

Exploring the Role of English Club Activities in Enhancing Senior High School Students' Speaking Skills: A Qualitative Study in Indonesia

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Abstract

Speaking is one of the most important language skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning; however, many Indonesian students still encounter difficulties in developing oral communication competence due to limited opportunities for authentic language practice. This study aimed to explore the implementation of the English Club program and identify the learning strategies employed by students to improve their speaking skills at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted. The participants consisted of 35 students participating in the English Club program and one instructor. Data were collected through classroom observations and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the English Club was implemented through various communicative activities, including debates, storytelling, speeches, conversations, and movie-based learning. These activities provided meaningful opportunities for authentic language use, increased students' confidence, and encouraged active participation in speaking practices. The study also found that students employed diverse learning strategies, such as self-directed learning, peer collaboration, media exposure, and technology-assisted learning. High-achieving students tended to use more autonomous and intensive learning strategies, while lower-achieving students relied more on peer support and digital tools. Overall, the English Club program played a significant role in enhancing students' speaking abilities and fostering positive attitudes toward English learning. The study suggests that extracurricular English programs can serve as effective complementary learning environments for improving speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *English Club, speaking skills, extracurricular activities, learning strategies, EFL learners.*

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Introduction

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively in various social and academic contexts. Despite years of formal English instruction, many Indonesian students continue to experience difficulties in speaking English due to limited opportunities for authentic communication, insufficient vocabulary mastery, pronunciation problems, and lack of confidence (Menggo et al., 2025; Othman et al., 2024; Purwati et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2021).

In many EFL contexts, classroom instruction often emphasizes grammatical knowledge and examination-oriented learning rather than communicative language use (Alharbi, 2022; Wu et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2026). Consequently, students may achieve satisfactory academic performance while still struggling to express themselves orally in English. This situation highlights the need for alternative learning environments that provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice speaking outside regular classroom activities.

One alternative learning environment is the English Club. English Club programs are commonly implemented as extracurricular activities designed to support students' language development through communicative and enjoyable learning experiences. Unlike formal classroom instruction, English Club activities generally promote active participation, peer interaction, collaborative learning, and authentic language use (Manabe et al., 2023; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022; Phung et al., 2023; Pladevall-Ballester, 2026). These activities may include debates, storytelling, speeches, role plays, discussions, and conversational practice.

Previous studies have reported positive impacts of English extracurricular activities on students' language development. For example, English Club participation has been associated with increased speaking confidence, improved communicative competence, enhanced motivation, and greater willingness to communicate in English (Aftinia et al., 2025; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022; Saraç & Doğan, 2024). However, most existing studies primarily focus on students' perceptions or general program effectiveness. Limited research has explored how English Club activities are implemented in practice and what specific learning strategies students employ to improve their speaking skills.

At SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta, English Club is conducted regularly as an extracurricular program aimed at supporting students' English language development. The program includes various speaking-oriented activities such as debating, storytelling, speech practice, and conversation sessions. The school employs qualified instructors and provides a supportive learning environment for students who are interested in developing their English proficiency. The present study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of the English Club program and investigating the learning strategies employed by students with different levels of English proficiency. Understanding these aspects may contribute to the development of more effective extracurricular language programs that support students' speaking development. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the English Club program implemented to improve students' speaking skills at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta?
2. What strategies do students employ to improve their speaking skills through participation in the English Club program?

The findings are expected to provide practical insights for teachers, school administrators, and language educators seeking to optimize extracurricular language-learning programs in secondary education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation of an English Club program and students' speaking-learning strategies. Qualitative inquiry was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and learning practices within a natural educational setting.

The research was conducted at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 35 students who actively participated in the English Club program and one instructor responsible for managing and conducting the extracurricular activities. The participants were selected because they were directly involved in the implementation of the English Club program.

Data were collected through observation. Observation was conducted to examine how the English Club activities were organized and implemented. The researcher observed instructional practices, classroom interactions, learning activities, and students' participation during the program. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis based on Miles et al. (2018) model which consisting of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification.

Results

Implementation of the English Club Program

The findings of observation revealed that the English Club at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta was designed to provide students with additional opportunities to practice English beyond regular classroom instruction. The program was conducted weekly on Fridays and involved students from different grade levels who were interested in improving their English proficiency. Activities were organized into several groups, including debate, storytelling, speech, and conversation practice.

The implementation of the program consisted of three major stages.

Opening Activities

At the beginning of each meeting, instructors introduced the learning objectives and provided explanations regarding the topic to be discussed. The instructor emphasized creating a friendly and supportive atmosphere to reduce students' anxiety and encourage active participation.

Main Activities

During the main learning session, students engaged in various speaking-oriented tasks such as debates, speeches, storytelling performances, and group discussions.

The instructor combined theoretical explanations with practical activities. Students were first introduced to relevant concepts and language features before being guided to apply them in communicative practice.

The findings indicated that the instructor employed multiple teaching approaches, including lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, collaborative learning, and performance-based activities. Students reported that these activities were enjoyable and significantly different from conventional classroom learning.

Closing Activities

The instructor frequently utilized English movies as supplementary learning materials. Students watched selected movie clips and discussed vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar usage, and communicative expressions found in the films. This strategy exposed learners to authentic language input and helped improve their listening and speaking skills.

The implementation of the program was organized into three interconnected stages: opening activities, main activities, and closing activities. During the opening stage, instructors established clear learning objectives and fostered a supportive classroom environment that encouraged student participation and reduced speaking anxiety. In the main activities, students actively engaged in a variety of speaking-focused tasks, including debates, speeches, storytelling, and group discussions. The integration of theoretical instruction with practical communicative activities enabled students to develop their speaking competence through meaningful language use. Furthermore, the use of diverse teaching approaches, such as lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, collaborative learning, and performance-based tasks, created an engaging and dynamic learning experience.

The findings suggest that the program successfully promoted active learning and enhanced students' motivation to participate in speaking activities. Students perceived the learning process as enjoyable and different from traditional classroom practices, indicating a positive response to the instructional strategies employed. Additionally, the incorporation of English movies in the closing activities provided authentic language exposure and enriched students' understanding of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and communicative expressions. Overall, the combination of interactive learning activities and authentic materials contributed to the development of students' speaking skills and supported a more effective and engaging language learning environment.

Students' Speaking-Learning Strategies

Based on the result of observation, the researcher categorized participants into three groups: High-skill students, Middle-skill students and Low-skill students.

Students with higher levels of English proficiency demonstrated strong enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation toward learning English. They viewed English not only as an academic subject but also as a valuable skill for personal development and future opportunities. Their positive attitudes toward language learning encouraged them to engage actively in various learning activities both inside and outside the classroom.

This high level of motivation played a significant role in supporting their continuous improvement in English proficiency.

The findings revealed that these students employed a wide range of independent learning strategies to enhance their English skills. They frequently utilized online learning platforms and educational websites to study grammar, vocabulary, and other language components. In addition, they regularly watched English-language movies and listened to English songs, which helped them become familiar with authentic language use, pronunciation patterns, and everyday expressions. These activities allowed them to learn English in a more enjoyable and meaningful manner.

Beyond consuming English media, the students also actively engaged in practical language-learning experiences. Several participants reported playing video games in English, which exposed them to contextualized vocabulary, interactive communication, and problem-solving situations in the target language. Others practiced speaking independently through monologues, enabling them to improve their confidence, fluency, and pronunciation. Furthermore, many students participated in English competitions and enrolled in additional English courses to gain more structured learning opportunities and further develop their language competence.

One participant explained that he consistently used online resources to strengthen his understanding of English grammar while simultaneously expanding his vocabulary through exposure to movies and songs. Another student emphasized that acquiring a solid foundation in basic language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension, was essential before advancing to more complex aspects of language learning. These perspectives suggest that successful learners tend to adopt systematic and strategic approaches to developing their English proficiency.

Despite their relatively advanced level of English proficiency, the students acknowledged that they still encountered several linguistic challenges. Common difficulties included mastering grammatical structures, using verbs accurately, pronouncing words correctly, and speaking fluently in spontaneous communication. Nevertheless, rather than allowing these challenges to hinder their progress, they actively sought ways to overcome them. Through self-directed learning, regular practice, and continuous exposure to English in various contexts, they demonstrated resilience and a strong commitment to improving their language skills. This finding highlights the importance of learner autonomy and sustained effort in achieving higher levels of English proficiency.

Students with intermediate levels of English proficiency generally perceived English as a valuable and essential skill for their future academic and professional development. They understood that English plays a significant role in higher education, career advancement, and access to global information. Many participants believed that proficiency in English would increase their opportunities for success in an increasingly interconnected world. This awareness contributed to their positive attitudes toward learning the language and motivated them to continue improving their skills.

The findings revealed that these students adopted various learning strategies to support their English development. One of the most common approaches was studying collaboratively with peers. They frequently worked together to discuss learning materials, practice language skills, and solve difficulties encountered during the learning process. In addition, they actively sought supplementary learning resources from books, online platforms, and other educational materials to deepen their understanding of English beyond classroom instruction. Such efforts demonstrated their willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.

Another important strategy employed by middle-skill students was active participation in English Club activities. They paid close attention to the explanations and activities provided during club sessions and used these opportunities to strengthen their language competence. Furthermore, they regularly practiced speaking with classmates in both formal and informal situations. To increase their exposure to authentic English, many students also watched English-language movies, videos, and other media. These activities helped them improve their vocabulary, listening comprehension, pronunciation, and overall confidence in using English for communication.

Although these students demonstrated moderate speaking proficiency, they remained highly motivated to enhance their English-speaking abilities. They recognized that effective communication in English requires continuous practice and effort. When facing challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or speaking confidence, they often relied on peer support and collaborative learning to find solutions. Through interaction with classmates and consistent engagement in learning activities, they gradually developed greater confidence and competence in spoken English. These findings suggest that peer collaboration and sustained motivation play crucial roles in supporting the language development of intermediate-level learners.

Students with lower levels of English proficiency demonstrated diverse attitudes and motivations toward learning English. Some participants initially viewed English merely as a compulsory subject that had to be studied to fulfill school requirements, resulting in relatively low interest and limited engagement in learning activities. However, other students reported that their perceptions gradually changed after participating in English Club programs. Through exposure to interactive activities, supportive learning environments, and opportunities to practice English in meaningful contexts, they began to develop a stronger interest in the language and became more willing to engage in learning activities.

The findings revealed that low-skill students encountered several challenges that hindered their English learning progress, particularly in speaking. One of the most frequently reported difficulties was limited vocabulary knowledge, which made it difficult for them to understand texts and express their ideas effectively. In addition, many students struggled with grammatical structures and often felt uncertain about how to construct correct sentences. Pronunciation also emerged as a significant obstacle, as students found it challenging to produce English words accurately. These linguistic difficulties were often accompanied by a lack of confidence, causing students to feel anxious or hesitant when required to speak English in front of others.



To cope with these challenges, students employed a variety of learning strategies aimed at improving their language competence. Many relied on translation applications to understand unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structures. They also accessed online learning resources, such as educational videos, websites, and language-learning platforms, to gain additional explanations and practice opportunities. Furthermore, students frequently sought assistance from friends when they encountered difficulties, highlighting the importance of peer support in their learning process. Repeated practice, regular review of learning materials, and increased attention during English Club activities were also commonly reported as effective strategies for strengthening their understanding and improving their English skills over time.

Despite their relatively low proficiency levels, many students demonstrated a strong desire to improve their English abilities and achieve their future goals. Several participants stated that aspirations such as studying abroad, pursuing higher education, or accessing broader career opportunities motivated them to continue learning English. More broadly, students across all proficiency levels shared similar ambitions regarding English learning. They expressed a desire to enhance their academic performance, communicate more effectively in English, and participate successfully in English-related competitions and extracurricular activities. These findings suggest that, regardless of their current proficiency level, students recognized the value of English and were motivated to develop their language skills for both academic and personal advancement.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the English Club functioned as a meaningful extracurricular learning environment that supported students' speaking development through authentic communicative experiences. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, the program emphasized active participation, collaboration, and practical language use.

The effectiveness of the English Club can be explained through the concept of extracurricular learning, which provides opportunities for students to engage in language use beyond formal instructional settings. Such environments encourage learners to experiment with language, develop confidence, and receive meaningful communicative practice. These findings support previous studies reporting that English extracurricular activities contribute positively to students' language development and communicative competence (Aftinia et al., 2025; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022; Saraç & Doğan, 2024).

Another important finding concerns the role of instructors. The instructor adopted a student-centered approach that prioritized interaction, enjoyment, and learner autonomy. The friendly relationship between instructors and students appeared to reduce speaking anxiety and foster a supportive learning climate. Such conditions are particularly important in EFL contexts where learners often experience fear of making mistakes (Saraç & Doğan, 2024; Schussler et al., 2021; Zhang, 2025). The use of debates, speeches, storytelling, and conversational activities also contributed significantly to speaking development (Diez-Itza et al., 2018; Horváthová & Galbová,

2022; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022). These activities required students to organize ideas, use vocabulary meaningfully, and communicate messages clearly. Moreover, they provided opportunities for repeated speaking practice, which is essential for developing fluency.

The findings further revealed that students employed diverse learning strategies regardless of proficiency level. High-performing students demonstrated extensive use of cognitive and self-regulated learning strategies, including independent learning, media exposure, and deliberate practice. Their behaviors reflect characteristics of successful language learners who actively seek opportunities to engage with the target language. Meanwhile, middle-skill students frequently relied on social learning strategies. Collaboration with peers enabled them to practice speaking, exchange knowledge, and maintain motivation. This finding aligns with social constructivist perspectives emphasizing the importance of interaction in language learning. Although low-skill students initially faced substantial challenges, participation in the English Club appeared to increase their motivation and willingness to learn. Their gradual engagement suggests that extracurricular programs may serve as effective interventions for students who struggle in traditional classroom settings.

Interestingly, the study found considerable similarities among learning strategies used by students across proficiency levels. Watching movies, listening to songs, utilizing digital resources, and practicing speaking were commonly reported by all groups. The primary difference was not the type of strategy employed but rather the consistency and intensity of strategy use. The findings also highlight the growing importance of technology-supported language learning. Students frequently used online platforms, translation applications, digital media, and internet-based resources to support their learning. These practices indicate that modern language learning extends beyond classroom boundaries and increasingly involves autonomous engagement with digital resources (Arifani et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2023; Kumar, 2024). Overall, the English Club created a learning ecosystem that integrated social interaction, authentic communication, learner autonomy, and motivational support. Such an environment appears particularly beneficial for fostering speaking development in EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic English communication are often limited.

Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of an English Club program and students' speaking-learning strategies at SMA Al Islam 1 Surakarta. The findings indicate that the English Club provided a supportive extracurricular environment that promoted students' speaking development through debate, storytelling, speech practice, conversation activities, and movie-based learning.

The program successfully encouraged active participation, enhanced students' confidence, and created opportunities for authentic language use beyond regular classroom instruction. The instructor's student-centered approach further contributed to positive learning experiences and reduced learners' anxiety in speaking English.

Students across different proficiency levels employed various learning strategies, including self-directed learning, peer collaboration, media exposure, and technology-assisted learning. Although differences existed in motivation and proficiency, all students demonstrated a willingness to improve their English-speaking abilities.

The study suggests that English Club programs can serve as valuable complementary learning environments for developing speaking skills in EFL contexts. Schools are therefore encouraged to strengthen extracurricular English programs and provide students with greater opportunities for authentic communication and meaningful language practice.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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