



An Analysis of English Course Background on Students' Speaking Ability at Ma'had Al Jami'ah

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ABSTRACT

Speaking ability is an important component in English language learning that enables students to communicate effectively. This study examines the influence of students' English course background on their speaking ability at Ma'had Al Jami'ah, UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and documentation from ten English Education students who had previous course experience. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify patterns and categories related to course duration, frequency, and teaching methods. The results show that differences in course duration, frequency, and teaching methods affect vocabulary mastery, fluency, and confidence. Intensive camp-based programs that provide daily practice and exposure to English result in greater improvements in speaking skills, while short-term or grammar-focused courses result in limited progress. In addition, the Ma'had environment, which integrates structured language programs and daily use of English, plays a crucial role in strengthening and accelerating students' oral skills. This study concludes that English courses provide a foundation for speaking proficiency, but consistent practice and a supportive environment are the main factors that strengthen students' communicative competence.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

English Course Background;
English Education Students;
Ma'had Al Jami'ah;
Speaking Ability

How to Cite in APA Style:

Aslihatullatifah, Meisuri, & Hidayat1, A. .
(2025). An Analysis of English Course
Background on Students' Speaking Ability
at Ma'had Al Jami'ah. *IJLHE: International
Journal of Language, Humanities, and
Education*, 8(2), 625–638.

<https://doi.org/10.52217/ijlhe.v8i2.1955>

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool for communication in our daily life. In this world there are so many kinds of language, such as Indonesian language, English language, mandarin language so on. Language is a communication change consisting of a

special symbol system conveyed by a group of people in the form of ideas and information (Apriyanto, 2022). Through language, people can connect with one another, share experiences, and exchange information. Without language, interaction does not occur, and personal development becomes limited. Among the many languages, English has become the unifying language of the world since it was named an international language in the 18th century. English also plays an important role in the field of education in Indonesia. By learning English, students gain the ability to communicate with people from various countries. To achieve this, learners must master four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Soreh et al., 2022). Speaking, in particular, is the ability to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings orally. It not only requires correct pronunciation, but also an understanding of grammar and the ability to express oneself clearly and effectively. Speaking skills are essential in everyday interactions, professional settings, and various social contexts.

Despite its importance, many learners still struggle with speaking skills due to a lack of practice, low self-confidence, and limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Vocabulary limitations, in particular, often hinder learners from developing their speaking ability. According to Azmi (2020), When a reader has a larger vocabulary size, their automation of the decoding process becomes rapid, which means they used the shortest time process a series of stages of information passage in the brain.

One effective way to overcome speaking difficulties and vocabulary limitations is through English language courses. These programs provide direct guidance from experienced instructors and access to various resources, such as textbooks, online materials, and practical exercises that help expand vocabulary. By actively participating, students can practice in relevant contexts, build confidence, and improve their overall communication skills. However, students from rural areas often do not have access to such opportunities, relying mainly on books with limited exercises due to financial or resource constraints. As a result, they experience greater difficulties when continuing their studies in college compared to those who have taken courses. English courses also support learners in improving their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and time management, while offering flexible schedules and engaging methods that make learning more effective.

English courses also provide opportunities for students to apply theories learned at school, expand vocabulary, practice pronunciation, and construct correct sentences, which help build confidence in using English in both daily and formal contexts. As Azmi (2020) suggests that vocational English courses should be designed with clear guidance and systematic curriculum planning to meet expectations and improve the quality of vocational education. In this case, English courses help students to really focus on their English learning process. The course provides clear guidance and a systematic structure, so students can concentrate on

important aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and writing skills. However, while previous studies have emphasized curriculum design and program effectiveness, little research has specifically explored how students' English course background such as duration, frequency, and learning methods is related to their speaking ability in the unique *pesantren*-based environment of Ma'had Al Jami'ah. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between students' prior course experiences and their speaking proficiency within this distinctive learning context.

At Ma'had Al Jami'ah, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, English is used as the official language, providing students with natural opportunities to develop their speaking skills. However, the impact of students' English course backgrounds on their speaking abilities in the context of Islamic boarding schools has not been widely studied. This study aims to investigate how previous course experiences influence students' speaking proficiency and evaluate the effectiveness of English courses while identifying areas that need improvement to support language learning at Ma'had Al Jami'ah.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design, because the data is presented in words rather than numbers (Mackiewicz, 2018). The research participants were students at Ma'had Al Jami'ah, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, specifically students of the English Education Study Program in batches 2021–2022 who had experience taking English courses. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, considering its relevance to the research focus.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore students' experiences in English courses and the perceived impact on speaking skills, while questionnaires were used to collect supporting data on course duration, frequency, material, and confidence level. The questionnaire was developed based on indicators of speaking ability such as vocabulary mastery, fluency, pronunciation, and confidence (Brown, 2004). Documentation, such as course certificates and syllabi, was also reviewed to verify the findings.

The researcher acted as the main instrument, assisted by interview and questionnaire guides (Hardani et al., 2020). Credibility was strengthened through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure trustworthiness, data source triangulation and member checking were applied (Norman & King, 2020). Furthermore, this study was carried out in accordance with ethical research principles. All participants were clearly informed about the aims of the study and gave their voluntary consent to take part. Approval was also obtained from Ma'had Al Jami'ah to access and use

relevant quotations and documentation related to language sanctions (such as wearing vests or uploading videos). The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained, and the collected data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS

Students' English Course Background

The study revealed that students had varying experiences in taking English courses prior to entering Ma'had Al Jami'ah. Some students only took short programs lasting about one month with one to three meetings per week. Others took longer courses lasting three months, while some students took intensive campus-based courses lasting more than a year. These differences affected their level of exposure to English and their basic speaking skills.

Students who attended intensive campus programs reported stronger initial vocabulary mastery and greater confidence in speaking compared to those who attended short courses or courses focused on grammar. A summary of the course backgrounds is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' English Course Background and Perceived Impact

No	Student	Course Type	Duration	Frequency	Main Focus	Perceived Impact on Speaking Ability
1.	Student 1	Regular	3-6 month	2 times/week	Grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, speaking	Very helpful
2.	Student 2	Camp-based	>1 year	>3 times/week	Grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, speaking	Helpful
3.	Student 3	Regular	3-6 months	2 times/week	Grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, speaking	Quite helpful
4.	Student 4	Short course	< 3 months	2 times/week	Grammar, vocabulary, speaking	Quite helpful
5.	Student 5	Short course	< 3 months	1 time/week	Grammar	Quite helpful
6.	Student 6	Camp-based	>1 year	2 times/week	Vocabulary	Quite helpful
7.	Student 7	Camp-based	>1 year	>3 times/week	Vocabulary	Very helpful
8.	Student 8	Short course	< 3 months	1 time/week	Speaking	Helpful

9.	Student 9	Short course	< 3 months	2 times/week	Speaking	Helpful
10.	Student 10	Camp-based	>1 year	2 times/week	Vocabulary, speaking	Helpful

The data in Table 1 show that students had diverse English language course backgrounds before entering Ma'had Al Jami'ah. Two students (20%) took regular courses lasting 3–6 months and twice a week. Four students (40%) took short courses of less than three months and once or twice a week. Another four students (40%) took intensive or camp-based programs lasting more than a year and two to more than three times a week. In terms of learning focus, most courses emphasize grammar and vocabulary, while some also integrate listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. Students taking short courses generally only receive limited material, such as grammar or basic speaking skills. In contrast, intensive or camp-based programs tend to provide more comprehensive and communicative practice. The impact of courses on speaking skills varied from "quite helpful" to "very helpful," indicating that students generally benefited positively from the English course experience. Specifically, students taking long-term, intensive programs reported greater improvements in skills and confidence compared to those taking short-term courses.

Learning Materials and Method in Courses

Most courses prioritize speaking-focused activities, including conversation practice, presentations, debates, storytelling, and educational games. Some courses also provide grammar and listening exercises as supporting skills. Some innovative programs even involve native speakers through online platforms such as Discord.

However, some courses place more emphasis on grammar theory with limited opportunities for communicative practice. Language teaching is most effective when it provides opportunities for learners to use the language meaningfully (Nunan, 2004). These findings suggest that courses that integrate more communicative activities are more positively related to students' speaking development.

Students' confidence in speaking

The questionnaire data shows that most students feel confident when speaking English, although some still admit to feeling nervous, especially in public settings.

Table 2 Students' Confidence Levels After Attending English Courses

Confidence Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Not confident	0	0%
Less confident	3	30%
Confident	3	30%
Very confident	4	40%
Total	10	100%

Table 2 shows the distribution of students' confidence levels after attending English courses. The results reveal that most students reported being confident (30%) or very confident (40%) when speaking English. Meanwhile, only a small proportion of students (30%) considered themselves less confident, and none reported having no confidence at all. This indicates that the majority of students experienced a positive impact on their self-confidence after taking English courses.

These findings suggest that English course experiences are significantly related to building students' confidence in using English for communication. Students who had exposure to structured learning environments with opportunities for practice were more likely to develop self-assurance when speaking. This aligns with the Input hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful input and practice in promoting language development (Krashen, 1982). Self-confidence also has impacts on the English learning process. For instance, the study discovered that students with self-confidence are more likely to participate more actively in class, have less test anxiety, be more motivated to pursue their goals, and feel more at ease around their teachers and peers (Siadah, 2023).

Moreover, the fact that none of the respondents reported having no confidence at all reflects the effectiveness of English courses in reducing anxiety and promoting a supportive learning environment. However, the presence of students who still expressed low confidence (30%) indicates that additional support is needed. For example, more speaking practice, peer collaboration, or motivational strategies could help these students overcome hesitation and increase their active participation in communication.

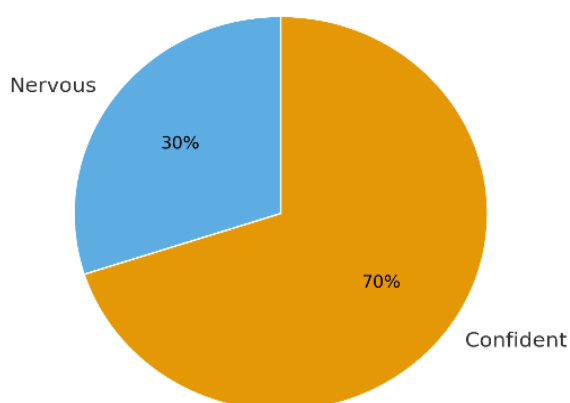


Figure 1. Students' Confidence in Speaking English

The interview findings support these results, showing that students who took English courses felt that the learning environment gave them the initial courage to speak. The courses allowed them to practice in small groups, where mistakes were tolerated, thereby reducing anxiety. It is now generally acknowledged that both comprehensible input and comprehensible output are needed if learners are to achieve high levels of linguistic accuracy in a second language (Ellis, 2015). This

explains why students gain confidence from courses that emphasize speaking activities.

However, confidence gained from courses alone is not always sufficient. Students report that their nervousness often resurfaces in front of larger audiences, such as during class presentations. This shows that confidence is situational and must be reinforced through repeated exposure. Providing diverse input and continuous practice through the integration of the arts significantly improves students' English language skills, in line with the principle that repeated practice and continuous input are important for the development of communicative competence (Albaqami, 2020). Therefore, English courses act as a starting point, while further reinforcement is needed for sustained confidence.

Summary of Questionnaire Results

To strengthen the findings, the questionnaire data was also summarized descriptively to determine the average Impact and Confidence scores based on the duration and frequency of the English courses attended by students. This summary is presented in Table 3 below.

Category	Subgroup	Mean Impact (1-4)	Mean Confidence (1-4)
Course Duration	<3 months	2.5	3.0
	3-6 months	3.0	2.5
	>1 year	3.25	3.25
Course Frequency	1x/week	2.5	3.5
	2x /week	2.8	2.6
	>3x/week	3.5	4.0

The table above shows that students who took courses lasting more than a year achieved higher average Impact and Confidence scores (3.25 each) compared to students who took short-term courses. The same trend is also evident in course frequency, with students who took courses more than three times a week having the highest scores (Impact = 3.5; Confidence = 4.0). These findings indicate that the longer and more frequently an English course is taken, the greater the impact on speaking ability and confidence. In other words, intensive courses have a more significant impact on improving speaking skills than short-term courses or courses that focus on grammar.

Thematic Findings From Interviews

To strengthen the credibility of the qualitative data and show the analytic process (audit trail), interview responses were analyzed thematically. The coding process identified several recurring patterns related to students' English course experiences and their speaking ability after living at Ma'had Al Jami'ah. The analysis also revealed that students who participated in camp-based programs with

structured activities such as vocabulary recitation and the English-only obligation experienced notable improvements in their self-confidence. This was clearly reflected in the experiences of Respondents 1, 3, and 6, who emphasized that intensive practice through oratory, debates, and master of ceremony (MC) training significantly enhanced their speaking ability, showing the benefits of intensive and communicative programs.

In contrast, Respondent 2 described that a short grammar-focused course with monotonous activities provided only limited improvement in speaking ability and self-confidence. This counter-example strengthens the overall claim that intensive and immersive programs are more effective than short-term or grammar-oriented ones. Furthermore, the Ma'had environment itself, with structured programs such as Language Day, Language Academy, Language Fair, halaqah, and monitoring systems, provided daily exposure and situated practice that encouraged consistency and reduced students' hesitation in using English. Respondents 5, 7, 8, and 9 highlighted how this ecosystem motivated them to maintain English communication beyond formal classes. The summary of these recurring themes and supporting quotations from the interviews is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Thematic Map From Interview Findings

Main theme	Subtheme	Representative quote
Course environment builds foundational speaking experience	Supportive and engaging camp atmosphere	"The course was very enjoyable and effective because the environment truly supported us to speak English." (R1)
	Daily English use and monitoring system	"We were required to speak English every day, and a language monitor system ensured consistency." (R5)
Course focus shapes confidence and fluency	Speaking-oriented courses increase confidence	"The course made me more confident, especially during discussions and presentations." (R7, R9)
	Grammar-focused courses limit practice	"The course I joined focused only on grammar; we rarely practiced speaking." (R2)
Immersive Ma'had environment enhances fluency	Language Day and daily use provide exposure	"At Ma'had, we use English daily, which helps us expand our vocabulary and fluency." (R1, R10)
	Feedback and sanctions sustain consistency	"Feedback and even language sanctions helped me stay consistent in using English." (R5)

Interpretation of Findings

The thematic analysis reveals that students' prior English course experiences contributed significantly to their foundational speaking skills, especially when the learning environment was interactive and communicative. Students who joined *speaking-oriented* or *camp-based* courses reported higher confidence and readiness to speak English, while those who attended grammar-focused courses tended to have limited oral practice. Moreover, the immersive environment of Ma'had Al Jami'ah through programs such as *Language Day*, *Language Fair*, and daily communication rules provided continuous exposure that further enhanced fluency and confidence. Consistent feedback and evaluation systems (both during courses and at Ma'had) motivated students to improve their speaking performance and maintain regular English use. Overall, the findings support the idea that both the duration and quality of English course experiences, combined with daily immersion at Ma'had, have a strong positive impact on students' speaking ability and self-confidence.

DISCUSSION

Various previous studies have attempted to understand how English language education, especially through courses or non-formal approaches, affects students' speaking ability. These studies provide great insight into the effectiveness of courses in improving speaking skills in different contexts. One of the studies was conducted by Azmi (2020), who examined the effect of English courses on the speaking ability of third semester students in the English Education Department of UIN Ar Raniry. In this study, Dian Azmi used a qualitative approach with interviews and document analysis as data collection methods. The results showed that the English course had a significant positive impact on students' speaking ability. Students who joined the course had various motivations, such as improving language skills for the future, learning from qualified teachers, as well as getting a more enjoyable learning experience. Overall, students who took the course showed improvement in their speaking scores, most of which were in the good to excellent category.

Another study by Cahyono (2002) explored the effectiveness of the Intensive Course (IC) Program in improving students' English language skills in eight Indonesian universities. The course was designed as a one-semester program with an integrated curriculum covering a wide range of exercises, including listening, reading, writing and speaking. This study used quantitative methods to compare the pretest and posttest results of course participants. The results showed that students who attended the program experienced significant improvements in speaking skills and felt more confident in using English. However, the lack of a control group in this study is one limitation that needs to be considered in interpreting the results.

Meanwhile, Efendi (2016) examined the teaching of speaking skills in a boarding course institution called "First Course" in Bangkalan. This research used a descriptive case study approach by observing two instructors who taught at the institution. Data were obtained through interviews, classroom observations, and

field notes. The research found that the instructors used various teaching techniques such as storytelling, discussions, debates, and interviews, which effectively helped students improve their speaking skills. In addition, "First Course" also instills character education values, such as discipline, responsibility, and hard work, which are related to shaping students' personalities during the learning process. This combination of language learning and character education yields significant results in improving students speaking skill.

From previous research, there is a useful overview of various methods and approaches that can improve students' speaking ability. However, most of these studies focused on formal or non-formal educational institutions, such as general English courses and intensive programs in higher education (e.g. Dian Azmi, Bambang Yudi Cahyono, and Usman Efendi). In addition, many previous studies used quantitative or mixed methods, such as pretest-posttest and survey, to measure the improvement of students' English proficiency. This study will use a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how students' backgrounds are related to their speaking ability in depth, thus providing a richer perspective on the relationship between students' learning experience in the course and their speaking ability. On the other hand, not many have explored how English language education through courses affects students' speaking ability in a *pesantren* environment, such as Ma'had Al-Jami'ah.

Previous research has often focused on the effectiveness of specific programs, teaching methods, or learning techniques in improving speaking ability. However, none has specifically examined how students' English course background is related to their speaking ability in the context of *pesantren*-based education. *Pesantren*, as an educational institution that integrates religious and cultural values, has distinctive characteristics that affect the way students learn and communicate, including in mastering English, which is one of the official languages that must be used within Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. Until now, there are still few studies that specifically explore how students' English educational background, especially through courses, is related to the speaking ability of mahasantri in Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by using a qualitative descriptive approach. Its main focus is to understand how students' background in English language courses is related to their speaking ability in Ma'had Al Jami'ah.

The Ma'had Al Jami'ah environment plays an important role in strengthening and accelerating the development of students' speaking skills. Unlike courses that vary in duration and method, the Ma'had environment provides consistent requirements for the use of English in everyday life. Programs such as Language Day, Language Fair, Language Academy, and language *halaqah* create authentic opportunities for practice. These activities not only expand vocabulary but also encourage discipline and confidence in using English in public.

Language learning involves cognitive processes, such as memory and attention, as well as meaningful interaction (Skehan, 1998). The immersive environment at Ma'had helps students consolidate the vocabulary and structures learned in courses, making them more automatic in real communication. For example, while courses may introduce vocabulary through controlled exercises, daily life at the Ma'had requires students to capture and use that vocabulary spontaneously. This shows that the Ma'had environment not only reinforces previous learning but also transforms passive knowledge into active communication skills.

In addition, interactions among fellow students at the Ma'had play a significant role in supporting the development of speaking skills. Practicing with roommates, mentors, and through group activities creates a more flexible learning environment and encourages authentic communication. Language proficiency develops optimally in environments where learners actively use the language in daily interactions and are consistently exposed to both input and output.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study participants were limited to students in batches 2021 and 2022 of the English Education Study Program at Ma'had Al Jami'ah, which may not represent the university's student population as a whole. Second, the data used mainly came from questionnaires and interviews completed by the participants themselves, which may have been influenced by the students' subjective perceptions. Third, this study did not examine long-term changes in speaking ability outside the period of residence at Ma'had, so the sustainability of these improvements remains uncertain.

Future research could address these limitations by involving a larger and more diverse sample of students from various institutions, as well as using a longitudinal design to track the development of speaking ability over time. Additionally, further studies could integrate classroom observations or speaking performance assessments to provide objective evidence of improvement. Exploring the role of other variables, such as motivation, peer support, or technological tools, could also enrich our understanding of how English courses and immersive environments are related to speaking proficiency..

CONCLUSION

This study examines the influence of students' English course background on their speaking skills at Ma'had Al Jami'ah, Raden Intan State Islamic University Lampung. The findings show that English language courses provide students with basic vocabulary knowledge, structured practice, and the confidence to start speaking in English. However, the type and intensity of the course play a significant role: campus-based programs with daily practice are more effective than short courses or those focused on grammar. This conclusion is supported by the

questionnaire data, which showed that 70% of students reported being confident or very confident after taking courses, while none reported having no confidence at all.

Furthermore, the Ma'had environment proved to be a determining factor in the development of students' speaking skills. Daily language requirements and structured programs, such as Language Day, Language Exhibition, Language Academy, and language halaqah, strengthened students' skills and encouraged authentic communication. Interview data consistently confirmed that students benefited from these programs, with those exposed to intensive or camp-based settings reporting greater gains compared to peers in short grammar-focused courses. This analytic consistency between survey results and interview findings demonstrates the robustness of the conclusion.

Overall, this study suggests that English courses and a supportive language environment complement each other in improving speaking skills. For educators, these results emphasize the importance of integrating communicative activities and providing continuous exposure to English, both in formal courses and in everyday learning settings.

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