

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH CLUB PARTICIPATION: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Putra Sulaiman, Ridha Ilma, Deta Desvitasari

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah

putrasulaiman1304@gmail.com, ridhailma_uin@radenfatah.ac.id,

detadesvitasari_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

ABSTRACT: English learners in Indonesia have limited opportunities to use English communicatively outside formal classroom instruction. Although English Clubs may provide supplementary learning opportunities, students' experiences of their linguistic and non-linguistic benefits, as well as the challenges they encounter, require further investigation. This study explored senior high school students' perceptions of English Club participation in supporting their English language development. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved six eleventh-grade students (three male and three female, aged 16–17) from a senior high school in Palembang, Indonesia. The participants were selected through homogeneous purposive sampling based on their consistent participation in the English Club for at least one year. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of the interview data. The participants perceived that English Club activities supported the development of their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. They also reported increased confidence, motivation, and awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement. Interactive activities, regular practice, and peer support contributed to a collaborative and low-anxiety learning environment. Nevertheless, the participants identified limited variation in learning materials, insufficient session duration, and scheduling conflicts with academic responsibilities as major challenges. The findings indicate that English clubs can complement formal EFL instruction by providing opportunities for meaningful language practice and encouraging learner autonomy. However, more systematic planning, varied materials, and flexible scheduling are necessary to improve program implementation and accommodate students' diverse learning needs.

Keywords: *English club, perceived benefits, perceived challenges, learner autonomy*

PANDANGAN SISWA SMA TENTANG PARTISIPASI KLUB BAHASA INGGRIS: KEUNTUNGAN DAN TANTANGAN DALAM PENGEMBANGAN BAHASA INGGRIS

ABSTRACT: Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia memiliki peluang terbatas untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris di luar lingkungan kelas formal. Meski Klub Bahasa Inggris dapat memberikan kesempatan belajar tambahan, pengalaman siswa terhadap manfaat linguistik maupun non-linguistik serta hambatan yang mereka hadapi masih memerlukan penelitian lebih lanjut. Penelitian ini menyelidiki persepsi siswa sekolah menengah atas terhadap partisipasi Klub Bahasa Inggris dalam mendukung pengembangan bahasa Inggris mereka. Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian melibatkan enam siswa kelas XI (tiga laki-laki dan tiga perempuan, usia 16–17 tahun) dari sebuah SMA di Palembang, Indonesia. Peserta dipilih melalui sampling purposif homogen berdasarkan partisipasi konsisten di Klub Bahasa Inggris minimal satu tahun. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi terstruktur dan dianalisis secara tematik. Pemeriksaan anggota dilakukan untuk

memastikan keakuratan data wawancara. Para peserta merasakan bahwa kegiatan Klub Bahasa Inggris mendukung perkembangan kemampuan berbicara, mendengar, membaca, dan menulis mereka. Mereka juga melaporkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri, motivasi, serta kesadaran tentang kekuatan dan area yang perlu ditingkatkan. Kegiatan interaktif, latihan reguler, dan dukungan teman sebaya menciptakan lingkungan belajar kolaboratif dan kurang cemas. Namun, para peserta mengidentifikasi variasi materi belajar yang terbatas, durasi sesi yang tidak memadai, dan konflik jadwal dengan tanggung jawab akademis sebagai tantangan utama. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa klub bahasa Inggris dapat melengkapi pengajaran EFL formal dengan menyediakan kesempatan praktik bahasa yang bermakna serta mendorong otonomi pembelajar. Namun, perencanaan yang lebih sistematis, materi yang beragam, dan penjadwalan fleksibel diperlukan untuk meningkatkan pelaksanaan program dan mengakomodasi kebutuhan belajar siswa yang beragam.

Kata kunci: klub bahasa Inggris, keuntungan, tantangan, otonomi pembelajar

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in providing students with access to educational, technological, and professional opportunities. In Indonesia, however, English is learned primarily as a foreign language, and students generally have limited opportunities to use it in everyday communication (Alrajafi, 2021; Meisani, 2021). Although English is formally taught at school, classroom instruction may not always provide sufficient time and conditions for sustained communicative practice. Consequently, students require additional learning opportunities that allow them to use English actively, interact with peers, and develop confidence beyond the formal classroom. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexible and student-centered learning, further encourages schools to provide learning experiences that respond to students' interests and developmental needs (British Council, 2025; Wahyudin et al., 2024).

Among various extracurricular initiatives, English Club programs have received particular attention for providing an informal and participatory space for language practice outside regular instruction. Previous studies have reported that English Club activities such as discussions, games, debates, and storytelling support the development of students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Ariana et al., 2022; Vadriani et al., 2023), while also fostering greater confidence and enthusiasm through a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere (Astari & Hadi, 2023; Handayani et al., 2023). However, much of this research has approached English Club participation primarily in terms of measurable skill gains or motivation, with comparatively little attention given to how students reflect on their own learning process or develop autonomy through participation. Prior studies have also noted persistent challenges such as limited learning resources, restricted session time, and difficulty balancing club involvement with academic obligations (Amelia et al., 2017; Rachmania et al., 2022), yet these challenges are typically reported descriptively rather than examined alongside the benefits students perceive from the same program. Moreover, few studies have specifically examined senior high school students' experiences of English Club participation within the Indonesian context of the Merdeka Curriculum, where extracurricular programs are positioned as a central complement to formal instruction. This study addresses this gap by concurrently exploring students' perceived benefits and challenges of English Club participation at a senior high school in Palembang, giving particular attention to the previously underexplored dimension of self-awareness and learner autonomy.

This study aimed to explore senior high school students' perceptions of English Club participation by examining its perceived benefits for their English language development and the challenges they experienced during their participation. Particular attention was given to students' perceptions of their language-skill development, confidence, motivation, and self-awareness, as well as the factors that constrained their engagement in the program. By examining these perceived benefits and challenges concurrently, this study provides a contextualized account of English Club participation in an Indonesian senior high school and offers practical insights for developing more structured, engaging, and responsive extracurricular English programs. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do senior high school students perceive the benefits of English Club participation for their English language development? (2) What challenges do students experience during their participation in the English Club?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore senior high school students' perceptions of English Club participation. A case study design was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth examination of participants' experiences within a bounded, real-life educational context (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The case was bounded by one English Club program at a senior high school in Palembang, Indonesia, during February 2025. The school's name was replaced with a pseudonym to protect its identity. The English Club was conducted weekly, every Saturday from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., and included activities such as discussions, vocabulary games, debates, storytelling, role-playing, and group presentations. This context enabled the researchers to examine how students perceived the benefits and challenges of participating in the program.

The participants were six eleventh-grade students selected through homogeneous purposive sampling. At the time of data collection, the English Club had more than 100 registered members, of whom approximately 70 were considered active participants. To be eligible, students were required to have participated in the English Club for at least one year, maintained an attendance rate of at least 80% during the preceding three months, and actively participated in regular or competition-related club activities. These criteria were applied to recruit information-rich participants who had sufficient experience to reflect on the program. The participants consisted of three female and three male students aged 16–17. They were assigned identification codes, P1 to P6, to maintain confidentiality. Although the selection criteria provided access to students with substantial experience, recruiting highly active members may have resulted in predominantly positive perceptions; therefore, this potential selection bias was considered when interpreting the findings.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 45 open-ended questions. The guide was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature concerning extracurricular English learning. It covered three principal areas: students' experiences of participating in the English Club, their perceptions of its linguistic and non-linguistic benefits, and the challenges affecting their participation. Follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and encourage participants to provide examples from their experiences. The interview guide was reviewed by experts to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions, and the guide was approved for use following this review.

Data were collected in February 2025. Each participant was interviewed individually in a quiet location at the school after regular class hours. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were conducted in a combination of Indonesian and English to allow participants to express their experiences clearly. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the data. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. During member checking, the researchers explained the meaning of participants' quotations in Indonesian to help participants confirm the accuracy of their statements. The researchers checked each transcript against its corresponding audio recording before beginning the analysis. Recording and transcription were used to maintain data accuracy; they were not treated as sufficient evidence of interpretive validity.

The interview data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2021). First, the researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the data and record preliminary observations. Second,

meaningful segments related to students' experiences, perceived benefits, and participation challenges were systematically coded. Third, related codes were grouped to develop initial themes and subthemes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to determine whether they accurately represented the participants' accounts. Fifth, each theme was clearly defined and named by identifying its central meaning and boundaries. Finally, the themes were organized into a coherent report and supported with relevant participant quotations.

The research questions provided broad areas of analytical interest, but the researchers remained open to meanings and patterns that emerged from the participants' accounts. The analysis focused primarily on the explicit meanings expressed by participants. Coding was conducted manually by the researcher without the assistance of qualitative data analysis software. Because coding was carried out by a single researcher, no formal inter-rater disagreement resolution procedure was applied; the coded extracts were instead revisited multiple times against the transcripts to check consistency. This analytical process produced themes concerning perceived language-skill development, confidence, motivation, self-awareness, learning materials, session duration, and time-management challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis generated two overarching themes corresponding to the research questions: (1) the perceived benefits of English Club participation and (2) the challenges experienced by students during their participation. The first theme comprised three subthemes: perceived language-skill development, increased confidence and motivation, and greater self-awareness. The second theme included limited variation in learning materials, insufficient session duration, and difficulties balancing club participation with academic responsibilities. Table 1 summarizes the themes, subthemes, illustrative codes, and participant representation.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes emerging from the interview data

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative Codes	Participants
Perceived Benefits of English Club Participation	Perceived language-skill development	Participants associated the club with gains in speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing, though the extent of improvement varied.	P1–P6 (6/6)
	Increased confidence and motivation	Participants reported reduced anxiety, greater willingness to speak English, and sustained motivation driven by peer support and enjoyable activities.	P1–P6 (6/6)
	Greater self-awareness	Participants recognized personal strengths and weaknesses in English, prompting some to plan further self-directed practice.	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6 (5/6)
Challenges Experienced During English	Limited variation in learning materials	Some participants noted the absence of a structured vocabulary follow-up and reduced competition-specific training;	P1, P2 (concern); P4, P6 (satisfied)

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative Codes	Participants
Club Participation		others viewed the materials as varied and engaging.	
	Insufficient session duration	Most participants felt the two-hour, once-a-week schedule limited practice and coach interaction; others considered it sufficient when paired with independent study.	P2, P3, P4 (insufficient); P1, P5, P6 (sufficient)
	Difficulties balancing club participation with academic/extracurricular responsibilities	Participants described dividing time between English Club and other commitments, sometimes alternating weekly attendance or shortening sessions.	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6 (5/6)

1. Perceived Benefits of English Club Participation

a. Perceived Language-Skill Development

All six participants associated English Club participation with development in one or more of the four core English skills, although the extent of the reported improvement varied among them. Several participants reported noticeable gains, particularly in speaking. P1 explained that since joining the club, when his teacher asked him to speak English in class, "I can do it immediately and without stuttering." P3 reported an even more marked change: "Since joining, my English-speaking skills have improved a lot. Now I can speak English very fluently. " P4 similarly noted, "It has gotten much better. I already know how to pronounce it correctly, and I understand it when I listen," and P6 stated that her skills "have improved a lot because of the supportive environment."

However, not all participants perceived the same degree of change. P2 explained that her progress had been modest: "It increased a bit, but not a lot, because the activity was only done once a week, and I wasn't practicing enough at home." P5 offered a similar account, reporting that his comprehension had improved but that speaking remained a weakness: "I'm not very good at speaking English, which means I'm not yet fluent." These accounts suggest that perceived skill development was shaped not only by attendance at club sessions but also by participants' independent practice habits outside the club, consistent with the divergent views also identified for materials and session duration below.

b. Increased Confidence and Motivation

All participants linked their participation in the English Club to greater confidence in using English, which they generally attributed to the club's supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere. P3 described a substantial change from her earlier reluctance to speak in public: "Before joining English Club, I was very shy and didn't like to speak in public. But after joining English Club, I have become much more confident. I no longer get nervous or afraid of being judged. " P2 reported a comparable shift, noting that she now stammered far less than before, although she remained "still a little afraid" when speaking outside the club setting. P4 summarized his change succinctly: "I went from not being able to do anything in English to being able to do it now."

Motivation was closely tied to the same supportive environment and to peer influence. P1, who also served as the student coordinator of the English Club, explained

that he initially joined "because of a friend" but remained engaged once he recognized the club's long-term benefits. He further described how peer enthusiasm sustained his motivation: "The people around us can also make us carried away by their positive energy. So, if our friends are excited, we will be too." P6 similarly reported that seeing a more fluent peer "immediately motivated" her to keep improving. Notably, P5 expressed a more moderate view, describing the environment's influence on his motivation as present but "not that big of a deal," indicating that peer-driven motivation was not experienced uniformly across participants.

c. Greater Self-Awareness

Beyond linguistic and affective gains, participants described becoming more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in English through regular participation and comparison with peers. P1 reflected critically on his own progress relative to peers outside the club, asking himself, "Why can't I do it, while those who don't join the English Club can?"—a comparison that appeared to drive his continued practice. P2 acknowledged persisting gaps despite her progress: "I now feel that my speaking skills are still lacking, and I need to practice more." P3 similarly recognized a specific weakness in her listening skills despite regular listening sessions: "Maybe the listening needs to be improved again, because I feel it is still lacking." P6 connected this awareness directly to her growing confidence, explaining that participants felt more assured "because we already know where the problem is."

For some participants, this awareness appeared to extend into more deliberate, self-directed learning. P5 described a moment when his improvement in writing and reading felt unconscious rather than the result of formal instruction, noting that it had simply "gotten better now" without him being able to explain why. Taken together, these accounts suggest that repeated exposure to English use in the club, combined with peer comparison and coach feedback, prompted participants to reflect on their own learning gaps—a pattern that connects to the development of learner autonomy discussed further in the Discussion section.

2. Challenges Experienced During English Club Participation

a. Limited Variation in Learning Materials

Compared with the other challenges reported, concerns about learning materials were less widespread and more specific in nature. P1, who was also responsible for organizing club activities, noted the absence of a structured vocabulary reinforcement system: when asked whether there was a pronunciation or vocabulary memorization session, he answered simply, "none," and confirmed there was no requirement to report newly learned words in subsequent meetings ("nothing"). P2 observed that competition-oriented activities such as storytelling and speech teams, which had previously offered more specialized material, were "not active anymore" because the coach was often busy. In contrast, several participants viewed the materials positively: P4 described the sessions as "fun because there are many different activities," and P6 found the material "quite different from what is usually taught at school... more fun and interesting." This divergence indicates that perceptions of material adequacy depended partly on whether participants were preparing for competitions, which required more intensive and specialized content than the regular weekly sessions provided.

b. Insufficient Session Duration

Most participants felt that the current schedule of one two-hour meeting per week was insufficient. P2 explained, "I think it's not enough because English Club should be fun, and it's only two hours long. If it can be added, I think it should be longer," and suggested that two to three meetings per week would be more appropriate. P3 raised a related concern about how session time was allocated: "In two hours, most of the time is spent explaining the material, so there is less time to interact with the coach." P4 likewise felt that more frequent meetings were needed, although he considered the two-hour duration itself adequate.

Other participants, however, regarded the existing schedule as sufficient. P1 explained that "two hours is enough because I can't only focus on English Club. I also frequently study on my own at home," while P5 similarly felt that once-weekly sessions were manageable given his already demanding regular class schedule. P6 expressed a more ambivalent position, stating that the time felt sufficient "but sometimes... not enough, but because there is only that much time so what else can I do?" This range of responses suggests that perceptions of session duration were closely tied to participants' capacity and willingness to supplement club learning with independent study at home.

c. Difficulties Balancing Club Participation with Academic and Extracurricular Responsibilities

Several participants described the difficulty of reconciling English Club attendance with other academic or extracurricular commitments. As the student coordinator, P1 explained that members who joined more than one extracurricular activity, such as basketball, were required to attend English Club at least once every two weeks, and that when time conflicts arose, it was "up to him where his main interest is." P2 offered a similar account of how members resolved such conflicts in practice, noting that some students "divide their time in half" between activities or "take turns, with English Club one week and other extracurricular activities the next," a strategy she also applied to her own schedule when preparing for competitions. P3 described a specific case of a fellow member who managed a tight schedule by moving directly from English Club to volleyball practice immediately after each session.

Other participants reported managing the two demands with fewer difficulties. P4 stated that he personally had no competing obligations, while P5, who served as the club's secretary, described his own schedule as "quite tight" but still manageable. P6 highlighted a formal consequence of unresolved absences, explaining that repeated unexcused absences ("alpha") could affect a student's extracurricular grade on their report card. Together, these accounts indicate that while time-management difficulties were common, particularly among members involved in multiple extracurricular activities, participants generally relied on informal strategies — dividing time, alternating weeks, or seeking permission — to manage the resulting conflicts.

DISCUSSION

The first research question examined students' perceptions of the benefits of English Club participation for their English language development. The participants perceived the club as a supplementary learning environment that provided opportunities to practise English through interactive and collaborative activities. This finding supports Ariana et al. (2022) and Vadriani et al. (2023), who reported that English Club activities facilitate language practice beyond formal classroom instruction. The present study adds

contextual detail by showing that students associated perceived language development with opportunities to use English repeatedly and meaningfully rather than solely with exposure to instructional content. Because these outcomes were based on self-reports, however, they should be interpreted as perceived benefits rather than verified gains in language proficiency.

The participants also connected English Club participation with greater confidence and motivation. The informal and supportive environment appeared to reduce their fear of making mistakes and increase their willingness to communicate. This finding is consistent with Astari and Hadi (2023), who emphasised the importance of an encouraging English-learning environment, and Handayani et al. (2023), who identified motivation as an important outcome of English Club participation. The current findings suggest that peer support, repeated participation, and enjoyable activities may operate together: supportive interaction reduces apprehension, while positive experiences encourage students to remain engaged. Nevertheless, the study cannot determine whether participation caused these affective changes because no comparison or longitudinal measurement was conducted.

Self-awareness represents a particularly meaningful aspect of the findings. Participants reported that interacting with peers helped them recognise their language strengths, identify learning gaps, and establish areas for further improvement. This finding extends the discussion beyond language practice and affective benefits by suggesting a connection between English Club participation and reflective learning. When students recognize what they can and cannot yet accomplish, they may be better positioned to plan independent practice and assume responsibility for their learning. Thus, the English Club was perceived not only as a space for communication but also as a setting in which learner autonomy could begin to develop. This interpretation should remain cautious because evidence of long-term autonomous behavior was not independently examined.

The second research question concerned the challenges students experienced during English Club participation. Limited material variation, insufficient session duration, and competing academic commitments were the principal difficulties. The concern about repetitive or insufficiently structured materials is consistent with Rachmania et al. (2022) and Hamadameen and Najim (2020), who noted that the quality and diversity of activities influence students' engagement in extracurricular language programs. Similarly, the reported time constraints support Wulandari (2021) and Neliwati et al. (2024), who identified limited time as a barrier to sustained extracurricular participation. In the present study, time limitations appeared to restrict active practice and feedback, particularly when substantial portions of the sessions were used for material explanation.

The findings also revealed variation among participants. While some students considered the materials repetitive and the sessions too short, others regarded them as adequate when connected with classroom learning or supplemented by independent practice. This divergence indicates that program quality cannot be evaluated solely from the presence or absence of resources. Students' proficiency, expectations, preferred activities, and capacity for independent learning may shape how they perceive the same program. The inclusion of these differing perspectives provides a more nuanced account than a uniformly positive evaluation of English Club participation.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that the English Club could be improved through more varied and level-appropriate materials, greater allocation of time

for active language use and feedback, and more flexible scheduling. Program coordinators could also involve students in selecting activities so that the program responds more closely to their interests and learning needs. Integrating guided independent tasks may help students continue practising when face-to-face meeting time is limited. These recommendations should be treated as context-specific rather than universally applicable because they were derived from one English Club program.

The findings must be interpreted within several limitations. First, the study involved only six highly active students from one senior high school; therefore, the perspectives of less active members, students who frequently missed sessions, or those who had withdrawn from the program were not represented. This sampling approach may have contributed to the predominantly positive perceptions. Second, the study relied exclusively on interview data and did not include observations, program documents, teacher perspectives, or language-proficiency assessments. Consequently, the findings cannot establish actual improvement or program effectiveness. They instead provide a contextualized account of how a small group of sustained participants understood the benefits and challenges of their English Club experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study explored senior high school students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of participating in an English club. The participants perceived the program as a valuable supplementary environment that provided opportunities to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing through interactive and collaborative activities. They also associated their participation with greater confidence, sustained motivation, and increased awareness of their language strengths and learning needs. Nevertheless, limited variation in learning materials, insufficient session duration, and competing academic commitments constrained their participation. These findings represent the participants' perceived experiences and should not be interpreted as evidence of objectively measured improvement in English proficiency.

The study provides a contextualized understanding of how repeated language practice, supportive peer interaction, and engaging activities may contribute to students' confidence, motivation, and self-awareness. In practice, English Club coordinators should provide more varied and level-appropriate materials, allocate sufficient time for active language use and feedback, and develop flexible schedules that accommodate students' academic responsibilities. Involving students in selecting activities and providing guided independent-learning tasks may also make the program more responsive to their interests and learning needs.

These conclusions are limited to six highly active students from one senior high school and may not represent the experiences of less active members or students who discontinued their participation. Furthermore, the exclusive use of interview data did not permit verification of perceived language development through observation or proficiency assessment. Future research should involve participants with more diverse levels of engagement, examine English Club programs across different school contexts, and combine interviews with observations, program documents, and language assessments. Such research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how English Club participation relates to students' language development and sustained learner autonomy.

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