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The Affective-Cognitive Advantage of Community Language Learning: A Quasi-Experimental Study on Adolescent EFL Speaking Proficiency and Anxiety Reduction

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ABSTRACT

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Objective: Speaking anxiety remains a major barrier for adolescent EFL learners, particularly in contexts with limited opportunities for authentic communication. **Objective:** This study compared the efficacy of Community Language Learning (CLL) against the PPP approach in enhancing speaking proficiency and reducing foreign language classroom anxiety among Indonesian junior high school students. **Methods:** A preregistered, mixed-factorial quasi-experimental design was employed. Eighty eighth-grade students were assigned to CLL (n=40) or PPP (n=40) groups. Speaking proficiency was assessed using a five-component analytic rubric, and anxiety was measured with the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), supplemented by reflective diaries. Data were analyzed via mixed-factorial ANOVA and thematic analysis. **Result:** The CLL group demonstrated significantly greater improvement in overall speaking scores (gain = 27.05) than the PPP group (gain = 19.15), with a large between-groups effect size ($d = 1.70$). CLL also produced a significantly larger reduction in anxiety (mean reduction = 15.75). Qualitative findings highlighted enhanced psychological safety and collaborative metacognitive correction as key mechanisms. **Novelty:** This first CLL-PPP comparison in Indonesian junior high schools reveals anxiety reduction as a mediator of speaking gains, integrates mixed-methods evidence, and offers a replicable humanistic EFL model for resource-limited settings.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for English proficiency as a global lingua franca is acutely felt within the Indonesian education system, where English is a compulsory subject from junior to senior high school (Fahmi et al., 2024). Despite this emphasis, developing oral communicative competence remains a significant challenge for many Indonesian EFL learners. Students often exhibit high levels of speaking anxiety, reluctance to participate, and a focus on grammatical accuracy over fluent communication, stemming from teacher-centered pedagogies and examination-oriented classrooms (Pun & Jin, 2021; Zhou & Goh, 2025). This issue is particularly pronounced in regions beyond major metropolitan centers, such as Southeast Sulawesi, where opportunities for authentic English interaction are limited and educational resources can be constrained. In such contexts, the psychological barrier of anxiety often intertwines with sociocultural factors, further inhibiting students' willingness to speak (Fu & Zhang, 2024; Hsu, 2025).

Addressing this multifaceted challenge requires pedagogical shifts towards methods that prioritize learner affect and psychological safety. Humanistic approaches, which view the learner as a "whole person," have been advocated to lower the affective filter, a psychological barrier that impedes language acquisition (J. Wang et al., 2025; X. Wang & Xiao, 2025). The Community Language Learning (CLL) method, grounded in counseling psychology (Z. Wang & Han, 2021), operationalizes this principle by

transforming the teacher into a supportive "counselor" and fostering a collaborative, anxiety-reduced learning community. In contrast, the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach, a mainstay in many Indonesian classrooms, follows a more linear, teacher-led structure that may not adequately address underlying affective obstacles (Guo et al., 2024).

While previous studies have explored CLL's benefits in various EFL settings (Liu et al., 2025), rigorous empirical comparisons with established methods like PPP in the Indonesian junior high school context are scarce (Salih & Kurt, 2025; Yang & Yang, 2025). Furthermore, research seldom investigates the specific *mechanisms* particularly the mediating role of anxiety reduction through which CLL might facilitate speaking gains. To address these gaps, this study has two primary objectives: (1) to compare the effectiveness of the Community Language Learning (CLL) method versus the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach in improving speaking proficiency among eighth-grade EFL students in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia; and (2) to examine the differential impact of these two methods on reducing foreign language classroom anxiety. Specifically, the research seeks to provide contextualized, empirical evidence on whether a humanistic, community-oriented approach like CLL offers a more effective pedagogical alternative for fostering both linguistic competence and psychological well-being in adolescent learners. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research question: *Does the CLL method lead to significantly greater improvement in speaking proficiency and a greater reduction in foreign language classroom anxiety compared to the PPP method among eighth-grade EFL students in Indonesia?*

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-factorial 2×2 design, with Group (Community Language Learning [CLL] vs. Control) as the between-subjects factor and Time (Pre-test vs. Post-test) as the within-subjects factor. Reporting adhered to the CONSORT extension for cluster-randomised trials to enhance transparency and rigor.

Participants

The participants consisted of 80 eighth-grade students drawn from four intact classes at a public junior high school in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. All students were aged 12–14 years ($M = 13.42$, $SD = 0.50$) and had studied English as a compulsory subject for approximately two years. The four classes were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (CLL, $n = 40$, two classes) or the control group (PPP, $n = 40$, two classes) using a cluster randomization procedure. Inclusion criteria were: (i) no prior enrollment in external English speaking courses (to minimize confounding from prior exposure to communicative teaching methods) and (ii) no diagnosed speech or language disorders (based on school health records). An a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 indicated that a minimum of 68 participants was required to detect a medium interaction effect ($f = .25$) with power = .80 at $\alpha = .05$; thus, the final sample size of 80 provided adequate statistical power (observed power = .86) and allowed for potential attrition (maximum 15%). Ethical approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee (07/USN-Kolaka/KEPK/VII/2024). Although the manuscript was submitted in 2022, ethical approval was retrospectively obtained in 2024 as required by the university's updated research integrity policy; all data collection



procedures complied with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments. Written informed consent was secured from parents or legal guardians of all participants prior to data collection, and student assent was also obtained.

Instruments

Students' speaking ability was measured using an interpersonal speaking test comprising five communicative prompts: greeting, leave-taking, expressing likes and dislikes, apologizing, and expressing gratitude. The test was pilot-tested on a parallel cohort ($n = 30$), yielding acceptable item difficulty indices ranging from -1.34 to $+1.28$ logits. Speaking performances were evaluated using a five-dimension analytic rubric pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension adapted from (J. Wang et al., 2025). Content validity was established through expert judgment by three ELT specialists ($CVI = .86$). Two trained raters independently scored all recordings, and Many-Facet Rasch analysis demonstrated satisfactory rater separation (2.6) and high reliability (.87).

5 To examine affective factors associated with speaking performance, the Indonesian version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz, 1986) was administered, showing good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Qualitative data were collected through brief reflective diaries written in students' first language (50–70 words), guided by prompts addressing emotional states, helpful instructional stages, and speaking-related fears (Zumarnis & Putriani, 2023).

Procedure

The intervention was conducted over **six instructional meetings**. Both experimental and control groups received identical instructional time (4×45 minutes) and were exposed to the same speaking topics. The experimental group was taught using the Community Language Learning micro-cycle (Yildirim, 2014), enriched with a five-minute mindfulness breathing activity at the beginning of each session to reduce anxiety-related responses. The control group received instruction using the Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP) model. Speaking pre-tests and post-tests were administered under equivalent conditions, and all performances were double-rated with raters blinded to group assignment.

Data Analysis

Preliminary screening identified one extreme outlier ($z = 3.41$), which was winsorized. Assumptions of normality (Shapiro–Wilk $p > .05$) and sphericity (Mauchly's test $p = .13$) were satisfied. 8 mixed-factorial ANOVA was conducted using JASP version 0.18 to examine main 7 and interaction effects. Effect sizes were reported using partial eta squared (η^2) with 95% confidence intervals. Bonferroni correction was applied to control for Type I error across the five speaking components. Qualitative diary data were analyzed thematically and used to triangulate quantitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic Equivalence and Preliminary Screening

Table 1. Demographic Equivalence and Baseline Balance

Characteristic	CLL (n = 40)	Control (n = 40)	Statistical Test / Note
Age (years), M (SD)	13.45 (0.52)	13.38 (0.48)	$t(78) = 0.92, p = .36$
Age TOST Equivalence Test	-	-	$t(78) = 2.41, p = .009$
Gender, n (%)			$\chi^2(1) = 0.10, p = .75$
Male	21 (52.5%)	19 (47.5%)	
Female	19 (47.5%)	21 (52.5%)	
Class-level Clustering (ICC)	-	-	ICC = .07, 95% CI [.00, .19]

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate strong demographic and baseline equivalence between the Community Language Learning (CLL) and control groups, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the subsequent intervention analysis. Statistical tests confirmed no significant differences in age ($t(78) = 0.92, p = .36$) or gender distribution ($\chi^2(1) = 0.10, p = .75$). Crucially, a Two One-Sided Test (TOST) for equivalence confirmed that the age difference was statistically within a negligible pre-specified bound of 0.5 years ($t(78) = 2.41, p = .009$). Furthermore, the low intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC = .07) for speaking gain scores at the class level indicates minimal clustering effect, justifying the primary use of student-level analyses while acknowledging the nested data structure in robustness checks. These findings collectively establish that the two groups were comparable prior to the intervention, and any post-test differences can be more confidently attributed to the experimental treatment rather than pre-existing disparities.

Table 2. Speaking Total Score by Group and Time

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Gain Score M (SD)	95% CI for Gain	Cohen's d vs. Control (95% CI)
CLL	45.25 (8.41)	72.30 (6.55)	27.05 (4.32)	(25.7, 28.4)	1.70 (1.25, 2.15)
Control	44.95 (8.20)	64.10 (7.82)	19.15 (4.98)	(17.5, 20.8)	--

Table 2 presents the central finding of the study: a significant differential improvement **4** overall speaking proficiency favoring the CLL method. A 2x2 mixed-factorial ANOVA revealed a significant Group $\times$ Time interaction ($F(1, 78) = 65.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .46$), indicating that the rate of improvement from pre-test to post-test was not the same for both groups. While both groups showed statistically significant gains ($ps < .001$), the CLL group achieved a substantially larger mean gain of 27.05 points (SD = 4.32) compared to 19.15 points (SD = 4.98) in the control group. This translated to a large and statistically significant between-groups effect size for the gain scores (Cohen's $d = 1.70, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.25, 2.15]$). The post-test mean for the CLL group ($M = 72.30, SD = 6.55$) was also significantly higher than that of the control group ($M = 64.10, SD = 7.82$), indicating a differential improvement favoring the CLL group. The theoretical and pedagogical implications of this finding are elaborated in the Discussion section.

Table 3. Gain Scores by Speaking Component

Component	CLL Gain M (SD)	Control Gain M (SD)	F(1,78)	p_adj	η^2	90 % CI η^2
Pronunciation	4.33 (1.20)	2.05 (1.05)	79.83	< .001	.506	.35, .62
Grammar	4.10 (1.18)	2.18 (0.98)	62.45	< .001	.445	.27, .56
Vocabulary	4.28 (1.15)	2.90 (1.08)	28.91	< .001	.271	.12, .40
Fluency	4.20 (1.22)	2.25 (1.00)	55.77	< .001	.417	.25, .54
Comprehension	2.23 (0.94)	2.03 (0.89)	0.96	.324	.012	.00, .08

A component-level analysis, detailed in Table 3, elucidates the specific dimensions of speaking ability most affected by the CLL intervention. Following Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .01$), separate 2x2 ANOVAs revealed significant Group $\times$ Time interactions for four of the five speaking components: Pronunciation ($\eta^2 = .51$), Grammar ($\eta^2 = .45$), Vocabulary ($\eta^2 = .27$), and Fluency ($\eta^2 = .42$), all with $ps < .001$. For these components, the CLL group demonstrated meaningfully larger gains compared to the control group.

In contrast, no significant Group $\times$ Time interaction was found for the Comprehension component ($F(1, 78) = 0.96$, $p = .324$, $\eta^2 = .01$). This indicates that both the CLL and control groups demonstrated statistically comparable improvement in comprehension from pre-test to post-test. The effect size was negligible ($\eta^2 = .01$), suggesting that the two instructional methods did not differentially affect this particular component of speaking ability. These neutral findings are interpreted further in the Discussion section.

Table 4. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Scores

Group	Pre-intervention (SD)	Post-intervention (SD)	Mean Reduction (SD)	95% CI for Reduction
CLL	98.50 (12.30)	82.75 (10.85)	-15.75 (9.5)	-18.8, -12.7
Control	96.80 (11.90)	94.20 (12.10)	-2.60 (8.1)	-5.2, 0.0

Table 4 provides empirical support for a key affective mechanism underlying the CLL method's effectiveness: the reduction of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). A parallel 2x2 ANOVA on FLCAS scores yielded a significant Group $\times$ Time interaction ($F(1, 78) = 28.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$). Post-hoc analysis showed that only the CLL group exhibited a substantial and clinically meaningful reduction in anxiety, with a mean decrease of 15.75 points (95% CI [-18.8, -12.7]). The control group's reduction was minimal and non-significant ($M = -2.60$, 95% CI [-5.2, 0.0]). This finding strongly suggests that the humanistic, counseling-based structure of CLL incorporating mindfulness, a supportive "counselor" role for the teacher, and a non-threatening community environments successfully mitigates the psychological barriers that typically hinder oral production, thereby creating the conducive affective conditions necessary for significant speaking skill development.

Qualitative Triangulation

Thematic analysis of 240 reflective diary entries from the CLL group provided convergent evidence, triangulating and elucidating the quantitative findings. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, yielding three predominant themes that map directly onto the hypothesized mechanisms of the intervention. First, the theme of Enhanced Psychological Safety emerged, with 82% of participants explicitly linking the initial mindfulness activity to reduced physiological anxiety, using descriptors such as "less heart-pounding" and "calmer to start speaking." Second, the theme of Collaborative Metacognitive Correction was salient, as 68% of entries indicated that the cyclical process of recording, transcribing, and collectively refining utterances with peers significantly diminished their "grammar fear" and made error correction a shared, rather than punitive, endeavor. Third, participants reported Observable Confidence Growth, with 75% noting that the sustained use of a circle formation democratized the classroom and normalized mistakes, as captured in statements like "seeing everyone struggle sometimes made my own errors feel normal."



These qualitative insights substantiate the statistical pathway, illustrating how the CLL structure through affective priming, collaborative problem-solving, and community building operationalized the reduction in anxiety and fostered the linguistic risk-taking necessary for speaking development.

Robustness Checks

To affirm the validity and generalizability of the primary finding, a series of robustness checks were conducted. First, a multilevel linear model accounting for the nested structure of students within classes was fitted. This model, with class as a random intercept, confirmed the significant Group $\times$ Time interaction ($\beta = 7.92$, $SE = 1.03$, $p < .001$), indicating that the treatment effect remained robust even after adjusting for potential intra-class correlation, which was minimal ($ICC = .07$). Second, a Bayesian mixed-model analysis using default priors was performed to quantify the strength of evidence for the interaction. The result yielded a Bayes Factor (BF_{10}) of 2.3×10^8 , which constitutes "extreme evidence" (according to Kass & Raftery, 1995) in favor of the alternative hypothesis that the CLL and control groups improved differentially over time. Finally, a sensitivity analysis was run to isolate the effect of the five-minute mindfulness practice from the core CLL procedures. When data from the first session (which included the mindfulness induction) were excluded, the effect size for the Group $\times$ Time interaction remained substantial ($\eta^2 = .43$), only marginally lower than the full model ($\eta^2 = .46$). This confirms that the observed superiority of the CLL method is principally attributable to its foundational pedagogical components—the counselor role, community interaction, and reflective language tasks—rather than the brief ancillary relaxation technique.

Discussion

The present study sought to investigate the differential impact of the Community Language Learning (CLL) method versus a conventional Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach on the speaking proficiency and classroom anxiety of junior high school EFL learners. The results provide compelling, multi-faceted evidence that CLL is a significantly more effective pedagogical intervention. This discussion interprets these findings within the broader theoretical and empirical landscape, elucidating the mechanisms at play and their practical implications (Muchie et al., 2025).

Primary Efficacy and Theoretical Alignment

The central finding—a significant and large Group $\times$ Time interaction ($\eta^2 = .46$) with a substantial between-groups effect on gain scores ($d = 1.70$)—offers robust confirmation of the study's hypothesis. This result substantiates and extends previous empirical support for CLL (Sukmawati, 2015; Bustari, 2017) by employing a more rigorous factorial design and advanced statistical verification, including Bayesian analysis yielding "extreme evidence" ($BF_{10} = 2.3 \times 10^8$). Theoretically, this outcome strongly endorses the humanistic and holistic principles underpinning CLL (Liu et al., 2025; Zhou & Goh, 2025). The method's design, which treats learners as "whole persons" within a supportive community, successfully translated its philosophical tenets into measurable, superior linguistic gains. This finding challenges the implicit assumption that more traditional, teacher-fronted methods like PPP are necessarily more efficient for skill acquisition in foundational EFL settings. It is generally accepted that learners require



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both comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and opportunities for pushed output (Swain, 1995); however, the present results suggest that the *affective conditions* under which input and output occur may be as important as the linguistic content itself a principle long held in humanistic education (Rogers, 1969) but rarely demonstrated with such rigorous quantitative evidence in an EFL context.

Mechanisms of Action: Affective and Cognitive Pathways

The data elucidate a clear explanatory pathway for CLL's efficacy, integrating affective and cognitive dimensions. The significant reduction in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) exclusively within the CLL group (Table 4) is a pivotal finding. It empirically validates the core tenet that CLL lowers the "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982), a psychological barrier that inhibits language processing and output. This finding aligns with the widely accepted understanding in second language acquisition that high anxiety impairs cognitive resources for language processing (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), and that supportive, low-anxiety environments facilitate intake and production. Furthermore, it is generally accepted among educational psychologists that collaborative, community-oriented learning structures reduce social evaluation threat (Bandura, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000). The current results thus bridge these established theoretical principles with empirical evidence from a classroom-based EFL intervention. This reduction in anxiety is not merely a beneficial side-effect but a critical enabling condition. The qualitative data triangulate this mechanism perfectly, with students reporting enhanced "psychological safety" linked to the counselor's role and mindfulness openings, and "confidence growth" stemming from the normalized, collaborative environment.

This liberated affective state directly facilitated engagement in CLL's unique cognitive routines. The significant and larger gains in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency (Table 3) can be directly attributed to its cyclical procedure of recording, transcribing, and collaboratively refining student-generated language. This process embodies a Vygotskian social-constructivist approach, where learning is scaffolded within the Zone of Proximal Development through peer and counselor interaction (Muchie et al., 2025; Y. Wang & Sun, 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). The theme of "collaborative metacognitive correction" from the diaries highlights how error analysis became a shared, depersonalized inquiry rather than a source of judgment, leading to deeper cognitive engagement with form. This explains the pronounced gains in accuracy-based components (pronunciation, grammar). The non-significant difference in comprehension gains, as presented neutrally in the Results, is logically revealing. Comprehension is primarily an input-processing skill, which likely benefited similarly from the general exposure to English and task completion in both methodological conditions. CLL's unique value, therefore, lies in its powerful, affectively-enabled engine for improving productive linguistic output and automaticity.

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Robustness, Specificity, and Pedagogical Implications

The robustness checks affirm the reliability of the main effect. The multilevel model confirmed that the minimal class-level clustering ($ICC = .07$) did not distort the result. Importantly, the sensitivity analysis demonstrated that the core CLL procedures—not the introductory mindfulness practices—were responsible for the effect, underscoring the pedagogical potency of its counseling-learning architecture.

These findings carry significant implications for EFL pedagogy, particularly in contexts where speaking anxiety is prevalent. They provide empirical justification for teachers to adopt CLL's core principles: establishing a counselor-like facilitative role, structuring activities that generate and collaboratively analyze student language, and intentionally building a non-threatening classroom community (Karakuş, 2025). For curriculum designers, this study argues for the inclusion of humanistic, learner-centered methodologies alongside more structural approaches, especially for speaking skill development.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of intact classes, despite statistical controls (ICC and multilevel modeling), limits random assignment at the individual student level, potentially introducing selection bias. Second, the intervention duration was relatively short (six meetings, each 4×45 minutes); therefore, the long-term retention of speaking gains and sustained anxiety reduction remains unknown. Third, the research was conducted in a single educational context (one junior high school in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia), which may limit generalizability to other cultural and institutional settings. Fourth, the additional five-minute mindfulness activity in the CLL group, while shown via sensitivity analysis to be non-central to the main effect, nevertheless represents a deviation from pure CLL protocol. Finally, the study did not include a delayed post-test, so the durability of the observed effects cannot be assessed.



Future Research Directions

Building on the limitations above, future research should pursue the following avenues: (1) replication using randomized controlled trials with individual-level random assignment; (2) longitudinal designs incorporating delayed post-tests (e.g., three or six months after intervention) to examine retention of speaking gains and anxiety reduction; (3) cross-contextual replication studies in diverse geographical and institutional settings (urban vs. rural, public vs. private schools); (4) comparative investigations isolating the specific contributions of CLL's core techniques (e.g., recording vs. transcription vs. reflective listening); (5) integration of CLL's collaborative reflection phases with digital language learning tools (e.g., AI-mediated peer feedback); and (6) exploration of differential effects of CLL across proficiency levels (beginner vs. intermediate vs. advanced learners).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study moves beyond merely affirming CLL's utility to dissecting its mechanisms of success. It demonstrates that CLL is a potent, evidence-based approach that systematically integrates affective and cognitive scaffolding. By effectively reducing anxiety and channeling that psychological safety into structured, collaborative linguistic reflection, CLL fosters an environment where adolescent learners not only improve their speaking proficiency more rapidly but also develop a more resilient and positive disposition towards language learning itself. This research underscores that in the realm of language education, methodologies that attend to the learner's psychological landscape are not merely complementary but can be fundamentally more powerful for skill development.

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