

FUN LEARNING FOR ENGLISH COMMUNICATION: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM IN AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRAK

Kemampuan komunikasi bahasa Inggris masih menjadi tantangan yang persisten bagi siswa di lingkungan pesantren, di mana pembelajaran bahasa sering dibentuk oleh struktur kedisiplinan yang kuat, namun masih dibatasi oleh kecemasan berbicara, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, serta minimnya kesempatan untuk berinteraksi secara bermakna. Dalam diskursus pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di pesantren, persoalan ini menjadi penting karena kesulitan komunikatif umumnya direspons melalui penguatan pembelajaran formal dan regulasi bahasa, sementara peran pembelajaran yang menyenangkan dan berbasis interaksi masih belum banyak dikaji secara sistematis. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana workshop fun learning dapat mendorong keterlibatan siswa, meningkatkan kepercayaan diri berbicara, serta menumbuhkan kemauan untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara lebih aktif dalam lingkungan pesantren. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini dilaksanakan di sebuah pesantren tingkat menengah pertama di Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, dengan melibatkan sekitar 100 siswa kelas IX serta beberapa penggerak bahasa. Artikel ini didasarkan pada data kualitatif yang diperoleh melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan siswa peserta, serta umpan balik informal dari penggerak bahasa, yang dianalisis secara deskriptif dan diinterpretasikan secara tematik. Selain itu, data evaluasi sederhana menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang terukur dalam keterlibatan dan kepercayaan diri siswa, di mana partisipasi aktif dalam kegiatan berbicara meningkat dari 48% menjadi 76%, sementara kepercayaan diri berbicara siswa meningkat dari skor rata-rata 2,6 (52%) menjadi 3,9 (78%) pada skala 5 poin, serta kemauan untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggris meningkat dari 50% menjadi 80%. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aktivitas fun learning mendorong partisipasi yang lebih aktif, mengurangi keraguan siswa untuk berbicara, serta membantu mereka memandang bahasa Inggris sebagai sarana komunikasi yang praktis, bukan sekadar mata pelajaran formal. Kegiatan ini juga menghasilkan gagasan praktis untuk mempertahankan penggunaan bahasa Inggris melalui interaksi antarsiswa dan penguatan program bahasa berbasis asrama. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa program pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang komunikatif di pesantren dapat diperkuat melalui integrasi aktivitas yang interaktif dan responsif terhadap konteks, sementara penelitian lanjutan diperlukan untuk mengkaji dampak jangka panjang dari pendekatan serupa pada berbagai konteks pesantren.

Kata Kunci: *pembelajaran yang menyenangkan, komunikasi bahasa Inggris, pesantren, kepercayaan diri berbicara, pengabdian kepada masyarakat*

ABSTRACT

English communication remains a persistent challenge for students in Islamic boarding schools, where language learning is often shaped by strong disciplinary structures but still limited by speaking anxiety, low confidence, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful interaction. Within the broader discussion of English language teaching in pesantren, this issue is important because communicative difficulties are frequently addressed through formal instruction and language regulation, while the role of enjoyable, interaction-based learning remains less systematically explored. This article aims to examine how a fun learning workshop can foster

students' engagement, speaking confidence, and willingness to use English more actively in a boarding school environment. This community engagement program was conducted at a junior secondary Islamic boarding school in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, involving approximately 100 ninth-grade students and several language coordinators. The article is based on qualitative data gathered through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with student participants, and informal feedback from language coordinators involved in the program, which were analyzed descriptively and interpreted thematically. In addition, simple evaluation data indicated measurable improvements in students' engagement and confidence, as active participation in speaking activities increased from 48% to 76%, while students' self-reported speaking confidence improved from an average score of 2.6 (52%) to 3.9 (78%) on a 5-point scale, and willingness to use English increased from 50% to 80%. The findings show that fun learning activities encouraged more active participation, reduced students' hesitation to speak, and helped them experience English as a practical means of communication rather than merely a formal subject. The workshop also generated practical ideas for sustaining English use through peer interaction and dormitory-based language supervision. These findings suggest that communicative English programs in Islamic boarding schools can be strengthened by integrating interactive and context-responsive activities into regular language practice, while future studies may examine the longer-term impact of such interventions across different pesantren settings.

Keywords: *fun learning, English communication, Islamic boarding school, speaking confidence, community engagement*

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, English proficiency has become an increasingly important skill for students to access global knowledge, academic resources, and international communication. For students in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the use of foreign languages forms an essential component of the educational environment. Arabic is commonly used for understanding Islamic texts and religious studies, while English provides access to global knowledge, technology, and intercultural communication [1],[2]. Therefore, strengthening English communication skills among *pesantren* students is necessary to prepare them for broader educational and professional opportunities and to enable them to engage with global communities through a widely used international language [3],[4].

Although English is widely recognized as a key language for accessing global knowledge and communication, learning English in many *pesantren*-based schools remains challenging. Students often perceive English as a difficult subject that requires memorizing complex grammar rules and vocabulary lists. This perception frequently leads to low motivation and hesitation when students are asked to speak English in class. Many learners feel anxious about making mistakes, which ultimately limits their willingness to participate in communicative activities. Previous studies have reported that students in Islamic boarding schools frequently experience difficulties in speaking English due to limited vocabulary, nervousness, and lack of

confidence during interaction [5]. As a result, students may possess basic knowledge of English but still struggle to use the language confidently in real communication.

Another challenge lies in the teaching approaches commonly used in language classrooms. In some contexts, English instruction still focuses heavily on grammar explanation and textbook exercises rather than communicative practice. Such approaches may limit students' opportunities to interact meaningfully in the target language. Without sufficient practice, students may develop passive language knowledge but lack the confidence needed to express ideas in English. In addition, classroom management issues, including low student motivation and limited opportunities for active participation, may further hinder effective English learning in *pesantren* contexts [6]. These challenges indicate the need for more interactive and context-responsive teaching strategies that support students' active engagement in language learning.

To address these challenges, language learning environments need to incorporate more engaging and student-centered approaches. One promising strategy is fun learning, which integrates games, interactive activities, and collaborative tasks into the learning process. Research has shown that playful and interactive learning environments can significantly increase students' motivation and reduce language anxiety. When language learning is presented in an enjoyable and supportive atmosphere, students tend to participate more actively and become more willing to experiment with the language. Previous studies have demonstrated that interactive and creative activities, such as storytelling, games, and collaborative tasks, can make English learning more engaging and accessible while promoting students' confidence in communication [7]. Similarly, club-based and authentic task approaches have been shown to empower students to practice English beyond the classroom while developing teamwork and creativity [8].

For such interactive learning activities to be implemented effectively, however, they require a clear instructional design framework that connects learner needs, learning objectives, selected activities, participant engagement, and evaluation. In this regard, the ASSURE instructional model is relevant because it provides a systematic yet flexible framework for designing learner-centered instruction. Its emphasis on analyzing learners, stating objectives, selecting and utilizing materials, requiring learner participation, and evaluating learning outcomes aligns with the need to develop English communication activities that are both enjoyable and pedagogically purposeful. Therefore, the integration of fun learning with ASSURE-based instructional planning can help ensure that playful activities are not merely

entertaining, but are also directed toward measurable communicative and affective learning goals.

In addition to classroom-based approaches, community-based learning programs such as service-learning have also been widely recognized as effective strategies for improving students' language abilities. Service-learning integrates academic learning with community engagement, providing students with opportunities to use English in authentic social contexts. Studies have reported that participants in service-learning programs often experience improvements in oral communication skills, self-confidence, and intercultural awareness as they interact with real communities [9],[10]. Moreover, experiential learning environments encourage students to reflect on their learning experiences, which further strengthens both their communicative competence and personal development [11].

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the creation of a supportive language environment is particularly important. Many *pesantren* aim to establish a *bi'ah lughawiyah*, or language-rich environment, in which students are encouraged to use foreign languages in their daily interactions. However, sustaining such an environment requires not only institutional policies but also innovative learning activities that make language practice enjoyable and meaningful for students.

The selection of ABR Islamic Boarding School (pseudonym) as the partner institution in this program was based on an initial needs' identification conducted through informal communication with school administrators and language coordinators. The *pesantren* is located in Malang, East Java, and accommodates approximately one hundred junior secondary students who actively participate in dormitory-based learning activities. Although the institution has implemented a language program that encourages the use of English in daily communication, the practice remains inconsistent and is often limited to formal instruction or rule-based enforcement. Language coordinators reported that many students were reluctant to speak English due to fear of making mistakes and limited confidence, despite having learned basic grammatical structures in class. In addition, the *pesantren* does not yet have a structured communicative training program or language laboratory that supports interactive speaking practice. These conditions indicate a gap between language policy and actual language use, which became the primary reason for designing a community engagement program that focuses on interactive and confidence-building English communication activities.

Responding to this need, a community engagement program was conducted at ABR Islamic Boarding School (pseudonym) located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The program

was organized as a two-day English training workshop that adopted a fun learning approach to promote students' active participation in language learning. The workshop design was also informed by the ASSURE instructional model to ensure that the activities were aligned with students' communicative needs, clearly defined learning goals, suitable materials, active participation, and reflective evaluation. Facilitated by lecturers from the English Literature Department, Faculty of Humanities, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, the program involved ninth-grade students as the primary participants. Rather than focusing solely on grammar instruction, the workshop emphasized interactive learning through games, short conversations, and collaborative activities designed to create a relaxed learning atmosphere. Through these activities, students were encouraged to view English not merely as a school subject but as a practical communication tool that can be used in everyday interactions.

The workshop emphasized interactive learning through educational games, role-play activities, and motivational sessions aimed at increasing students' confidence in speaking English. In addition to the students, several language coordinators from the boarding school also participated in the program to learn practical teaching techniques that could later be implemented in daily language activities within the dormitory environment. Through this approach, the program aimed not only to improve students' communicative confidence but also to support the sustainability of English language practices within the school environment.

This study presents the design, implementation, and outcomes of the English fun learning workshop conducted at ABR Islamic Boarding School. Specifically, the study explores how interactive and communicative learning activities can enhance students' motivation and confidence in using English. By positioning the workshop within an ASSURE-informed instructional design, this study also highlights how community engagement programs can combine enjoyable learning experiences with systematic pedagogical planning. The documentation of participants' experiences and responses provides insights that contribute to the growing discussion on community-based language education and innovative teaching practices in Islamic educational institutions.

METHOD

This community engagement program was conducted at ABR Islamic Boarding School (pseudonym) located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The participants consisted of ninth-grade students enrolled in the junior secondary level of the boarding school. These students were selected because they represent the senior level within the school and are expected to contribute

to maintaining the language environment in the *pesantren*. Approximately one hundred students participated in the English training workshop. In addition, several language coordinators (*penggerak bahasa*) from the boarding school were involved in the program. Their participation allowed them to observe and learn communicative teaching techniques that could later be implemented in daily language supervision activities within the dormitory environment.

The program was facilitated by lecturers from the English Literature Department, Faculty of Humanities, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang as part of the university's community engagement initiative. Prior to the implementation of the program, the participants were informed about the purpose of the activity and their involvement in the training sessions. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring that the identity of the institution remained confidential through the use of a pseudonym.

The English training program was conducted over two days in February 2026 and adopted a fun learning approach that emphasized interactive and student-centered learning activities. The workshop was designed to gradually build students' confidence and communicative competence in English through several stages of training. The initial stage focused on developing a positive language mindset by encouraging students to view English as a practical tool for communication rather than merely a subject that requires memorization of grammatical rules. The following stage introduced students to basic English expressions relevant to everyday interactions within the school and boarding school environment. Subsequent activities encouraged students to practice speaking even with limited vocabulary, emphasizing message delivery and fluency rather than grammatical perfection. The final stage highlighted strategies for maintaining English practice in the boarding school environment through collaborative interaction and peer support. These stages were designed to create a supportive learning atmosphere in which students could experiment with English in a relaxed and enjoyable setting.

The overall design of the workshop was also informed by the ASSURE instructional model, which provided a structured framework for aligning learner needs, learning objectives, instructional activities, and evaluation processes. The initial stage of the training reflects the "Analyze Learners" and "State Objectives" components, as it focused on understanding students' communicative challenges and establishing goals related to confidence and participation. The selection of interactive materials such as games, role-play scenarios, and collaborative tasks corresponds to the "Select Media and Materials" stage, while the implementation of these activities during the workshop represents the "Utilize Media and

Materials” phase. Students’ active involvement in discussions, group work, and speaking tasks aligns with the “Require Learner Participation” component, and the use of observation, interviews, and feedback as evaluation tools reflects the “Evaluate and Revise” stage. Although applied flexibly, this framework helped ensure that the fun learning activities were pedagogically structured and responsive to participants’ needs.

To provide a clearer description of how the program was implemented, the workshop activities were organized into three main stages that reflect both the procedural flow of the community engagement program and the ASSURE instructional framework. The initial stage focused on preparation and needs analysis, corresponding to the “Analyze Learners” and “State Objectives” components of the ASSURE model. Prior to the workshop, informal communication with school administrators and language coordinators was conducted to identify students’ main difficulties, particularly related to speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and low confidence. Based on this needs analysis, the learning objectives were formulated, focusing on increasing students’ participation, confidence, and willingness to use English in daily communication. Instructional materials and activity designs were then prepared to match the students’ level and the pesantren context.

The second stage involved the implementation of the workshop, which reflects the “Select Media and Materials,” “Utilize Media and Materials,” and “Require Learner Participation” components of the ASSURE model. The two-day workshop consisted of a sequence of interactive sessions designed to gradually build students’ communicative competence. On the first day, the activities focused on developing a positive language mindset through ice-breaking activities, motivational sessions, and guided discussions, followed by vocabulary-based games and guided speaking practices aimed at introducing basic expressions for daily communication. Students were then engaged in small-group discussions and simple dialogue construction to encourage peer interaction. On the second day, the focus shifted to more intensive speaking practice through role-play and short conversational tasks, allowing students to apply their language knowledge in simulated real-life situations. Collaborative tasks and communicative games were also implemented to strengthen teamwork and active language use. The workshop concluded with reflection and feedback sessions that encouraged students to evaluate their learning experiences and develop a commitment to continue practicing English. These activities were designed to gradually shift students from passive learners to active participants, allowing them to use English in meaningful and contextually relevant situations.

The final stage focused on evaluation and follow-up, corresponding to the “Evaluate and Revise” component of the ASSURE model. Evaluation was conducted through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal feedback from students and language coordinators. This stage aimed to assess students’ engagement, confidence development, and overall response to the workshop activities. In addition, discussions with language coordinators were carried out to explore the possibility of integrating similar interactive activities into daily language programs within the dormitory environment. This follow-up component was intended to support the sustainability of English language use beyond the workshop and to strengthen the existing language environment in the boarding school.

During the workshop, several teaching strategies were implemented to promote active language learning. Short interactive lectures were delivered to introduce key concepts and motivate students to engage in English learning. These sessions included discussions and question-and-answer activities to stimulate student participation. The use of interactive lectures and dialogic activities helps increase students’ engagement and encourages active participation in the learning process. This is consistent with previous studies which suggest that interactive lectures can support student engagement and encourage greater involvement in classroom interaction [12]. Discussions and questioning strategies also allow learners to construct knowledge through interaction and negotiation of meaning with peers and instructors. This view aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of collaborative interaction in developing learners’ language awareness and communicative competence [13]. Role-play activities were also incorporated to allow students to practice short dialogues in simulated everyday situations, such as conversations between classmates or interactions in school settings. These activities aimed to build students’ confidence in using English spontaneously. This approach is also supported by findings explaining that role-play provides meaningful opportunities for learners to practice real-life communication and improve their speaking confidence [14]. In addition, various educational games were integrated into the sessions to maintain students’ enthusiasm and reduce language anxiety. The games focused on vocabulary development, sentence construction, and communicative interaction. Collaborative learning tasks were also employed, in which students worked in small groups to complete activities requiring them to use English together. Through these methods, the workshop aimed to create a supportive learning environment that encouraged active language use.

Data for evaluating the program were collected through several qualitative techniques. Participant observation was conducted during the training sessions to monitor students’

participation, engagement, and interaction in the learning activities. Field notes were recorded to document students' responses and behavioral patterns throughout the workshop. Observation is commonly used in qualitative program evaluation to understand how interactions and processes occur during the implementation of an activity [15]. In addition, short semi-structured interviews were carried out with several student participants after the training sessions in order to explore their perceptions of the workshop and their confidence in using English. Interviews are widely recognized as an effective method for obtaining in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives [16]. Informal feedback from students and language coordinators was also collected to identify their impressions of the training activities and their perceived impact on motivation and language use.

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. Observational notes, interview responses, and participant feedback were carefully reviewed and organized to identify recurring themes related to students' motivation, participation, and confidence in speaking English. Identifying patterns and themes from qualitative data is a common analytical procedure in qualitative research [17]. The analysis focused on identifying patterns in students' responses to the training activities and examining how the fun learning approach influenced their engagement in English learning. The findings were then interpreted in relation to existing literature on communicative language teaching, language anxiety, and interactive learning environments.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study describe students' responses, participation patterns, and perceived benefits of the English fun learning workshop conducted at ABR Islamic Boarding School. The analysis of observational notes, interview data, and informal participant feedback revealed several recurring themes regarding students' engagement, confidence in speaking English, and perceptions of interactive learning activities. Overall, the findings suggest that the fun learning approach created a supportive learning environment that encouraged students to participate more actively and to view English as a practical communication tool rather than merely an academic subject.

Overview of Emerging Themes

The qualitative analysis identified three major themes related to students' learning experiences during the workshop. These themes emerged from recurring patterns observed across multiple data sources, including classroom observations, interview responses, and

participants' reflections collected at the end of the training sessions. During the analysis process, the researchers carefully reviewed observational field notes and interview transcripts to identify repeated expressions, behavioral patterns, and shared perceptions among participants. Statements that reflected similar experiences or attitudes toward the learning activities were grouped together and gradually organized into broader thematic categories.

The process of thematic identification revealed that students' experiences during the workshop were primarily related to three interconnected aspects of the learning process. First, many observations and interview responses highlighted students' active involvement in the learning activities. Second, a considerable number of participants described noticeable changes in their confidence when using English during communicative tasks. Third, students frequently expressed positive perceptions toward the fun learning approach used in the workshop, particularly in relation to the enjoyable and supportive learning atmosphere created by the activities.

These recurring patterns were then synthesized into three central themes that represent the core outcomes of the program: active engagement in learning activities, increased confidence in speaking English, and positive perceptions of fun learning. Each theme captures a different dimension of students' experiences during the training and reflects how the interactive learning environment influenced their attitudes and participation in English language learning.

Table 1. Major Themes Identified from Observations and Interviews

Theme	Description	Data Sources
Active engagement in learning activities	Students actively participated in games, discussions, and role-play tasks	Observation, interviews
Increased confidence in speaking English	Students reported reduced anxiety and greater willingness to speak	Interviews, observation
Positive perceptions of fun learning	Students perceived the workshop as enjoyable and motivating	Interviews, feedback

As shown in Table 1, the first theme concerns students' behavioral engagement during the learning activities. Observational data indicated that students were actively involved in collaborative tasks and frequently interacted with their peers during games, discussions, and role-play activities. This level of participation suggests that the interactive structure of the

workshop encouraged students to move beyond passive learning and become active contributors in the learning process.

The second theme relates to the development of students' confidence in speaking English. Interview responses revealed that many participants initially felt nervous or hesitant to use English in front of others. However, after participating in the workshop activities, they reported feeling more comfortable expressing their ideas in English. Observational data also showed that students gradually became more willing to volunteer during speaking activities and participate in group interactions.

The third theme refers to students' overall perceptions of the fun learning approach implemented during the workshop. Feedback from interviews and informal reflections indicated that students found the learning experience enjoyable and motivating. Many participants described the activities as more engaging than their usual English lessons, particularly because the workshop emphasized interaction, collaboration, and practical communication rather than memorization of grammar rules.

These themes indicate that the workshop activities influenced students' attitudes toward English learning and their willingness to participate in communicative interactions. The findings suggest that the integration of fun learning strategies not only increased students' engagement during the training sessions but also contributed to creating a positive learning environment that supported the development of communicative confidence.

Students' Active Participation in Fun Learning Activities

One of the most prominent findings from the observational data was the high level of student participation during the training sessions. Throughout the two-day workshop, students were actively involved in various learning activities, including educational games, small-group discussions, and role-play simulations. Compared to traditional classroom settings where students often listen passively to teacher explanations, the fun learning approach appeared to encourage students to interact more frequently with their peers and to experiment with English in a more relaxed communicative environment. The high level of participation observed during the workshop can also be seen in Figure 1, which illustrates students' attentiveness and engagement during the training session.



Figure 1. Students participating in the English fun learning workshop session at ABR Islamic Boarding School.

During the interactive sessions, students were frequently observed collaborating in small groups to complete communicative tasks designed to simulate everyday interactions in the boarding school environment. For example, in one activity students were asked to create short dialogues about daily situations such as greeting friends, asking for help, borrowing items, or discussing daily routines in the dormitory. At the beginning of the activity, several students appeared hesitant and reluctant to initiate conversations in English. Some students paused frequently, searched for words, or laughed nervously before speaking. However, as the activity progressed, many students gradually became more engaged and began to interact more confidently with their peers.

One student explained that practicing in small groups helped reduce the psychological pressure of speaking English in front of the entire class:

“At first I was afraid to speak English because I thought my grammar was wrong. But when we practiced in groups, it felt more comfortable. My friends also helped me find the right words.” (Student Interview 3)

This comment illustrates how collaborative interaction allowed students to negotiate meaning together and support each other during the learning process. In many groups, students were observed assisting their peers by suggesting vocabulary, correcting pronunciation, or

encouraging classmates who hesitated to speak. Such peer support appeared to create a more supportive learning atmosphere that encouraged students to participate actively.

Another student highlighted how the use of games changed the overall learning atmosphere compared to regular classroom experiences:

“Usually, English class feels serious and difficult. But in this workshop, we played games while learning English, so it felt fun and I didn’t feel afraid to try.” (Student Interview 7)

Observational notes recorded during the sessions also showed that students responded enthusiastically to competitive and collaborative games incorporated into the workshop. For instance, during a vocabulary challenge activity, students were asked to work in teams to guess English words related to daily activities in the boarding school environment. Students were observed raising their hands eagerly, volunteering answers, and encouraging their teammates. In several moments, students spontaneously discussed possible answers in English with their peers before responding to the facilitator’s questions.

The classroom atmosphere during these activities was noticeably lively. Laughter, spontaneous comments, and informal exchanges between students frequently occurred as they attempted to complete the tasks. These interactions suggest that the playful learning environment helped reduce students’ anxiety about using English while simultaneously increasing their willingness to participate.

One student reflected on how the interactive format made the learning process more engaging and motivating:

“When we learned through games, I felt more motivated to participate. It didn’t feel like studying, but I still learned new words and expressions.” (Student Interview 11)

Another participant similarly emphasized the importance of collaborative interaction during the activities:

“When we worked together in groups, we could help each other. If I forgot a word, my friend could remind me. It made speaking English easier.” (Student Interview 9)

These reflections indicate that the interactive structure of the workshop played a significant role in encouraging active participation. Rather than focusing solely on teacher-centered instruction, the fun learning approach allowed students to become active contributors to the learning process. Students were not only responding to the facilitator’s instructions but were also interacting with peers, negotiating meaning, and collaboratively constructing simple English expressions during the activities.

The observational data and interview responses consistently indicate that the fun learning activities transformed the classroom atmosphere into a more interactive and student-centered environment. The combination of games, group discussions, and role-play tasks created opportunities for students to practice English in a supportive and low-anxiety context, which in turn encouraged greater participation and engagement throughout the workshop.

Increased Confidence in Speaking English

Another important finding emerging from the data concerns the development of students' confidence in using English during communicative activities. Interview responses revealed that many participants initially experienced anxiety or nervousness when asked to speak English in front of their peers. This hesitation was often associated with fear of making grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary, and concern about being evaluated by others. However, as the workshop activities progressed, many students reported feeling increasingly comfortable expressing their ideas in English, even when their linguistic resources were still limited.

To complement these qualitative findings, a simple post-workshop evaluation using a confidence rating scale was conducted to capture changes in students' perceived speaking ability. The results, based on observational indicators and student self-assessment, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Observed Changes in Students' Speaking Confidence Based on Post-Workshop Evaluation

Aspect	Pre-Workshop Mean Score	Post-Workshop Mean Score	Improvement (%)
Speaking Confidence	2.6 (52)	3.9 (78)	50%
Participation in Speaking Activities	2.4 (48)	3.8 (76)	58%
Willingness to Use English	2.5 (50)	4.0 (80)	60%
Fluency in Short Responses	2.8 (56)	3.9 (78)	39%

As shown in Table 2, all aspects of students' speaking confidence demonstrated noticeable improvement after the workshop. The most significant increases were observed in students' willingness to use English and participation in speaking activities, indicating that the

interactive and low-anxiety learning environment effectively encouraged students to engage more actively in communication.

Several students explained that the role-play activities were particularly helpful in building their speaking confidence. These activities required students to simulate everyday conversations commonly encountered in the boarding school environment, such as introducing themselves, greeting friends, asking for help, or discussing daily routines in the dormitory. Because these situations were familiar to students' daily experiences, they were able to relate the language expressions directly to real-life contexts. Figure 2 further illustrates how role-play activities created opportunities for students to practice English in front of their peers in a supportive setting.



Figure 2. Students performing role-play activities during the English-speaking practice session.

One participant described how the role-play sessions gradually helped reduce their fear of speaking:

“Before this training I rarely spoke English because I was afraid of making mistakes. But during the role-play activities, everyone was practicing together, so I felt more confident to speak.” (Student Interview 5)

This statement illustrates how collaborative practice in a supportive environment allowed students to overcome the psychological barriers often associated with speaking a foreign language. Instead of focusing on individual performance, the activities encouraged collective participation, which helped reduce students' anxiety about being judged.

Another student noted that the workshop helped shift their perception of language learning, particularly in relation to the expectation of grammatical accuracy:

“I used to think English must be perfect before speaking. But here the teachers told us it is okay to make mistakes as long as we communicate.” (Student Interview 2)

Such comments indicate that the workshop activities encouraged students to view communication as the primary goal of language use rather than grammatical perfection. This shift in perspective appeared to play an important role in increasing students’ willingness to participate in speaking tasks.

Observational data collected during the workshop also supported these interview responses. At the beginning of the training sessions, only a small number of students volunteered to participate in speaking activities, and several students appeared hesitant when asked to respond in English. Some students avoided eye contact with the facilitator, while others relied on their peers to answer questions.

However, noticeable changes were observed as the workshop progressed. On the second day of the training program, a larger number of students began to volunteer for speaking tasks during role-play simulations and group discussions. Students were observed initiating short conversations with their peers, responding to questions more spontaneously, and demonstrating greater willingness to experiment with English expressions.

One student reflected on this gradual change in confidence:

“In the beginning I felt nervous when speaking English. But after practicing several times with my friends, I became more comfortable. Now I think speaking English is not as difficult as I thought.” (Student Interview 9)

Another participant similarly described how repeated practice helped reduce their hesitation:

“When we practiced many times in the activities, I started to feel more confident. Even if my sentence was not perfect, my friends could still understand me.” (Student Interview 12)

These reflections suggest that the opportunity to practice English repeatedly in a supportive and low-pressure environment contributed significantly to the development of students’ communicative confidence. The combination of collaborative interaction, role-play simulations, and communicative tasks allowed students to gradually overcome their fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to experiment more freely with the language.

Overall, the findings indicate that the fun learning approach played an important role in reducing students' speaking anxiety and promoting greater confidence in English communication. By shifting the focus from grammatical accuracy to meaningful interaction, the workshop created an environment in which students felt encouraged to participate actively and express themselves using English.

Positive Student Perceptions of Fun Learning

In addition to increased participation and confidence in speaking English, students also expressed highly positive perceptions of the fun learning approach implemented during the workshop. Interview responses and informal feedback indicated that the interactive structure of the activities made the learning experience more enjoyable and less intimidating compared to their usual English classes. Many participants described the workshop as a refreshing alternative to conventional classroom practices that typically emphasize grammar explanation and written exercises.

To further capture participants' perceptions, a simple post-workshop satisfaction survey was conducted. The results, summarized in Table 3, indicate consistently high levels of positive responses across different components of the training program.

Table 3. Student Satisfaction with Fun Learning Workshop

Aspect of Training	Satisfaction Level (% Positive Responses)
Workshop Content	91%
Interactive Activities (Games & Discussions)	94%
Role-Play and Speaking Practice	92%
Group Collaboration Activities	90%
Learning Atmosphere (Fun & Relaxed)	96%
Overall Workshop Experience	93%

As shown in Table 3, the highest level of satisfaction was recorded for the learning atmosphere, indicating that students strongly valued the relaxed, enjoyable, and supportive environment created during the workshop. Interactive activities and role-play sessions also received very high ratings, reinforcing their effectiveness in engaging students and promoting active participation.

Several students explained that the integration of games, discussions, and role-play activities made it easier for them to understand and remember English expressions. Instead of memorizing vocabulary lists or grammatical rules in isolation, students were able to practice

language through meaningful interactions with their peers. This experiential learning process appeared to make the language more accessible and relevant to their daily communication needs.

One student explained how activity-based learning helped improve vocabulary retention:

“When we learn through activities and games, it is easier to remember the vocabulary. It feels more natural than memorizing words from a book.” (Student Interview 4)

This comment suggests that interactive learning activities may support deeper language processing by connecting vocabulary learning with practical communication contexts. Students were not merely recalling isolated words but using them in communicative situations that resembled real-life interactions.

Another student emphasized the importance of the relaxed and supportive learning environment created during the workshop. According to this participant, the informal atmosphere helped reduce the embarrassment often associated with speaking English in front of others:

“In this workshop the atmosphere was relaxed. We could laugh and practice together, so I didn’t feel embarrassed when speaking English.” (Student Interview 8)

Observational notes taken during the workshop also supported these perceptions. Students frequently laughed, exchanged comments, and interacted spontaneously during the activities, indicating that the learning environment was perceived as friendly and non-threatening. Such an atmosphere appeared to encourage students to participate more freely without worrying excessively about linguistic accuracy.

Students also appreciated the opportunity to practice English in communicative situations rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical exercises. Several participants noted that their regular English lessons often prioritize grammar explanation, writing exercises, or textbook-based activities, which sometimes limit opportunities for oral communication.

One participant explained how the workshop provided a more practical learning experience:

“Usually in English class we focus on grammar and writing. But here we practiced speaking and communicating with our friends. It helped me understand how English can be used in real situations.” (Student Interview 6)

Another student similarly highlighted the practical value of communicative activities:

“I like the activities because we can use English directly. It is different from just studying grammar rules.” (Student Interview 13)

These comments indicate that students perceived the workshop as a more authentic and meaningful language learning experience. The emphasis on interaction and communication allowed students to experience English as a functional tool for everyday communication rather than merely an academic subject.

Furthermore, several students reported that the enjoyable nature of the activities increased their motivation to participate throughout the workshop. Because the learning tasks were presented in an engaging format, students felt encouraged to remain actively involved during the sessions.

One student described this experience as follows:

“When the activities are fun, we want to participate more. We don’t feel bored, so we keep trying to speak English.” (Student Interview 15)

These perceptions suggest that students valued the communicative, collaborative, and experiential aspects of the fun learning activities. The combination of interactive tasks, supportive peer interaction, and a relaxed learning atmosphere appeared to contribute positively to students’ attitudes toward English learning. The findings indicate that the fun learning approach not only enhanced students’ engagement during the workshop but also helped reshape their perceptions of English as a more approachable and meaningful language to learn.

Implications for Language Practice in the Boarding School Environment

Beyond the immediate impact on students’ engagement and confidence during the workshop, the findings also suggest broader implications for sustaining English language practice within the boarding school environment. Interview responses and observational data indicate that the workshop helped raise students’ awareness of the importance of using English beyond the classroom context. Rather than perceiving English as a subject limited to formal lessons, several students began to view the language as a practical tool that could be used in their daily interactions within the dormitory and school environment.

During the interviews conducted after the workshop, a number of students expressed their intention to continue practicing English with their peers in informal situations. This indicates that the workshop not only influenced students’ attitudes toward English learning but also encouraged them to consider integrating the language into their everyday communication.

One student explained this intention as follows:

“After this workshop I want to try speaking English more often with my friends in the dormitory.” (Student Interview 10)

This statement suggests that the workshop activities helped students recognize the value of consistent language practice outside formal instructional settings. For many participants, the experience of using English in interactive activities appeared to reduce the psychological barriers that previously discouraged them from speaking the language in daily situations.

Another participant emphasized the importance of maintaining similar activities within the boarding school environment in order to sustain students’ motivation to practice English:

“If we have activities like games or speaking practice regularly, it will help us practice English more often.” (Student Interview 12)

Such comments indicate that students perceived the fun learning activities not only as temporary training sessions but also as potential models for ongoing language practice within the boarding school community. The combination of games, discussions, and role-play tasks appeared to demonstrate practical strategies that could be adapted for daily language activities.

In addition to students’ perspectives, feedback from language coordinators who observed the training sessions also provided important insights into the potential sustainability of the program. These coordinators, who are responsible for supervising language use in the dormitory environment, noted that the interactive techniques demonstrated during the workshop could be incorporated into existing language supervision programs.

Importantly, the involvement of the pesantren management and language coordinators was not limited to passive observation. They actively participated in several workshop sessions, assisted in facilitating group activities, and engaged in discussions with the facilitators regarding the adaptation of fun learning strategies into their existing language programs. Their presence during the sessions also helped create a more supportive institutional atmosphere, as students perceived that the program was endorsed and supported by the pesantren authorities.

One language coordinator commented:

“The activities used in this workshop are very useful for encouraging students to speak English. We can adapt some of these games and role-play activities for our daily language programs in the dormitory.” (Language Coordinator Interview 2)

Another coordinator similarly observed that the fun learning approach could help create a more supportive language environment among students:

“Sometimes students feel shy to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes. But when the activities are fun and interactive, they are more willing to try.” (Language Coordinator Interview 4)

Furthermore, follow-up discussions conducted after the workshop indicated that the coordinators planned to integrate selected activities, such as vocabulary games and role-play sessions, into routine dormitory language programs. This demonstrates that the partner institution was not only receptive to the intervention but also showed commitment to sustaining and institutionalizing the practices introduced during the program.

These observations suggest that the workshop provided not only learning experiences for students but also pedagogical insights for those responsible for maintaining the boarding school's language environment. The observation of interactive teaching strategies enabled language coordinators to identify practical approaches that could help strengthen the existing *bi'ah lughawiyah*, or language-rich environment, promoted in many *pesantren*.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the workshop activities demonstrated how peer interaction can support the sustainability of language practice. When students work together in communicative tasks, they create opportunities to use English naturally in social contexts. Such interactions can contribute to the development of a more active and supportive language community within the boarding school.

The findings also indicate that the fun learning workshop increased students' motivation and confidence during the training sessions while offering practical ideas for sustaining English language practice within the *pesantren* environment. The workshop encouraged students to view English as a tool for everyday communication and provided language coordinators with examples of interactive teaching strategies. These outcomes contributed to strengthening the foundation for a more communicative and supportive language environment within the boarding school.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the English fun learning workshop conducted at ABR Islamic Boarding School generated four closely related outcomes. First, the workshop increased students' active participation in English learning activities. Second, it strengthened students' confidence in speaking English during communicative tasks. Third, it fostered positive perceptions of English learning through an enjoyable and less threatening atmosphere. Fourth, it offered practical directions for sustaining English use within the boarding school environment. These results suggest that a short-term community engagement program, when designed around interaction, collaboration, and meaningful communication, can function not only as a pedagogical intervention but also as a practical contribution to strengthening the language culture of an educational institution [17] - [19].

These outcomes can also be interpreted through the lens of the ASSURE instructional model, which emphasizes the alignment between learner characteristics, instructional objectives, activity design, and evaluation. The observed increase in participation and confidence reflects the effectiveness of analyzing learners' needs and designing context-relevant objectives, while the use of interactive games and role-play activities demonstrates the role of carefully selected and utilized materials in promoting engagement. Furthermore, students' active involvement throughout the workshop illustrates the importance of requiring learner participation, and the integration of observation and feedback processes aligns with the evaluation component of the model. This suggests that the success of the program was not solely due to the use of fun learning activities, but also to the structured instructional design that guided their implementation.

The high level of student participation observed during the workshop can be explained by the interactive structure of the fun learning approach. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of teacher explanation, the workshop created repeated opportunities for them to speak, respond, negotiate meaning, and collaborate with peers through games, discussions, and role-play tasks. This is consistent with the view that dialogic and interactive learning activities increase learner engagement because they allow students to become participants in the meaning-making process rather than mere listeners [12], [13]. In the present study, students' willingness to take part in communicative tasks appears to have been strongly supported by the social and collaborative format of the activities, which lowered the emotional burden of speaking in a foreign language and encouraged shared participation.

The increase in students' speaking confidence can also be explained by the workshop's emphasis on communication over perfection. Many participants initially associated English speaking with the risk of making mistakes, particularly in grammar and vocabulary use. However, repeated exposure to low-stakes communicative practice gradually shifted this perception. When students were encouraged to speak even with limited vocabulary, they began to realize that successful communication does not always require grammatical perfection. This finding aligns with previous work showing that communicative practice and peer-supported interaction can reduce speaking anxiety and strengthen learners' confidence in using English more spontaneously [5], [14]. In this sense, the workshop did not merely teach language forms; it also helped students renegotiate their emotional relationship with English.

Another important explanatory factor lies in the contextual relevance of the activities. The tasks used in the workshop were not abstract or detached from students' lives; instead, they

were grounded in familiar situations from the boarding school environment, such as greeting peers, asking for help, and engaging in simple daily interactions. This context-sensitive design likely made the learning activities more meaningful and accessible to participants. Such a result is in line with studies emphasizing that English teaching in *pesantren* settings becomes more effective when it is responsive to learners' sociocultural context and daily communicative needs [2], [20]. The present findings therefore suggest that contextual familiarity plays an important role in making English learning feel achievable for students who might otherwise perceive it as distant, difficult, or overly academic.

From an interpretive perspective, the findings imply that the main obstacle faced by students in this *pesantren* context may not simply be insufficient linguistic knowledge, but rather a combination of limited communicative opportunity, low confidence, and anxiety about error. In other words, the issue is not only what students know about English, but whether the environment enables them to use what they know without fear. This interpretation is supported by the observation that many students became more participatory once the learning atmosphere was made less formal, more collaborative, and more playful. The workshop thus reveals that fun learning should not be understood merely as entertainment in the classroom, but as a pedagogical strategy for creating emotionally safe spaces in which language can be practiced more naturally and more confidently [7], [17].

The positive perceptions expressed by students toward the workshop further reinforce this interpretation. Students repeatedly described the activities as enjoyable, memorable, and different from their usual classroom experiences. Their responses suggest that enjoyment was not a superficial by-product of the workshop, but a key mechanism that enhanced participation and reduced resistance to English learning. This finding resonates with previous research demonstrating that interactive and experiential language activities can reshape students' attitudes toward English by making learning feel more meaningful, practical, and motivating [7], [8], [11]. In this study, the fun learning approach appears to have redefined English from a burdensome subject into a usable social resource, which is a significant attitudinal shift in contexts where fear and passivity often characterize foreign language learning.

When compared with previous studies, the results of this workshop largely confirm earlier findings while also extending them in a specific *pesantren*-based direction. The present study confirms prior research that communicative, collaborative, and practice-oriented activities can improve learners' motivation and confidence [8], [14]. It also supports work showing that students in *pesantren* often struggle with speaking because of nervousness, limited vocabulary,

and low self-confidence [5]. However, beyond confirming these findings, this study contributes something more specific by showing that a community engagement workshop led by university lecturers can serve as a practical model for addressing those challenges within an Islamic boarding school environment. In this respect, the findings are also consistent with recent community-based educational interventions that demonstrate how targeted training programs can strengthen competence, engagement, and institutional capacity through context-responsive design [18], [19].

The study also adds to the emerging literature on identity-responsive and faith-sensitive English instruction in Islamic educational settings. The workshop was not designed as a generic English training program detached from the students' environment; instead, it was implemented in a *pesantren* context and aligned with the social dynamics of boarding school life. This matters because language learning in Islamic institutions is shaped not only by curriculum and pedagogy but also by institutional identity, communal values, and patterns of peer interaction. In this regard, the findings support the broader argument that English learning in Islamic contexts becomes more effective when pedagogy is adapted to learners' identity and environment rather than transferred uncritically from external models [20], [21]. The present study therefore suggests that communicative language teaching in *pesantren* can be strengthened when it is both interactive and culturally situated.

Another notable contribution of the study lies in its implication for the sustainability of language practice beyond the workshop itself. The participation of language coordinators was particularly important because it opened a pathway for continuity after the formal training ended. Their positive responses indicate that the games, role-play activities, and collaborative speaking tasks used in the workshop could be adapted into daily or weekly language supervision practices in the dormitory. This points to a broader institutional meaning of the program: the workshop did not function only as a temporary motivational event, but as a model that could inform the ongoing development of *bi'ah lughawiyah* within the boarding school. Similar to previous community-based language initiatives that combine pedagogy with institutional empowerment, this study shows that short-term intervention can generate practical momentum for longer-term language culture development when local actors are also involved in the process [18], [19].

Theoretically, this study contributes to discussions on communicative and experiential language learning by demonstrating that active participation, confidence development, and positive learner attitudes are closely interconnected outcomes rather than separate variables.

The findings indicate that when students are engaged in collaborative and enjoyable activities, their confidence increases; when their confidence increases, their willingness to participate also grows; and when both participation and confidence improve, their perception of English learning becomes more positive. This interrelationship underscores the value of examining language learning as a socially and emotionally situated process rather than a purely cognitive one [13], [17]. Methodologically, the study also shows the usefulness of combining classroom observation, interviews, and participant feedback in capturing not only what students do during an intervention but also how they experience and interpret it [15] - [17].

Practically, the results suggest several follow-up actions. English programs in *pesantren* could benefit from integrating fun learning activities more systematically into regular language routines rather than limiting them to occasional events. Games, role-play, peer speaking tasks, and context-based conversations can be incorporated into classroom lessons, dormitory language supervision, or extracurricular language clubs. Moreover, involving student language coordinators as co-facilitators or peer motivators may help sustain student engagement beyond formal training sessions. For institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, this means that strengthening English communication does not always require highly complex resources; what is needed is a pedagogically responsive design that makes students feel safe, motivated, and socially supported in using English [2], [18], [20].

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that the challenges in improving students' English communication in an Islamic boarding school are not solely related to limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. Instead, students' hesitation to use English appears to be closely associated with language anxiety, low confidence, and limited opportunities to practice the language in a supportive communicative environment. Even within a short two-day workshop, noticeable changes were observed in students' participation, confidence, and attitudes toward English learning. These observations indicate that improving English communication in *pesantren* contexts may require more than stricter discipline or increased emphasis on formal instruction. When students are placed in a relaxed, collaborative, and meaningful learning environment, they tend to become more willing to speak, more motivated to participate, and more open to viewing English as a practical tool for everyday interaction rather than merely as a difficult academic subject.

The findings also contribute to ongoing discussions on English language teaching in Islamic educational settings by providing a clearer understanding of how communicative

confidence can develop in *pesantren* contexts. Rather than viewing English learning as a purely cognitive process focused on mastering grammatical rules, the study shows that participation, confidence, and positive learner perceptions are shaped through social interaction and supportive pedagogical practices. In this sense, fun learning should not be seen merely as an entertaining classroom technique, but as an instructional approach that can help reduce anxiety, encourage communicative participation, and support the development of a more active *bi'ah lughawiyah*. The study also offers insights for community-based education by showing how a university-led engagement program can function as a context-sensitive initiative that supports both student development and the strengthening of language culture within Islamic boarding schools.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed for pesantren administrators and language program coordinators. First, interactive language activities such as games, role-play, and group discussions should be integrated into regular weekly language programs rather than being limited to occasional workshops. Second, pesantren can establish structured “English Days” or daily short speaking sessions in the dormitory environment to encourage consistent language use in informal contexts. Third, language coordinators (*penggerak bahasa*) can be trained as peer facilitators to lead simple communicative activities, thereby sustaining student engagement beyond formal classroom instruction. Fourth, the development of a supportive language policy that emphasizes communication over grammatical perfection may help reduce students’ anxiety and increase their willingness to speak. Finally, collaboration with universities or external facilitators can be maintained periodically to provide additional training and refresh innovative teaching practices. These recommendations are intended to be directly applicable and adaptable to the daily language management system within Islamic boarding schools.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. The program was conducted in only one Islamic boarding school and involved a relatively limited group of participants. The intervention was also implemented over a short period of two days. For these reasons, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of this program. In addition, the study relied primarily on qualitative data, which provided detailed insights into students’ experiences but did not measure long-term changes in speaking performance or language use after the workshop. Future research may explore similar initiatives in a wider range of *pesantren* contexts, involve students from different educational levels, and include longer follow-up periods to examine whether improvements in confidence and participation can be sustained

over time. Comparative studies across different types of Islamic schools may also help deepen understanding of how fun learning and community engagement approaches can be adapted to diverse educational environments.

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