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Investigating Students' Perspectives on English Camp as A Tool to Enhance Communicative Competence

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Abstract: This study addresses the need to understand how short-term immersion programs, such as English Camps, influence communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly the sustainability of affective and behavioral gains. The objective was to investigate senior high school students' perspectives on the effectiveness of English Camps in enhancing communicative competence. A qualitative case study design was employed with 12 students from SMA Al-Abidin Bilingual Boarding School in Surakarta. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The analysis followed Creswell's thematic analysis model, examining experiences through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Findings reveal that English Camps serve as high-impact catalysts for communicative self-efficacy. Cognitively, students reported increased confidence and perceived ease in communication. Affectively, the peer-driven, low-anxiety environment reduced barriers and encouraged spontaneous speech. Psychomotorically, students exhibited increased communicative readiness, though gains often diminished after the camp without ongoing reinforcement. The study concludes that while English Camps do not guarantee immediate linguistic mastery, they are crucial for lowering affective barriers and building the confidence necessary for communication. The findings underscore the pedagogical necessity of integrating "immersion pockets" and sustaining policies into standard curricula to ensure long-term sustainability. English Camps should be viewed as critical triggers within a broader approach to communicative language teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

English language education in Indonesia has long been characterized by a classroom-centered approach in which grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension receive disproportionate emphasis, while opportunities for authentic oral communication remain scarce (Hapsari, 2017). This instructional imbalance is particularly consequential because the ultimate goal of English education in the Indonesian context is not merely linguistic knowledge but communicative competence: the ability to use English effectively and appropriately in real-life interactions. Drawing on Canale and Swain's (1990) foundational framework, communicative competence encompasses linguistic knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness, discourse skills, and strategic thinking, all of which must be developed through meaningful practice rather than rote learning alone.

To address the limitations of classroom-bound instruction, English Camps have emerged as a widely adopted pedagogical innovation in Indonesian schools. These short-term, intensive programs blend structured lessons with interactive activities in an immersive, peer-driven environment, creating what Nuraeni (2021) describes as a "living language" setting. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and sociocultural perspectives, English Camps treat language as a symbolic medium for cognitive, social, and emotional interaction, aiming to achieve "low anxiety atmospheres" that encourage risk-taking

and thematic project work (Athirah et al., 2024). Rather than privileging grammatical accuracy, these programs prioritize communicative engagement, collaborative learning, and the development of confidence in using English spontaneously. Specifically, English Camp stands out as an outdoor learning experience designed to boost teenagers' speaking skills and help them gain confidence in expressing themselves in English (Yani & Army, 2024).

A growing body of empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of immersion-based English Camps across diverse EFL contexts. An autoethnographic study of Japanese participants in a summer English camp demonstrated that cultural immersion facilitates both language development and cross-cultural understanding, as learners are compelled to make meaning and adopt new discourse patterns (Athirah et al., 2024). Stegall (2021) found that learners in intensive English immersion programs became more confident communicators when instructors fostered a sense of belonging and cultural respect. In the Philippines, the National Learning Camp produced statistically significant improvements in English proficiency, helping to offset pandemic-related learning losses (Sosmena, 2024). Within Indonesia, post-camp assessments have documented gains ranging from 13.9% to 83.3%, with students reporting marked increases in confidence and fluency (Binti Abdullah Sidek & Abdul Malek, 2024). Similarly, Husnaini et al. (2025) demonstrated that a two-day English Camp significantly improved speaking fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation, particularly among lower-proficiency learners. Comparative research further confirms that non-traditional learning environments, such as English camps, produce superior speaking proficiency and motivational outcomes compared to conventional classroom instruction (Setyowati et al., 2025). Beyond camps, Virtual Exchange programs have also proven effective in developing language and intercultural competence through interactive, task-focused collaboration (Nguyen et al., 2024).

However, the Indonesian EFL landscape presents unique challenges that complicate the transfer of findings from other contexts. Because learners must navigate a greater variety of sounds, sentence structures, and social cues in bilingual environments, cognitive complexity is increased (Singh et al., 2024). Compared with countries where English is a first or second language, exposure to English in Indonesia remains highly limited. Since the 2003 National Education System Act, bilingual programs have expanded, but English use remains largely confined to the classroom (Hapsari, 2017). Furthermore, many instructional materials are adapted from ESL curricula originating in Singapore, Australia, or Cambridge, which do not always align with the linguistic realities of Indonesian learners.

Despite the growing evidence on English Camp outcomes, a significant gap persists in the literature. Most existing studies focus on quantifiable linguistic gains such as fluency scores and vocabulary growth, while the subjective cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of the student experience remain underexplored, particularly within specialized settings such as bilingual boarding schools. Few studies have investigated what students themselves think about how these programs influence their communicative development, the emotional barriers they encounter, or the motivational processes that sustain their engagement. This gap is especially salient in the Indonesian context, where short-term immersion represents the primary mechanism for communicative practice outside the classroom, yet its psychological impact on learners has received limited scholarly attention.

This study addresses these gaps by examining English Camp through the tri-dimensional lens of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor/conative development. The novelty of this research lies in its characterization of the English Camp not merely as a language workshop, but as a strategic accelerator for communicative self-efficacy. By foregrounding students' own perspectives within a bilingual boarding school environment, this study bridges the divide between theoretical models of communicative competence and the lived realities of EFL learners in Indonesia.

To support these contributions, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students at SMA Al-Abidin perceive the influence of English Camp on their communicative competence across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions?
2. To what extent does the immersion-based environment facilitate the reduction of communicative anxiety and the promotion of spontaneous speech?

METHOD

Research design

This study used a qualitative case study approach. A case study may make the object of study the product of the research at the same time. A case study is a qualitative method in which an investigator examines a real-life, contemporary, bounded system (a case) or several bounded systems (cases) over time, using a variety of sources. Its purpose is to develop in-depth descriptions and analyses of cases, showing scientific characteristics, with certain systematicness, observation, and proposals to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participant. (Creswell, 2018). This design was selected because it allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of English Camp participants within their natural educational context at SMA Al-Abidin Bilingual Boarding School, Surakarta, the flowchart is shown in Figure 1.

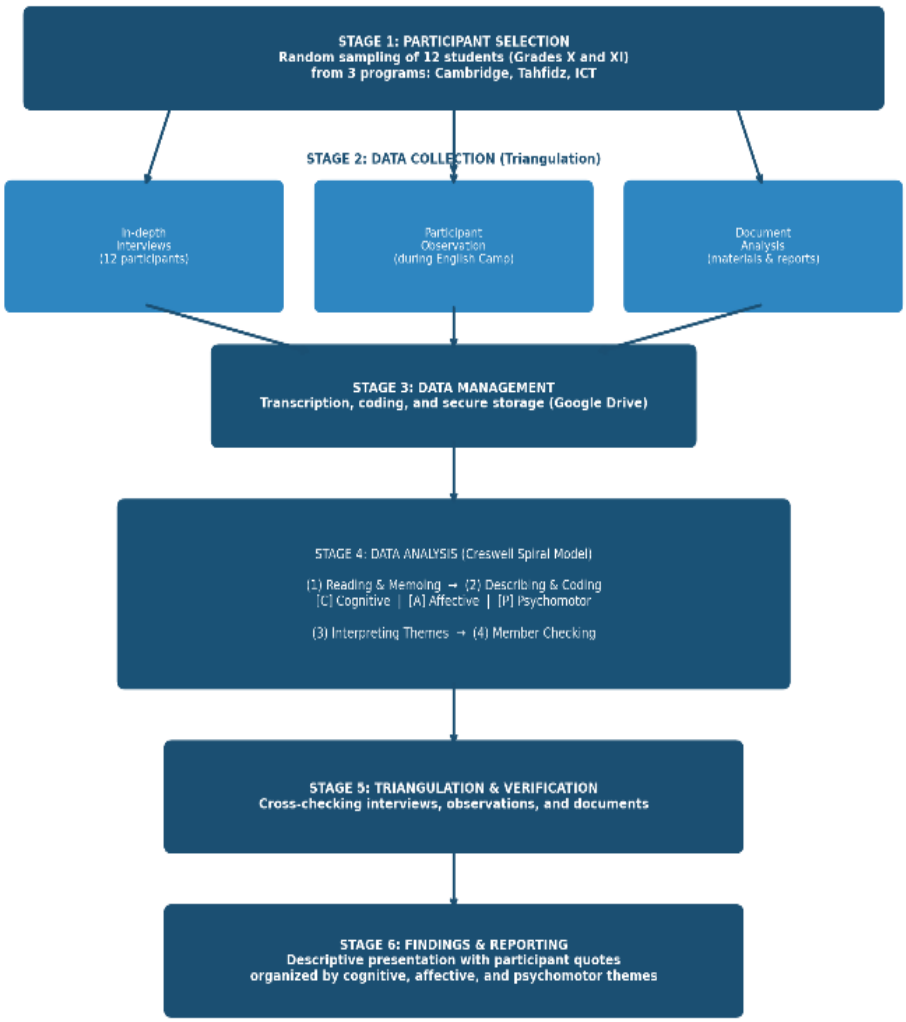

Figure 1. Research Flowchart

Participant of the study

Participants in this case were randomly selected from grade X and XI students at SMA Al-Abidin Bilingual Boarding School in Surakarta, with potential participants who had attended an English Camp once during their own semester at SMA Al-Abidin Bilingual Boarding School Surakarta. For a given degree of sampling error, random sampling may be the most expensive sample in terms of time and energy, but it also provides the most freedom from bias. (Brown, 1947). To capture rich and diverse perspectives, participants were drawn from three distinct class programs in each grade that have done the English Camp: the Cambridge program, the Tahfidz program, and the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) program. The final sample comprised 12 participants: 6 from Grade X and 6 from Grade XI, with 2

participants from each program in each grade. Each participant was assigned a numerical code (e.g., Cs1, Cs2) to facilitate systematic analysis while preserving anonymity. All participants were fully informed of the research objectives, and written informed consent was obtained from both the students and their guardians before data collection.

This study was conducted in accordance with established principles of research ethics. Prior to data collection, all participants and their guardians were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was secured from both students and their guardians. The study was also approved by the SMA Al-Abidin school administration. All data were treated as strictly confidential, and no personally identifying information was included in any publications or reports arising from this research.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. This triangulated approach strengthened the validity of findings by cross-referencing information from multiple sources.

The interview served as the primary data source. In qualitative research, the interview is a setting in which "knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee," and it "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Creswell, 2018). In this study, the interview consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences of English Camp activities and their perceived impact on communicative competence, whether positive or negative. Interviews were conducted individually, audio-recorded with participant permission, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Direct observations were conducted in person during the English Camp at ABBS. The researcher observed participants' engagement in camp activities, their use of English in communicative tasks, and the overall learning environment. These observations served to corroborate or contextualize participants' interview accounts.

Document analysis involved a systematic review of instructional materials used during the English Camp, including the material book and the expression and idiom book provided by the camp committee. These documents were examined to verify participants' claims about the camp's content and to gain additional insight into the program's structure and pedagogical approach. By triangulating interview data with observational and documentary evidence, the study ensured that participants' self-reported experiences were consistently supported by contextual and material evidence.

Data analysis

The research results and findings were presented descriptively, and the data of this research will be analyzed using thematic analysis as the theory to conduct the process. The basic concept of spiral data analysis (Figure 2) is an approach that describes the qualitative data analysis process as a recurring cycle with five steps, from data collection to account findings. In this model, the researcher moves back and forth between various stages of analysis, allowing them to continuously reflect on and refine their understanding of the data. (Creswell, 2018).

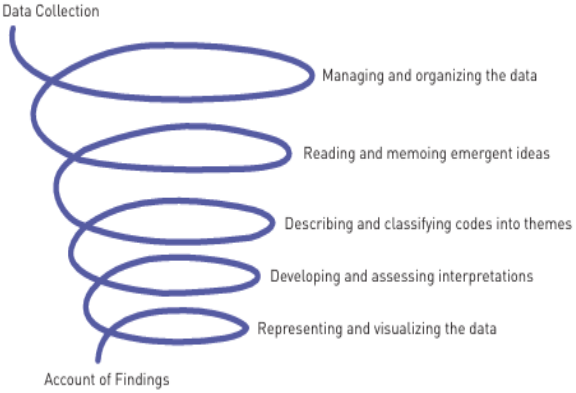

Figure 2. The Data Analysis Spiral

Stage 1: Data Managing and Organizing. The researcher gathered all information from interviews, documents, and observations. This included audio recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, and scanned copies of instructional materials. Interview transcripts were prepared and organized in the researcher's Google Drive, while documentary data were cataloged and stored in a secure digital repository.

Stage 2: Reading and Memo-ing. After initial organization, the researcher systematically reviewed all data to develop a thorough understanding. During this process, reflective memos were written to capture emerging ideas and initial impressions. As Creswell (2014) notes, repeatedly reading the data is important for allowing the researcher to understand the subtleties involved. In this study, reading and memo-ing were conducted three times per week throughout the analysis period.

Stage 3: Describing, Classifying, and Coding. The researcher began segmenting the data into meaningful units and assigning descriptive labels (codes) to these segments. Where numerous codes were established, they were grouped into broader thematic categories that captured the central ideas. In this research, all data were organized in a spreadsheet and coded according to three dimensions derived from the theoretical framework: Cognitive (C), Affective (A), and Psychomotor (P). This coding scheme enabled the researcher to systematically map participants' experiences onto the three components of communicative competence.

Stage 4: Developing and Assessing Interpretation. The researcher analyzed the relationship among the identified themes, examining how they connected and what patterns emerged across participants. This interpretive stage continued until the point of data saturation was reached. Upon reaching saturation, member checking was conducted to verify that the interpretations accurately reflected participants' intended meanings.

Stage 5: Representing and Visualizing Data. The final stage involved presenting the research findings through descriptive reports that included direct participant quotes, researcher interpretation, and connections to the existing literature. Each participant's responses, including recommendations, reflections, and perspectives, were carefully recorded and displayed to provide a comprehensive account of students' perceptions of the English Camp.

Validation

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the findings, this study employed several strategies consistent with qualitative research standards. Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents), prolonged engagement during the English Camp period, and member checking with participants following the analysis. Transferability was enhanced by providing a thick description of the research context, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar settings. Dependability was ensured through the systematic application of Creswell's (2018) spiral analysis model and the maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting all analytical decisions. Confirmability was supported by the triangulated design, which reduced the influence of individual researcher bias by requiring that all major findings be corroborated across multiple data sources.

RESULT

The interview data collected from Grade X and XI students of SMA Al-Abidiin Bilingual Boarding School revealed three main themes that illustrate their perspectives on the English Camp as a medium for enhancing communicative competence. These findings were conceptualized based on the components of attitude, namely cognitive, affective, and psychomotor/conative aspects.

English Camp as Catalyst for Confidence and Communication Ease (Cognitive aspect).

The findings indicate that the English Camp significantly reshaped students' cognitive perceptions regarding the challenges of communicating in English. Cognitively, participants generally reported that communication felt "easier" after attending the camp, although they acknowledged ongoing linguistic challenges. Many students experienced increased confidence, even though not all demonstrated substantial improvement in their linguistic abilities. Below are excerpts from students' responses:

"*Maybe if you ask… yes, there is an improvement, more in the confidence". (Cs1)*
"More confident, more fluent, understand grammar, practiced speeches, improved vocabulary". (Cs6)
"For me it was really increasing, we use English all the times so it made me develop my speaking" (Cs7)
"We learn and practice grammar well in English camp and better after English camp". (Cs3)
"We get 2 useful books to guide us use English properly so we can practice correctly and confidently". (Cs10)

Based on the above interview results, the degree of improvement seems to be greater in confidence than in linguistic ability itself. This is in accordance with the strategic/linguistic aspects of communicative competence. In the observation, the researcher found that participants really enjoyed using English as much as they could during the English camp, from morning to evening. More than that, from the document analysis, we analyzed two books from the committee, the Material Book and the Expression and Idiom Book. The material book contained crucial material to develop their competence in English, such as public speaking, pronunciation, speaking for IELTS, and cross-cultural understanding. They learn to increase their cognitive skills by mastering English with tutors. And the other book is an expression and idiom book, it contains a variety of expressions that they can use during the English camp, even after the English camp, and also a relatable idiom list that they can use. They learn and practice this book with their own advisor in the English camp. So here, the result could answer the reason why English is easier during and after the English camp.

Reduction of Affective Barriers: Social Bonding and Increased Learning Interest (Affective Aspect)

The findings highlight a key determinant of the English Camp's effectiveness, centered on students' positive evaluations of their learning experience. Participants expressed that the "fun," supportive atmosphere and intensive interaction with peers and teachers created an emotionally conducive environment for learning. But the way they explained it, we also found different feelings about the English camp among the participants. Their responses include:

"It was just a fun experience, and I got new friends". (As6)
"It feels different … but I like it". (As2)
"Enjoyable, with many games, new friends, increased confidence, and not being afraid of making mistakes". (As3)
"it's so so for me". (As1)
"Firstly, it feels scary because we directly use English, but in the end, we can pass it well and it is fun" (As12)
"I fell so enjoy, because we can learn together from different program and supporting each other to grow up". (As11)

On the basis of the above results from the interviews, the students mostly feel enjoyable during the English camp although they have a specific feeling to explain it. In the observation, we saw that all the students were really enjoying the English camp because of the way the committee conceived the event. They make groups consisting of mixed programs so they can learn together with new friends. More than that, the committee also made many interesting and fun group games that require teamwork, such as pass bridge, scramble egg, maze drawing, and water war, so here their relationship was formed. It had an impact on their performance in using English skills because the supportive environment made them enjoy and find it fun to improve their English. From the book, we also saw polite, easy expressions to guide them in using English with others, and some engaging activities during the tutor moment in each material, for example, case studies for the cross-cultural understanding material, and interactive discussion and speech practices.

Retention Strategies for Post-Camp Competence (Psychomotor Aspect)

This theme focuses on the behavioral component about how students' experiences during the English Camp influenced their actions in maintaining or extending their communicative abilities. It also

encompasses students' perceptions of the camp as an effective learning intervention. Their responses include:

"There were moments when I could speak directly". (Ps4)
"It was effective, for me". (Ps5)
"Direct practice, spontaneous speech, had an impact in Grade XI, and exposure to different accents". (Ps6)
"at that time I can follow to use English properly, but now just a little bit". (Ps9)
"I can communicate to speak English directly on the spot sometimes". (Ps1)
"for me it feel easier some part of school subject, like listening and speaking test I do more understand". (Ps5)

These results indicate that these students engaged in conative behavior with the intention of maintaining their skills after the camp. They reported some positive shifts in their behavior; for instance, they began speaking more automatically and became more eager to speak in English, which was a manifestation of their applying their communication skills even though they had not yet attained optimal structural competence. More than that, some of them felt that the English camp reflects their competence in school, especially in listening and speaking. Based on observation, we can see that they really tried to use English as well as possible in the English camp, and after that, when we conducted the interview, their speaking was upgraded, although some of the grade XI students forgot the progress and went back to the barrier level of English competence. In the document analysis, we found that some materials were used to enhance competence in the school; moreover, the materials were delivered not only through speech but also through deep understanding through practice and discussion. It means that if the students were really serious about attending the English camp and improving afterward, their level would improve significantly.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that English Camps function as critical catalysts for communicative competence, operating primarily through the cognitive and affective dimensions of the learner's experience. This section analyzes the broader pedagogical implications of these results, particularly regarding curriculum design, language policy, and the sustainability of immersion programs in Indonesian EFL contexts.

The study's most significant finding is the primacy of cognitive readiness and affective security over immediate linguistic accuracy. Participants reported that English Camp "reshaped" their perception of communication, making it feel "easier" despite ongoing grammatical challenges. This supports the theoretical position that communicative competence is not merely a collection of linguistic rules but a complex interplay of confidence and strategic use (Canale & Swain, 1990). The "cognitive ease" reported by students suggests that the immersive environment successfully reduced the perceived distance between the target language and the learner's "self," a common barrier in traditional Indonesian EFL classrooms where English is often treated as a rigid academic subject rather than a functional tool.

Pedagogically, the data underscored the limitations of the traditional classroom-centric model. The findings suggest that for Indonesian learners, the primary obstacle to fluency is not a lack of knowledge but a "communicative anxiety" rooted in fear of making mistakes. The English Camp's success in "routinizing error-making" as a natural part of learning highlights a critical need for curriculum designers to integrate "immersion pockets" of low-stakes, high-frequency communicative tasks into standard weekly schedules. These pockets can sustain the affective gains achieved during camps, preventing the "barrier level" relapse observed among some Grade XI participants once they return to the formal classroom.

From a language policy perspective, the study advocates for a shift from a "test-centric" to a "communication-centric" paradigm. While national education acts have expanded bilingual programs, the use of English often remains confined to the classroom. The participants' experience suggests that policies like "English Day" are not merely administrative labels but essential tools for bridging the gap between intensive camp events and daily linguistic reality. Such policies provide the necessary environmental support to transition English from a "subject" to be mastered to a "medium" for interaction.

Furthermore, the study offers a nuanced critique of the "total immersion" ideal. The findings indicate that while short-term camps are powerful "triggers," their long-term impact is limited by the lack of subsequent exposure. This aligns with research suggesting that immersion-based interventions work best as catalysts for further development rather than standalone solutions (Setyowati et al., 2025). Consequently, the development of sustainable immersion programs requires a systemic approach in which camps are integrated into a larger, ongoing communicative framework rather than treated as isolated events.

CONCLUSION

This study explored senior high school students' perspectives on the effectiveness of English Camp as a tool for enhancing communicative competence in an EFL context. Through qualitative analysis of interviews, observation, and document data framed within cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions, the findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions of English Camp as a meaningful and impactful learning experience.

The findings show that the most valuable aspects of English Camp lie in the affective and cognitive domains. The real-life context and immersion provided by the English Camp were effective in helping students cope with the anxiety of English communication, promoting self-confidence, and encouraging active participation in English communication. Although the empowerment of language accuracy was uneven, the development of confidence and motivation to speak served as a crucial basis for establishing communicative mastery. The implications of the findings underscore the relevance of emotional preparedness and self-perception as mediators for EFL speaking proficiency.

Moreover, in terms of psychomotor and conative aspects, it is evident that English Camp promoted spontaneous speaking and encouraged students to use their communication skills outside the camp experience. Unfortunately, although certain results were maintained at a sustainable level among students, this effect is not a guarantee in long-term situations.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that English Camp serves as a high-impact catalyst for communicative competence. It answers the research questions by highlighting that, while linguistic accuracy remains a work in progress, the cognitive and affective barriers to communication have been significantly reduced (RQ1). The peer-driven, low-anxiety environment was identified as the primary driver for spontaneous speech (RQ2). Future research should employ longitudinal designs to investigate the long-term sustainability of these communicative shifts and explore how different camp durations impact linguistic mastery beyond self-perception.

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