In the process of learning English, speaking is widely recognized as the most challenging skill for learners, particularly for university students and high school students. The difficulty does not always come from a lack of vocabulary or grammar knowledge, but rather from the fear of making mistakes in public. Many learners develop the belief that they must speak grammatically perfect English before they are allowed to speak at all. As a result, speaking practice becomes a source of anxiety instead of a platform for growth.

This overemphasis on grammatical accuracy often prevents students from building confidence. Instead of viewing errors as a natural part of the learning process, they treat them as signs of failure. Consequently, many learners choose to remain silent even when they have ideas to express. This creates a learning barrier where linguistic competence develops more slowly due to limited real communication experiences.

In real-life communication, however, success in speaking is not determined solely by grammar. Fluency, clarity of ideas, confidence, and willingness to interact play an equally, if not more, important role. Across international communication settings, imperfect grammar is rarely a major obstacle as long as the message is conveyed effectively. Fluency often grows out of repeated speaking practice, not from perfect mastery of grammar before speaking.

At the same time, Indonesian learners often experience what is commonly referred to as “*grammar-shyness*”, a condition where students refrain from speaking because they are afraid of being corrected or ridiculed for grammatical errors. This phenomenon is rooted in classroom culture, where correctness is sometimes prioritized over communicative competence. While grammar remains an important foundation in language learning, excessive attention to accuracy at an early stage may hinder natural language production.

Another growing issue is that learners today are surrounded by opportunities to use English in digital spaces social media, online games, videos, global forums yet they still hesitate to engage in real interaction. They consume English passively rather than use it actively. The problem is not exposure, but confidence. What learners truly need is a *supportive platform* that helps them speak first and refine later. The community service program “**No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication**” is therefore designed to respond to this psychological and communicative gap. It aims to shift learners’ mindset from perfectionism to progress, from fear to participation, and from silence to expression. The program emphasizes that English is a tool for communication, not merely a set of grammatical rules to be memorized.

Through confidence-based speaking strategies, gamified activities, peer interaction, and mindset reshaping, the program encourages learners to view mistakes as opportunities for growth. The goal is not to eliminate grammar, but to reposition it from a barrier at the entrance, to a support along the journey. In this way, learners will gradually develop both fluency and accuracy, but without losing their willingness to speak.

Identification of the Problem

Despite having access to grammar knowledge and vocabulary, many students struggle to speak English confidently. The primary obstacle is not a lack of linguistic competence, but a psychological barrier that inhibits active communication. Learners often experience anxiety and fear of making mistakes in front of peers or teachers, a phenomenon commonly referred to as “*grammar-shyness*.” This fear discourages students from participating in speaking activities and limits opportunities to practice real communication.

As a result, even when learners possess sufficient grammar and vocabulary, they hesitate to express their ideas, leading to low speaking confidence and reduced fluency. Overemphasis on grammatical accuracy in classroom settings further reinforces this barrier, creating a mindset that mistakes are unacceptable rather than a natural part of learning. Consequently, students’ willingness to speak is suppressed, and their language development slows down due to limited practical experience.

In today's context, where learners are constantly exposed to English through digital platforms social media, online games, videos, and global forums the problem is not exposure, but the lack of confidence to engage actively. Learners consume English passively rather than using it for communication, perpetuating the gap between knowledge and practical ability.

Therefore, the core problem addressed by this program is the psychological inhibition of speaking caused by fear of grammatical mistakes, low self-confidence, and lack of practical speaking opportunities. Addressing these barriers is essential to shift learners' mindset from fear and perfectionism toward active, meaningful communication.

Objectives of the Program

The primary aim of the program is to enhance students' confidence and ability to communicate effectively in English by addressing psychological barriers that inhibit speaking. Specifically, the program seeks to:

1. Increase speaking confidence – Encourage learners to express ideas without fear of making grammatical mistakes.
2. Promote active participation – Motivate students to engage in conversations, discussions, and real-life communication scenarios.
3. Foster a growth mindset – Help learners view errors as opportunities for improvement rather than signs of failure.
4. Shift focus from perfection to communication – Emphasize the importance of conveying meaning and ideas effectively rather than achieving flawless grammar.
5. Develop practical speaking skills – Provide repeated practice in supportive and interactive environments to improve fluency and real-time communication.

Through these objectives, the program aims to transform learners' attitudes toward speaking English, enabling them to communicate more confidently, naturally, and meaningfully in both academic and everyday contexts.

Program Activities

To achieve the objectives of enhancing speaking confidence and promoting active communication, the program will implement a series of interactive and supportive activities:

1. Interactive Speaking Workshops

Participants will engage in structured speaking exercises, discussions, and role-plays that simulate real-life situations. These workshops provide a safe environment to practice expressing ideas without focusing solely on grammatical accuracy.

2. Peer Conversation Labs

Small group activities will facilitate peer-to-peer interaction, allowing learners to practice speaking with classmates in a collaborative and low-pressure setting. This method encourages mutual support and constructive feedback.

3. Confidence-Building Games

Gamified activities will be incorporated to make speaking practice enjoyable and motivating. Through challenges, storytelling, and team competitions, learners can reduce anxiety and increase willingness to participate.

4. Guided Real-Life Communication Scenarios

Participants will be guided through practical communication situations, such as ordering at a restaurant, presenting ideas, or participating in group discussions. These scenarios aim to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application.

5. Mentoring and Feedback Sessions

Instructors and program facilitators will provide personalized feedback and encouragement, helping learners reflect on their progress and reinforcing positive speaking habits.

By combining workshops, peer interaction, games, real-life simulations, and mentoring, the program ensures that learners practice speaking in diverse and engaging contexts, gradually building confidence, fluency, and communicative competence.

Expected Outcomes

By participating in the “No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication” program, learners are expected to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increased Willingness to Speak

Participants will demonstrate a greater readiness to engage in English communication, actively expressing ideas in both academic and informal settings.

2. Reduced Speaking Anxiety

Learners will experience a decrease in fear and nervousness associated with making grammatical mistakes, allowing them to participate more comfortably in conversations.

3. Improved Fluency in Real-Time Communication

Through repeated practice in interactive activities and real-life scenarios, participants will enhance their ability to speak spontaneously and convey ideas clearly.

4. Enhanced Confidence and Courage

Students will develop the self-assurance to communicate without overemphasizing grammatical perfection, fostering a growth mindset toward learning English.

5. Positive Attitude Toward Mistakes

Participants will learn to view errors as opportunities for improvement, rather than signs of failure, which supports long-term language development.

Overall, these outcomes aim to empower learners to communicate more effectively, confidently, and naturally in English, bridging the gap between knowledge and real-world application.

METHOD

This community service program entitled “No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication” employed a qualitative approach to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and responses toward a confidence-based English speaking program. A qualitative method was considered appropriate because the main focus of the program was not on measuring numerical learning outcomes, but on understanding changes in participants’ confidence, attitudes, and willingness to communicate in English after the intervention.

The program was conducted in the form of a one-time interactive seminar and practice session, combining short theoretical input, live demonstrations, guided speaking activities, and reflective discussion. This format was selected to accommodate time limitations while still allowing meaningful engagement and interaction among participants.

Participants

The participants consisted of university students and members of the general public outside the campus who were interested in improving their English communication skills. The inclusion of both academic and non-academic participants was intended to broaden the social impact of the program and ensure that the activities were accessible to diverse backgrounds, levels of proficiency, and learning needs. Participation was voluntary, and no strict English proficiency requirements were imposed.

Program Procedures

The implementation of the program followed several stages. The first stage was preparation, which involved designing seminar materials, preparing speaking activities that emphasized communication over grammatical accuracy, and developing simple reflection instruments. The second stage was program implementation, where participants attended a seminar session introducing the concept of confident English communication without overemphasis on grammar. During this session, participants engaged in guided speaking practices, short role-play activities, and interactive discussions designed to reduce anxiety and encourage spontaneous speech.

The final stage was reflection and evaluation, in which participants were invited to share their experiences, feelings, and perceived changes in confidence after participating in the program. This stage was essential to capture authentic responses and personal insights related to the learning experience.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several qualitative data collection methods. The primary method was participant reflection, where participants completed short written reflection forms at the end of the seminar. These reflections focused on their feelings toward speaking English, perceived confidence, challenges, and overall impressions of the program.

In addition, observational notes were taken by the facilitators during the seminar to document participant engagement, interaction patterns, and responses during speaking activities. Informal group discussions and feedback sessions were also used to gather verbal responses and immediate impressions

from participants. These multiple data sources allowed for data triangulation to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants' written reflections and facilitators' observation notes were carefully read and coded to identify recurring themes related to confidence, anxiety reduction, participation, and perceptions of grammar-free communication. The themes were then interpreted to describe how the program contributed to encouraging confident English communication among participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the "No Grammar, No Cry: Encouraging Confident English Communication" program provides a deeper understanding of how a confidence-oriented approach can influence learners' speaking behavior. Insights drawn from participants' reflections, facilitator observations, and interactive discussions reveal a noticeable transformation, not only in speaking performance but also in learners' mindset toward using English.

At the initial stage of the program, hesitation was clearly visible among participants. Many of them showed reluctance to speak, often pausing excessively or limiting their responses to very short phrases. This condition was not caused by a lack of knowledge, but rather by an internal concern about making errors. Several participants expressed that they had been accustomed to associating speaking with correctness, which made them overly cautious and, in many cases, silent.

However, as the activities progressed, a gradual yet meaningful shift began to emerge. When participants were placed in a learning environment that did not immediately emphasize correction, they started to speak more freely. The absence of pressure allowed them to focus on conveying meaning instead of monitoring every grammatical detail. This change was evident during peer interaction sessions, where conversations became more spontaneous and less restrained. One of the most significant developments observed in this program was the change in how participants perceived mistakes. Initially viewed as something to avoid, errors gradually became accepted as part of the learning journey. This shift indicates the development of a more adaptive and growth-oriented perspective, where learners begin to understand that language proficiency evolves through continuous use rather than perfection at the outset. Such a transformation is essential, as it directly affects learners' willingness to take risks in communication. In terms of fluency, participants demonstrated improvement in maintaining the flow of conversation. Although pauses and minor inaccuracies were still present, their speech became more continuous and expressive. This suggests that when learners are given the opportunity to practice without excessive fear, their ability to communicate ideas develops more naturally. Over time, this kind of practice can also support the gradual improvement of accuracy. The role of social interaction also appeared to be highly influential. Participants reported feeling more comfortable engaging with peers compared to traditional classroom settings that are often perceived as evaluative. The collaborative atmosphere created a sense of shared experience, reducing the fear of being judged. This condition encouraged learners to participate more actively and support one another during the speaking process.

Additionally, the use of real-life communication scenarios contributed to making the learning experience more meaningful. Participants were able to relate the activities to everyday situations, which increased their motivation to engage. Instead of practicing isolated sentences, they were involved in meaningful exchanges that reflected actual communication needs. This relevance plays an important role in sustaining learners' interest and reinforcing their confidence. Overall, the findings suggest that reducing the dominance of grammar-focused thinking at the early stage of speaking practice can significantly improve learners' engagement. By prioritizing communication and gradually integrating accuracy, learners are able to develop both confidence and competence in a more balanced way.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this community service program highlight that the main barrier in English speaking is not merely linguistic limitation, but psychological resistance. Fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence often prevent learners from utilizing the knowledge they already possess. As a result, opportunities for meaningful practice become limited, and language development slows down.

Through the implementation of a communication-focused approach, the program successfully encouraged participants to engage more actively in speaking activities. When the pressure to be grammatically perfect was reduced, learners became more willing to express their ideas. This change was accompanied by increased confidence, improved fluency, and a more positive attitude toward the learning process. An important outcome of this program is the emergence of a mindset that values progress over perfection. Learners began to understand that mistakes are not obstacles, but necessary steps in developing communication skills. This perspective is crucial in sustaining long-term learning motivation and fostering independence in language use.

The program also emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. When learners feel safe and encouraged, they are more likely to participate and take risks in using the language. Activities that involve collaboration, real-life context, and meaningful interaction play a key role in achieving this condition. In the broader educational context, this program offers an important implication for English language teaching practices. While grammar remains an essential component, its role should be positioned as a support system rather than a barrier. By giving learners the space to speak first and refine later, educators can help them develop both confidence and communicative competence more effectively.

Ultimately, the ability to communicate in English is not defined by perfection, but by clarity and confidence in delivering ideas. When learners are empowered to speak without fear, they are more likely to grow into active and capable language users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future implementations of similar programs may benefit from longer duration and repeated sessions to observe more sustained development in learners' speaking ability. Integrating technology-based platforms could also provide additional opportunities for learners to practice communication beyond face-to-face settings. Expanding the program to different educational levels and community groups would further enhance its impact and accessibility.

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