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Beyond Student Perceptions: The Role of English Community in Reducing Non-English Major Students' Speaking Anxiety

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to explore more deeply the role of the English Community in reducing English speaking anxiety among students at the Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. This study is a descriptive qualitative research supported by quantitative descriptive data. Data were collected using open interviews with 5 students and questionnaires distributed via Google Form to 104 students. The results of the study found that the English Community is very helpful for students in developing their English speaking talent and reducing the anxiety they face when speaking English. The safe and comfortable atmosphere of the English Community class without pressure, peers without bullying, fun English tutors, interesting and appropriate teaching materials and learning media, and receiving full support to continue sharpening their English language talents are strong reasons for students to join and develop their English speaking skills. English communities have been proven to foster interest, passion, and confidence in speaking English. Therefore, it is important for every college to have an English Community as a means of developing students' English talents and interests free from anxiety.

Keywords: *Anxiety, English Community, Students' Perceptions*

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INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that should be mastered by all levels of global society, including Indonesia. However, many Indonesians have not yet mastered English for various reasons. The EF English Proficiency Index 2024 reported that Indonesia ranked 12th out of 23 countries in Asia with an EF EPI score of 468, placing the country in the Low Proficiency category (First, 2024). Indonesia remained below neighboring countries such as Malaysia and South Korea, while performing slightly better than several other Asian countries with lower proficiency levels. Indonesians are at an intermediate level in English proficiency. Many students, as intellectuals, still lack English proficiency. Many EFL students still experience difficulties in mastering English due to limited vocabulary and psychological factors, such as low self-confidence, anxiety, low self-efficacy, and lack of motivation (Ren & Abhakorn, 2022; Fathurizki et al., 2025). Learning English in class often evokes fear and anxiety for many students, especially non-English majors, such as those in the Faculty of Economics and Islamic Business.

The anxiety faced by students are divided into internal factors such as lack of confidence, embarrassment, and fear of appearing in public, and external factors including a lack of mastery of grammatical terms, pronunciation, and several other language aspects (Jaya et al., 2022). One of their biggest anxieties is the anxiety of making mistakes when trying to speak English, especially when speaking in front of a lecturer or classmates. They worry about being judged as less capable or even laughed at because of poor pronunciation, messy grammar, and a very limited vocabulary. Lihami et al. (2024) and Mulyaningsih (2021) revealed that the problems faced by students in speaking include linguistic problems such as

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inadequate vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, as well as non-linguistic problems such as lack of motivation, embarrassment, excessive anxiety, and lack of participation in speaking. Furthermore, creating a supportive classroom environment is essential because emotional support, constructive feedback, and positive peer interaction help students feel psychologically safe to practice English without fear of negative evaluation or making mistakes (Herawati et al., 2025). Lack of motivation and insufficient support for English learning can significantly hinder students' progress in mastering English (Ren & Abhakorn, 2022).

Furthermore, anxiety often arises when non-English major students must focus on listening comprehension and speaking skills. They are asked to listen to English conversations and must be able to understand the contents of the conversation correctly and must respond to the conversation using English. Many non-English major students feel uncomfortable and nervous when they are unable to understand the contents of the English conversation quickly. This anxiety and nervousness in speaking, listening, writing, and reading can arise overthinking thoughts that disrupt students' concentration and focus, resulting in decreased learning performance (Dikmen, 2021). Psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes in front of others, are among the main reasons why EFL students experience difficulties in speaking English (Sari et al., 2022).

Many students feel anxious to speak English in public. They tend to feel nervous and stressed when having to speak in public. Students tend to compare their abilities with those of their more skilled and proficient English-speaking peers. The classroom atmosphere should be low-anxiety and prevent students from feeling afraid and worried (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). Several studies conducted by Devrim & Kasimi (2022); and Suparlan (2021) show that fear of being criticized while speaking, nervousness when speaking in front of a large audience, shy, afraid compared with others, and fear of making mistakes can trigger students' anxiety.

The role of lecturers as the vanguard of the learning process is crucial in reflecting a model of independent and happy personality in teaching students, especially non-English majors who rarely encounter English in their daily lives. The learning atmosphere/environment is one factor that influences students' English language skills (Chand, 2021). Furthermore, classroom teaching strategies should be carefully considered because the instructional methods employed by lecturer can either increase or reduce students' foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, teaching strategies implemented by instructors play a crucial role in influencing students' foreign language anxiety. Appropriate instructional strategies can significantly reduce communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Tang, 2022). However, the anxiety that students face in speaking English does not only come from themselves; some triggers come from unprofessional lecturers and environments that do not support English (Bogodad et al., 2021). This is what makes students reluctant to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes and feeling imperfect.

English Community is a means or forum for developing students' talents and interests in the field of English. Every college certainly has a talent and interest development facility to accommodate the talents of each student whether in the fields of sports, arts, and language. In the field of English, Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai has an independent language institute that oversees the development of students' interests and talents in the field of English. In the English Community there are various kinds of English language talent development activities such as practicing speaking/public speaking, discussions and questions and answers using English. Then, the English Community also invites students to participate in competitions or scientific competitions using English both at the national and international levels.

In addition, the English Community is also able to shape the personality of students to be open-minded, confident, good at socializing, good at building relationships and interacting with the world community. The English Community aims to improve students' soft skills in the field of linguistics and foster a culture of literacy and international communication in the college environment. Some activities carried out by students in the English Community

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include speaking clubs, English debate forums, English movies, writing classes and coaching clinics, as well as several other supporting activities. In general, students who join the English Community not only learn about English, but more than that, students learn about how to train themselves in the areas of leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking skills.

Many studies have examined the anxieties faced by students and how to reduce anxiety when speaking English. Zrekat & Al-Sohbani (2022); Mustamir (2024) & Kusmayanti et al. (2022) conducted research and investigations into the anxiety of speaking English among EFL and ESL students, but no one has researched the anxiety of speaking English among students of the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business. However, no research has yet revealed solutions or ways to reduce the anxiety faced by students not majoring in English, such as students in the Faculty of Economics and Islamic Business. Therefore, it is crucial for researcher to conduct this study. Furthermore, the solution offered by using an English community has also not been widely studied. This study aims to determine the role of English communities in reducing the anxiety of speaking English among non-English major students. Furthermore, it aims to explore the perceptions and views of students who have joined English communities about the community itself and the progress of their English language skills after joining.

METHOD

This study is descriptive qualitative research supported by quantitative descriptive data. that aims to describe a situation in more depth and detail as well as systematically based on the qualitative data. A descriptive qualitative study is used by researcher to observe and analyze phenomena in the field in a more real, comprehensive and as is. Total of 104 students who are members of the English Community consisting of the Islamic economics and Islamic banking study programs of the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai became samples to fill out an online questionnaire using Google Form to determine their perceptions and responses regarding the existence of an English Community in reducing the fear they face in speaking English. To explore the development of students' English after joining the English Community and their perceptions about the role of the English Community in reducing the anxiety of speaking English, totally there are 5 (five) students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai became informants or volunteers to be interviewed in this study. the five interview participants were selected by purposive sampling. Researcher distributed online questionnaires using Google Form and conducted observations, interviews and documentation as data collection techniques in the field. All interview data obtained were analyzed using three stages, namely: 1) reducing data (data reduction); 2) presenting data (data display); 3) drawing conclusions and verifying data (conclusion drawing and verification) (Moleong, 2007).

The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms to the 104 students who were members of the English Community from the Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking study programs at the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. The questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative descriptive information about students' perceptions and responses toward the English Community, particularly its role in reducing fear and anxiety when speaking English. The questionnaire responses were used as supporting quantitative data to complement the qualitative findings obtained from the interviews and observations. In addition to the questionnaire, observations were conducted to obtain information about students' participation and involvement in English Community activities. Documentation was also used as supplementary evidence of the activities conducted by the English Community.

To obtain more detailed information about students' experiences, five students were selected as interview participants through purposive sampling. The interviews focused on students' experiences after joining the English Community, their perceived development in using English, their experiences when speaking English, and their perceptions of the

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community's role in reducing speaking anxiety. The interview data were analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification following Moleong (2007). The questionnaire results were presented using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of students' perceptions, while the qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation were interpreted to provide a deeper understanding of students' experiences. The integration of these data sources enabled the researchers to compare students' reported perceptions with their experiences and observed participation in the English Community.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to provide a complete picture of the role of the English Community in reducing the anxiety faced by students in speaking English frankly, as well as delving deeper into the perceptions of students who are members of the English Community about their English development after joining the English Community using in-depth and open interviews. Based on the results of filling out an online questionnaire using Google Forms to 104 students at the Faculty of Economics and Islamic Business, Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai, North Sumatra regarding their feelings and responses, as well as their responses regarding the anxiety they face when in the English Community class and when they are in class during English lesson, especially in English speaking, are as follows:

Table 1. Percentage of English-Speaking Anxiety in the English Community

No	Pernyataan	Persentase (%)		
		Agree	Disagree	Total
1	I feel happy and free to express myself using English in the English Community class.	85,6	14,4	100%
2	English Community tutors are very good and friendly and open to all students.	100	0	100%
3	I can hone my hidden English talents and abilities in the English Community class.	91,3	8,7	100%
4	My English skills have improved since joining the English community.	96,2	3,8	100%
5	I can practice my English skills in the English Community class.	93,3	6,7	100%
6	I feel more comfortable in the English Community class than in other classes.	82,7	7,3	100%
7	I feel like I am in one circle and vibe as my friends in the English Community class.	75	25	100%
8	English Community makes me more confident when speaking English	87,4	12,6	100%
9	I do not feel anxious, trembling, or stressed being in the English Community class.	83,7	16,3	100%

Based on the data obtained, it is known that as many as 85.6% of students feel comfortable expressing themselves using English in the English Community class. And 100% or all students in the English Community stated that the English Community teachers are very kind, friendly and open to all students. Then as many as 91.3% of students said that being in the English Community can hone their hidden English talents and talents. In addition, as many as 96.2% of students stated that their English skills have improved since joining the English community. As many as 93.3% of students said that they can practice their English skills even better in the English Community class. Furthermore, based on the data, it was found that the English Community made 82.7% of students feel comfortable and have a good circle of friends (75%). Meanwhile, 87.4% of students became confident when speaking using English and as many as 83.7% did not feel afraid, trembling and stressed when being in the English Community class.

Based on interviews with five (5) English Community students from the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business at the Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai, several

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unique and important facts emerged regarding their perceptions of how the English Community can reduce English speaking anxiety.

Comfortable, Safe, and Pressure-Free Atmosphere.

Students A, B, C, D, and E unanimously stated that the atmosphere they experienced in the English Community was very conducive, relaxed, yet focused on the English topics being discussed. The students were enthusiastic and eager to begin speaking English and learn it more deeply without anxiety of internal or external pressure. Tutors and peers in the English Community class did not bully them.

Peers with a Positive and Supportive Vibe

The students stated that when they joined the English Community, they met many good friends who supported each other and collaborated on solving all the learning materials in the class. The students stated that their classmates could become conversation partners in using English in conversation. Students feel free to practice English in class because none of their classmates mock or laugh at them when they speak English. Students in the English Community always ask questions and discuss English freely without anxious of making mistakes.

Enjoyable English Tutors

Students expressed that learning English in the English Community with good tutors who always listen to their English language challenges is beneficial. Tutors in the English Community are open to sharing any language challenges they encounter and provide appropriate solutions and treatments to increase their motivation to use English. Tutors never dictate or correct students' English mistakes while they are speaking. Tutors tend to listen to the conversation thoroughly and then provide feedback and examples without judgment. This allows students to express themselves freely in English without fear or undue pressure.

Appropriate Teaching Materials

Students believe that the teaching materials provided by the tutors are tailored to their individual needs. Tutors always begin lessons by briefly explaining a few important aspects of English/the subject matter, then immediately engaging in speaking practice, either between the tutor and the students or between students, taking turns. Tutors always allow time for students to understand the topic and open a question-and-answer session, which is always conducted in English. The teaching materials provided are always tailored to current issues. Tutors often also hold simple debate sessions between students on a specific statement, using English. Students report that they are very engaged in these debate sessions because they can express their opinions or refute their peers' statements in English.

Engaging Learning Media

Learning media is a crucial aspect that is highly considered to support the successful and efficient delivery of teaching materials. Students report that the learning media in the English Community are very diverse. These include listening to English music while filling in/completing the blank lyrics provided by the tutor, and then starting to understand the lyrics, then attempting to express their content and present them in English. Then, they watch several short English videos, each 5 to 10 minutes long, and then discuss the content and moral values contained within them. Afterward, to relieve boredom and fatigue, fun games, guessing games, and other activities are played to keep students relaxed and enthusiastic.

Full Motivation and Support

Students in the English Community receive constant motivation from tutors to foster their interest and talent in English. Several English Community students have won international competitions, bringing honor to Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. These students won the ASEAN 2024 International Business Plan Competition at the Islamic Science

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University of Malaysia in July 2024. With their English language skills, these students feel confident competing internationally. They stated that joining the English Community was the best opportunity they ever had. Besides being free, the English Community program was extremely beneficial in honing their soft skills, particularly in linguistics.

Discussions

The data shows that the English Community plays a significant role in improving students' English language skills, especially speaking. Extracurricular programs such as the English Community have a very positive impact in supporting and encouraging confidence in speaking English (Hranush et al., 2020). The results of the questionnaire also show that 87.4% of students feel very confident using English when they are in the English Community compared to when they are in a regular classroom. The English Community plays a role in reducing the anxiety faced by students in speaking English. The English Community is able to create a supportive learning environment and a positive vibe in the classroom without pressure, thus supporting students' English performance to be more productive (Virawan et al., 2021). This is because the English Community can make them feel comfortable and free to express themselves using English without pressure, as evidenced by a percentage of 85.6% and as many as 83.7% of students agree that they do not feel nervous and anxious in the English community. English teachers play an important role in reducing students' speaking anxiety by implementing supportive teaching strategies, providing constructive feedback, and creating opportunities for meaningful speaking practice (Purba et al., 2026). In addition, a stress-free, bullying-free environment and a curriculum design that focuses on students' English language needs, such as vocabulary mastery and self-confidence training, can improve students' speaking skills (Tahang et al., 2025). Then, 100% of students agreed that the English Community tutors were very friendly, kind, and open about English, making them feel calm and enthusiastic about developing their English skills. English speaking clubs provide supportive and interactive environments where students can practice speaking more confidently, improve fluency, and develop communication skills beyond the formal classroom setting (Suryanto et al., 2025).

Lecturers should pay more attention to a more positive learning environment and create various English learning methods that can motivate students to learn (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022). Furthermore, lecturers should design an English-speaking curriculum as well as possible, not just theory without speaking practice to train students' English language skills. English curriculum development must connect the latest technology and existing social media to expand students' knowledge of cultures and sciences around the world (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). The challenge of aligning the curriculum with the teaching materials and technology-based teaching tools used is very necessary to achieve the desired results (Karabacak & Kürüm-Yapıcıoğlu, 2022). The role of English teachers in overcoming all the anxiety problems faced by students when speaking English is very much needed (Mari et al., 2024).

Participation in an English Community provides students with additional opportunities to practice English through meaningful interaction, discussions, and speaking activities, which contribute to the improvement of their communication skills and confidence (Suryanto et al., 2025). 91.3% of students agreed that the English Community is a great place to hone their skills and talents. 93.3% of students said that they can practice their English skills in the English community. Students also acknowledged that their English skills improved after joining the extracurricular, as evidenced by a 96.2% agreement rate. Aenum et al. (2022) revealed that English language activities and participating in English extracurricular programs can improve students' English skills. Therefore, it is important for English lecturers to collaborate on the English curriculum with the English-speaking community to provide opportunities for students to develop and use English both inside and outside the classroom in their daily lives to facilitate the use of English properly and correctly (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020).

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Students who join English Community are not typically high-level English learners. They typically struggle with various English language challenges, particularly speaking, such as poor pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical terms, as well as a lack of confidence in speaking English in class (Harahap & Harahap, 2024). However, when students join an English club, they can practice various English language skills, such as mastering vocabulary, correct pronunciation, grammar, and fluency (Maros et al., 2023). Furthermore, these students often lack the motivation to successfully master English. These students are nurtured, trained, and nurtured in the English Community until they become successful and confident in using English. The English club fosters a mental attitude in students that encourages them to use English effectively and confidently (Mattarima et al., 2022). Joining an English club has also been shown to reduce students' feelings of anxiety, fear, and stress, and increase their motivation, interest, and drive to speak English (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022).

Furthermore, the English Community teaches that communicative English learning is collaborative learning among students, not individual learning. As many as 75% of students feel they are in a circle with their friends in the English Community class. Collaborative English learning with peers can improve students' self-confidence and English skills (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). Students in the English Community are more confident speaking English when they are in a group/circle. They are consciously and motivated to continue improving their English skills, especially speaking skills, in their English Community rather than in a regular class because they feel less pressured to express themselves (Nurdin, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the English Community plays a significant role in reducing speaking anxiety among non-English major students. Participation in the community provides a supportive learning environment where students can practice English in a less threatening atmosphere. Regular speaking activities, peer collaboration, constructive feedback, and limited academic pressure encourage students to express themselves more confidently. As students become more accustomed to communicating in English, their anxiety decreases, while confidence, willingness to communicate, and speaking fluency improve. These findings suggest that informal learning communities can complement classroom instruction by providing authentic opportunities for meaningful language use. Moreover, the English Community helps students overcome language challenges through a comfortable and positive atmosphere that minimizes bullying, pressure, and anxiety. Sensitive tutors, appropriate teaching materials, and engaging learning media further support students' interest and participation. Therefore, higher education institutions are encouraged to establish sustainable English Community programs emphasizing collaborative learning, frequent speaking practice, and supportive interaction. Future research should examine long-term effects, compare extracurricular English programs, and investigate outcomes across disciplines and educational settings.

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