

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTENSIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL: A CASE STUDY AT ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF SYEKH ALI HASAN AHMAD AD-DARY

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APA Citation: Tarihoran, S., & Jufrizal. (2024). The effectiveness of intensive language program on university students' speaking skill: A case study at Islamic University Of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 12(3), 1141-1150. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v12i3.10091>

Received: 12-06-2024

Accepted: 23-08-2024

Published: 30-10-2024

Abstract: This study examines the impact of a language program on the speaking skills of students at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary, Padangsidempuan. Using an ex post facto research design, 43 English department students were assessed. Speaking tests were administered at the start and end of the semester, and the data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test showed a modest increase in mean scores but no statistically significant enhancement ($p = 1.146$) in speaking skill. This study underscores the necessity for customized interventions and enhanced teaching strategies to improve the efficacy of language programs in universities.

Keywords: *effectiveness; language program; speaking*

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, English proficiency is vital for academic achievement, communication, and career success. Universities have incorporated intensive language programs to ensure that students acquire essential speaking skills to meet global demands. As communication forms the core of knowledge exchange and career advancement, mastering spoken English is a crucial skill for students preparing for the workforce (Renandya et al., 2018; Budiharso, 2004). However, the proficiency level of Indonesian students in speaking English remains low, highlighting the need for language programs tailored to address this gap (Yoniswan, 2020; Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). This research focuses on the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary's language program, evaluating its effectiveness in enhancing students' speaking skills.

Language programs often focus on immersive environments to facilitate English acquisition. Studies emphasize that an environment where students consistently speak English, such as in classes or dormitories, enhances their fluency (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020; Chiang, 2018). Psychological barriers, such as anxiety and low self-confidence, hinder students from actively

practicing their speaking skills. Well-designed language programs can help alleviate these anxieties, fostering confidence through continuous speaking practice (Ali et al., 2019; Asif, 2017).

Vocabulary limitations and pronunciation issues also challenge students' speaking proficiency, often leading to communication breakdowns (Pratolo et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2019). Programs addressing these aspects have shown significant improvements in students' ability to articulate thoughts accurately (Azmi, 2020; Brown, 2019). Collaborative learning, through teamwork-based activities, enhances both speaking skills and interpersonal abilities (De Prada et al., 2022; Syaputri & Yustita, 2021). However, some programs lack collaborative opportunities due to small class sizes, limiting students' ability to engage in peer interactions (Fang, 2022; Ali et al., 2019).

The integration of digital tools into language programs offers additional flexibility and engagement. Online platforms and multimedia resources provide students with varied learning experiences, promoting better retention and engagement (Kong, 2019; Salimi & Farsi, 2015). These resources align with modern educational practices, making it easier for students to learn at their convenience (Azizifard, 2024; Mukundan et

al., 2012). However, some research highlights that the effectiveness of such programs varies depending on students' backgrounds and prior English exposure (Chiang, 2018; Ayaz et al., 2019).

While language programs can improve general language proficiency, their impact on speaking skills remains underexplored. Most research has focused on academic performance or motivation, overlooking specific outcomes in speaking competence (Sugara, 2018; Roshdy, 2020). Teacher proficiency also plays a vital role in these programs. Educators with strong language skills provide better feedback, helping students improve pronunciation and fluency (Fang, 2022; Oktaviani et al., 2024). Inconsistent teaching standards, however, can undermine the effectiveness of the programs (Febrianto, 2023; Omar, 2019).

Government policy also influences the design and implementation of language programs. In Indonesia, national regulations encourage universities to offer programs that align with international standards, aiming to prepare students for global competition (Rahayu, 2021; Mañoso-Pacheco & Sánchez-Cabrero, 2022). UIN Syahada's language program reflects these policy goals, providing an immersive environment to foster English speaking skills across academic settings (Pratolo et al., 2019; Renandya et al., 2018).

Despite the extensive research on language programs, few studies have specifically investigated their impact on speaking skills. Most existing studies focus on motivation, confidence, and vocabulary enhancement, leaving a gap in understanding how these programs affect oral communication abilities (Yoniswan, 2020; Christy et al., 2021). Furthermore, limited research addresses the effectiveness of language programs in Indonesian universities. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating UIN Syahada's language program, focusing on its impact on students' speaking proficiency.

Given the importance of English in global communication, assessing the effectiveness of language programs is essential. Understanding the strengths and limitations of these programs can help educators and policymakers develop strategies that better meet students' needs (Azizifard, 2024; Mukundan et al., 2012). The insights gained from this study will support the design of more targeted programs, ensuring students acquire the speaking skills needed for academic and professional success (Salimi & Farsi, 2015; Omar, 2019). Moreover, this research will

contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance English education in Indonesia, preparing students to excel in an increasingly interconnected world.

METHOD

This study employed an ex post facto research design, as defined by Gay and Airasian (2012), which involves identifying potential causes for differences in behavior or group characteristics without manipulating variables. The researcher selected this design to investigate the effect of the language program on students' speaking skills. Ex post facto research is ideal for this purpose since it allows the researcher to assess the impact of the language program on students without any intervention or control over the given conditions or treatment.

The population in this study comprised 43 first-semester students from the English Department at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary Padangsidempuan. Rangkuti (2016) describes a population as a group of objects or subjects selected to represent the entire target group under study. These students were selected to evaluate whether the language program had effectively enhanced their speaking skills after participating in the program. The students were placed into several classes based on their English proficiency to ensure balanced learning.

The sampling technique used in this study was total sampling, following Arikunto's (2012) recommendation that if a population is fewer than 100 individuals, the entire population should be used as the sample. Thus, all 43 students who participated in the language program during their first semester were included in the study, ensuring comprehensive data collection and analysis to assess the program's impact on their speaking abilities.

A speaking test was employed to measure the students' performance, with the scoring criteria based on Brown's (2019) framework, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Each student's performance was evaluated using these indicators, and their individual scores were merged to form an overall score. These scores were then categorized into four levels: Excellent (16–20), Good (11–15), Average (6–10), and Poor (1–5) to provide a clear classification of student performance.

Before conducting the test, the validity, reliability, and practicality of the instrument were thoroughly assessed. Construct validity was ensured by consulting with lecturers from UIN Syahada Padangsidempuan, while content validity

was verified by aligning the test with the syllabus for the first-semester language program. Inter-rater reliability was employed, with two lecturers from the program scoring the students to ensure consistency. This method, based on Brown (2019), ensures that the ratings remain consistent across different raters. Practicality was also considered by limiting the test duration to 10 minutes per student, ensuring clear instructions and understandable communication from the interviewers.

The data collected from the tests were analyzed using the following steps:

Student Score Analysis: After completing the speaking test, the individual scores for each indicator were merged, and the total scores were classified into the four performance levels mentioned earlier to provide a comprehensive view of students' speaking abilities.

Normality Test: Before proceeding with further analysis, the researcher conducted a normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov in SPSS to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. If the significance value exceeded 0.05, the data were considered normally distributed; if it was below 0.05, the data were not normally distributed.

Homogeneity Test: The researcher then conducted a homogeneity test using Levene's statistics in SPSS to determine whether the sample variance was homogeneous. If the significance value was greater than 0.05, the data variance was considered homogeneous; if below 0.05, it was not.

Hypothesis Testing: Since the data were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon test (Sundayana, 2016) was used to assess whether a statistically significant difference existed between the students' scores before and after the language program. SPSS was used to calculate the test results, comparing the pre- and post-test scores to determine the effectiveness of the program.

The hypotheses tested in this study were:

H1: There is a significant difference in the students' speaking skills before and after participating in the language program at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary.

H0: There is no significant difference in the students' speaking skills before and after participating in the language program.

This method ensured a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact on students' speaking skills, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the language program in developing the speaking abilities of English Department students at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The speaking test was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the language program in improving students' speaking skills. Students were tested twice: once in the first month after starting the program (pre-test) and again in the fourth month (post-test) during the first semester. This test was designed to assess improvements across key speaking components, including pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. The data gathered offers a comparative insight into students' speaking performance before and after engaging in the language program, helping identify any noticeable changes in proficiency.

The summary of results provides statistical metrics such as the mean, maximum, minimum scores, standard deviation, variance, and total score. By comparing the pre-test and post-test outcomes, we can determine the extent of the progress made. These metrics offer not only a snapshot of individual performance but also an overview of how the language program may have impacted the students collectively. The slight improvement in scores will inform the discussion about the effectiveness of the program and the areas where additional support may be necessary.

Table 1. *Summary of students' speaking score*

Test	N	Mea n	Ma x	Mi n	SD	Varian ce (Var)	Sum
Pre- Test	4 3	81.6 9	90	65	6.9 5	48.42	3512.5 0
Post - Test	4 3	82.6 7	95	60	8.9 4	79.88	3555

The data above shows a comparison between students' pre-test and post-test scores in speaking skills after participating in the language program. The mean score increased slightly from 81.69 in the pre-test to 82.67 in the post-test, indicating a small improvement in students' speaking performance.

The maximum score increased from 90 to 95, while the minimum score slightly decreased from 65 to 60, showing variability in student performance. The standard deviation (SD) increased from 6.95 to 8.94, reflecting greater spread or variability in the post-test results. Additionally, the variance also increased from 48.42 to 79.88, suggesting that students' scores became more dispersed after the program.

The total score (Sum) also slightly increased from 3512.50 to 3555, indicating a collective improvement in students' overall performance.

However, the relatively modest rise in the mean score suggests that while the program had a positive effect on speaking skills, the impact was not dramatic. The increase in standard deviation implies that some students may have benefited more than others, resulting in varied improvements.

This result highlights that the language program was moderately effective in enhancing students' speaking abilities, although additional interventions or tailored support may be needed to ensure more consistent improvement across all students.

The researcher analyzed the normality of the test by using Kolmogorov smirnov the result of the normality test can be seen on the table below:

Table 2. *Normality testing of students' speaking skill score*

Test	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pre-Test	.148	43	.019
Post-Test	.143	43	.028

Table 2 presented the results of normality testing for students' speaking score. The table highlighted the significance values obtained from the normality tests conducted both before and after the intervention. In the pre-test phase, the significance value was recorded at 0.019, while in the post-test phase, it was slightly higher at 0.028. These values served as indicators of the distribution of speaking skill scores among the students were not distributed normally. The result of normality testing can be illustrated by the data distribution chart below:

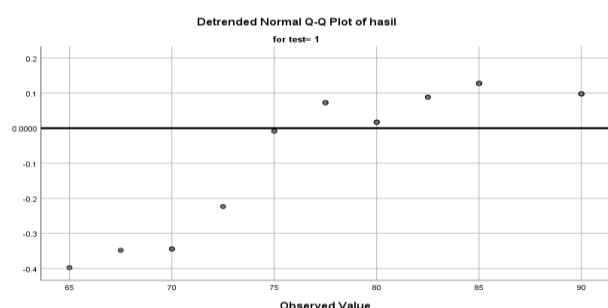


Figure 1. *Detrended normal Q-Q plot of hasil*

The significance level of students' speaking in speaking skill by using oral test in pre-test and post-test were lower than 0.0. it can be concluded that the data were not normally distributed. The researcher made that statement because based on the chart, if the sample formed a normal distribution then the cases fell more or less in straight line.

The other main requirement before doing the paired sample t-test was the homogeneity test. This test was used to know whether the sample variance in this research is homogeneous or not. The researcher used Levene statistics in SPSS to analyze the homogeneity for the sample variance in this research. Then, the result of the homogeneity test in SPSS could be seen in the table below.

Table 3. *Homogeneity testing of students' speaking score*

Test of Homogeneity of Variance				
Students' Score	Levene Statistic	d f	df	Sig.
Based on Mean	2.553	1	84	.114
Based on Median	2.540	1	84	.115
Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.540	1	79.46	.115
Based on trimmed mean	2.599	1	84	.111

Table 3 of the homogeneity testing for students' speaking score revealed the results of the statistical analysis. The key figure from this table is the Levene statistic, which is used to evaluate the equality of variances among the different groups of students. The mean score and the significance value (sig. value) derived from this test are essential components. In this case, the significance value reported is 0.114.

The purpose of conducting homogeneity testing, as demonstrated in Table 4.6 was to ensure that the assumption of equal variances was met for further statistical analyses. The use of Levene's statistic helped to determine whether the variance in speaking skills scores was consistent across different student tests. The significance value of 0.114 indicated that the test was homogenous because the variances were statistically similar, as it was greater than the 0.05 threshold.

To test the research hypotheses, the researcher used the SPSS formula to compute the scores. The results were as follows

Table 4. *The summary of Wilcoxon test analysis of students speaking skill*

Test Statistics ^a	
Z	post – pre -1.452 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.146
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

Table 4 presented the summary of the Wilcoxon test analysis that was conducted to assess students' speaking skills using oral test scores, with a reported significance value of 0.146. This value indicated the level of statistical significance observed in the test results. In statistical hypothesis testing, a significance value (often denoted as p-value) of 0.146 suggested that there was no strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis, which typically assumed no difference between the score or conditions being compared. Therefore, in this context, a significance value of 0.146 indicated that the difference in students' speaking skills as measured by the oral test was not statistically significant.

The hypothesis testing conducted using SPSS revealed that the language program is not effective to improve students speaking skill. It can be said that the language gave negative outcomes regarding the improvement in speaking skill. Specifically, the analysis found that there was no statistically significant improvement in. so the alternative hypothesis was rejected and null hypothesis was accepted.

The various language programs on students' speaking skills has been demonstrated through multiple studies, each employing different methodologies and yielding distinct outcomes. The result of this research supported by the evaluation research conducted by (Ayaz et al., 2019) English courses at several high schools in Turkey revealed that in order to meet the program's goals and objectives, the courses weren't very effective. The four language skills were still got low score even they have followed the course. The research also indicated that course content and materials need to be revised and supplementary materials for teaching of all language areas (four skills, grammar, and vocabulary) should be provided, variety needs to be added to the teaching activities, and the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) need to be assessed properly.

Another researcher also found the same result (Hsu, 2014) study on English for Specific Purposes courses in Taiwan revealed no significant longitudinal increase in TOEIC scores at the interdepartmental level. However, it did highlight significant differences in performance between students from different disciplines, with hospitality students showing improvement while those in tourism and culinary arts experienced a decline. This suggested that the effectiveness of language programs can vary greatly depending on the specific focus and context of the course.

In Iran, a comparison was made between the impact of an intense and non-intensive English course, with backing from (Nasiri & Shokrpour, 2012) Although the identical textbooks were used in both classes, the non-intense group of students performed noticeably better than the intensive group's, according the findings. Consistent with Nasiri and Shokrpour's findings on the ineffectiveness of the intensive courses, Although most students preferred intensive programs because they shortened the amount of time they had to spend in class, (Gallo & Odu, 2009) found that intensive programs were not the best way to learn English, in line with Nasiri and Shokrpour's findings about the ineffectiveness of the courses. There is a claim that when students take new courses less intensively over longer periods of time in fewer but longer class hours, their psychological learning increases. Additionally, they discovered that because of the quick tasks that do not allow for a thorough discussion of each new topic, intense courses may cause learners to become weary and fail to assimilate the new material

In contrast, (Mukundan et al., 2012) reported significant improvements in students' speaking abilities on Malaysian secondary school students using an intensive English program showed a substantial increase in post-test scores. A marked improvement from pretest to posttest scores indicating a significant positive impact on speaking skills. The finding also suggested that immersive and engaging teaching methods were highly effective in enhancing students' speaking skills. The studies by (Nadia & Aditama, 2018) and (Azmi, 2020) further illustrated the significance of methodological rigor and targeted instruction. Nadia & Aditama used of the Mann-Whitney test due to non-normal data distribution ensured accurate analysis, revealing significant improvements in an intensive English class. Azmi's research, which categorized students' speaking abilities from very good to good, emphasizes the benefits of well-structured English courses that provide comprehensive language skills training. With effective lesson plan, such as hiring native speaker and doing games included in course's lesson plan, students able to understand the material that has been given. Competition also gives students incentive to be better and lead them to be more serious when receiving material given by the lecturer

Supported by (Syaputri & Yustita, 2021) in her mixed-method approach and the significant difference in vocabulary mastery between course participants and non-participants underscore the

effectiveness of integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses to capture a holistic view of language learning outcomes. In another study conducted by (Wayan, 2023), 74% of students achieving sufficient or higher speaking competence, indicates that a substantial majority of students benefit from structured language programs. Overall, these studies collectively affirm that intensive, immersive, and well-planned English language program or courses were highly effective in enhancing students' speaking skill.

The research on various language programs for improving students' speaking skills demonstrated diverse outcomes based on different methodologies. Intensive and immersive English programs often led to significant improvements in speaking abilities, particularly when they involved engaging teaching methods, effective lesson plans, and motivational strategies like competitions. However, the effectiveness of these programs varied significantly depending on the context and specific focus of the course. Some studies suggested that non-intensive, well-paced learning schedules were more effective than intensive courses, which could lead to learner fatigue and insufficient absorption of new material. Additionally, differences in performance across disciplines indicated the need for tailored approaches to language instruction. These findings underscored the importance of methodological rigor, targeted instruction, and context-specific strategies in designing effective language programs.

In another article the researcher also found that the students had positive attitudes towards this program even the score that the students had was still low. This indicated that This result of this research supported by theory of (Fakeye, 2010). She found that students' personal variables, including attitude are not correlated with academic achievement in English as a second language. A study by (Nagar & Shonfeld, 2018) highlighted that while attitudes towards multiculturalism and collaborative program were important, they did not directly translate into improved language proficiency without the support of structured and effective teaching methodologies. (Lightbown and Spada, 2013) stated that even the students had motivation to learn and had positive opinion about the program, the student still got unsuccessful language learning outcomes, learner autonomy, and learning engagement, even though motivation can be considered a better predictor of language learning outcomes. This indicated that a positive

attitude alone might not necessarily lead to significant improvements in language skills.

This underscored the importance of not relying solely on student opinion but also focusing on the quality and structure of language instruction because as (Erarslan, 2018) revealed in his research issues with the language education curriculum, such as poorly crafted goals and outputs that omit important areas. Additionally, it exposed issues with the materials' inadequate and ineffective design and content choices. Finally, it was noted that another issue with the emphasis on paper-based evaluation was its failure to include productive abilities. Since these problems appeared to be ongoing across all of the ELTPs, considerable thought and action are necessary to enhance future program modifications.

(Leong & Ahmadi, 2017); (Asif, 2017) (Suwartono & Pangesti, 2019), (Scarpino et al., 2019), (Riadil, 2020); (Alrasheedi, 2020); (Christy et al., 2021); (Kansil et al., 2022) discovered that various factors also play crucial influence in improving learners' speaking skill such as motivation, mother tongue or native language, self-confidence, shyness, peer-pressure, limited exposure to the target language and insufficient opportunity to practice speaking outside of the classroom. All of these factors could affect students' speaking abilities and expertise in doing communication with others. That is why the role of teachers are very crucial in improving students' speaking stated by choosing the appropriate methods or approaches, giving motivation, building self-confidence, using media, games, role-play, tasks and any other things that could support the willingness of students to speak as stated by several researcher, they were (Kurniadi, 2018); (Ho et al., 2019); (Oktaviani et al., 2024); (Azizifard, 2024).

Generally, the effectiveness of language programs in enhancing students' speaking skills was found to be influenced by various factors, as highlighted in multiple studies. Ho (Oktaviani et al., 2024) however, challenges such as discrepancies between perceived effectiveness and actual speaking skill improvement underscored the need for a balanced approach that combined positive attitudes with structured, effective teaching methodologies. By addressing these factors comprehensively, language programs were able to better fulfill their potential in enhancing students' language proficiency and overall learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study explores the effectiveness of a language program aimed at improving students' English speaking skills at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary Padangsidempuan. The findings indicate that while there was a slight improvement in students' mean speaking scores from pretest to posttest, the increase was not statistically significant. The data revealed a mean score increase from 67.79 to 76.63, but with greater variability in scores post-intervention, suggesting inconsistent impacts across the student population. The statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test further supported this, with a p-value of 0.146, indicating no significant difference in students' speaking abilities before and after the program. These results align with previous studies that have highlighted mixed outcomes of language programs, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to address diverse student needs and improve overall effectiveness.

In conclusion, this study found no statistically significant improvement in students' speaking skills after the language program. The increased variability in scores suggests the need for more personalized interventions. Future research should focus on addressing these disparities and exploring different assessment methods to enhance program effectiveness.

To maintain and enhance the effectiveness of language programs, it is crucial to regularly assess and refine teaching strategies. Incorporating modern technology and interactive methods can make learning more engaging and effective. Educators should stay updated with the latest teaching methodologies and adapt their instruction to meet the evolving needs of students. Future researcher should delve into the long-term impact of language programs on students' speaking skills, tracking their progress over extended periods to assess sustained effectiveness. It would be valuable to examine the specific components that contribute most significantly to improvement and compare various instructional strategies, including traditional classroom instruction and technology-enhanced learning environments.

Other researchers also have a chance to investigate socio-cultural factors, such as students' backgrounds and previous language learning experiences, can lead to more tailored and effective programs. Lastly, Understanding the role of motivation and psychological factors, like anxiety and self-confidence, is crucial for supporting students in overcoming challenges.

Research on feedback techniques, comparing immediate versus delayed feedback and peer versus instructor feedback, could identify the most effective methods for fostering improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher would like to express heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this research. First and foremost, the deepest thanks go to Allah SWT for granting the strength and perseverance to carry out this study. The researcher extends sincere appreciation to the parents for their unwavering support, love, and encouragement throughout the research process. Your belief in the researcher's abilities has been a constant source of inspiration. The researcher would like to express special thanks to the English Department of the Language and Art Faculty at the State University of Padang for their invaluable support and resources especially to the researcher's advisor. Special thanks to lecturers and staffs at the Islamic University of Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary, Padangsidempuan, for their cooperation and assistance throughout this research.

Particular gratitude is extended to the students who participated in this study; without their willingness and effort, this research would not have been possible. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges the support and encouragement from colleagues and families, whose understanding and motivation have been instrumental in the successful completion of this work. Lastly, the researcher extends thanks to everyone who, directly or indirectly, has lent their support and encouragement, contributing to the realization of this research. Your contributions have been invaluable, and the researcher is profoundly grateful for your assistance.

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