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FROM HESITATION TO ARTICULATION: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EPROS IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study evaluated the efficacy of the English Proficiency of Speaking (EPROS) program in enhancing English speaking skills among Malaysian students. EPROS is an innovative conference-style event featuring eight interactive booths each targeting key components of speaking proficiency, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and overcoming inhibition. The program integrated game-based learning and a reward system to increase engagement and motivation. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative assessments of speaking proficiency with qualitative feedback from participants and facilitators. The results indicated that EPROS significantly improved students' confidence, fluency, and overall speaking competence. The findings suggest that EPROS offers an effective and engaging platform for developing English speaking skills, addressing both linguistic and psychological barriers. Future research should explore the long-term impact of EPROS and its potential scalability in various educational contexts.

Keywords: EPROS, English speaking skills, speaking symposium

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Introduction

English, as a second language (L2) in Malaysia, has been an integral part of the educational system due to the country's colonial history and ongoing global interactions. However, despite its compulsory inclusion in the curriculum, many Malaysian students struggle with English speaking proficiency. The legacy of the British colonization has established English as a crucial language in Malaysia, both in education and business. However, the transition from English to Malay as the medium of instruction in schools after independence has led to challenges in maintaining English proficiency. The shift resulted in a reduced emphasis on English communication skills, particularly speaking, which remains a significant challenge for students today (Azlina & Kashinathan, 2021). There are several factors that contribute to the low proficiency of the English-speaking skills.

Firstly, it is without a doubt that anxiety is a major barrier to effective language learning, particularly in speaking. Studies have shown that students with high levels of anxiety tend to perform poorly in oral tasks. In Malaysia, the fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed can prevent students from practicing their speaking skills. This anxiety often stems from a lack of confidence, which is exacerbated by limited exposure to English in daily life (Juhana, 2023). To add to that a restricted vocabulary is another critical factor that hinders students from speaking fluently. When students do not have a sufficient range of words to express their thoughts, they struggle to engage in meaningful conversations (Asnawi et al., 2018). This limitation is often due to a lack of practice and exposure to English outside the classroom, where the language of communication is predominantly Malay (Rahman et al., 2017).

Secondly, Malaysia's education system has traditionally been exam-oriented, with a stronger emphasis on reading and writing rather than listening and speaking. This focus has led to students being more concerned with passing exams than developing practical language skills (Farhana Yasmin et al., 2023). Consequently, while they may excel in written English, their speaking skills often remain underdeveloped. Effective language learning requires active participation and interaction in the classroom. However, in many Malaysian schools, English lessons are still teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for students to practice speaking (Azlina & Kashinathan, 2021). The lack of interactive activities that encourage speaking hinders students from developing the confidence and fluency needed to communicate effectively in English.

Last but not least, it is undeniable that Malaysia is a multicultural country, and each race has their specific language that they have (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2002), because of that, some communities have a preference for using the national language, Malay, or other local dialects, which limits the opportunities for students to practice speaking English. Additionally, the lack of a supportive environment that encourages the use of English in everyday situations contributes to students' low proficiency in speaking (Abu Bakar et al., 2021).

Improving English speaking proficiency among Malaysian students requires addressing these key factors; reducing anxiety, expanding vocabulary, shifting focus from exam-oriented practices, promoting interactive classroom activities, and creating a supportive cultural and environmental context. By tackling these issues, the education system can better equip students with the necessary skills to communicate effectively in English, both locally and globally. However, there are several initiatives that have already been taken in order to curb the low proficiency in the English-speaking skills.

To address the declining standards of English, the Malaysian government established the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) in 2013, which introduced the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into the country's education system. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is crucial for improving English speaking skills as it provides a clear and structured approach to language learning. By categorizing proficiency into six distinct levels (A1 to C2), CEFR offers learners a roadmap for progression, enabling them to set realistic goals and track their improvement. It outlines specific competencies required at each level, allowing for targeted practice and development. Additionally, CEFR facilitates effective assessment through self-assessment grids and standardized feedback, ensuring learners can identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The framework's emphasis on practical communication skills and real-life scenarios helps learners apply their language abilities effectively, while its clear benchmarks and incremental goals enhance motivation and build confidence.

Other than that, Malaysian education also put an emphasis on encouraging the students to participate in various creative public speaking competition such as debate, mock united nations, storytelling and even public speaking itself. This especially plays a pivotal part in providing a practical, engaging platform for students to improve their language skills. From expanding their vocabulary to learning the art of persuasion, students enhance their command of language in a lively, interactive way. This will not only aid them in their academic journey but also in their future professional lives.

Despite the existence of various initiatives, full participation and the complete benefits they offer are not always guaranteed. This is where EPROS comes in. EPROS is designed as a dynamic, conference-like event featuring eight booths, each focusing on different aspects of English-speaking skills (Brown, 2004; Fitriani, 2015). At each booth, participants engage with English-speaking skills through interactive, enjoyable activities rather than traditional methods, and they also have the opportunity to play games. Building on Sigalingging et al. (2023) research, which highlights that rewards can boost motivation and enthusiasm for learning, EPROS incorporates a reward system. Participants who complete all the activities at the booths will receive rewards that not only enhance their motivation but also encourage their full participation. This approach aims to illuminate the teaching of English-speaking skills and provide Malaysian students with a comfortable and engaging platform to practice English.

EPROS, stands for English Proficiency of Speaking in which this product's sole function is to improve English Speaking Skills. In this program, there will be 8 booths that will cover all the components of English-speaking skills, which are Inhibition, Nothing to Say, Low Participation, Mother Tongue Use, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Grammar and an open-mic stage. EPROS' mission is to provide affordable and accessible English language learning opportunities to students, particularly those from underserved communities or non-native English speakers. The goal is to empower them with the skills needed for better educational and career prospects.

Based on our research and the feedback that we received from experts and the public, we can conclude that our product, EPROS, is able to fulfill its main objective which is to help and encourage the student to speak English comfortably and confidently in a fun and effective way. Furthermore, by participating in this program, the students not only are able to gain knowledge for

themselves, but they are also able to help others improve their speaking skills. Therefore, we hope we are able to shed light on the new teaching and learning process in order to effectively and efficiently improve English Speaking Skills.

Literature Review

Improving English speaking skills is a key goal for many learners around the world. Speaking is the most expedient form of communication, and therefore the primary communication method (Sudarmo, 2021). However, traditional methods of language instruction often fall short, failing to engage students or provide meaningful practice. Recently, innovative approaches like specialized language programs, game-based learning (GBL), and conferences have emerged as promising alternatives. This literature review takes a closer look at these methods, language development programs, GBL, and conferences and explores their effectiveness in enhancing English speaking skills. We'll delve into how these approaches impact learner engagement, speaking proficiency, and motivation, while also identifying where more research is needed to fully understand their potential.

Theoretical Foundations

Language Development Programs

Language development programs are built on the idea of learning through direct experience and reflection, a concept championed by Kolb (1984). His experiential learning theory suggests that the best learning experience happens when people engage actively with the material and reflect on their experiences. These programs often include hands-on activities like role-plays and group discussions, which fit well with Kolb's approach. Additionally, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) supports these programs by emphasizing that social interaction and collaboration are essential for effective language learning. Vygotsky believed that learners achieve the best results when they engage in meaningful interactions with others.

Game-Based Learning (GBL)

Game-based learning taps into several educational theories that highlight its effectiveness. Bailey & Fahad (2021) suggest that learners acquire language best when exposed to input that is just beyond their current level of proficiency. Many games use this principle by gradually increasing in difficulty, helping learners build their skills step by step. Gee (2003) ideas on situated learning also support GBL, arguing that games create immersive environments where language use is contextualized. This means learners can practice speaking in simulated real-world scenarios, making the learning process more relevant and engaging.

Conferences

Conferences offer a unique educational setting by combining social learning with networking opportunities. They provide a platform for learners to interact with experts and peers, fostering dynamic language practice. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is again relevant here, as conferences

create spaces where learners can practice language in interactive and supportive environments. This social interaction is crucial for developing language skills effectively.

Impact on English Speaking Skills

Language Development Programs

Research shows that language development programs can significantly improve speaking skills. Murphy and Sedivy (2024) found that intensive language programs, with their focus on activities like public speaking and group discussions, helped participants make notable gains in speaking proficiency. These programs combine practical exercises with theoretical knowledge, creating a well-rounded learning experience. Similarly, Kang (2022) observed that participants in language learning conferences experienced improved fluency and confidence, thanks to interactive workshops and networking opportunities.

Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning has also proven to be effective in boosting English speaking skills. Bakan et al. (2022) found that online role-playing games provided valuable contexts for conversational practice, leading to significant improvements in spoken English proficiency. The interactive nature of these games allows learners to engage in realistic dialogue, which enhances their speaking skills. Hung et al. (2018) found that mobile games improved vocabulary and grammar retention, which supports better speaking abilities. However, Chand (2021) pointed out that while GBL excels in areas like vocabulary and pronunciation, it may fall short in developing more advanced speaking skills, such as nuanced conversation.

Conferences

Conferences are effective in creating interactive environments that boost speaking skills. Collie and Martin (2019) found that learners who attended language conferences reported higher levels of motivation and engagement compared to those in traditional classes. The chance to interact with experts and peers in these dynamic settings enhances learners' speaking proficiency and fosters a deeper connection with the language.

Engagement and Motivation

Language Development Programs

Language development programs often excel in keeping learners engaged through interactive and practical activities. Topushipambao (2022) found that learners in these programs were more motivated and engaged compared to those using traditional methods. The hands-on, practical approach of these programs makes learning more stimulating and enjoyable.

Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning naturally boosts motivation by offering engaging and fun activities. Khiem (2023) highlighted that games increase intrinsic motivation, encouraging learners to continue practicing their speaking skills outside of formal educational settings. This intrinsic motivation is vital for long-term language development, as it drives learners to keep improving their skills beyond structured lessons.

Conferences

Conferences play a significant role in motivating learners by providing interactive and engaging experiences. Collie and Martin (2019) noted that the dynamic format of conferences and the opportunity to interact with experts and peers significantly enhance learners' motivation and engagement. This increased motivation helps learners remain committed to their language learning goals.

Challenges and Limitations

Language Development Programs

Language development programs face challenges such as variability in quality and potential lack of focus. Norris and Ortega (2000) noted that the success of these programs is heavily dependent on their design and content. Additionally, the cost and accessibility of high-quality programs can be barriers for some learners, limiting their availability and impact.

Game-Based Learning

Creating high-quality educational games requires significant resources and expertise, which can be a limitation. Furthermore, while GBL is effective for certain skills, it may not address all aspects of language learning, such as advanced grammar and writing skills (Khiem, 2024). Therefore, GBL should be used alongside other instructional methods to ensure comprehensive language development.

Conferences

Conferences may also face challenges related to cost and accessibility. High-quality conferences often require significant financial investment, which may not be feasible for all learners. Additionally, the effectiveness of conferences can vary based on their structure and the level of engagement they offer, making it essential to carefully design and select conferences to maximize their benefits.

Gaps in Literature

Despite a growing body of research on these interventions, several gaps remain. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes, with limited exploration of the long-term effects on speaking proficiency. More research is needed to understand how these methods impact language skills over time and to

investigate their effectiveness across different learner demographics. Hence, EPROS is created as a tool to increase participants' English language speaking skills proficiency.

Materials and Methods

EPROS

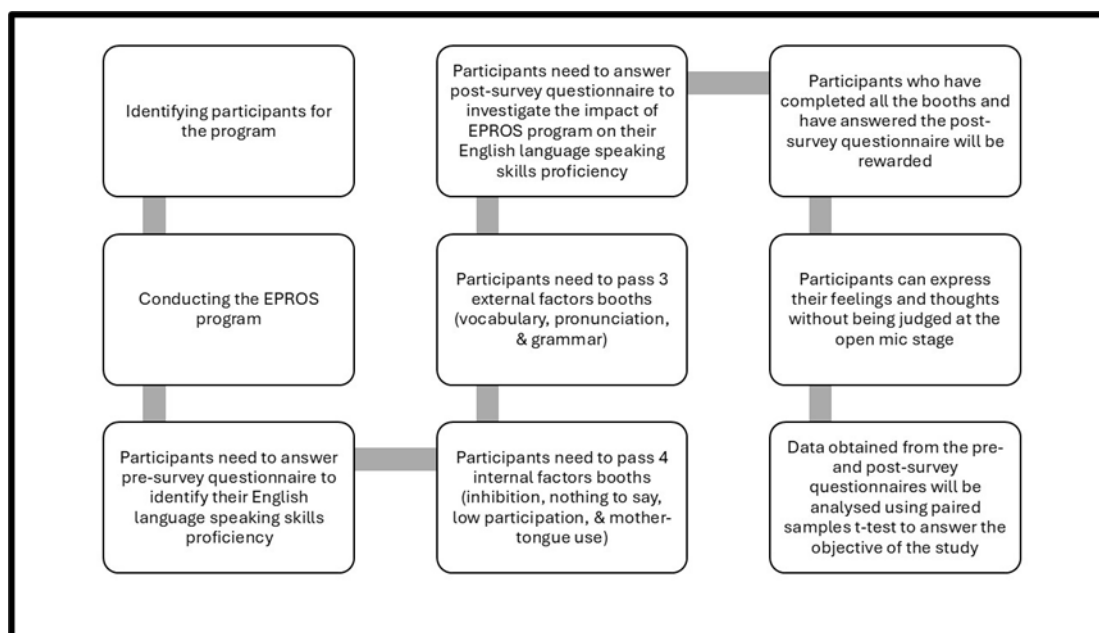
EPROS 2024 is a program designed to improve English speaking abilities, informed by existing research (e.g., Brown, 2004; Fitirani, 2015; Ur, 1996). This initiative was conceived in response to a perceived gap in current pedagogical practices, which often underemphasize oral communication skills. EPROS 2024 represents a pioneering effort to prioritize intrinsic factors, such as the use of the first language and individual confidence, prior to focusing on English-specific elements like grammar and vocabulary. EPROS, a pedagogical initiative designed to enhance the English-speaking abilities of English language learners, offers multifaceted benefits to both societal and industrial sectors. For students, EPROS provides a conducive environment for cultivating fluency and confidence in English communication through engaging and effective pedagogical strategies. Moreover, students can not only acquire personal linguistic proficiency but also contribute to the development of their peers' communication skills. EPROS serves as a valuable resource for educators seeking to augment their students' English-speaking abilities. Additionally, EPROS offers parents a platform to invest in their children's linguistic development by providing opportunities to improve their English-speaking skills.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study, adapted from Apple (2011), assessed the Big Five personality traits and foreign language speaking confidence among Malaysian students. Both the pre-survey and post-survey questionnaires consisted of four sections (32 questions and 42 questions respectively): A: Speaking Anxiety; B: Language Speaking Self-Competence; C: Desire to Speak English; and D: Past English Classroom Experiences. These sections remained consistent across both surveys to facilitate a direct comparison of participants' responses. The post-survey additionally included a fifth section, E: Feedback of the EPROS Program, to gather participants' insights on the program's impact. This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough evaluation of the program's effectiveness in enhancing participants' English language speaking skills.

Research Procedure

Figure 1
Research Procedure



Research analysis

A paired-samples t-test was employed to analyse the significant difference in participants' English language speaking skills before and after their involvement in the EPROS program. Given the identical questions across the four sections of the pre- and post-survey questionnaires, the paired-samples t-test was utilized to investigate the significant variation within each section. This analysis aimed to elucidate the implications of the EPROS program on participants' enhanced confidence and knowledge in English language speaking skills. Regarding Section E of the post-survey questionnaire, the mean scores of the questions were calculated to ascertain the effects of the EPROS program on participants' English language speaking proficiency.

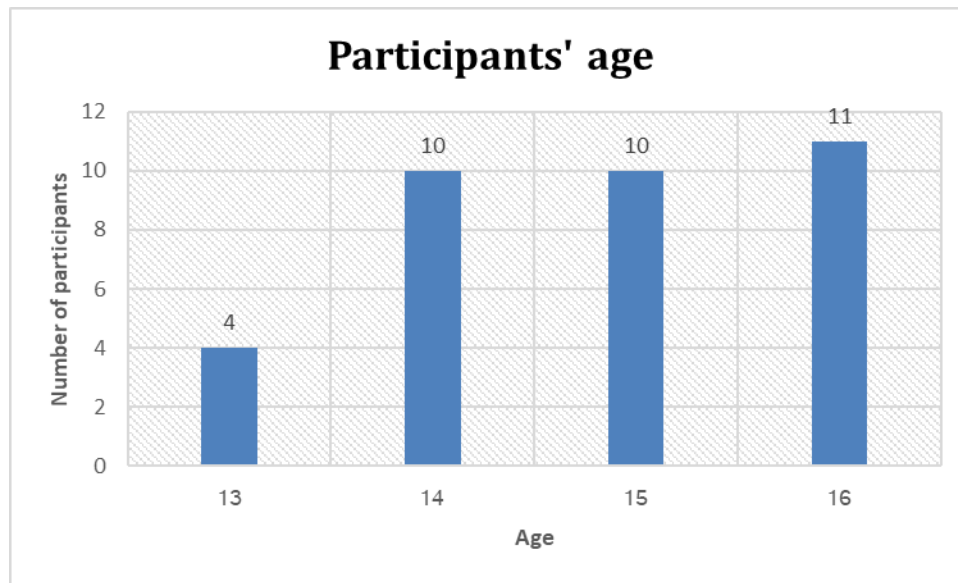
Result and Discussion

A quantitative research design was adopted for this study, incorporating pre- and post-survey questionnaires to address the stated objectives. This section explains the demographic findings and analyse the results from each section of the questionnaire, identifying significant differences in the data obtained.

1. Demographic data

The participants in this study ranged in age from 13 to 16 years old, with 4 aged 13, 10 aged 14, 10 aged 15, and 11 aged 16. Fifth-grade students were not included due to their involvement in SPM preparation programs. All participants were rural residents with limited English proficiency.

Figure 2
Demographic data (Age)



2. A: Speaking Anxiety

This section consists of 10 statements about expressing feelings of anxiety and self-doubt consistently related to speaking English in various social contexts. The individual seems to experience a significant amount of stress when speaking in front of a group, speaking in pairs, and expressing opinions. In essence, individuals experience significant anxiety related to their English language skills and the fear of negative social evaluation.

Table 1
Paired samples t-test for Section A

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre - Post	15.46	6.63	1.12	13.18	17.74	13.78	34	<.001

The results indicated a significant decrease in anxiety following the EPROS program (M = 17.26, SD = 3.04) compared to pre-survey questionnaire (M = 32.71, SD = 6.75). A paired samples t-test confirmed this finding, $t(34) = 13.78, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [13.18, 17.74]$. As the significant value is less than alpha, the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings provide compelling evidence that the EPROS program was effective in significantly reducing participants' anxiety about speaking English.

3. B: Language Speaking Self-Competence

This section consists of 8 statements that are about the capacity of an individual who can demonstrate a strong proficiency English communication across a variety of contexts (i.e., engage in everyday conversations, participate in academic settings, interact with native speakers, and provide information). In short, it is hoped that after joining EPROS program, the individual has a

solid foundation in English and can effectively communicate in various social and academic situations.

Table 2
Paired samples t-test for Section B

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre - Post	-634	5.03	.85	-8.07	-4.61	-7.45	34	<.001

The majority of students reported a significant increase in confidence in speaking English after participating in the EPROS program (M = 34.03, SD = 2.95) compared to pre-program levels (M = 27.69, SD = 5.83). A paired samples t-test revealed a significant difference, $t(34) = -7.45$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-8.07, -4.61], indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings provide compelling evidence that the EPROS program was highly effective in enhancing students' confidence in using English.

4. C: Desire to Speak English

This section included of 8 statements designed to assess participants' aspirations for improving their English language skills and utilizing them effectively in various contexts. Participants expressed a strong desire to engage in social interactions, enhance their communication skills, immerse themselves in English-speaking cultures, and achieve academic success through English language proficiency. From an academic standpoint, the EPROS program was designed to foster increased motivation among students to develop their English language skills.

Table 3
Paired samples t-test for Section C

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre - Post	-4.00	6.00	1.02	-6.06	-1.94	-3.94	34	<.001

The majority of students reported a significant increase in their motivation to speak English after participating in the EPROS program (M = 36.23, SD = 3.11) compared to pre-survey questionnaire (M = 32.23, SD = 6.54). A paired samples t-test revealed a significant difference, $t(34) = -3.94$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-6.06, -1.94], indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings provide compelling evidence that the EPROS program was highly effective in enhancing students' motivation and comfort level in speaking English.

5. D: Past English Classroom Experiences

There are 6 statements covered in this section. The aim to investigate this section is to investigate whether individuals have had positive experiences in their English language learning, particularly regarding classroom environment and opportunities for interaction.

Table 4
Paired samples *t*-test for Section D

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre - Post	-4.14	4.26	.72	-5.61	-2.68	-5.75	34	<.001

The results indicated a notable increase in both enjoyment and motivation ($M = 26.26$, $SD = 2.23$) compared to the pre-survey questionnaire ($M = 22.11$, $SD = 4.45$) following program participation. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between pre- and post-program scores, $t(34) = -5.75$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-5.61, -2.68], supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings strongly suggest that after joining EPROS program, individuals express a sense of comfort and motivation in their English language classes, suggesting a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and language use.

6. E: Feedback on the EPROS Program

This section comprises of 10 statements to investigate the effectiveness of EPROS program in enhancing participants' English language skills which include the key areas of improvements in vocabulary, grammar, versatility, fluency, confidence, public speaking, and effective teaching.

Table 5
Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Section E

Statements	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Sum
	Valid	Missing			
EPROS has helped me learn strategies of increasing my vocabulary reservoir.	35	0	4.54	.505	159
EPROS offered comprehensive revision of the English grammar I learned in school.	35	0	4.51	.507	158
EPROS helped me acquire the skills of speaking English language for various purposes.	35	0	4.54	.505	159
EPROS has improved my English language speaking skills.	35	0	4.51	.507	158
EPROS has developed my English speaking skills and increasing my confidence to speak in English language.	35	0	4.69	.471	164
EPROS has improved my skills of speaking in front of an audience.	35	0	4.46	.505	156
The methods used for each booth were effective.	35	0	4.43	.588	155
EPROS did not improve my English speaking proficiency skills.	35	0	1.40	.497	49
My English speaking skills are good and EPROS made no addition.	35	0	1.49	.507	52

EPROS has enhanced my comfortability to speak in English language.	35	0	4.51	.507	158
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The findings of this study demonstrate the efficacy of the EPROS program in providing a comprehensive and effective approach to English language acquisition. The program's seven-step framework, requiring participants to address internal factors prior to external components, aligns with existing research (Brown, 2004; Fitirani, 2005; Ur, 1996). This suggests that overcoming internal challenges, such as anxiety, confidence, and fear of judgment, is a crucial prerequisite for mastering the technical aspects of English language proficiency. By addressing these internal factors, individuals can significantly enhance their capacity to improve their English-speaking skills and sustain long-term motivation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the EPROS programme significantly enhances English-speaking skills among Malaysian students by effectively addressing both linguistic challenges and psychological barriers. The program's interactive, game-based structure fosters vocabulary development, improves pronunciation, and enhances grammatical accuracy while reducing anxiety that often hinders language learning. The participants experienced increased confidence and fluency, confirming that EPROS provides a dynamic and supportive environment for mastering spoken English. Although these results are promising, future research should focus on several key areas. Further studies are required to assess the sustained effect of EPROS on speaking proficiency over time. Additionally, exploring a program's adaptability to different educational contexts and diverse learner groups could offer insights into its broader applicability and scalability. Investigating the integration of EPROS with other language-learning strategies may also enhance its effectiveness. By addressing these areas, future research can further validate and expand upon the success of the EPROS programme, contributing to the development of innovative approaches in language education.

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