



EFL Students' Experience in a Language Immersion Program: A Diary Study

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Abstract

This study will seek to find out the effectiveness of the immersive English environment in the Bidan Dormitory in developing the language and speaking confidence of EFL learners. In this research study, qualitative data collection methods were employed through diary entries of the students, observation, and interviews with the camp supervisor. The results of the study showed that continuous exposure to English, peer interaction, and structured activities facilitated linguistic proficiency and confidence. At first, the students were battling with fear, embarrassment, and a limited vocabulary due to the strict English-only rule; however, their skills improved significantly through consistent practice supported by operant conditioning principles of rewards and penalties. According to Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory, peer interaction and supportive community created a collaborative learning atmosphere, while some structured activities such as Morning Class and Camp Night Party aligned with Long's Interaction Hypothesis, offering active participation opportunities despite additional support needs for lower-achieving students. This immersive environment integrates the behaviorist, interactionist, and constructivist approaches to language learning so well that it highlights a number of tailored interventions, such as study clubs and personalized mentoring, that may be required to support less confident learners. The paper also confirms the potential of an immersive setting in second language acquisition and recommends that future research investigate how such settings might respond to the diverse needs of learners.

Keywords: *Behaviorism, Constructivism, Interactionism, Language Immersion, Second Language Acquisition*

Introduction

English fluency is essential for global communication, yet second language acquisition (SLA) remains challenging due to limited exposure (Kim, 2023). Immersion programs in language-rich environments effectively improve proficiency (Porter & Castillo, 2023). Schools and hostels with English-only policies, such as Kampung Inggris, enhance fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Pratiwi, 2023; Supriyono et al. 2022).

This study explores immersion-based SLA through three core theories: Skinner's Behaviorism, reinforcing habits via praise and correction (Addaeroby & Febriani, 2024); Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, emphasizing peer collaboration (Negi, 2020); and Long's Interaction Hypothesis, focusing on negotiation and feedback (Zhang et al., 2023). At Bidan Dormitory, students practice English daily through structured interactions and reinforcement techniques (Hamzah et al., 2023).

While immersion is effective for SLA (Wilson, 2022; Mas'ud et al., 2020), most studies focus on classrooms, leaving dormitory-based learning underexplored. This study examines how continuous language use in residential settings influences fluency and confidence through diaries, observations, and interviews.

By shifting focus from classroom immersion to dormitory settings, this research highlights the strengths and challenges of real-life SLA experiences, addressing a critical gap in existing literature.

To address the identified research gap, this study investigates the following questions:

1. How does the dormitory-based immersive environment influence EFL students' language acquisition and speaking confidence?
2. What challenges and benefits do students experience in a dormitory immersion program?
3. How do behaviorist reinforcement strategies, social interaction, and peer feedback contribute to learners' language development?

Method

Research Design

This qualitative study, adapted from Yadav (2022), explores students' Second Language Acquisition (SLA) experiences at Bidan Dormitory. Using an exploratory approach, it examines interactions, reflections, and socialization in an immersive environment.

Participants and Sampling Method

Six participants were randomly selected from 24 students enrolled in the Language Center's English course. A simple random sampling method (Aityan, 2022) ensured equal selection probability through an online name generator. Given the researcher's dual role as a teacher and former tutor, steps were taken to maintain objectivity. Over two weeks, participants recorded daily diaries documenting their learning experiences.

Data Collection Techniques

Diaries

Participants kept structured diaries (Alamri, 2019) for two weeks, limited to 50 words per entry (Rhubido et al., 2021). Themes included first impressions (Lee et al., 2021), daily communication (Chew & Cerbin, 2021), confidence milestones (Giannakos et al., 2020), and learning goals (Skinner et al. 2022).

Field Observations

Unstructured observations examined student interactions, English usage, and peer reinforcement. Findings align with Duncan et al. (2020), emphasizing social learning in language acquisition

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with students and the camp supervisor explored immersion experiences, program structure, and effectiveness (Karatsareas, 2022).

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in participants' experiences (Khokhar et al., 2020). This involved coding diaries, interview transcripts, and observation notes, grouping similar codes into themes, and comparing findings across data sources for consistency. Key themes included language confidence, skill development, and peer support (Baker, 2023). To ensure reliability, the coding process was reviewed by the Camp Management Supervisor.

A comparative analysis across diaries, interviews, and observations helped identify common challenges and successes in the immersion environment. Triangulation further ensured objectivity and credibility by cross-referencing diary data with supervisor interviews and observations.

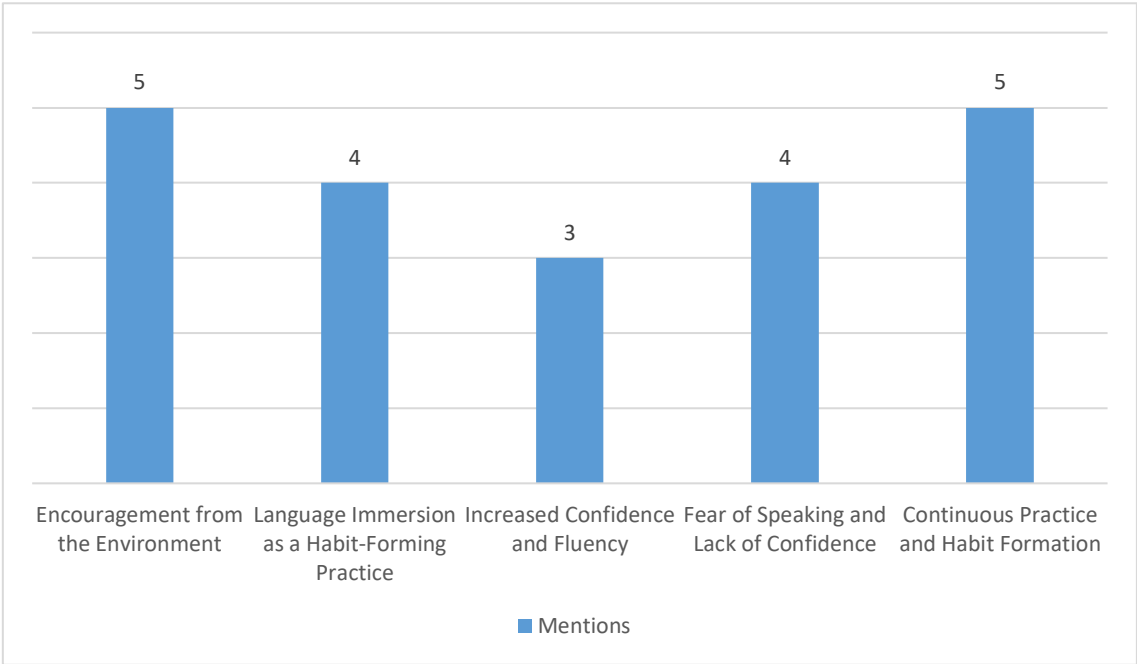
Ethical Considerations

This study follows ethical research guidelines, with written consent obtained from participants, camp tutors, and camp management. All participant details have been anonymized for academic purposes, and they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Ethical measures were upheld to ensure participant rights and research integrity.

Results

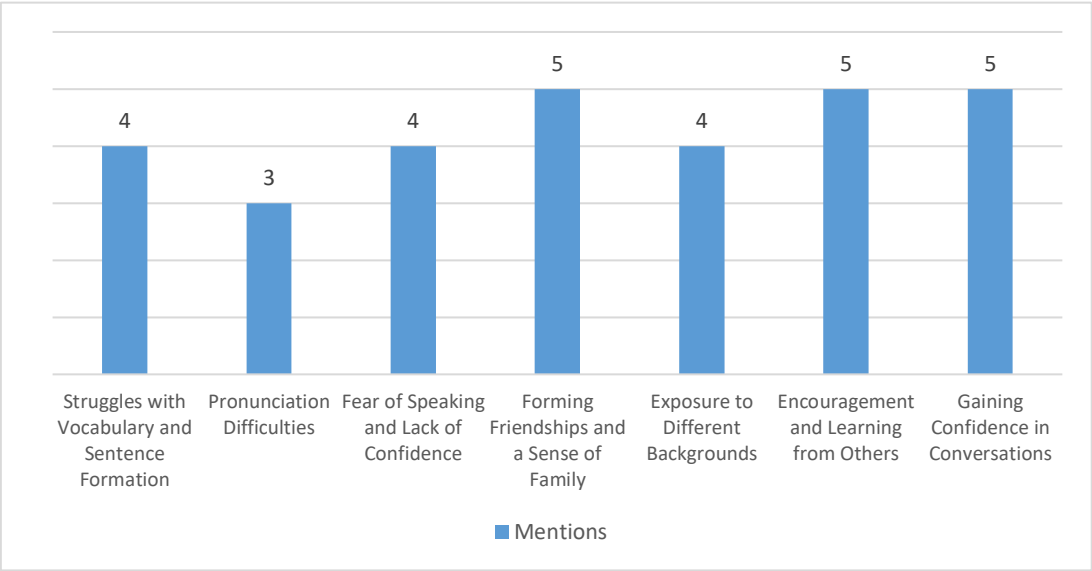
Students' Diaries

Table 1. Effect of Immersive Dormitory Environment on Language Acquisition



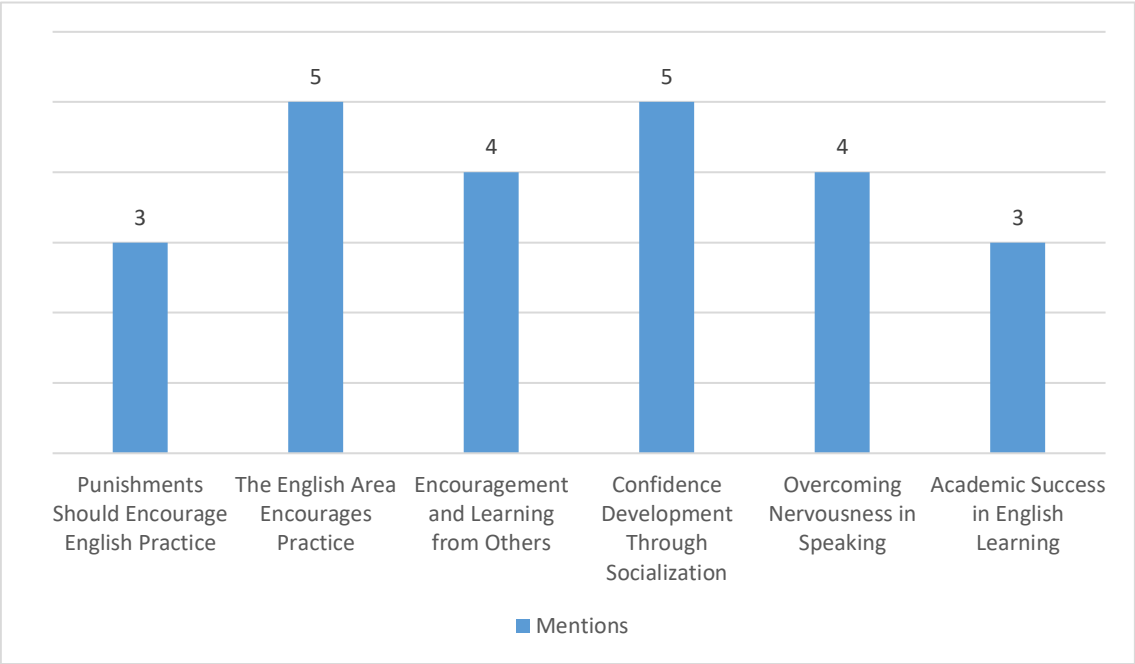
The English Zone at Bidan Dormitory fosters second language learning through consistent practice, peer interaction, and cultural exposure. While adapting to the English-only rule was initially challenging, students later recognized its benefits. Rifai, for instance, expressed a desire to return due to its effectiveness. Most participants found the program meaningful, emphasizing the value of a supportive environment.

Table 2. Challenges and Benefits of Dormitory Immersion Program



The dormitory setting helps students form language habits, as seen in Amy’s goal of mastering grammar and fluency. However, lack of confidence remains a challenge, with some feeling discouraged by fines and punishments. While reinforcement strategies encourage English use, excessive penalties sometimes reduce motivation instead of promoting learning.

Table 3. Role of Reinforcement, Social Interaction, and Peer Feedback



Despite initial struggles, students gain confidence and fluency through continuous exposure. Jeremy felt a sense of achievement when communicating with foreigners, while Risky overcame nervousness with regular practice. Peer support plays a crucial role, with many valuing encouragement and feedback. Some suggest shifting punishments toward skill-building rather than fines.

To enhance the program, alternative reinforcement methods like vocabulary memorization, confidence-building activities, and flexible rules could improve the learning experience. Ultimately, the dormitory's immersive setting fosters fluency and long-term success.

Interview with the supervisor

"English Area ini adalah sebagai wadah member untuk mengembangkan, meningkatkan Bahasa Inggris mereka, tapi di sisi lain juga itu menjadi sebuah forum bagi si member untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan dirinya."

The English Area provides students with a space to develop their English skills and build confidence.

"Kalau misalkan kita hanya patuhkan, atau hanya berharap, dengan materi pembelajaran yang kelas aja, maka itu kurang efektif atau kurang mendukung."

According to the supervisor, classroom learning alone is insufficient; students need active participation in the immersive environment to enhance fluency.

"Enggak cukup hanya memaksa diri untuk melaksanakan, atau mempraktekan Bahasa Inggris itu, tapi dia juga butuh partner untuk melaksanakannya."

While the dormitory offers opportunities, students must take the initiative to engage.

"Tidak hanya tutor camp yang berkomitmen, tapi membernya juga yang berkomitmen."

Peer interaction is crucial, as learners need partners to practice with. However, some feel insecure about their proficiency and avoid speaking. Lack of structured support and fear of mistakes further limit participation. Reinforcement strategies and peer encouragement are essential for improving engagement. Strengthening these aspects will make English a natural communication tool and create a more effective learning environment.

Observation

The English Area program at Bidan Dormitory creates an immersive learning environment through structured activities, peer interactions, and confidence-building exercises. Observations over two weeks focused on student participation, interaction, and program effectiveness. Students engage in Morning and Evening

Classes, vocabulary discussions, and Thursday Gatherings. A strict English-only policy with monetary penalties promotes consistent language use. While confident students participate actively, less proficient learners struggle, highlighting the need for additional support. Immersive exposure fosters regular practice, gradually improving speaking confidence.

Despite its benefits, lower-level and introverted students engage less, limiting progress. However, social events like drama competitions encourage teamwork and enhance grammar, pronunciation, and confidence. Feedback sessions create a supportive atmosphere, reducing fear of judgment and encouraging participation. Reinforcement strategies play a key role, with confident students influencing peers and penalties enforcing English use. Some suggest alternatives, like vocabulary memorization instead of fines, to boost engagement. Peer feedback in discussions aids learning, but hesitant students need more encouragement.

To enhance the program, introducing study clubs and targeted assignments could help struggling students integrate better. Confidence-building exercises should be incorporated to create a more inclusive environment, ensuring all students benefit from immersion.

Discussion

The Influence of the Dormitory-Based Immersive Environment on Language Acquisition and Speaking Confidence

Reinforcement Strategies and Their Effectiveness

The immersive environment enforces English use, aligning with Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which emphasizes learning through interaction and scaffolding (Negi, 2020).

“...there was a rule of using the language full 24 hours a day and before that I didn't know about vocabulary and I always tried and thank God I can speak English...”

Many students initially struggle with the English-only policy but acknowledge its effectiveness in maintaining consistent practice.

"English Area itu tidak bisa berjalan dimulai dari tengah-tengah. Jadi memang harus didisiplinkan dari awal ketika mereka datang ke sini."

The dormitory's SPV stresses the importance of enforcing discipline from the start, ensuring that students adapt early to the immersion setting.

"Speaking 24-hour English was both fun and hard. It was fun because I was able to practice speaking and build my confidence"

In this context, dormitory-based English immersion serves as a structured approach to language acquisition, integrating reinforcement, social interaction, and continuous feedback. This reflects the principles of Behaviorism, as proposed by Skinner (Rahmah & Aly, 2023), which emphasize the role of reinforcement in developing consistent language habits.

"If getting punishment and we pay it, so when we improve? Most of all prefer to pay."

However, at Bidan Dormitory, punishment-based strategies, such as monetary fines, do not always encourage language practice, as some students view them as an easy way out.

"It's even better when the punishment is not money but the memorization of the vocab to train our brain."

Instead, alternative reinforcement strategies, such as vocabulary memorization, are suggested to be more effective in forming language habits through active recall.

"I realized that the people around me were so supportive that I became confident to speak English with them without any judgment."

Building on this, reinforcement strategies like peer feedback and role modeling by advanced students further support English use in informal settings, encouraging active participation. However, while punishment is intended as a deterrent, it does not always lead to habit formation. Observations reveal that confident students initiate conversations more frequently, whereas hesitant learners require additional encouragement to engage in meaningful practice. This highlights the need for structured peer support, where more proficient students assist others (Poehner & Lantolf, 2021).

Social Interaction and Confidence-Building in the Dormitory Setting

Social interaction plays a vital role in building students' speaking confidence, supporting Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which highlights negotiation of meaning and feedback as crucial to language learning (Owusu et al., 2022).

"Dan tidak hanya didisiplinkan saja, tapi juga berkomitmen bersama. Jadi tidak hanya tutor camp yang berkomitmen, tapi membernya juga yang berkomitmen."

Peer encouragement enhances fluency, and the SPV emphasizes that both tutors and students must commit to maintaining English use.

"At the time I was afraid to try because I was embarrassed, but now I'm more confident,"

Confidence-building emerges as a key outcome, with students overcoming initial nervousness through continuous exposure, as illustrated by Amy's realization of her gradual improvement. However, some students did not achieve the same results. Rifai shared,

"...But I kept trying even though it wasn't clear and even my friends didn't understand. But I don't care about self-confidence. In fact, I prefer to remain silent rather than speak..."

Additionally, tailored interventions based on Social Constructivism and the Interaction Hypothesis should ensure that all students, regardless of confidence level, benefit from the immersive environment. By optimizing reinforcement and interaction strategies, the dormitory program can further enhance language acquisition and student success.

Challenges and Benefits of a Dormitory Immersion Program

The findings illustrate both the challenges and benefits of the dormitory-based English immersion program. While the immersive environment encourages language development, it also presents significant hurdles that impact students differently.

Struggles with Vocabulary and Pronunciation

Behaviorists argue that language acquisition occurs through reinforcement and repetition (Rahmah & Aly, 2023), but many learners struggle with vocabulary and sentence formation in dormitories. Nabil shared,

"...my difficulty was that I was confused about having to string words because I didn't know much vocab"

Similarly, pronunciation difficulties were frequently mentioned, with Aldo expressing,

"...And I keep trying even though I don't know how to pronounce it I'm still trying to communicate in English and I think it's very difficult to pronounce because my tongue isn't used to it."

This suggests that while immersion encourages communication, the lack of corrective feedback can hinder pronunciation development, potentially leading to the fossilization of errors. Without consistent reinforcement through correction, some errors may become habitual.

Insecurity and Limited Engagement

Social Constructivism emphasizes peer interaction in learning, but students' English proficiency insecurity hinders participation, leading to feelings of embarrassment and reluctance to use English. The SPV noted,

"Salah satunya adalah ketika member tidak berani atau merasa insecure dengan kemampuan yang dia miliki untuk mempraktekan English Area itu sendiri."

Fear of judgment limits English practice, weakening the program's impact. Introverts withdraw, reducing peer interaction and group projects. Lack of direct facilitator guidance also hinders impact (Dang, 2018). as The SPV stated in,

"Dan tidak adanya bantuan atau pendampingan secara langsung dari fasilitator kita, yaitu tutor camp... makanya English Area-nya tidak berjalan."

Natural Interaction and Social Learning

Dormitory environments foster natural interaction, collaborative learning, and friendships, aligning with Vygotsky's Social Constructivism and the Long's Interaction Hypothesis. This enhances students' language learning experiences. Amy shared,

"...now I'm more confident because here when we can't we're not judged by anyone. This is a very supportive environment for learning English."

Peer interactions and exposure to diverse backgrounds shape students' immersion experiences, scaffold learning, and broaden perspectives, aligning with Vygotsky's theory and prior linguistic experiences (Iren & Ирена, n.d.). As Aldo remarked,

"Then I learned a lot from them when I didn't understand grammar, I asked my friends and studying together made me understand it even better."

Peer Encouragement and Confidence Development

Peer encouragement and collaborative learning also play crucial roles in student progress, reinforcing Vygotsky's notion of social interaction in learning. Many participants emphasized that learning from others helped their development. Amy stated,

"...it makes me happy because the longer we turn into a family Here I am not afraid to speak English although it is wrong because we correct each other..."

The English Area program fosters natural interaction between students and tutors, promoting language growth and enhancing communication, thereby supporting Long's Interaction Hypothesis. As the SPV noted,

"English Area ini juga bisa meningkatkan interaksi antara satu member ke member yang lain ataupun juga ke tutor camp-nya tanpa itu dibuat-buat."

Moreover, students gradually gain confidence in conversations through continuous exposure and practice. Amy expressed,

"When I went to Bali last month, I also chatted a lot with tourists about our daily activities with each other, I was proud of myself because now I can speak English."

Students gain confidence in conversations through continuous exposure, practice, and an immersive environment. Events such as the Camp Night Party and drama competitions further enhance social interaction, encouraging teamwork and fostering friendships. However, personality differences and confidence barriers may hinder engagement.

Role of Reinforcement, Social Interaction, and Peer Feedback

Reinforcement

The dormitory-based English immersion program effectively enhances language learning through reinforcement, social interaction, and peer feedback, aligning with Behaviourism, Social Constructivism, and the Interaction Hypothesis. These elements shape students' experiences in language acquisition, yet challenges remain in optimizing their effectiveness.

"...thank God I can speak English but I can't speak it quickly and I think it is mandatory language regulations are good because they can become good habits."

According to Skinner's Behaviourism, reinforcement plays a key role in habit formation. Praise and punishments, such as monetary fines for using the native language, are used to encourage English use.

"If getting punishment and we pay it, so when we improve? Most of all prefer to pay."

However, students like Nabil find fines ineffective, preferring vocabulary memorization as a more meaningful reinforcement method. This highlights the need for strategies that directly contribute to language retention.

Social Constructivism and Peer Collaboration

" Speaking 24-hour English was both fun and hard. It was fun because I was able to practice speaking and build my confidence,"

Social interaction and collaboration, as emphasized by Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, enhance learning through peer engagement (Maflah Alharbi, 2023). While adapting to the English-only rule is initially challenging, Risky observed that continuous exposure improves communication skills.

"English Area itu tidak bisa berjalan dimulai dari tengah-tengah. Jadi memang harus didisiplinkan dari awal ketika mereka datang ke sini."

The SPV emphasized that strict early enforcement of English use is essential for long-term success. This peer-supported learning aligns with Long's Interaction Hypothesis, where students assist each other.

"Dan tidak hanya didisiplinkan saja, tapi juga berkomitmen bersama. Jadi tidak hanya tutor camp yang berkomitmen, tapi membernnya juga yang berkomitmen."

The SPV also stressed the need for a mutual commitment between students and tutors to sustain the immersion program, reinforcing the role of self-awareness and motivation in language development and students rely on peer interaction when tutors are unavailable, further demonstrating the dormitory's supportive learning environment.

"The first time I spoke English in Pare with various people, of course I felt nervous because I rarely do this, but day by day I started to get used to speaking English and it is a pleasant everyday life,"

Confidence-building is another crucial outcome of immersion. Many students initially struggle with nervousness but gain confidence through peer feedback and structured support. Rifai's experience illustrates that overcoming fear is essential for progress, while Nabil acknowledged that the program's reinforcement strategies extend beyond speaking fluency to academic success.

Implications for Language Learning and Policy

Structured immersion programs that integrate behaviorist reinforcement, social scaffolding, and interactionist principles effectively enhance language acquisition. These strategies can be applied beyond dormitories to classroom immersion and extracurricular programs to boost engagement and fluency.

To improve immersion-based learning, institutions should refine reinforcement methods. Instead of fines, strategies like peer accountability, vocabulary reinforcement, and task-based learning should be prioritized. Encouraging shared responsibility between students and instructors will strengthen immersion effectiveness, making the dormitory model adaptable to other educational settings.

Suggestion

To enhance the effectiveness of the English immersion program at Bidan Dormitory, several improvements can be made. First, individualized support, such as mentoring programs or small study groups, can help students with lower confidence or proficiency by providing targeted assistance for steady progress.

Diversifying the enforcement of the English-only policy can also make the program more engaging. Instead of monetary penalties, alternative methods like creative language tasks or vocabulary-building exercises can reinforce positive behavior without discouragement, aligning with operant conditioning principles.

Expanding structured activities, such as debate clubs, storytelling sessions, and interactive games, can accommodate different learning styles and encourage greater participation. Regular feedback sessions for both students and facilitators would also help identify challenges and refine the program based on participants' experiences.

Finally, integrating technology, such as language learning apps, video-based lessons, and virtual exchanges, can enrich the immersion environment and expose students to real-world English usage.

These improvements would make Bidan Dormitory a more inclusive, interactive, and supportive space, maximizing the benefits of English immersion for its residents.

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