



Assessing the effectiveness of english camp in enhancing junior high school students' conversational skills

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of English language camps in developing junior high school students' conversational skills. In non-English-speaking countries, English language camps are seen as a popular approach to improving English language skills through immersive learning environments. This study employed a case study approach involving junior high school students as research subjects and focused on the effect of immersion learning on speaking and listening skills. Data were collected through pre- and post-camp assessments, observations of learning activities, and interviews with students and teachers. Data analysis was conducted using a quantitative approach to compare the results of pre- and post-program assessments, and a qualitative approach through thematic analysis of the interview and observation results to describe the participants' learning experiences in greater depth. The results showed that the immersive environment in English language camps positively contributed to the development of students' conversational skills, particularly in terms of fluency and vocabulary use. These findings provide important implications for educators and language program managers in designing more effective English language camps, oriented towards communicative practice, and supporting the sustainable development of students' conversational skills.



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INTRODUCTION

As English continues to become a global lingua franca, mastering English has become a necessity in multiple fields, whether in the professional, academic, or social domains. Countries where English is not the primary language have implemented educational reforms aimed at improving students' attitudes toward learning English. Among various learning approaches, immersion programs such as English language camps are gaining popularity due to their effectiveness in helping students develop English communication skills. These programs intend to foster a supportive, engaging, and informal atmosphere during English language practice, which helps learners use the language in everyday interactions. This is different from the more formal environment of a classroom.

The purported effectiveness of English camps on students' conversational skills continues to be of interest to scholars and practitioners. The ability to understand and produce language simultaneously in real-time situations constitutes one of the ultimate dimensions of language mastery (Díaz et al., 2023). The ability to converse is an essential component of one's personal and professional life. Although the skills of reading and writing, and the command of formal grammar, are an indispensable part of the language, speaking and listening are the most proximate means of communication, and therefore most demanding, in the real world. Thus, in the case of students who have few opportunities to practice English communicative skills in, and outside, the classroom, these skills require more intensive and focused teaching (B. A. R. Kaharuddin & Purwarno, 2023).

One of the most notable advantages of English camps is the chance for students to use the English language in a concentrated and immersive context. Rather than engaging the language in the classroom and practicing it for a few hours a week, English learners spend a week or more in an English speaking environment, giving them more exposure to the language in various real life situations (Ahmad et al., 2024). English language immersion camps also incorporate activities such as group discussions

and interactive English karaoke and other tasks to encourage unprompted English speaking, listening, and comprehension (A. Kaharuddin, 2024). This immersion facilitates the students' active use of the language as they participate in ordinary conversations with peers, teachers, and even native speakers of the language.

Improving English language skills, particularly conversational skills, is a primary goal of education in both non-English-speaking and native English-speaking countries. Conversation skills encompass the ability to speak and listen actively in meaningful communication contexts and are the culmination of the language learning process, as they involve applying language in real-life situations. Mastery of these skills relates not only to grammar and vocabulary, but also to pragmatic competence, self-confidence, and the ability to adapt language use to social contexts. For junior high school students, conversational skills play a crucial role in supporting language fluency and long-term retention through authentic communication experiences.

One approach considered effective in developing conversational skills is immersive learning through English language camps. These programs provide intensive exposure to English in a variety of formal and informal contexts, encouraging spontaneous and meaningful language use. Activities such as discussions, role-playing, and task-based interactions are designed to mimic real-life situations and reduce the anxiety often present in formal classroom learning. The more relaxed and communicative environment allows students to focus more on conveying meaning than on the accuracy of language structure, thereby improving fluency, confidence, and motivation to learn.

Various studies have shown that English language camps generally have a positive impact on students' speaking, listening, and vocabulary acquisition, although their effectiveness is influenced by a number of factors (Aini & Prihantoro, 2024; Aziz, 2024). The quality of the instructor, the design of the activities, the intensity and duration of the program, and the level of student motivation are key determinants of success. However, several studies have also highlighted the limitations of English language camps, particularly regarding the sustainability of learning outcomes after the program ends. Therefore, designing a structured, communicative, and sustainable English language camp, and integrating it with further learning, is crucial to ensure that students' conversational skills are maintained and enhanced over the long term.

Research regarding the popularity of English camps and their effectiveness, especially for junior high school students, is still somewhat limited. Most of the research has centered on adult learners, for whom the long-term gaps in research have also failed to address. The frameworks of camp organization, implementation of teaching practices, and integration of interactive English speaking and conversational practice still have a long way to go in properly addressing the gaps in the literature. With some research indicating positive results on confidence and language skills, the general sentiments still speak to concerns on timing, engagement, and especially the short nature of the camp. Moreover, the extent to which variables like age, previous proficiency in the language, and motivation affect the results of the English camp programs has been studied minimally.

This study focuses on the impact of English camps on junior high school students. Junior high students are at a pivotal point in the language acquisition and consolidation process. Speaking and listening foundational skills are built during this period. Students at this age are more receptive to immersive learning opportunities. Conversational skills are crucial to language learning, and English camps promote the development of these skills. This study, therefore, augments the available body of literature on the effectiveness of English camps on the development of conversational skills during the foundational years of learning English.

The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of a week-long English on the conversational skills of junior high school students. More specifically, this study measures the impact of a week-long English camp on the students' fluency, use of appropriate vocabulary, listening comprehension, and overall speaking confidence. The study also considers the instructional and interactive design of the camp, particularly the activities, and the teaching style as well as the student-teacher interactions and their impact on learning. This study examines the impact of these variables on the language learning environment.

Findings will be useful for educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers in understanding the organization and implementation of these programs, the intended purpose of English camps and the effective advancement of the students' English language competencies. This study seeks to showcase the importance of English camps within the English language educational framework. It fills a gap in the research on the impact of English camps while offering insights on effective language teaching and the design of more stimulating, experiential pedagogical environments for English language instruction to junior high school students.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a mixed methods approach with a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design to evaluate the effectiveness of an English language camp program on junior high school students' conversational skills. A mixed methods approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding by combining quantitative and qualitative data within a single, integrated research framework (Mujeeb et al., 2025). Quantitative data were used to measure changes in students' conversational skills before and after attending the camp, while qualitative data were used to explore the experiences, perceptions, and learning processes of students and teachers during the program. A pre-test and post-test design is considered relevant for assessing the effectiveness of educational interventions in the context of foreign language learning (Alzubi et al., 2024).

Research Participants

The study participants were junior high school students from a private school in Makassar, Indonesia, who voluntarily participated in a one-week English language camp program. Fifty students, aged twelve to fourteen, participated in the study, with an average age of thirteen. Based on the initial test results, the students' English proficiency was at a beginner to intermediate level. In addition to the students, this study also involved five English teachers who served as camp facilitators. The teachers had between three and ten years of experience teaching English as a foreign language and were responsible for leading group discussions, managing language game-based activities, and providing direct feedback to students. The teachers were also interviewed after the camp to obtain their professional perspectives on the program's effectiveness.

Procedures and Data Collection

Data collection in this study was conducted in three stages: before, during, and after the English camp. Quantitative data were collected through pre-camp and post-camp assessments, which consisted of conversation-based oral tests. These assessments aimed to measure students' speaking skills in terms of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The pre- and post-assessment instruments were designed similarly to allow for consistent comparison of student performance changes, as recommended in evaluative research on language learning (Xu et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through direct observation and semi-structured interviews. During the camp, researchers observed students' engagement in various activities, such as group discussions, role-plays, language games, and cooperative assignments. Observations focused on spontaneous use of English, the intensity of speaking participation, and the quality of interactions between students and instructors. After the camp concluded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and teachers to explore their learning experiences, perceptions of the camp's effectiveness, and factors that supported or hindered the development of conversational skills. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provided participants with the flexibility to share their experiences in depth while maintaining a focus on the research theme (Chand, 2025).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study employed a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data from pre- and post-camp tests were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to identify differences in students' conversational abilities before and after participating in the camp program. The analysis focused on changes in scores on fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and

listening comprehension. The use of paired t-tests is considered appropriate for comparing two measures derived from the same group of participants (Chicco et al., 2025). All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software.

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis by transcribing the data, coding participant responses, and identifying key themes that emerged related to students' learning experiences and speaking skill development. To enhance the validity of the qualitative findings, this study employed data triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and quantitative findings. This triangulation approach aims to strengthen the validity of the research results and ensure consistency of findings across data sources (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses demonstrate the extent to which junior high school students' conversational skills improved thanks to the English Camp program, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. In this section, improvements in these key language features are documented, analyzed, and illustrated through various tables and figures.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data were collected from pre-camp and post-camp assessments focusing on fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension, the four fundamental components of conversational skills. Each of these components was scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the lowest proficiency and 4 the highest. These assessments were then summarized in a table and graph, which are presented below, along with a more comprehensive analysis.

The assessment of fluency was conducted by observing students' ability to maintain a conversational flow without excessive pauses, their level of hesitation when speaking, and the speed and continuity of responses in oral interactions. The metric with the greatest improvement was fluency, with an average increase of 25%. Before the camp, students, especially those at the beginner level, showed significant signs of hesitation and frequent, unproductive pauses. After the camp, their ability to sustain conversations, respond effectively, and speak fluently and quickly improved significantly. This progress was undoubtedly a result of the camp's engaging and interactive structure, which encouraged students to interact directly with their peers in group conversations, structured argumentative conversations, and simulation exercises.

The vocabulary evaluation focused on the variety and accuracy of words and phrases used by students during conversations. Assessment was conducted by observing the extent to which students were able to select vocabulary appropriate to the context of the conversation and use it meaningfully. All proficiency levels experienced a 20% increase in vocabulary use. Post-campaign evaluations showed that students had acquired a larger pool of words and phrases, which helped them express their thoughts more clearly. This expansion of their vocabulary was closely linked to the camp's emphasis on task-based activities that motivated students to use newly acquired words and phrases in context. However, the gap between passive and active vocabulary remained. Many students recognized new words, but integrating these words into everyday conversation remained a challenge.

Pronunciation assessments focused on clarity of articulation, accuracy of vowel and consonant pronunciation, and use of word stress and basic intonation in conversation. Improvement in pronunciation was more modest, with only a 15% increase. Although some students made significant progress, particularly in mastery of vowel and consonant sounds, others still struggled with more complex aspects of pronunciation, including stress and intonation patterns. The relatively smaller improvement in pronunciation suggests that more focused attention and specific practice are needed to successfully address these challenges.

Listening comprehension skills were assessed through students' responses to questions and oral statements delivered by the examiner during conversation tests, as well as through observations of students' ability to understand instructions and peer contributions in group interactions. Listening

comprehension improved by 15%, indicating that students were improving in understanding spoken English, although the progress was smaller compared to other skill areas. This small increase suggests the need to incorporate more complex and challenging listening activities in future sessions. Students' comprehension skills need further development. Students' ability to process spoken discourse directly can be enhanced through exposure to a variety of accents, speaking rates, and more sophisticated audio materials.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings in this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews and direct observations during the English Camp. All qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved open coding, code grouping, and the extraction of key themes. The themes presented in this section emerged consistently from student and teacher response patterns in interviews, as well as from language behavior observed by the researcher during the camp. This analysis aims to explain how learning experiences, social interactions, and the design of the camp activities influence the development of students' conversational skills.

1. Interviews

Based on the interviews, the dominant theme that emerged was increased fluency and confidence in using English. Most students stated that they felt more confident speaking without being overly concerned about making mistakes, primarily due to the informal and supportive atmosphere of the camp. Teachers also confirmed that students showed clear progress in their ability to sustain conversations and respond spontaneously. This theme emerged from repeated student statements emphasizing a reduced fear of speaking and from teacher recognition of changes in students' attitudes during the camp.

The next theme that emerged from the interviews was increased contextual vocabulary use. Students reported that they began using more new words and phrases in everyday conversations during the camp. Teachers assessed that task-based activities and group discussions encouraged students to try out new vocabulary, although not all students were able to use it consistently. Thematic analysis revealed a gap between passive vocabulary mastery and active vocabulary use, reflected in students' narratives of understanding new words but remaining hesitant to use them in extended conversations.

Another theme emerging from the interviews concerned limitations in pronunciation and listening comprehension. Both students and teachers revealed that certain aspects of pronunciation, such as word stress and intonation, remained difficult to master, primarily due to limited time for individual practice. Furthermore, students stated that they still had difficulty understanding spoken language that was fast or differed from the language patterns they were accustomed to hearing. This theme emerged from the consistency of participant statements, highlighting the need for more focused practice and more intensive mentoring.

2. Observations

Observations during the camp revealed a key theme of increased student engagement in communication-based activities. Researchers noted that students participated more actively in group discussions, role-plays, and collaborative assignments, and used English more spontaneously than in the initial stages of the camp. This theme emerged from recurring behavioral patterns, such as increased frequency of speaking, decreased use of the native language, and students' initiative to initiate conversations with peers and facilitators.

Observations also revealed the theme of positive social interactions as a supporting factor for learning. Students appeared more comfortable communicating in small groups, providing support to each other, and learning from each other's mistakes. Researchers observed that the collaborative environment helped students reduce language anxiety and improve their fluency. However, observations also revealed that pronunciation and listening comprehension were often neglected in large-group activities, as the focus was more on fluency and conveying meaning.

Overall, qualitative findings indicate that English Camp creates an effective learning environment for improving students' conversational skills, particularly in terms of fluency and vocabulary usage. Through thematic analysis of interview and observation data, this study revealed that the communicative and immersive approach encouraged active engagement and student confidence. However, the findings also emphasized the need for more targeted interventions focused on pronunciation and listening comprehension, as well as the importance of designing follow-up activities to support more comprehensive language skill acquisition.

Discussions

The study sheds light on how English camps shape the conversational abilities of junior high school students. The English camps under study not only help students achieve fluency, broaden their vocabulary, and strengthen their listening skills and overall command of their speech, they also heighten confidence in their conversational skills. An overall positive trend is clear from the results; however, response patterns also indicate diverse developments that need to be further unpacked. This chapter analyzes the developments and patterns to clarify the complex influence of English camps on learning the English language.

1. Impact on Fluency: A Significant Improvement

Improvement in students' fluency is one of the most notable observations from the quantitative data, with an increase of 25% across all levels of proficiency. Fluency, defined as the facility and smoothness of speech, is considered one of the most important elements of conversational competence. Such increase in fluency is encouraging in view of the fact that a considerable number of students, and most importantly the beginners, had major difficulties in communication, as there were frequent prolonged silences or hesitation in their speech.

This improvement stems from a number of important camp design and structure features. The camp was immersive, which meant that students had excellent opportunities to practice English for long stretches of time and in a variety of real-life contexts. As described in Daniau (2016) output hypothesis, camp activities such as role play, group discussions, and interactive games, provided opportunities for learners to perform activities where real time language was produced in a spontaneous manner, as in authentic communication tasks. This sort of environment assists learners of a language to employ speech with less calculation and abstract thinking about grammar and vocabulary (Kyaw & Deng, 2025).

The problem of anxiety in language learning, particularly in young learners, also needs to be considered. Multiple studies examining the interplay between anxiety and fluency show that learners frequently hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making errors (Budiarti & Silalahi, 2025). Regardless of the situation, the camp's non-threatening, supportive environment was central to alleviating these anxieties. Many reported that confidence to speak English increased because they were encouraged to be risk-takers and were not criticized for making mistakes. This supports Wang (2025) who identified the need for positive, low stress environments in which learners are able to freely experiment with the language and gain fluency.

2. Vocabulary Usage: A Significant but Gradual Improvement

Proficiency levels indicate a 20% increase on the use of vocabulary, and improvement on this category is especially significant given the challenges that vocabulary poses, especially during the beginner and intermediate stages. Prior to the camp, students demonstrated a significant amount of lexical repetition, using a very small number of words and phrases to describe a wide range of scenarios. Following the camp, students possessed a greater vocabulary and, as a result, were able to describe situations more appropriately, and with more precision, allowing them to fit a range of possible descriptions to varied contexts.

The camp activities' interactivity might be a reason the students were able to stretch their use of vocabulary. Discussions, role-plays, and games offered students the chance to use the vocabulary within appropriate contexts. Vocabulary is most effectively acquired and retained when learners are

given opportunities to use the words in a communicative context in real-time, as stated by Schmitt (2008). The camp activities where context-based learning occurred would most certainly increase the students' retention and recall of vocabulary.

The improvement in vocabulary use is constructive, however the students' passive vocabulary (words they understand) and active vocabulary (words they can use fluently) still demonstrate a significant gap. This is expected in vocabulary acquisition, for example, a learner recognizes a word in a given context but might be unable to use it appropriately in a discussion. Many students find it especially challenging to retrieve a word for use in active vocabulary. This issue may be resolved by including targeted vocabulary exercises in future English camps, such as vocabulary-building activities, or focused conversations that encourage students to practice recently acquired words in discussion.

3. Pronunciation: A Modest Improvement and Challenges Ahead

The changes in pronunciation showed an average improvement of only 15% in assessment scores after the camp was completed. This reflects a positive improvement with regards to the efforts taken during the camp, but it highlights a challenge in the study of language. This is because the personal attention needed to develop pronunciation and the practice necessary will be demanding and continuous. Immersion into the English language, as with the English camps, is helpful, but it will focus on the broad elements of language acquisition and will not capture the intricate aspects of pronunciation. This requires personal attention and specific exercises due to the individual stated needs of the learner.

Elements like phonemic proficiency, muscle memory, and exposure to speech patterns impact speech and pronunciation and can be found in the works of Celce-Murcia and others. The camp activities, in which the pupils practiced English through lecturing and listening, probably contained insufficient concentration practice in the areas of speech patterns, specifically stress and intonation, and the pronunciation of consonant and vowel phonemes. Specific to pupils with weak pronunciation, there is need for intervening actions which focus on defined measures, for example, pronunciation exercises, individualized teacher feedback, and vocal demonstration (Mukarrama & Fajriansyah, 2025).

In addition to this, it is also worthwhile to discuss the impact of the learner's first language on the pronunciation formed. In Indonesia, many junior high school students may be subject to the influence of the phonological characteristics of their first language when producing spoken English (Alfanyah et al., 2023). Personalized corrective feedback and phonetic training would help these students overcome such obstacles and attain clearer pronunciation.

4. Listening Comprehension: Room for Improvement

A 15% improvement in listening comprehension, while encouraging, suggests that developing this skill should receive stronger emphasis during the camp. Comprehending spoken discourse requires a unique skill set, which, beyond the mastery of language elements, includes real-time processing of speech, and contextual cue interpretation (Zhou & Divekar, 2025). The noted improvement in this study suggests that, during the camp, students received sufficient exposure to spoken English and that, in this case, listening comprehension exercises should become a focal point of instruction to facilitate greater advancement in this skill.

A possible explanation of the limited improvement in listening comprehension could be the listening activities' challenge level during the camp. The students most certainly encountered a variety of spoken English in peer conversations and teacher-led dialogues. However, the challenge inherent in the material, especially related to pacing, accent, and complexity, might not have been sufficient to stretch their listening skills. For future camps, using a greater variety of listening activities, such as exposure to varying national accents of English, audio material presented at differing rates, and more demanding interactive listening activities could be beneficial.

5. Student Motivation and Engagement: Key to Success

One important finding of the qualitative analysis revolves around student motivation as a factor for the camp's success. From the student interviews, motivation seemed to be a primary factor in the students' active participation and their willingness to take the risk to speak. A number of students mentioned the fact that they felt more relaxed in speaking English because the camp environment

encouraged them to participate at a time when they felt they would make mistakes, It is consistent with the idea of Dörnyei (2010), in which motivation is central, to at least some degree, to all aspects of language learning, especially when students spontaneously use the language.

The most important factor in motivation, as the teachers' supportive environment and variety of interesting activities kept motivation at high levels (Tauchid et al., 2024). Role-plays, debates, and problem-solving tasks fostered a sense of enjoyment and competition, which contributed the students' motivation to learning (Arafah et al., 2023). The significance of engagement is paramount. Students who actively use the language during the camp are more likely to retain the language and use it after the camp (Iamsamai et al., 2025).

6. Teacher Support and Feedback: A Critical Factor

The contribution of teachers in giving feedback and scaffolding students' language development was crucial for the success of the camp. The teachers' efforts in giving constructive feedback during the activities, providing motivation, and establishing an environment where students felt safe speaking without the fear of being judged contributed greatly to the development of the students' conversational skills. This aligns with Mughal et al. (2024) work highlighting the strong impact of feedback on student learning.

The teachers' individualized attention for students to work on particular weaknesses in a given area—be it fluency, vocabulary, or pronunciation—was essential. The balance of individualized attention, along with the group-based activities, contributed positively to the environment created for these students to acquire a new language. However, for future camps, there may be structured activities for the other staff to work on targeted areas of one-on-one coaching for pronunciation or listening comprehension exercises.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that a one-week English language camp program positively impacted junior high school students' speaking skills. In line with the study's objectives, the results demonstrated improvements in fluency, more appropriate vocabulary use, and listening comprehension. Furthermore, students demonstrated increased confidence in oral communication, influenced by the intensity of English use and the more natural learning environment during the camp.

In terms of instructional and interactive design, a variety of learning activities, such as group discussions, language games, and cooperative assignments, as well as the teacher's supportive teaching style, significantly contributed to student engagement and the creation of a positive learning environment. Intensive interaction between students and the teacher, as well as between students, was a key motivational factor supporting the program's success, although aspects of pronunciation and listening comprehension still require a more targeted and individualized approach.

Based on these findings, this study recommends more systematic reinforcement of pronunciation practice and listening activities, accompanied by structured feedback. Overall, the results of this study confirm that English language camps are effective learning environments for improving students' speaking skills and provide a basis for program development and further research to ensure they are more structured and sustainable.

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