
Exploring the role of English club for students speaking skills

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A B S T R A C T

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This study explores the role of English clubs in improving the speaking skills of junior high school students. By utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through observation and semi structured interviews with nine participants from a public junior high school in Bandung, Indonesia. The result showed that enrollment in the English club can improve students' confidence and speaking skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. The encouraging environment and engaging activities, such as public speaking, storytelling, and watching English movies, created a comfortable learning atmosphere. The teacher plays an important role providing constructive feedback, which motivates students to develop without fear of making mistakes. Collaboration with peers cultivates a positive learning environment. Apart from these benefits, challenges such as repetitive material and short duration of participation were also noted. The study concludes that English clubs effectively enhance speaking skills by combining interactive activities, teacher coaching, and peer support. The study also recommends integrating English clubs into school programs and carrying out further research on long term impact and wider application, including the use of digital tools to improve engagement and learning outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, speaking English is essential for all people, because it is broadly recognized as the worldwide lingua franca. Capability in English opens many opportunities in educational and professional fields, allowing individuals to engage more confidently in the global environments and cross-cultural interaction (Huy et al., 2024). Speaking is broadly recognized as an essential skill for English language learners, as speaking is a frequent part of daily life, involving communication that requires interaction between the speaker and the audience (Nair & Yunus, 2021). Speaking English enables them to convey messages and communicate effectively for various purposes. According to Burns and Joyce (1997), speaking skill is defined as the ability to engage in an interactive process of creating meaning, which involves the production, reception, and processing of information. Furthermore, it can be described as the ability to articulate sounds or words to communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Mandasari, 2020). Many learners often seek proficiency in speaking English as it can represent their skills in mastering the language, particularly for those learning it as a second or foreign language (Nunan, 2003). It is aligned with Sudarmo (2021), stating that students with strong speaking skills are more likely to excel academically, as the ability to speak allows them to understand complex concepts better and actively participate in classroom discussions.

However, speaking is widely recognized as the most challenging skill for students to master, and many still struggle to communicate orally in English (Zhang, 2009). This difficulty is often attributed to factors such as the lack of a supportive environment, anxiety, and insufficient grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. In Indonesia, students face challenges in classroom discussions primarily due to difficulties with grammar and vocabulary selection that foster the development of speaking skills. Despite this, the government has transitioned the educational approach from being teacher-focused to student-focused, as demonstrated by the emancipation curriculum. This change is in line with the goals of the emancipation curriculum, which prioritizes students in their educational journey and motivates them to utilize their skills in practical situations. Thus, this approach serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding the English language curriculum. Furthermore, the emancipated curriculum highlights the significance of students in mastering all six components of English language skills, which encompass listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting across different text formats (Luhur et al., 2023). Among these skills, speaking is particularly crucial for students to achieve their learning goals as it is the basis for effective English language communication.

On the other hand, students in Indonesia face several challenges during classroom discussions, mainly due to difficulties in using proper grammar, limitations in vocabulary selection, unclear pronunciation, excessive anxiety, and worries about negative feedback, even though they are highly motivated to engage in these activities (Kusuma, 2021). To support these challenges, Abugohar et al. (2019) revealed that the main barriers to speaking English include lack of practice, anxiety and fear while speaking, pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes.

One of the ways to overcome the challenges is joining the English club, which provides activities that promote greater engagement in the English-speaking community. A study by Rachmania et al. (2022) and Hidayat et al. (2023) highlighted that the activities in English clubs often encourage members to be involved in conversations in English, potentially boosting their confidence in speaking the language. Additionally, Holandyah et al. (2023) noted that practicing in pairs during English club activities made students feel more relaxed and comfortable communicating in English with peers of the same age. Furthermore, Maming et al. (2024) found that students perceived that joining an English club significantly improved their speaking skills, as the club environment and peers in the club motivated them to continue learning and practicing.

However, not all studies show positive results. The study by Desmiyanti (2022) found that English clubs might not really improve speaking skills. This was because the students did not fully take opportunities to speak in the activities. Moreover, many English clubs only focus on competition preparations, such as debates and speeches, rather than developing English communication skills. While previous studies have generally discussed the benefits of English clubs, few have examined their specific roles in enhancing junior high school students' speaking skills, particularly in the Indonesian context. This study addresses this gap by exploring not only the overall impact of English clubs but also identifying the distinct activities and strategies that foster students' speaking confidence and fluency. By focusing on the underexplored age group of junior high school students, this research contributes practical insights for educators and English club facilitators seeking to develop more targeted programs for speaking skill enhancement.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the activities conducted in the English club that can improve junior high school students' speaking abilities to determine whether the English club

is an appropriate and effective environment for students to develop their speaking skills. The researchers expect to provide valuable insight into an English club that can improve speaking skills and provide suggestions for future researchers who will conduct a similar topic.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative to examine how English club activities help junior high school students improve their English-speaking skills. According to Furidha (2023), descriptive qualitative aims to create systematic, accurate, and factual general descriptions about facts, characteristics, and connections between the phenomena being studied. A descriptive qualitative method is used due to several reasons such as a difficulty to fine a specific research objectives or problems, a detailed and in-depth understanding of a research, the purpose of a research is to examine the natural phenomenon, and intention to test interrelated research (Fadli, 2021). The research was conducted in one public junior high school in Bandung, involving seventh to ninth grade students chosen through random sampling. Nine students were selected based on regular attendance and interest in improving speaking skills.

Data collection involved observations and semi-structured interviews. This approach utilized a flexible interview guide, as outlined by Bryman & Bell (2019), allowing the interviewer to dig deeper into topics based on the participants' responses. The questions for the interview used in this study were adopted from a previous study conducted (Hijrah & Umar, 2021). Then, the data analysis used in this study was thematic analysis. As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), this method offers flexibility in exploring themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This section provides the findings from the classroom observation and semi-structured interview which based on key aspects that emerged during the study. The results are classified into four main points that emphasized the students' experience and insights obtained from participating in the English club. These points include students' confidence and speaking skills, role of the teacher and feedback, the comparison between English club and regular classes, and motivation and willingness to join. Each of these points will be elaborated further to present a comprehensive understanding which contributed to the role of English club in developing the students' speaking skill as mentioned in detail below.

3.1.1. Students' Confidence and Speaking Skills

Based on the data collected, six out of nine students revealed that after joining the English club for a few months, they feel more confident in speaking English publicly compared to their level before joining the English club. This feeling can be attributed to their improvement of self-efficacy which refers to their confidence in their ability to effectively communicate in English. According to Maddux (1995), "self-efficacy" is defined as a person's confidence in their ability to perform a task effectively by applying skills they learned in a particular situation.

"After joining the English club for a semester, the changes I experienced include feeling more confident, gaining a broader understanding of English than before, and improving my pronunciation." (S)

In contrast, the researchers found in the classroom observation that students demonstrated varying levels of confidence, indicated by trembling voices, eye contact, and their willingness to step forward and perform. In addition, nervousness and hesitation were frequently observed among students during the session. Besides that, some students also relied on the text, which reflected a lack of confidence and readiness.

Apart from building confidence, the English club also significantly influenced students' mastery of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. Students consistently said that their speaking skills had an improvement as they engaged and practiced new vocabulary during English club activities. They saw pronunciation as an important factor in speaking clearly. Many students also said that correct pronunciation helped them express their thoughts better, making it easier for people to understand them. Furthermore, students felt that their regular participation in the English club contributed to their fluency, allowing them to speak more smoothly and interact more effectively with their teacher and peers. Grammar was also seen as an essential component of their learning. One student shared how his perspective of grammar changed. At first, he thought it was not so important. But he then realized it was crucial for understanding English. This new understanding enabled them to form sentences more accurately and let them communicate with more confidence. This perceived improvement was influenced by the supportive environment and enjoyable learning activities. The English club played a huge role in helping students develop their speaking skills. Students' willingness to join the club, recognizing the importance of English in today's world.

3.1.2. Role of the Teacher and Feedback

The role of teacher was important in creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment. The teacher gave corrections in a friendly and positive way, instead of scolding students for their mistakes. They explained things clearly to help students learn, which kept students motivated for learning without being afraid of making mistakes. This in line with what the researchers discovered during the activities that the teacher consistently provided feedback after each student's performance, and it was evident that students helped with this suggestion. For instance, the feedback highlighted the students' attention to intonation, engagement with the audience, and subsequently the next student performed better after implementing these.

The support that students receive does not just come from the teacher. Their peers also played the role in creating a positive and collaborative atmosphere, motivating each other to improve their English-speaking skills. In this case, it correlated with the researchers observed in the classroom observation that students received support from the audience, such as applause and feedback, both of which assisted them to boost their confidence. This highlighted the variations in nervousness level during speaking and the ways to overcome them implemented in English club activity. This combination of teacher guidance and peer support helped to create a comfortable and inspiring environment. As a result, students did not only work on their language skills but also built their confidence in the learning process. Moreover, a supportive environment also supported them to help build their personal and academic growth.

"The teacher is supportive. If we answer incorrectly, they explain why the answer is wrong step by step. This keeps us motivated to continue learning." (S)

3.1.3. Comparison: English Club vs Regular Classes

Most students preferred studying in the English club rather than a regular classroom setting. The main reason why students like the English club more than regular English class is

because of the number of students. The number of English club students is smaller, which supports a more focused and deep learning environment. However, regular classrooms often distract students because of the crowdedness.

The English club also offered a variety of engaging activities, including speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary. For example, the activities implemented in this club such as, watching English movies, singing English songs, public speaking, storytelling, and grammar lessons. Many students reported that watching movies is their favorite activity as they can expand their vocabulary in a fun and light way. Besides that, public speaking is considered as their second favorite because of the tons of benefits they can gain through that activity.

“Because in class, there are many students. So, it is hard to focus. But here, there are fewer students, so it is more comfortable to learn.” (S)

However, one student felt that the larger numbers of a regular English class were more comfortable and supportive.

“In class, because it is more crowded with friends.” (S)

Despite the differences in setting, all students gave positive feedback about the English club’s impact on their English abilities with scores ranging from 7 to 8.5 out of 10, with the average being 8. The reason is because it helped them to improve their proficiency through a supportive and interactive learning environment. One student even rated the English club a 8.5, praising that the program has a fun atmosphere that assists in enhancing the learning experience. However, there are two ideas from students about the lack of this activity. First, some students acclaimed that the materials provided in the club were repetitive and focused more on reviewing previous learning topics rather than introducing new topics. Second, a few students also felt that they still needed more attention on their speaking practice.

Overall, the interview results highlighted that the English club provides a great environment in which to learn and practice English. The teacher in the club provided corrections in a friendly and positive manner, ensuring that students felt comfortable learning from their mistakes without fear of criticism. This supportive environment encouraged and motivated them to improve their speaking skills, and because of this, many students found that the English club is a vital part of their language learning and personal development.

3.1.4 Motivation and Willingness to Join

The motivation and willingness to join the English club emerged as significant factors in the interviews and aligned with the phenomenon observed in the classroom observation. Many students expressed their desire to join the English club, driven by intrinsic motivation and also encouragement from their parents without any forced feelings. The findings suggested that intrinsic motivation serves an essential role in students’ decision to participate in the English club. Most students shared that they joined the club due to genuine interest in learning English and some of them were affected by the external encouragement from their parents. As reflected in excerpt 5, intrinsic motivation became more clearly portrayed as students recognized the value of English for their future goals, such as studying abroad. This realization further strengthened their commitment to improving their English skills.

“Actually, I already have an interest in English. At first, I didn’t want to join English-related activities because I felt lazy. However, the desire to continue my studies abroad encouraged

me to start learning English early on. Since joining here, my love for English, which was not so strong before, has now grown." (S)

3.2. Discussion

This study reveals that the role of the English club can contribute to the students' speaking improvement. Students indicate that they gained more confidence in speaking English and enhanced their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency through different activities in the club. Besides that, it is also found that the smaller number of students and positive peer support create a comfortable atmosphere that encourages active participation. The teacher offers helpful feedback in a supportive way, allowing students to learn from their mistakes without anxiety, which improves their speaking skills even more.

Additionally, both intrinsic motivation, such as the aspiration to study abroad, and extrinsic motivation, such as support from parents, hold a significant role in students' dedication to join in the club and improve their English proficiency. These results are in line with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning takes place through social interactions and support from more knowledgeable others, such as teachers and peers. These social interactions enable learners to gain support, which enhances their speaking performance and increases confidence (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, it aligns with the study by Tripudiyana et al. (2022) who stated that learners' self-esteem influenced their speaking abilities. As a result, the higher the learners' self-esteem, the better their speaking abilities.

Considering this, it also supports what Astari and Hadi (2023) have previously discovered, which emphasized the essential of various activities within the English club as an opportunity to develop students' speaking abilities. On the other hand, Hijrah and Umar (2021) demonstrated that a supportive environment and motivation for practicing English led to increased speaking among the students. Additionally, English clubs can provide students with enjoyable and interactive learning experiences through regular practice, helping to alleviate the stress that can reduce language anxiety (Elnadeef and Abdala, 2019).

However, this data also presents a new view of the extent of the teacher in terms of constructive feedback, where students' motivation and learning enthusiasm in developing their speaking skills by concentrating on the areas that need improvement. This aspect has not been addressed in previous research, which has primarily emphasized environmental factors or the variety of activities within English clubs. It also highlights the importance of the teacher concentrating on how they provide feedback, ensuring that it is constructive and presented in a friendly manner for students to accept. This approach will assist students in recognizing their speaking errors, allowing for corrections, and will also boost their confidence to keep practicing without the worry of making mistakes. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback is an appropriate alternative in improving students' performance if the feedback is valuable and motivates them.

Then, there are some implications of this study's findings with real-world correlations that have advantages for students, schools, and the teacher. In this case, students' involvement in English clubs not only improves their English-speaking skills, but also their level of confidence in using English in social contexts, including the ability to contribute to class discussions, respond to questions that the teacher may ask during the lesson, and interact with peers. A supportive environment with smaller class sizes and interactive activities contributes a key role in this development. For schools, this study suggests that English clubs can be integrated into their program by organizing thematic sessions, such as debates, group discussions, or daily

conversations which lead them to a speaking skill environment. In addition, the teacher's role in providing positive feedback and actively engaging students should be prioritized to create a collaborative learning environment. Therefore, future research could further explore how participation in the English club affects other English skills to assess whether there are broader benefits for overall language development as improvement in speaking skills has already been observed.

Aside from the benefits that have been mentioned earlier, there are several limitations in this study, including the following: First, the research data was only collected from one school, so the results cannot be fully generalized to a wider context. This indicates the need for further studies involving schools with different backgrounds to obtain more representative findings. Secondly, the limited duration of the study makes the long-term impact of student's participation in the English club on speaking skills not fully measurable. This study only describes the short-term changes experienced by students during several months of participating in the program. Therefore, future research can consider long-term observations to evaluate the extent to which the English club can sustainably influence students' speaking skills development.

Future research could explore the impact of English clubs in schools with diverse geographical and socioeconomic contexts, potentially uncovering unique factors that shape students' learning experiences. Additionally, integrating digital and media could provide new methods to enhance engagement and support skill development, especially in fostering confidence, fluency and collaborative learning environments. These explorations could offer valuable insights into tailoring English club programs to different settings and needs.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows how English clubs help improve students' speaking skills through a supportive environment and engaging activities that contributed to the speaking confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. A teacher's constructive feedback and peer collaboration help create a positive atmosphere that encourages participation in activities and reduces speaking anxiety. Additionally, intrinsic motivations, such as the aspiration to study abroad and extrinsic factors, including parental encouragement, reinforce students' commitment to joining the club. However, previous research focused primarily on environmental factors and activities, such as the availability of immersive environments and the design of extracurricular programs. While these studies provided valuable insights, they often overlooked the role of teacher feedback in shaping students' speaking development and transformative learning experiences. This study addresses that gap by highlighting the significant impact of teacher feedback on improving students' speaking abilities. Despite the limitations of previous research in exploring teacher involvement, this study suggests incorporating English clubs into school programs by organizing weekly speaking practice sessions, peer-led discussion groups, and teacher-guided activities to improve students' speaking skills. It emphasizes the need for further research to examine their long-term effect and broader impact, potentially incorporating digital tools to improve language learning experiences.

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