

Exploring Students' Experiences In Learning English Through English Club Activity

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Abstract

This study explored students' experiences in learning English through participation in English Club activities at SMKN 7 Pinrang. The research aimed to examine how involvement in this extracurricular program contributed to students' English language development, particularly in improving their speaking skills, as well as to identify the benefits and challenges they encountered. Focusing on the English Club, the study emphasized the importance of interactive, collaborative, and enjoyable learning environments in supporting language proficiency and personal growth. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to capture the participants' lived experiences. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with eight English Club members, classroom observations during routine and special sessions, and document analysis, including the club's syllabus and photographic documentation of activities. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and recurring themes from the data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The findings revealed that participation in English Club activities enhanced students' confidence, speaking fluency, vocabulary, and motivation. Additionally, it strengthened their social relationships and creativity. However, challenges such as scheduling conflicts, inconsistent attendance, and fluctuating enthusiasm were also reported. Overall, the study concluded that English Club participation significantly contributed to students' language development and supported their personal and collaborative learning growth.

Keywords: Students' experiences, English Club, speaking skills, phenomenology.

1. Introduction

The mastery of English has become one of the most essential skills in the 21st century, particularly under the Kurikulum Merdeka implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Education (Kemendikbud, 2021). This curriculum encourages students to become independent, critical, and globally competent learners. One initiative supporting this goal is the integration of extracurricular programs such as English Clubs, which offer informal spaces for authentic language practice. According to Madina and Sidabutar (2024), English Clubs serve as student-centered environments that foster confidence and motivation, complementing formal instruction.

English Clubs have been shown to improve speaking fluency, vocabulary, and learner autonomy through interactive activities such as debates, drama, storytelling, and games (Richards, 2015; Harmer, 2015). Such activities align with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles by emphasizing real-life communication. Furthermore, these clubs nurture a collaborative learning atmosphere that encourages peer support and creativity (Seong et al., 2019). Despite these advantages, the effectiveness of English Clubs varies

across schools, influenced by institutional support, teacher involvement, and student participation (Madina & Sidabutar, 2024).

In vocational schools, English proficiency plays a vital role in preparing students for job interviews and workplace communication (Maming et al., 2024). However, limited exposure to English often hinders fluency. Extracurricular programs like English Clubs provide valuable opportunities for authentic language use, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. In addition, English Clubs contribute to emotional and psychological well-being by reducing anxiety and boosting self-confidence (Astari & Hadi, 2022).

Observations at SMKN 7 Pinrang revealed that the English Club engages students in a variety of activities such as English Camp, debates, and games, which increase enthusiasm and active participation. However, challenges such as inconsistent use of English and schedule conflicts remain. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how English Club participation shapes students' experiences in learning English, particularly in improving speaking skills, confidence, and motivation. Conclude the introduction with a paragraph detailing the objectives of the work and providing a brief introduction to the methodology. Avoid excessive length to keep the reader's attention.

2. Methodology

This section describes the research design, participants, data collection instruments, and analysis procedures employed to explore students' experiences in learning English through English Club activities. This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to capture students' lived experiences in learning English through English Club activities. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding the essence of human experiences as perceived by the participants themselves.

The participants of this study consisted of eight students from SMKN 7 Pinrang who were selected using purposive sampling. The selection ensured that all participants had been actively involved in the English Club for at least one semester. The participants represented both male and female students from different grades to obtain a variety of perspectives. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms were used in the presentation of results.

Data for this study were collected through three primary instruments, namely interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' motivation for joining the English Club, the challenges they encountered during participation, and their perceived progress in speaking English. Follow-up questions were posed during the interviews to gain deeper insights into their personal experiences. Observations were conducted during regular English Club sessions such as debates, storytelling, and English Camp. These observations aimed to record students' authentic behaviors, including peer interaction, confidence level, and vocabulary use, while maintaining a non-intrusive stance. In addition, document analysis was conducted by reviewing relevant materials such as attendance lists, activity schedules, club syllabi, and student reflection notes. These documents served to verify and triangulate data obtained from interviews and observations, thus enhancing the study's credibility.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process involved six key stages: data familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting. Through these stages, recurring themes such as “confidence growth,” “speaking fluency,” and “peer collaboration” were identified and interpreted. To maintain the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher employed triangulation among different data sources and conducted member checking to confirm the accuracy of participants’ responses. The following section presents the findings and discussions derived from the analyzed data.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the research along with their interpretation and discussion based on theoretical and empirical perspectives. The results are organized according to the sequence of the methodological process to ensure logical consistency and coherence between the data and its analysis.

3.1. Result

The findings of this study reveal that students participated in the English Club for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Intrinsic motivation was reflected in their enthusiasm to improve English proficiency, expand vocabulary, and gain confidence in communication. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, was associated with their awareness of English as an essential skill for employment and higher education. Most participants viewed the English Club as a valuable opportunity to practice English beyond classroom boundaries, allowing them to experience authentic language use in a supportive environment.

Various English Club activities such as storytelling, Scrabble, debates, and English Camp provided meaningful practice that enhanced students’ speaking fluency and pronunciation. Observations showed that students participated enthusiastically and demonstrated consistent improvement over time. The mentor’s active guidance ensured that the sessions ran effectively, with each meeting combining both practice and fun. In addition, students displayed a sense of belonging and teamwork, often encouraging each other to speak English even outside formal sessions.

Students’ self-reports also indicated significant gains in self-confidence. Initially, some participants admitted that they were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English; however, over the course of their participation, they became more comfortable expressing themselves. This positive shift was attributed to the friendly and non-judgmental atmosphere of the club. Moreover, students noted that using English in games and performances helped them remember vocabulary and speak more naturally. These results demonstrate that the English Club not only enhanced linguistic ability but also fostered psychological readiness for communication.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that English Clubs play a crucial role in fostering effective and enjoyable English learning experiences. The supportive and low-anxiety learning environment encouraged students to engage actively in communication without fear

of error. Such conditions reflect the concept of a low-affective learning environment, which facilitates language acquisition and motivation (Krashen, 1982). The interactive nature of the club aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and experiential learning approaches, where authentic language use and meaningful tasks enhance fluency and confidence (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Furthermore, the mentor's involvement proved vital in sustaining motivation and guiding students' development. This finding is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding theory, emphasizing that learning occurs effectively through social interaction and guided practice within the learner's zone of proximal development. The mentor provided structure and feedback that supported students' linguistic growth while fostering independence and collaboration.

The present study also strengthens the findings of Astari and Hadi (2022) and Wahyuniati et al. (2020), who concluded that English Clubs improve students' speaking fluency and self-confidence through continuous interaction and collaborative activities. The similarities in results confirm that extracurricular programs play an essential role in complementing classroom instruction. However, the challenges identified—such as scheduling conflicts, transportation difficulties, and inconsistent attendance—reflect the contextual realities of vocational school settings. These findings are consistent with Yanti and Sulisty (2018), who observed that logistical constraints often affect the sustainability of extracurricular programs.

Despite these challenges, the English Club remained effective in enhancing students' communicative competence and interpersonal skills. It provided a space where students could practice English authentically, strengthen peer relationships, and develop personal growth. The findings underscore the importance of maintaining and institutionalizing English Clubs as integral components of language education, particularly in vocational contexts where practical communication skills are highly valued.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that participation in the English Club at SMKN 7 Pinrang significantly contributed to the improvement of students' English-speaking fluency, vocabulary mastery, and confidence. The English Club created a collaborative and enjoyable atmosphere that motivated students to practice English actively, both within and beyond the classroom. Activities such as debates, storytelling, and language games provided authentic learning experiences that supported linguistic, emotional, and social development.

The findings also revealed that students benefited from increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and stronger interpersonal relationships through their engagement in the club. These outcomes demonstrate the club's role as an effective extracurricular platform that bridges formal education and practical communication skills. Although students faced challenges such as scheduling conflicts and limited transportation access, these obstacles did not significantly hinder their overall progress.

In conclusion, English Clubs should be sustained and further developed as vital extracurricular programs that enhance students' communicative competence and personal growth. Future studies are recommended to explore the long-term impact of English Club

participation on students' professional communication abilities and to compare the effectiveness of similar programs across different educational institutions.

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