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English Speaking Skills Through Community Service Experiences

English Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how community service experiences shape the development of English-speaking skills, through an integrative narrative review of 32 empirical papers published between 2020 and 2026 in Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC, focusing on changes in fluency, self-confidence, linguistic accuracy, and how participants themselves perceived the experience. A consistent pattern emerged. When evaluative fear turned into civic responsibility, students in community settings grew less anxious and their affective filter dropped, while immersion in authentic, pragmatic

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communication produced measurable gains in self-confidence, speech pace, and interactional competence. Service-learning outperformed the conventional classroom overall, largely because it offers the emotionally safe, motivating setting that oral fluency needs.

KEY WORDS: English as a second language; speaking abilities; service-learning; Social interaction and fluency.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisou como as vivências em serviço comunitário influenciam o desenvolvimento das habilidades de expressão oral (speaking skills) em inglês. Empregou-se uma revisão narrativa integrativa da literatura científica empírica. A amostra incluiu 32 estudos recentes, publicados entre 2020 e 2026, selecionados em bases de dados de alto impacto, como Scopus, Web of Science e ERIC. A análise dos dados concentrou-se em examinar as alterações na fluência, autoconfiança, precisão linguística e percepções dos participantes. Os resultados foram consistentes. Quando o medo avaliativo se transformou em engajamento cívico, os estudantes apresentaram menos ansiedade e um filtro afetivo mais baixo. Essa dinâmica levou a um aumento mensurável na autoconfiança, na fluência da fala e na capacidade de interação, favorecida pela imersão em comunicações pragmáticas autênticas. No conjunto, a aprendizagem em serviço superou o modelo tradicional de sala de aula, pois oferece o ambiente motivador e seguro de que a fluência oral precisa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizagem em serviço; Expressão oral; Inglês como segunda língua; Fluência; Interação social.

INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as a tool for professional and social advancement. According to Peng (2024), learning this language fosters social development, enhances job opportunities, and facilitates communication. English proficiency is thus both an academic requirement and a condition for social mobility and professional development.

Communicating in a second language bridges cultures and socioeconomic contexts. Fostering English oral skills in the classroom takes more than grammar instruction; it calls for experiences students actually find meaningful throughout their education (Ambrosio, 2025).

Once developed, these skills open access to broader knowledge, new technological tools, and international professional networks.

Public speaking is difficult for many students, yet the workplace values it highly. Karnedi et al. (2026) state that when public speaking courses are taught with a social focus, students experience measurable improvements in their vocabulary and fluency, and by the end of the process, they regard this skill as necessary. To overcome stage fright and clearly express ideas in English, it is necessary to have environments for continuous practice and strategies that encourage participation.

Educational institutions must rethink their teaching methods to achieve this level of proficiency, incorporating scenarios where errors are treated as part of learning. Speaking confidence does not arise spontaneously; it results from progressive exposure to authentic communication situations and interaction with individuals who express themselves in diverse ways. Curriculum design is central, as it must incorporate opportunities for extracurricular activities that complement the traditional education provided in regular classrooms (Algrni, 2020).

Language learning outcomes improve when digital tools are combined with community-based methods. According to Martinez Carranza et al. (2025), using digital literacy to teach languages to older adults enhances learners' oral explanation skills, as they gain fluency in explaining technology in their L2.

These experiences show that learning is a social and interactive process rather than a purely individual one. Students' intrinsic motivation increases when they take on an active role as disseminators of knowledge within their own communities, which also raises their academic engagement. Traditional classroom barriers are eliminated, creating a collaborative learning environment in which all participants—from community adults to young university students—derive mutual benefits (Ahern & Smith, 2023).

Virtual exchanges also help break down geographical barriers and enrich the communicative experience. Drawing on Basantes (2025), telecollaboration via interactive platforms connects isolated classrooms and fosters naturalness in the spontaneous speech of future teachers during synchronous videoconferences. These virtual practices represent a form of service and outreach that prepares individuals to interact in digital, multicultural environments.

Many students face emotional obstacles that limit their oral participation. Overcoming these affective barriers requires more flexible practice



environments where participatory dynamics help transform insecurity into confidence and facilitate communication that is more fluid and open (Alomari, 2023).

The fear of being negatively judged by teachers or peers discourages many who attempt to express themselves in a foreign language for the first time. Language-related anxiety causes a cognitive block that makes it impossible to translate theoretical and grammatical knowledge into natural, fluent dialogue during spontaneous conversations (Basantes, 2025). For this reason, it is necessary to create pedagogical interventions that shift the focus from grammatical perfection to communicative effectiveness, in an environment of support, patience, and empathy.

Rural and other underserved areas often lack spaces where residents can practice a second language. Ananto et al. (2024) found that outreach programs in rural schools that use role-playing and simulated encounters with tourists help participants overcome their fear of making mistakes when speaking.

This study examines how community service experiences affect the development of English oral communication skills. It looks at how participation in community projects shapes students' fluency and self-confidence, at the social interaction dynamics that emerge and how they sharpen linguistic accuracy, and at how participants themselves judge the effectiveness of this experiential method against conventional classroom learning.

Research questions

- How do community service activities impact university students' fluency and self-confidence in speaking English?
- In what ways do genuine social interactions in community settings improve communication skills and linguistic accuracy?
- What are the students' qualitative perceptions regarding the use of community service compared to traditional classes?

Development

Speaking Skills

Developing oral skills is central to learning any foreign language and requires immersion in authentic conversation. Direct engagement with the practical use of the language, interacting with real speakers, strengthens professional identity. Continuous language practice proves more valuable than theoretical learning alone (Baracheta, 2024).

Speaking English requires the coordination of complex processes—cognitive, articulatory, and pragmatic—all of which must occur within milliseconds during any fluent conversation. Beyond grammatical rules and vocabulary, the speaker needs the mental capacity to select the right words in the moment. This skill demands constant, meaningful practice in which the interlocutor acts not as a punitive evaluator but as a genuine recipient of the message, which fosters a communicative connection (Alomari, 2023).

Affective barriers and insecurities often prevent natural, spontaneous conversation among young learners. As Warna (2025) points out, the creation of community conversation clubs in rural areas reduces participant anxiety by providing a supportive, non-threatening environment. Through informal group discussions, students find more motivation than traditional grammar instruction offers, which helps lower the affective filter.

Enabling students to take necessary linguistic risks—without fear of ridicule or severe punishment for syntax errors—requires overcoming the affective filter. In inclusive environments that value the effort to communicate clearly over grammatical mastery, verbal fluency flourishes. When verbal interaction is given an authentic purpose, students free their minds from over-analysis and begin to acquire the second language instinctively, and their ability to retain information improves (Afriani et al., 2025).

Oral proficiency in English also requires an intercultural perspective and adaptation to different audiences and settings. Drawing on Gruber (2019), teaching the language in cross-border environments fosters the development of leadership and code-switching among students. This learning enables participants to improve their fluency, as they are compelled to adapt their speech to varying proficiency levels while managing groups with empathy.

The ability to adapt linguistically distinguishes a competent speaker in the target language. Adjusting pace, tone, precise word choice, and cultural references based on the listener is an advanced skill that is developed only through practice (Amelia et al., 2022). For this reason, pedagogical methodologies must prioritize exposing students to different ages, accents, and sociocultural contexts.

Community Service



In the field of education, community service repositions the student as an active agent within their own community.

This educational philosophy holds that knowledge gains value when applied to solve concrete problems within the surrounding community. The traditional classroom opens into an environment where academic goals and social needs converge. Through such projects, higher education institutions give back to society (Mufidatul et al., 2025)

Including outreach programs in marginalized areas gives the general population access to the fundamentals of foreign languages. As noted by Ananto et al. (2024), implementing playful, interactive activities in rural schools builds a link between formal academia and the surrounding community. These engagement practices yield positive effects in both directions: communities develop new skills, while facilitators strengthen their English proficiency through service.

The social responsibility of universities is realized through experiences that challenge traditional models of academic knowledge. University students move from receiving information to leading community projects, where they confront circumstances that enrich their perspectives. These interactions foster empathy, resilience, and teamwork (Khairatunnisa, 2025).

Community service also creates horizontal support networks that help overcome the psychological barriers associated with language learning. According to Tajuddin and Shafie (2025), direct interaction in such social projects fosters a collaborative environment in which classroom hierarchies fade. Working side by side for the benefit of others reduces stress and creates an atmosphere for participants to continuously practice and consolidate their oral communication skills.

These actions go beyond cognitive development or the understanding of new grammatical rules required to pass a language course. Individuals who previously felt incapable or marginalized find their voices and discover a capacity for community leadership. At the same time, communities benefit when they feel integrated, and both sides sustain progress over time (Said et al., 2020).

Nowadays, community service has become a practical laboratory for the continuous improvement of transversal communication skills. As confirmed by Yanti et al. (2026), assuming leadership or mentoring roles within the community empowers young people, helping them overcome difficult personal challenges such as excessive shyness when speaking. These immersive experiences reinforce meaningful learning. Evidence shows that using a language for social benefit is the most effective way to master it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

This research was conducted using the methodological design of a narrative literature review—a qualitative and descriptive research methodology that examines, synthesizes, and discusses the state of the art regarding a specific topic, offering a broad, contextual, or theoretical perspective without requiring the exhaustiveness or probabilistic rigor of a systematic review.

This approach allowed the comparison and synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data from recent international studies. The methodology supported a theoretical framework for understanding how community service (Service-Learning) relates to L2 (English) oral competence. The analysis traced recurring discourse patterns, weighed field-tested methodologies, and drew out the quantifiable results that support the review's conclusions.

Search process

Literature was gathered from academic databases, including Scopus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. Indexed journals in pedagogy and applied linguistics, such as the *Journal of English Learner Education* and TESOL Quarterly, were also reviewed.

Search strings combining primary and secondary descriptors in English and Spanish were used. The search expressions included terms such as: ("service-learning" OR "community service" OR "civic engagement" OR "outreach program") AND ("English speaking skills" OR "oral competence" OR "fluency" OR "speaking confidence" OR "L2 interactive competence") AND ("university students" OR "EFL" OR "ESL"). The initial corpus was screened by title and abstract, then by full-text review for relevance to the research objectives.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

1. Literature was included when it met three conditions. It had to be an original empirical article, action research study, qualitative case study, or high-impact theoretical review published in a peer-reviewed journal; it needed to report results between 2020 and 2026, including preprints and early-access publications from 2025 and 2026 that reflect the post-pandemic state of the field; and it had to measure variables directly tied to oral expression, such as fluency, accuracy, spoken vocabulary, confidence, or speaking



anxiety, within community service, volunteering, telecollaboration, or community immersion.

2. Studies were excluded when they addressed only written grammar, reading comprehension, or listening comprehension without a direct link to oral expression, or when they lacked verifiable peer review, as was the case with editorials and publications from before 2019.

Study Sample

The final consolidated database for this review comprises 32 empirical studies.

From a methodological perspective, the sample is methodologically diverse, which supports triangulation:

Table 1

Methodological classification of the studies analyzed

Methodological Design	Amount	Primary Approach and Data Collection Techniques
Qualitative Studies / Case Studies	14	In-depth perception, construction of teacher identity, reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, analysis of the affective filter.
Quantitative / Pre-experimental Studies	9	Quasi-experimental designs, standardized tests (pre-test and post-test), Likert surveys, MANOVA, quantification of fluency and anxiety.
Mixed-methods designs	5	A combination of statistical robustness and the narrative depth of focus groups and reflections.
Action Research	4	Active intervention by the teacher-researcher in the community (schools, factories) and documentation of change in situ.

The sample includes empirical research from Ecuador, the United States, Spain, Cambodia, Uganda, Indonesia, Malaysia, and mainland China—countries where English is spoken as a second language (ESL) and as a foreign language (EFL).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The literature supports the efficacy of service-learning in second-language acquisition. Qualitative data and reports on student perceptions demonstrate that moving learning from the classroom to community contexts fosters psychological empowerment and reduces anxiety levels associated with oral production. By giving communication a purpose—whether through tutoring immigrants (Wu, 2024), providing digital literacy training to the elderly (Martinez Carranza et al., 2025), or instructing rural schoolchildren (Silaban et al., 2025; Ananto et al., 2024)—language becomes a vehicle for inclusion and solidarity rather than an object of syntactic study. The following section synthesizes findings from the 32 studies, organized to address the three research questions guiding this work.

Impact of community service on fluency and self-confidence

The impact of community service on language learners' attitudes and confidence has been documented through statistically significant measurements in various quasi-experimental studies, and how it dissolves emotional barriers to fluency. For instance, interventions evaluated using rigorous rubrics have yielded quantifiable gains—specifically, a 21% increase in speech fluency, a 34% rise in objective conversational fluency, and a notable 51% boost in speaking self-confidence metrics (Karnedi et al., 2026; Silaban et al., 2025). This evidence supports the hypothesis that self-confidence grows during immersion in contexts of community need, as the "affective filter" is lowered and self-efficacy is fostered (Supriyani et al., 2025; Warna, 2025).

Numerous studies identify anxiety and shyness as the primary obstacles to fluent oral production. Yanti et al. (2026) established that shyness is the main barrier in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, based on qualitative research focused on civic service programs (KKN). However, when these same introverted students are placed in the community and assigned the role of "tutors," they experience psychological empowerment. The social responsibility inherent in the role shifts their focus from self-centered concerns (fear of making mistakes or appearing incompetent) to altruistic concerns, such as ensuring the community learner understands the message. This shift alleviates anxiety.

Extracurricular conversation clubs in rural villages, such as those studied by Warna (2025) and Supriyani et al. (2025), shows that an environment



described as "non-threatening" and grounded in "supportive friendship" eliminates the psychological pressure associated with numerical grading. In these informal settings, reduced anxiety enables adolescents to venture into using a broader vocabulary and to minimize hesitations (such as "uh" or "um"), which gives them a greater sense of fluency. Recognizing that making mistakes is a natural part of conversational interaction, rather than grounds for sanction, frees up the student's cognitive processes.

The study by Elov et al. (2025) indicates that the inclusion of conversational artificial intelligence (ICALA) as a partner in service programs—particularly in more technical environments—statistically reduces speaking anxiety and shyness, as it offers a safe space to practice and make mistakes before facing difficult interactions with other people.

Confidence gains correlate directly with lexical and phonological performance. In a pre-experimental study of university-level public speaking courses with a social focus, Karnedi et al. (2026) used strict rubrics over a 12-week period and found persuasive speech fluency rise by 21% and vocabulary mastery by 15%. An action-research intervention by Silaban et al. (2025) in rural Indonesian schools found that 80% of participants saw their scores improve after just three days of immersion in community simulations and practical work, with objective fluency up 34%, pronunciation up 31%, and the speaking self-confidence index up 51%.

Development of linguistic precision through social interaction

The traditional classroom often feels artificial: dialogues are prefabricated, and communicative purposes are merely academic simulations (e.g., speaking to earn a grade). In contrast, community service exposes the student to unpredictable, real language use. This exposure to authentic social interactions enhances linguistic accuracy through structural scaffolding, pedagogical symbiosis, and cross-cultural pragmatic adaptation.

The concept of "pedagogical symbiosis," formulated by Wu (2024), is one of the study's theoretical findings. In a study involving English-teaching students working with groups of newly arrived migrants, Wu demonstrated that the very act of teaching compels the educator's brain to clarify, structure, and define its own knowledge of the language. University students must model clear language and select appropriate vocabulary, avoiding jargon or confusing idioms, to ensure understanding by the learner from the community. The tutor internalizes syntactic and phonetic norms more deeply (Uwase, 2025).

This need for precision is corroborated by the action research of Ahern and Smith (2023), which focuses on the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach in disadvantaged schools. By applying cognitive scaffolding to teach literacy to actual students, prospective teachers developed a heightened awareness of language structure and mechanics. In this instance, precision comes from the obligation to convey a clear message to learners who depend on that instruction, not from exam preparation.

Accuracy and fluency are strongly influenced by power dynamics in communication. Quantitative research by Tajuddin and Shafie (2025), conducted with 50 university students, concluded that teamwork on social projects reduces the fear of evaluation and criticism from the instructor. This horizontal dynamic lets students attempt more complex oral structures without the pressure of perfectionism.

Research by Koike and Tocaimaza-Hatch (2024) revealed that short-term study-abroad experiences focused on community service foster rapid development of "Interactional Competence" (IC) in international contexts. This means that the learner becomes more natural and pragmatically adaptable to the native interlocutor, shaping their identity through ongoing dialogue. Gruber (2019) studied university students from Hong Kong teaching in rural China; these students had to develop code-switching skills and adjust their register to suit different proficiency levels among local learners.

Linguistic precision peaks when community service requires technical vocabulary. Supriatnoko et al. (2025) documented that, after just two days of immersion in technical tutoring, where factory workers were taught English to operate machinery, students' verbal instruction precision improved when reading was combined with oral instructions. Theoretical knowledge is reinforced by associating the spoken word with immediate physical action; this methodological approach was also validated by Hooli et al. (2023) through the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) in community recreational games. This process creates neural connections that link vocal production with motor and spatial memory. Likewise, bidirectional digital literacy methods—such as the one documented by Martinez Carranza et al. (2025), in which young people explain technology to older adults—require university students to find precise synonyms and apt metaphors in English to ensure intergenerational understanding, which improves their ability to explain concepts.

Student perceptions of traditional methodologies



Students describe community-based experiences as pedagogical interventions that feel emotionally safe and motivating, shaping their personal, civic, and professional growth. The review also captures how students weigh the choice between the traditional classroom and service-learning environments.

In a traditional classroom, students often feel they speak only to be evaluated. Community settings and immersive conversation clubs give their voice a social, developmental, and humanistic purpose instead, removing the pressure tied to grading. The camaraderie, support networks, and intrinsic satisfaction that rural students in Ananto et al. (2024) describe as a more "entertaining" and interactive process outweigh whatever the classroom offers.

Curricula built on repetition and school-based grammar often feel culturally disconnected or dry. Service-learning instead gives English acquisition a sense of urgency. Ene and Orlando (2022) found that among international students taking English for Academic Purposes classes integrated with community service, 70% reported a transformative impact regardless of whether the intervention was instructor-led or self-directed, describing shifts in social consciousness and new links between language, volunteering, and social issues.

The large-scale empirical research by Ikendi et al. (2025) and the theoretical work of Peng (2024) reinforce this finding. According to these authors, English gains motivational significance when students view it as a tool for social mobility, professional development, and intercultural understanding. Retrospective experience, for instance, was identified as a transformative event for participants involved in rural communities in Uganda throughout their professional careers; it enabled them to enhance their ability to resolve civic conflicts and communicate without barriers.

The qualitative perspective examines how modern community service integrates technology to overcome physical limitations. A qualitative study by Basantes (2025) reveals that pre-service teachers using telecollaboration platforms (such as eTwinning) to provide language-based services highly valued the ability of synchronous technology to connect isolated classrooms, perceiving that the service helped them overcome geographical barriers. Subsequent research, such as that by Chang, Choi, and Akbulut (2024), demonstrated that levels of interest, enjoyment, and the sense of proactive contribution increase qualitatively when university students create English-language resources for "real community clients" (primary schools), compared to students who develop hypothetical projects.

According to the literature, community service changes how students experience language learning. Students conclude that classroom theory is less effective and memorable than the experience of using English to help, lead, and connect with other realities.

Discussion and Conclusions

Synthesizing the literature produced between 2019 and 2026 enables the formulation of theoretical and practical conclusions regarding the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) in higher education institutions. The fundamental conclusion of this study is that oral proficiency in a foreign language cannot develop within conventional classroom methods alone. Service-learning emerges as a pedagogical approach that addresses persistent shortcomings in language instruction—namely, anxiety, a lack of contextual connection, and the absence of genuine motivation to achieve fluent oral production (Ene & Orlando, 2022; Peng, 2024).

First, the results corroborate the validity of the "Affective Filter" theory. Community-based performance alters the student's affective profile, replacing the evaluative tension that inhibits speech-articulation capabilities with a sense of shared responsibility that demands dynamic, pragmatic communication (Yanti et al., 2026). This methodological shift objectively increases speech rate, instructional fluency, and projected confidence; improvements of 51% in self-confidence and 34% in objective fluency have been demonstrated following community-based immersion experiences (Silaban et al., 2025; Karnedi et al., 2026).

Secondly, it is established that interaction with peers or native speakers—as well as assuming the role of teacher (the "pedagogical symbiosis" described by Wu, 2024)—develops "interactional competence" and accuracy organically. By compelling the student to employ scaffolding (Ahern & Smith, 2023), use Total Physical Response (TPR) (Hooli et al., 2023), or resort to metaphors to foster digital literacy among the elderly (Martinez Carranza et al., 2025), the mind searches for the right grammatical structure to get the message across. Accuracy becomes a social tool rather than a syntactic exercise.

The need to revise academic programs is corroborated by student perceptions favoring experiential, community-based practice over traditional in-class instruction. This suggests that language pedagogy has a secure future within the community and on social connection platforms. It is recommended that institutions incorporate community



engagement projects into their structures for the accreditation of advanced oral proficiency levels.

Study limitations and research gaps

Despite the findings presented in this review, the current literature has limitations that point to gaps for future research. First, most documented research focuses on short- or medium-term interventions. There is a need for long-term longitudinal studies to determine whether the observed gains in fluency, self-confidence, and vocabulary retention are sustained over the years following the conclusion of community engagement activities. Furthermore, although the review includes valuable pre-experimental approaches, more quasi-experimental studies with established control groups are needed; such studies would allow for the precise, empirical isolation of the direct impact of community service interaction compared to exclusively traditional pedagogical methods.

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