International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research (IJAPR)
ISSN: 2643-9123
Vol. 9 Issue 8 August - 2025, Pages: 176-182

Investigating the Students' Challenges in Speaking English Through English Club Program at Islamic Boarding School

Siti wardatun Jamilah1, Aan Erlyana fardhani2, bambang Arya Wija Putra3

1English Education Study Program, Jember University, Jember Regency, Indonesia
wardatunmila@gmail.com
2English Education Study Program, Jember University, Jember Regency, Indonesia
fardhanierlyana@unej.ac.id
3English Education Study Program, Jember University, Jember Regency, Indonesia
Bambangarya.fkip@unej.ac.id

Abstract: *This study reveals the real challenges faced by students at an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) in developing their English speaking skills through English Club activities. Many students experience challenges in speaking English due to internal pressures, such as fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of support from their peers. These obstacles can hinder the development of their speaking skills and confidence. However, through guidance from mentors and fun activities outside of class, the students have a safe space to practice speaking English without fear. This study was conducted using a Descriptive Qualitative Approach through in depth interviews with three active participants. The results of the study prove that the English speaking challenges faced by the students include lack of support from peers, inconsistency in speaking English by breaking language rules which indicates their low motivation, lack of self-confidence, low vocabulary mastery, and limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. On the other hand, a positive impact was found on Public Speaking activities which mostly helped build students' self-confidence; Muhadasah or daily vocabulary memorization activities have the potential to support students' vocabulary development and Ta'limul Lughoh or game-based grammar classes are beneficial for students' English grammar learning.*

Keywords; speaking english; students' speaking challenges; English club program.

1. INTRODUCTION

English speaking proficiency is the most critical skill in foreign language study, particularly in the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) due to its emphasis. It not only assesses the effectiveness of communication but also fluency, confidence, and a general command of the target language. However, speaking skills remain the biggest hurdle for most students, particularly in faith-based institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). In Islamic boarding schools, the process of learning English is often obstructed by a number of difficulties such as negligible time for formal English teaching, limited English use in daily interaction, and the dominance of local languages such as Javanese or Madurese in students' matters. For their solution, some institutions have added non-formal activities such as English Clubs as a more communicative and flexible alternative.

These activities are thought to be capable of providing students with more space to conduct speaking in a tension-free environment. English Club activities such as debating, group discussion, role-playing, and narration are designed to improve students' motivation and build students' confidence in employing English in speaking contexts. English Clubs have been proven to promote active participation, build speaking confidence, and provide an important and fun context of learning. For example, Elnadeef and Abdala (2019) specify the role of English Clubs in creating a safe and friendly setting, and Maros (2023) indicates their role in developing positive attitudes towards learning English.

Among other institutions, Islamic Boarding Schools (pesantren) have unique social and organizational characteristics that impact the effectiveness of English clubs. Some studies, for example, have described the enduring problems of speaking competencies to be psychological, such as shyness, anxiety, and fear of mistakes, linguistic (limited understanding of English vocabulary and sentence construction), and environmental (little to no motivation for English use outside the classroom). Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) report that there is little self-confidence to express ideas, and a lack of spontaneity. In addition, the hierarchical and formal order systems typical of Islamic boarding schools tend to foster a passive form of communication (Auladi & Bakhtiar, 2024). Also, lack of materials, absence of a more detailed plan for English Club activities, and the rarely observed English Area policies form other the limitations of the said students'

speaking skills (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022; Virawan et al., 2023).

The effectiveness of English Clubs, as well as speaking resistance, has been studied before, particularly in a general school or university setup. For instance, Demydovych & Holik (2020) studied the impact of Speaking Club sessions on university students' communication skills, while Phisutthangkoon (2024) noted the importance of balance between a learner's grammar and their fluency. The majority of ths studies, however, were not focused on the context of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and very few focused on English Clubs and how they help students with speaking challenges in highly religious and culturally routine structured educational environments.

Most researchers have studied speaking resistance as it appears in the context of formal situations like a classroom or general learning institution. The role of English Clubs, as an informal learning center, in the context of Islamic boarding school has received very little attention. No single study has addressed the overlap among English Club activities and the English language with regard to the students' psyche, their environment, and the informal learning context. This is the gap that this study attempts to address by exploring the experiences students have in English speaking skills development in the context of English Clubs.

The aim of this research is to analyze the main issues of Islamic boarding school students in constructing their speaking ability in three areas: linguistic, psychological, and environmental. Specifically, this research aims to identify how these issues arise in English Club activities at Islamic boarding schools and how the English Club activities can be an effective solution in overcoming these issues.

From the contribution perspective, this study provides empirical evidence of English literary learning in non-formal education, particularly in religious schools such as Islamic boarding schools. Pragmatically, these findings will be able to provide strategic suggestions for teachers, English Club managers, and Islamic boarding school principals in designing learning approaches that are more facilitative, interactive, and student-need-based. Hence, this study's findings not only enrich the academic community but also back policy studies and the development of better English language teaching strategies in Islamic boarding schools.

English language learning activities in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are typically carried out outside of regular class hours, such as through the English Club program. The program is typically set as a relaxed environment to facilitate students' speaking skills in different practical exercises, such as public speaking, practice conversation, vocabulary games, and storytelling. However, the effectiveness of these activities is in doubt, considering that many students are not able to communicate in English despite having been in the program for a considerable period. This shows that there are inhibiting factors that have not been effectively addressed, like psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors.

In addition, previous research has focused on formal classes, whereas speaking practice in informal settings such as the English Club at Islamic boarding schools has rarely been investigated. Nevertheless, it is the only practicing environment for most students, and especially those who have poor speaking practice in regular classes. Therefore, it is important to examine the types of activities implemented, the challenges students face, and their perceptions of the program's effectiveness.. Eventually, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the challenges faced by students in speaking English within the English Club program at Islamic boarding schools?

2. METHODE

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This design is used to specifically describe one's experience and opinion concerning a particular social phenomenon (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). Therefore, this method was found to be pertinent to the overall objective of this research, namely to examine the challenges of students in speaking English through English Club activities at an Islamic boarding school (pesantren).

The participants in this study were three female students who attended an Islamic boarding school in Jember, East Java. Purposive sampling, a sampling technique in accordance with some predetermined

criteria established in accordance with the aims of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014), was used to select them. The above selection criteria used were: (1) consistent participation in English Club activities, (2) regular joining-in during speaking sessions in the activities, and (3) satisfactory learning achievements in speaking English. The third category of participants was composed of two students in 11th grade, both 16 years old, and one student in 10th grade, aged 15. Experience-wise, two of the participants were members of the English Club for two years, while one of the participants had been a member for half a year. This diversity of experience resulted in a group of mixed views ranging from the newcomers to the old timers.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, which were found to be capable of drawing out detailed descriptions of participants' experiences as well as comments on the challenges of communicating in English in the English Club. The interview style was such that participants' spontaneous responses were encouraged but also constrained through pre-determined open-ended questions. This approach is said to be best suited for qualitative descriptive research in that it allows researchers to get rich and rich data (Ishtiaq, 2019). The interviews were carried out in Indonesian to make the participants comfortable and willing to express themselves more freely. The interviews were 10-15 minutes long and conducted in the Islamic boarding school private room. All the interviews had been recorded with participants' permission and afterward verbatim transcribed in order to be explained further.

The data were subjected to deductive thematic analysis in an Braun and Clarke (2006) developed framework. Top-level themes were derived pre-analysis in the framework using theory and available research evidence: psychological issues, language issues, and environmental factors. Analysis consisted of an initial re-reading of the transcripts to scan the content of the data, followed by coding of under the theme sections into pre-conceived categories. For example, statements such as "I often get anxious" were psychological barriers, while statements such as "I have no idea how to use words that I've memorized" were linguistic barriers. Data were collapsed into top level subthemes and themes following initial coding, which were derived from recurring patterns. Each theme was piloted for fit with data and characterized with theoretical definition and context developed by the participants.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Here are the findings of this study. The findings are summarized in five main points that embody factors that influence the efficacy and practice of speaking activities in English Clubs of Islamic boarding schools: speaking activity types, psychological issues, linguistic issues, environmental issues, and students' attitudes regarding the effectiveness of English Club activities. All the characteristics are analyzed based on qualitative interview data collected from student respondents using thematic approaches citing relevant theories. These findings attempt to show a general picture of how English Club activities work, the problems that beset students, and the ways they assess the impact of such activities on enhancing their English speaking skills.

Types of Speaking Activities Conducted at the English Club

Based on the interview with the participants, there are three types of English speaking activities offered by the English Club of this Islamic boarding school: Muhadasah (daily vocabulary memorization), Ta'limul Lughoh (grammar and pronunciation class), and Public Speaking. The activities are designed to increase students' speaking ability through informal, fun, and student-centered learning. Each activity focuses on one specific aspect of speaking capacity, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence.

Muhadasah is carried out each morning before formal classes begin. In this exercise, the students are asked to learn and memorize five new English words in groups or as individuals. The exercise is sometimes spiced with the singing of English songs to make it more enjoyable. One of the students exclaimed, "I enjoy Muhadasah because of singing and vocabulary memorization activities. The activity makes me motivated every morning." An activity like this is considered to be effective in building the habit of using English on a regular basis in a relaxed environment.

Ta'limul Lughoh is held in the evening after religious activities. This activity focuses on learning grammar and pronunciation through games, sentence construction tasks, and peer correction. One student said, "I enjoy Ta'limul Lughoh because I learn while

playing and there are lots of example sentences." This activity encourages active student participation in understanding language structure.

Public speaking is the most intense and challenging activity, according to students. In this activity, students are asked to speak in public, either through short speeches, announcements, or everyday interactions in English within the dormitory environment. Although initially challenging, this activity is considered the most effective in improving fluency and confidence. One student stated, "I used to be shy about speaking in front of friends, but because I practiced a lot, I became more extraordinary and confident."

Psychological Challenges Students Experience in Speaking English

Psychological difficulties, in this case, are referring to emotional difficulties such as fear, anxiety, and low confidence experienced by students when communicating in English. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis states that these affective factors possess the ability to block the process of language acquisition.

Most students indicated that they were nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and scared to speak publicly. For example, one student said, "I get nervous and am afraid of making mistakes while speaking." Another student commented, "I am afraid of appearing or being embarrassed in front of my peers during memorization practice." Fear of appearance before peers or teachers is a major suppressor of active involvement in speaking activities.

English Club mentors try to bridge these affective gaps by providing oral reassurance. Students feel psychologically safer when mentors tell them that it is all right to make mistakes. One student claimed, "If I am shy to answer or make a mistake, the mentor will say, 'It's okay to make mistakes.'" Feelings of inferiority, however, are brought about when students compare themselves with English proficient classmates.

There are also students who overthink before speaking for fear of making mistakes and others reacting against them. It leads them to lose speaking opportunities and choose silence. This practice confidence loss is also caused by past experiences of being scolded directly in front of their peers. Therefore, the creation of an environment where mistakes are tolerated and open assessment can occur is at the heart of cultivating students' courage to speak actively.

Linguistic Challenges That Hinder Speaking Skills

The barriers are limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and insufficient confidence in pronunciation, which have significant effects on students' speaking skills. After taking various speaking exercises, students are still struggling with constructing sentences, remembering words, and spontaneously pronouncing words.

One student said, "Sometimes I get stuck. forgetting vocabulary or grammar," illustrating self-reporting of problems with accessing language items when speaking. Another student said, "My grammar is messy, so I can't speak coherently," illustrating problems with syntactically well-formed sentence formation. Lastly, pronunciation is also an actual problem. One student said, "I'm unsure about my pronunciation, I'm not really sure yet," illustrating low phonological self-confidence.

Although activities like Ta'limul Lughoh include exercises in pronunciation and grammar, these findings indicate a need for more integrated practice of language in real contexts of communication.

The students also indicated not being familiar with English colloquialisms and idioms, which created problems in understanding how to react appropriately or even comprehend context while conversing. Being confronted with unfamiliar vocabulary never exposed before, they were more at ease with silence or code switching. This requires functional upgrading and natural speech practice for improving spontaneous performance of students.

Environmental Challenges in English Club Implementation

Environmental factors such as school policy, Islamic boarding school activity calendar, and friendship patterns also make speaking lessons successful. The English Zone policy was not implemented consistently, this research found. "Sometimes there are English Zone rules, but they're not always followed," a student explained. When there is no tutor supervision, native language will be used by students again.

Moreover, Islamic boarding school activities, such as religious events, also interrupt the continuity of the English Club. One of the students opined, "When there

are events for the Islamic boarding school, sometimes the English Club closes." This means that time constraints and busy schedules do not allow usual speaking activities.

Social interaction with peers also influences the readiness to speak. Other students are discouraged since they have peers who do not desire to speak English or even deride them. Sentences such as "Friends are sometimes lazy to speak English" are a low practice culture in language and can discourage students.

Lack of support from the environment is also a discouraging factor. A few students mentioned that other than English Club activities, there was neither space nor forum that provided them with opportunities to keep on using English. In fact, their use of English was occasionally regarded as "stylish" by others and hence made them feel uncomfortable. This negative environment resulted in a reduction in using English on a day-to-day basis, even though repeated practice was necessary to achieve command over speaking skills.

Student Perceptions of the Effectiveness of English Club Activities

Despite various challenges, most students stated that English Club activities were very helpful in improving their speaking skills. Activities such as Public Speaking were considered the most effective because they provided direct opportunities to speak in public. One student stated, "At first I was scared, but over time I got used to it. Now I'm more confident."

Muhadasah was also appreciated for helping memorize vocabulary in a fun way, such as singing. Ta'limul Lughoh were considered effective when they used interactive methods such as games and group work. This approach aligns with the principle that language learning will be more meaningful when conducted in an emotional and fun atmosphere.

Interestingly, students also found that materials related to Islamic boarding school life and values led them to greater engagement. One student mentioned that discussions about daily life at the Islamic boarding school or Islamic values made English Club feel more relevant and enjoyable. However, students also wanted a more consistent schedule and the addition of intensive speaking activities such as drama, interviews, or debates.

Overall, English Club is seen as an important platform to improve speaking skills and build students' confidence in English.

Discussion

Revealed from the research findings are several theoretical constructs regarding the challenges faced by students in speaking English, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Based on categories that have been defined in the literature, namely psychological, linguistic, and environmental challenges, this section discusses how the data from the interviews align and illustrate these theories. The use of deductive thematic analysis allowed the researcher to apply this theoretical lens to the interview responses and assess the extent to which students' experiences reflected known speaking barriers in EFL education.

These psychological challenges are very clear and very much in line with the theory by Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, namely that emotional variables such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence can hinder language acquisition. In this study, students consistently expressed nervousness when speaking English, especially in public or when seen by their peers. This condition creates mental barriers that reduce students' willingness to speak, especially in public. However, the presence of a supportive mentor and a few non-judgmental friends can help reduce these barriers, illustrating the important role emotional safety plays in language learning. This confirms that addressing affective factors is as important as providing linguistic input in the EFL context.

Linguistic challenges are also apparent and confirm the theoretical understanding that limited vocabulary, weak grammar, and low pronunciation confidence are major obstacles to speaking fluency (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). Students' difficulties in remembering vocabulary and constructing grammatically correct sentences reflect the limitations of memory-based learning without adequate real-life use. Although activities such as Daily Vocabulary Memorizing and Grammar and Pronunciation Classes provide basic input, they are not always integrated into communicative tasks. This supports the view that task-based language learning and the use of context-adapted grammar are more effective in promoting spontaneous speech than isolated practice. The students' feedback demonstrated

a clear need for more interactive and meaningful exercises.

Environmental and institutional factors, such as inconsistent implementation of the English Area policy and disruption due to Islamic boarding school schedules, further confirm theoretical insights regarding the importance of consistent explanations and presentations. Virawan et al. (2023) found that peer characteristics and teacher role models play a significant role in strengthening or hindering students' English use. When a wave of institutional support passes or negative peer roles occur, students' speaking efforts decline. EFL students are often associated with backgrounds that normalize English use outside of formal learning environments.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, the English Club program is still recognized by students as a beneficial activity for enhancing their speaking abilities. Public speaking and interactive grammar games have been proven to build confidence and improve the quality of language application. Additionally, the integration of Islamic values and culturally recognized topics into speaking activities attests to the relevance of Malu & Smedley's (2014) culturally responsive pedagogy. This adaptive learning context not only facilitates student participation but also bridges the gap between English learning and everyday life.

This research confirms that the speaking challenges faced by students are multidimensional. Psychological barriers hinder the willingness to speak, linguistic limitations reduce language fluency and clarity, and environmental factors influence language exposure. These findings support existing theory and emphasize the need for a balanced, responsive, and consistent approach to English language development. English Club programs in Islamic boarding schools must be designed not only around structured activities, but also pay attention to emotional safety, linguistic framework, and contextual relevance to be truly effective.

4. CONCLUSION

Within the framework of this deductive thematic analysis, it will have an ethic that leads workers to understand the English Club program in Islamic boarding schools in a specific way: showing the young people in the program, identifying the challenges they face in the process of speaking English; the analysis will take into account the relevant theoretical constructs, namely psychological barriers, linguistic difficulties, and environmental barriers. What will become thematic designations are actually categories of yes or no success with direct or indirect support from participants in the original data.

The challenges encountered in this Study plan are different because they include criteria for. The brother reported that it was difficult to harden anxiety, nervousness, or fear of making mistakes during tapping. This major challenge supports Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis, which postulates emotions as a prohibitive factor and minimizes language erosion. Despite possessing adequate linguistic knowledge, many students avoid speaking due to low self-confidence and fear of peer evaluation. These psychological barriers are important considerations for effective language learning programs.

Linguistic limitations, such as insufficient vocabulary, poor grammar, and uncertainty in pronunciation, also hinder students' ability to speak fluently and consistently. These results validate previous research that emphasizes the need for integrated and contextualized language practices. Although activities such as Daily Vocabulary Memorizing and Grammar and Pronunciation Classes provide basic linguistic input, they are not always sufficient to enable spontaneous communication. Therefore, the challenge is not just the acquisition of knowledge but also its practical application in real life.

Environmental and institutional challenges also have a similar influence. The irregular schedule of the English Language Club and limited strengthening of the English Language Area policy, as well as weak peer support resulted in reluctance to continue practicing the language. The results support the theoretical viewpoint about the importance of immersive context and peer interaction in foreign language learning. On the other hand, activities carried out correctly such as Public Speaking are seen as very beneficial in increasing fluency and self-efficacy, especially if done regularly and assisted by mentors and colleagues.

In conclusion, the English Language Club program has significant potential as a non-formal means for developing speaking skills in Islamic boarding schools. However, maximizing the potential of these programs requires a psychologically safe environment, consistent scheduling of club activities, contextually relevant

content, and a stronger commitment from the institution to sustain language learning.

5. REFERENCES

[1] Alshumaimeri, Y. A. N. (2019). The effects of using Web 2.0 technologies on EFL students' speaking skills: A case study of Blackboard. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, *10*(1), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no1.3

[2] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

[3] Brown, H. D. (2001). Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy (2nd ed.). Longman.

[4] Başöz, T., & Erten, İ. H. (2019). A qualitative inquiry into the factors causing foreign language speaking anxiety. *The Qualitative Report*, *24*(5), 893–914. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3747

[5] Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Heinle & Heinle.

[6] Coker, D. C. (2021). Making thematic analysis systematic: The seven deadly sins. *Journal of Studies in Education*, *11*(3), 126–142. https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v11i3.18882

[7] Elnadeef, A. A. E., & Abdala, H. E. H. (2019). The effectiveness of English club as free voluntary speaking activity strategy in fostering speaking skill in Saudi Arabia context. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 2(1), 202–211.

[8] Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(1), 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107

[9] Jim'alle, D. A. (2024). Exploring challenges of speaking English among secondary school students in Abudwak District, Galmudug State, Somalia. *SERDEC Education Journal*, *5*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.70595/sej108

[10] Kuckartz, U. (2019). Qualitative content analysis: From Kracauer's beginnings to today's challenges. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *20*(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.3.3370

[11] Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.

[12] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning*, 41(4), 513–534. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00691.x

[13] Malu, K. F., & Smedley, B. (2016). Community-based English clubs: English practice and social change outside the classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, *54*(3), 10–17.

[14] Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

[15] Nasruddin, A. P. (2021). The teachers' technique in teaching speaking skill. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, *4*(2), 210–218.

[16] Octaberlina, L. R., & Muslimin, A. I. (2022). Fostering students' speaking ability through English club activities. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(3), 414–428. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no3.27

[17] Riasati, M. J. (2012). EFL learners' perception of factors influencing willingness to speak English in language classrooms: A qualitative study. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, *17*(10), 1287–1297.

[18] Riasati, M. J., & Rahimi, M. (2018). Exploring EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English classroom: Focusing on individual and situational factors. *International Journal of Instruction*, *11*(1), 651–668. https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11145a

[19] Rodríguez, M. S. M, Vera, D. M. M., & Calderón, V. E. A. (2024). Methodological strategy for the development of speaking skills in the English language. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar*, *8*(4), 8505–8524. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v8i4.13013

[20] Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, *23*(4), 334–340. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G