



Creating an English-Speaking Community: A Qualitative Case Study of Students' Experiences of Using English Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract

English clubs are widely studied in Indonesian EFL research, yet most existing studies frame such clubs primarily as instruments for producing measurable gains in speaking competence, leaving the social and experiential processes through which an English-speaking community is created comparatively unexamined. This qualitative case study explored students' experiences of using English beyond the classroom through the English Club of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah, IAIN Parepare, using Communities of Practice as an interpretive lens. Data were collected through a semi-structured written questionnaire distributed to English Club members; following screening against the study's inclusion criteria, sixteen of twenty original responses (P1–P16) were retained for reflexive thematic analysis. Findings showed that students experienced English use in the club as a progression from initial nervousness to gradually increasing confidence, facilitated by a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere and by learning mediated through peers rather than pursued individually. English use was encouraged by peer support, peer modelling, tutor encouragement, and habitual practice, and discouraged by fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, classroom-carried evaluation apprehension, and a social concern about being perceived as showing off; language choice was managed through flexible, situation-dependent code-switching. Participation contributed to the creation of an English-speaking community through newcomers' peripheral participation, internalized shared expectations, and a shared improvement goal sustained by peer and tutor relationships, although the sense of community was not uniformly stable across members or sessions. The study extends the Communities of Practice framework to a student-run, extracurricular English-speaking community within an Islamic higher education context and offers a process-oriented alternative to outcome-oriented framings of English clubs in prior research.

Keywords: Communities of Practice, English Club, Out-of-class Language Learning, Willingness to Communicate, Qualitative Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

English language learning has traditionally been associated with formal classroom instruction, where learners develop vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communicative skills through planned pedagogical activities. However, opportunities to use English beyond the classroom provide learners with additional spaces to practice the language in more natural and socially meaningful ways. English clubs represent one such space, since they bring learners together for communicative activities, peer interaction, and informal language practice outside the constraints of the formal syllabus. Research on language learning beyond the classroom has argued that out-of-class settings complement, rather than replace, classroom-based instruction by offering learners naturalistic opportunities to use the target language for authentic communicative purposes (Benson & Reinders, 2011). This perspective has become increasingly relevant as digital technologies and informal social spaces expand the range of contexts in which foreign-language learners can engage with English beyond scheduled lessons (Soyoof, Reynolds, Vazquez-Calvo, & McLay, 2023), and a recent thematic review of informal digital learning of English across Asian EFL contexts shows that engagement with English outside the classroom is increasingly recognized as a distinct and consequential dimension of language development, associated with gains in motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate (Liu, Soyoof, Lee, & Zhang, 2025).

Within the Indonesian EFL context specifically, English clubs have received growing scholarly attention. Recent studies have examined how English clubs function as spaces to build students' speaking competence and performance (Aditya, Prayogo, & Anggara, 2024; Yusvita, Atmowardoyo, & Samtidar, 2024), to support speaking-skill development through structured club activities (Vadriani, Mulyani, Nurwahida, & Ardin, 2023; Mursidin, Sulviana, & Ningsih, 2023), and to sustain students' constructive engagement with English through regular club participation (Maming, Sianna, Hasman, Cabuso, & Sasmita, 2024). Studies at the secondary level have similarly explored how English clubs support the implementation of speaking-teaching strategies (Nisa, Al-Baekani, & Dewi, 2026) and how club-based interaction contributes to EFL speaking practice more broadly (Gisma, Nur, & Baa, 2025). Taken together, this body of research suggests that English clubs are consistently examined primarily as instruments for producing measurable improvements in speaking ability, rather than as social environments in which a shared practice of using English is collectively created and sustained. A similar tendency appears in adjacent research on speaking anxiety, which shows that Indonesian EFL students frequently experience apprehension when using English outside formal, controlled classroom settings (Daflizar, 2024; Fauzi & Asi, 2023; Meliyani, Utomo, & Masrupi, 2022), shaped by fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence (Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023), and in research on informal digital learning of English, which continues to conceptualize out-of-class engagement through individual psychological constructs such as willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, and online engagement rather than as a lived, collective experience (Fang, Meng, Tang, & Cui, 2025; Soyoof, 2023). Students' informal English use is further shaped by the language choices they make when interacting with peers, including code-switching and translanguaging between English, Indonesian, and local languages, which recent studies have shown to serve clarification, solidarity, and communicative efficiency (Liando, Dallyono, Tatipang, & Lengkoan, 2023; Sari, 2022; Sutrisno, 2023).

Theoretically, the concept of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) offers a lens for understanding language learning as a process of participation in social practice rather than as a purely individual cognitive achievement. Within this perspective, learners develop competence and identity through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of practices negotiated with other members of a community. Although this framework has been productively applied to teacher communities in Indonesian and regional EFL contexts (Putri & Damayanti, 2023), its application to student-run, extracurricular English-speaking communities remains uncommon in the Indonesian literature reviewed for this study.

Three converging gaps in the literature justify the present study. First, a gap in analytical framing: the majority of recent Indonesian studies on English clubs frame their research questions and titles around speaking competence, speaking skill, or speaking performance, leaving comparatively little space for process-oriented questions about how a community of English use is socially created, negotiated, and sustained through participation. Second, a gap in the treatment of out-of-class engagement: even where recent scholarship has moved toward examining students' engagement with English beyond the classroom, this engagement is still predominantly conceptualized and measured as

an individual psychological variable rather than explored as a lived, collective, and interactional experience. Third, a gap in theoretical application and institutional context: the Communities of Practice framework has rarely been used to examine student-run English clubs and has not, to the knowledge available through this review, been applied within an Islamic higher education (IAIN) setting in Indonesia. This study addresses these three gaps by investigating the social and experiential dimensions of English use beyond the classroom within a university English Club at IAIN Parepare, using Communities of Practice as an interpretive lens. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do students experience using English beyond the classroom through the English Club? (2) What factors encourage or discourage students from using English in their interactions within and beyond the English Club? and (3) How does participation in the English Club contribute to the creation and maintenance of an English-speaking community?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Yin, 2018). A case study was considered appropriate because the research focused on a bounded social setting—the English Club within the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah, IAIN Parepare—and sought an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon, namely the creation of an English-speaking community, within its real-life context. The study was conducted in the English Club of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah, IAIN Parepare, which was treated as a university-based English-speaking community in which students have opportunities to interact and practice English beyond regular classroom instruction. This institutional setting—an Islamic higher education institution (IAIN)—has not been directly represented in the English club literature reviewed above, which adds contextual value to the study.

Population and Sample or Research Subjects

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria requiring that participants were currently enrolled in the English Education Study Program, actively or regularly participating in the English Club, had experience using English in club activities or informal interactions with other members, and were willing to participate voluntarily. Twenty responses were originally collected. Before analysis, the dataset was screened against these inclusion criteria: two responses were excluded because the respondents explicitly stated they had never joined the English Club; two further responses were excluded because their entire account described a boarding-style immersion program inconsistent with the campus-based, weekly-meeting format described by the remaining participants; one additional response was retained but a single answer referring to the same immersion program was excluded from coding; and two further coded responses that showed an apparent misalignment between several answers and their corresponding questions were re-associated with the question they substantively addressed, based on content, before coding. Missing or non-substantive answers were treated as missing data rather than as evidence of an absent theme. After screening, sixteen responses were retained for thematic analysis and are referred to throughout as P1 to P16. Membership length among these participants ranged from single-session attendance to one year of continuous involvement, including one participant present since the club's formation, a range that is analytically useful because it captures perspectives from newcomers as well as more established members, consistent with the participation trajectory described in Communities of Practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Research Instruments

Data were collected through a semi-structured written questionnaire administered to English Club members, organized around the study's three research questions and covering participants' experiences of using English in the club, factors encouraging or discouraging their English use, and their perceptions of the club as an English-speaking community. The study was originally designed to triangulate three complementary data sources—semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation—in order to examine students' reported experiences, their naturally occurring interaction, and the material and institutional traces of the club's activities. At the present stage of the research, however, the findings reported here are based on the written questionnaire responses only;

observation and documentation data had not yet been analyzed at the time of writing and are addressed further in the Conclusion.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), following the six-phase process originally outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and refined in their later work: (1) familiarizing the researcher with the questionnaire responses; (2) generating initial codes from meaningful segments of data; (3) searching for and constructing candidate themes by grouping related codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes against the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and clear distinction between themes; (5) defining and naming themes in relation to the research questions; and (6) producing the final analytic narrative, interpreted through the Communities of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This process was further supported by the step-by-step approach to conceptual model development in thematic analysis proposed by Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni (2023). Analysis proceeded inductively in the early coding stages, allowing themes to emerge from the data, while the later interpretive stage drew deductively on Communities of Practice concepts to structure the discussion.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study drew on data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents (with observation and documentation data pending integration, as noted above), participant or member checking of selected interpretations, peer discussion regarding coding and emerging themes, and the maintenance of an audit trail of transcripts, coding decisions, and theme development, consistent with recommended practice for rigorous thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Participants received clear information about the purpose and procedures of the study prior to giving consent; participation was voluntary, and participants were informed they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms (P1–P16) in the research report, and data were stored securely and used only for the purposes of this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings organized by research question. Table 1 provides an overview of the themes identified before each is discussed in detail with supporting excerpts from participants' responses.

Table 1. Overview of Themes by Research Question

Research Question	Themes
RQ1: Experiences of using English beyond the classroom	From nervousness to growing confidence; a relaxed, non-judgmental space for practice; learning through and with peers; carrying English beyond the club; memorable moments as turning points Encouraging: peer support and non-judgmental atmosphere; peer modelling and social motivation; supportive tutors/facilitators; habitual, repeated practice. Discouraging: fear of mistakes and being laughed at; limited vocabulary; evaluation apprehension carried from the classroom; accommodating non-English-speaking interlocutors; fear of being seen as "showing off." Language choice: flexible, situation-dependent code-switching and translanguaging
RQ2: Factors encouraging or discouraging English use	Newcomers' peripheral participation; shared (informal) norms and expectations; mutual engagement and joint enterprise; what sustains the practice over time; a negative case — when it does not feel like a community
RQ3: Creation and maintenance of an English-speaking community	

RQ1: Students' Experiences of Using English Beyond the Classroom

From Nervousness to Growing Confidence

Nearly all participants described their initial experience of using English in the club in terms of nervousness, shyness, or confusion, followed by a gradual and self-reported increase in confidence over time.

"First time joining the class, i was confused with it. But eventually i learned slowly with my friend's help" (P5)

"At first, I was nervous and not confident about speaking English, but the club gave me a safe place to practice." (P2, 2 weeks)

"At first, I was just a regular member and was sometimes still shy to speak English. Over time, I became more confident and more active in the club." (P3, 2 weeks)

Even the participant with one year of membership echoed this trajectory retrospectively, describing an early period of shyness followed by comfort (P9), suggesting that the shift from nervousness to confidence is remembered as a defining arc of the club experience regardless of how long ago it began.

A Relaxed, Non-Judgmental Space for Practice

Participants consistently contrasted the English Club with the formal classroom, describing the club as more relaxed and less evaluative.

"it feels different cause in the English club we learn about english language deeply that in the class." (P4)

"In the English Club, when we speak Indonesian we will be sanctioned. If in regular classes we can use Indonesian a little... [the club is] less stressful and more enjoyable" (P14, founding member)

"It's very good because we are not demanded to be a perfect speaker. Just speak." (P11)

This informal, low-stakes quality was frequently linked to a stated absence of judgment: participants explained that mistakes were tolerated and not ridiculed, which several described as the single biggest difference from regular class.

Learning Through and With Peers

Participants overwhelmingly described their English use as socially embedded rather than solitary, learning through observing, imitating, and being corrected by peers rather than through individual study alone.

"It's fun because I can learn more from my friends." (P2, 2 weeks)

"My friends influence me a lot. When my friends speak English, I feel motivated to speak English too." (P2, 2 weeks)

This peer-mediated learning process appeared central to participants' descriptions of "experience," reinforcing that the club functions less as an instructional program and more as a space of mutual, informal apprenticeship among peers of broadly similar proficiency.

Carrying English Beyond the Club

Several participants reported that their participation in the club had begun to shape their English use outside club sessions, though the degree of this spillover varied.

"Yess, it change wheb i speak to my friend, she can understand what i say and i can understand what she say, ah its really Improving my English" (P7)

However, this spillover was not universal. One participant explained that continuing to use English outside the club could create social friction with peers who were not part of the club: "Sometimes some of my friends [are] tired or bored hearing me using English outside the class, that makes me kinda sad and feel like am I using English too much?" (P14, founding member). Another

participant reported that opportunities outside the club were simply scarce, since “in daily life... I don’t have friends to speak English with except the English [club] people” (P1, 2 weeks).

Memorable Moments as Turning Points

When asked to recall a memorable moment, participants tended to describe a specific instance of successfully speaking in front of others as a turning point in their self-perception.

“when I first practiced speaking English with other members. I felt shy and nervous at first, but my friends encouraged me. After that, I felt more confident.” (P10, 2 weeks)

Games and informal activities layered into sessions were also frequently mentioned as memorable, suggesting that affect rather than linguistic accuracy was the dimension of experience participants found most salient.

RQ2: Factors Encouraging and Discouraging English Use

Encouraging Factors

Peer support and a non-judgmental atmosphere:

“Tidak ada ejekan di club [There is no mockery in the club]” (P1, 2 weeks)

“because in the club we are not insulted if our English is not good but we are guided, improved and supported” (P8, attended once)

Peer modelling and social motivation:

“kadang ketika kita kumpul, teman teman saya terlihat kerenn lalu saya ingin sperti mereka [sometimes when we gather, my friends look cool, and I want to be like them]” (P12, ~1 week)

Supportive tutors/facilitators:

“The tutors encourage us to speak English and not be afraid of making mistakes.” (P2, 2 weeks)

Habitual, repeated practice:

“with all of my friend, because now it’s start like our habit” (P6, 2 weeks)

Discouraging Factors

Fear of making mistakes and being laughed at:

“Takut ditertawakan takut salah bicara dan vocab masih sedikit [Afraid of being laughed at, afraid of speaking wrongly, and vocabulary is still limited]” (P1, 2 weeks)

Limited vocabulary and lexical gaps:

“Because sometime i forget the vocab, i’m scared to make a mistake” (P7)

Evaluation apprehension tied to formal classroom norms:

“In regular classes sometimes we are afraid to make mistake and [get reprimanded by the lecturer]. In the other hand, English club... didn’t demand us to be perfect.” (P14, founding member)

A more socially complex discouraging factor also emerged: the perceived risk of being seen as showing off. One participant explained avoiding English in whole-class situations “because I don’t want to be the ‘Mr. Know it all’” (P14, founding member), while another noted a related concern about being labeled sok Inggris (“acting English”) by peers outside the club.

Language Choice: Code-Switching and Translanguaging

Almost all participants who addressed this question reported switching between English, Indonesian, and occasionally local expressions, primarily to resolve lexical gaps or to ensure mutual understanding.

“Yes, I sometimes switch between English and Indonesian during club activities... when I do not understand something, I usually switch to Indonesian to ask my friends.” (P2, 2 weeks)

Notably, one participant reported an English-only norm enforced through informal consequence within a specific activity setting, while another reported no switching at all, indicating that language-choice norms are locally negotiated depending on the specific session, activity format, or facilitator.

**RQ3: Creation and Maintenance of an English-Speaking Community
Newcomers’ Peripheral Participation**

Consistent with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), several newer members described an initial phase of observation and imitation before more active participation.

“New members learn by joining activities and practicing with other members. They listen to more experienced members and learn from them.” (P10, 2 weeks)

Shared (Informal) Norms and Expectations

Most participants indicated that the club held an implicit, rather than formally codified, expectation to use English during activities.

“One shared expectation in the club is that we try to use English during activities, especially when we practice speaking.” (P2, 2 weeks)

Mutual Engagement and Joint Enterprise

Participants frequently framed their participation in terms of a shared goal pursued together, rather than an individual pursuit undertaken in parallel with others.

“we all have the same goal, which is to improve our English.” (P2, 2 weeks)

What Sustains the Practice Over Time

Asked what kept the club’s English-speaking practice going despite difficulty, participants pointed less to institutional rules and more to relational and motivational factors.

“I think the support from friends and tutors keeps the English-speaking practice going. Even when we make mistakes or feel nervous, they encourage us to keep trying.” (P2, 2 weeks)

A Negative Case: When It Does Not Feel Like a Community

Not every account was uniformly positive. One participant located the sense of community specifically in the act of speaking English itself, implying its absence at other times: “[the club does not feel like a community] when we study about something that [is] not a[n] English subject part” (P7). Another participant offered a more ambivalent reading altogether: “I feel like I have to speak English in the English club, yet at the same time, it’s just a formality” (P19, attended once).

Discussion

The recurring arc from initial nervousness to gradual confidence closely mirrors the individual-difference literature on speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners, which identifies fear of negative evaluation and low self-perceived skill as central sources of apprehension both inside and outside the classroom (Daflizar, 2024; Fauzi & Asi, 2023; Meliyani, Utomo, & Masrupi, 2022). However, where that literature typically measures anxiety as a relatively stable individual trait, the

present findings suggest that within the English Club, anxiety functions as a starting condition that is actively and progressively worked through via repeated, low-stakes exposure—consistent with the incremental, practice-based model of learning implied by legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), rather than as a fixed barrier requiring separate intervention. The consistent contrast participants drew between the club’s relaxed, non-evaluative atmosphere and the classroom’s formality supports Benson and Reinders’ (2011) argument that out-of-class settings are valuable precisely because they differ from the classroom along dimensions of formality and locus of control.

The encouraging factors identified—peer support, peer modelling, tutor encouragement, and habitual practice—collectively describe the situational and interpersonal conditions associated with heightened willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). Participants rarely framed their willingness to speak English as a fixed personality trait; instead, willingness appeared highly responsive to who else was present and how the immediate environment was structured, echoing MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) situational model more than trait-based accounts of confidence. The discouraging factors largely replicate findings from prior Indonesian EFL research on speaking anxiety, particularly fear of mistakes and limited vocabulary (Daflizar, 2024; Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023), while the present data add a socially oriented discouraging factor not fully captured by that literature: the risk of being perceived as showing off when using English outside the club or in front of a wider, non-club audience. The code-switching and translanguaging patterns reported are consistent with prior findings that Indonesian EFL learners move fluidly between English and Indonesian primarily to resolve lexical gaps and maintain mutual comprehension (Liando, Dallyono, Tatipang, & Lengkoan, 2023; Sari, 2022), and the uneven strength of the “English-only” norm across sub-activities echoes Sutrisno’s (2023) observation that translanguaging in informal EFL contexts carries both risks and potentials for learners’ development.

The findings support the applicability of the Communities of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to this student-run English Club. Newcomers’ description of an observation-then-participation trajectory closely matches legitimate peripheral participation, while participants’ framing of a shared improvement goal and largely unwritten, internalized expectations around English use reflect Wenger’s (1998) constructs of joint enterprise and shared repertoire, respectively. This extends the Communities of Practice framework’s prior application to Indonesian EFL teacher communities (Putri & Damayanti, 2023) to a novel setting—a student-run, extracurricular club within an Islamic higher education institution. At the same time, the negative and ambivalent cases complicate a straightforwardly positive reading of the club as a fully realized community of practice: a sense of community was described as conditional on active English use within a given session, suggesting that the club may be better understood as a community of practice still in formation, or one whose mutual engagement varies session by session, rather than as a fully stabilized, uniformly experienced community for all members.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how students at the English Club of the English Education Study Program, IAIN Parepare, experience using English beyond the classroom, what factors encourage or discourage this use, and how their participation contributes to the creation and maintenance of an English-speaking community. Students experienced using English beyond the classroom as a progression from initial nervousness to gradually increasing confidence, enabled by a relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere and by learning mediated through peers rather than pursued individually. English use was encouraged mainly by peer support, peer modelling, tutor encouragement, and habitual repetition, and discouraged mainly by fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, evaluation apprehension carried over from formal classes, and a social concern about being perceived as showing off; language choice was managed through flexible, situation-dependent code-switching. Participation contributed to the creation of an English-speaking community through newcomers’ peripheral participation, an internalized shared expectation to use English, and a shared improvement goal sustained by peer and tutor relationships—though this sense of community was not uniformly stable across all members or sessions.

Theoretically, the study extends the Communities of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to a student-run, extracurricular English-speaking community within an Islamic higher education context, offering a process-oriented alternative to the outcome-oriented framings that have dominated prior research on Indonesian English clubs. Practically, the findings suggest that the

club's informal, low-stakes atmosphere and peer-mediated structure are central to its perceived value and should be preserved rather than formalized into a more classroom-like structure, while more deliberate attention to consistent English-use norms across sessions could strengthen the club's function as a sustained community of practice rather than an intermittent one.

This study is limited in that four of the twenty original responses were excluded and one additional answer within a fifth response was excluded due to evidence that they described a different program or no direct club experience, reducing the effective sample to sixteen responses. Data collection relied on a self-administered written questionnaire rather than live interviews, limiting the depth of probing possible for some items, and the observation and documentation data originally planned to triangulate these findings had not yet been analyzed at the time of writing; the findings reported here should therefore be read as provisional pending further data integration. Future research should integrate observation and documentation data, employ live follow-up interviews to probe ambivalent or negative cases in greater depth, and extend the Communities of Practice lens to other student-run, extracurricular English-speaking communities in Islamic higher education institutions to assess the transferability of the present findings.

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