

## ENHANCING GRAMMAR MASTERY THROUGH THE ENGLISH SPEAKING CLUB

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the role of the English Speaking Club (ESC) at Hamzanwadi University in enhancing students' grammar mastery through a non-formal, collaborative environment. While conventional EFL classrooms often focus on explicit form-based instruction that triggers cognitive overload, informal spaces offer a low-anxiety alternative. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through participant observations and in-depth interviews with active ESC members, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal two primary mechanisms: first, the informal environment significantly reduces speaking anxiety, aligning with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis; second, peer interactions facilitate spontaneous error correction, acting as peer scaffolding that accelerates the transition from declarative grammatical knowledge to procedural fluency, as posited by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. This study contributes theoretically by bridging cognitive Second Language Acquisition (SLA) with sociocultural frameworks and practically by urging higher education institutions to integrate extracurricular language clubs into comprehensive language learning ecosystems.*

**Keywords:** *Affective filter, English Speaking Club, Grammar mastery, Peer scaffolding, Qualitative case study.*

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran *English Speaking Club* (ESC) di Universitas Hamzanwadi dalam meningkatkan penguasaan tata bahasa mahasiswa melalui lingkungan non-formal dan kolaboratif. Di saat kelas EFL konvensional sering kali berfokus pada instruksi berbasis bentuk kaku yang memicu kelebihan beban kognitif, ruang informal menawarkan alternatif dengan tingkat kecemasan yang rendah. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan anggota aktif ESC, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan dua mekanisme utama: pertama, lingkungan informal secara signifikan menurunkan kecemasan berbicara, yang sejalan dengan Hipotesis Saringan Afektif Krashen; kedua, interaksi antar-teman sebaya memfasilitasi koreksi kesalahan spontan, bertindak sebagai perancah teman sebaya (*peer scaffolding*) yang mengakselerasi transisi dari pengetahuan tata bahasa deklaratif menuju kelancaran prosedural, sebagaimana dikemukakan dalam Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi secara teoretis dengan menjembatani akuisisi bahasa kedua (SLA) kognitif dengan kerangka sosiokultural, serta secara praktis dengan mendorong institusi pendidikan tinggi untuk mengintegrasikan klub bahasa ekstrakurikuler ke dalam ekosistem pembelajaran bahasa yang komprehensif.

**Kata Kunci:** *English Speaking Club*, Penguasaan tata bahasa, Filter afektif, Penguasaan tata bahasa, Perancah sebaya, Studi kasus kualitatif.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence is the central cornerstone of modern English language learning, where grammatical mastery serves as the fundamental structure to avoid miscommunication in real-life interactions (Richards &

Rodgers, 2014). Unfortunately, the reality in conventional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom reveals a crucial instructional mismatch. Educators often dominate instruction with rigid form-based methods, prioritizing explicit

theoretical grammatical accuracy over the practice of meaningful communicative fluency (Ellis, 2015). Consequently, students remain trapped at the level of declarative knowledge; they understand syntactic rules on paper but experience cognitive overload and fail to apply these structures when forced to produce spontaneous speech.

Despite this failure in theoretical implementation, the majority of current academic research and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature remains overly focused on formal classroom interventions. There is a significant research gap regarding how informal, extracurricular learning environments—particularly those driven by peer dynamics—facilitate grammar assimilation. Comprehensive empirical data is still lacking on how peer interaction, meaning negotiation, and implicit error correction function outside the formal curriculum to lower language anxiety while simultaneously improving syntactic accuracy (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Students often lack a platform to practice theory without the looming fear of negative academic evaluation.

Ignoring the dynamics of this informal learning carries detrimental consequences both scientifically and practically. Educational institutions run a massive risk of losing a highly potent pedagogical tool if student study groups are reduced to mere casual social gatherings. Scientifically, it is urgently necessary to acknowledge and investigate how low-anxiety environments can serve as a practical bridge for learners. These non-formal communicative spaces are crucially needed to habituate students to take linguistic risks, which ultimately transforms rigid grammar rules into fluent, accurate, and natural speech.

Departing from this gap and urgency, this study aims to explore and analyze the specific role of the English Speaking Club (ESC) at Hamzanwadi University in enhancing students' grammar mastery. This investigation is focused on how collaborative communicative activities within the club, such as interactive discussions and peer-based debates, operate as an alternative pedagogical mechanism. The primary objective is to dissect how this tension-free environment assists students in transforming declarative knowledge

into automated procedural skills during spontaneous speech.

This article is expected to provide a dual contribution to the development of applied linguistics and educational practice. Theoretically, the findings of this research will enrich Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) literature by providing empirical evidence that implicit grammar acquisition can be accelerated through peer scaffolding outside the classroom. Practically, this research offers an operational foundation for lecturers, university policymakers, and club administrators to strategically integrate extracurricular programs with formal curriculum targets, fostering a comprehensive and supportive language learning ecosystem.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Grammar mastery within the EFL context is inextricably linked to the cognitive framework of second language acquisition. Theoretically, the transition of language mastery involves a movement from declarative knowledge—a conscious understanding of syntactic rules—toward procedural knowledge, where

learners can automatically produce grammatical structures without experiencing cognitive overload (Anderson, 1983; DeKeyser, 2015). This automatization process, according to Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), relies heavily on social interaction and peer scaffolding, wherein meaning is actively negotiated. Furthermore, the Affective Filter Hypothesis asserts that advanced grammar assimilation can only occur optimally when the learner's anxiety levels are at their lowest (Krashen, 1982). Formal classroom environments frequently fail to satisfy these conditions, thereby raising the urgency for alternative learning platforms such as language communities.

Empirical exploration regarding the effectiveness of extracurricular activities and language communities has been extensive over the past decade. Numerous studies have consistently highlighted the positive impact of language clubs on communicative fluency. For instance, Lightbown and Spada (2013) found that active participation in informal English environments significantly enhanced students' fluency and

vocabulary acquisition. This finding is corroborated by observational studies conducted by Mackey (2012), which demonstrated that non-formal environments alleviate the fear of academic evaluation, thereby encouraging learners to take linguistic risks. Conversely, from the perspective of peer collaboration, investigations into corrective feedback proved that peer-correction in a casual setting is much more readily accepted and internalized compared to explicit, teacher-led correction in the classroom (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Although the existing literature provides broad insights into the benefits of language communities, a deeper examination reveals a substantial research gap. The majority of previous studies have focused almost exclusively on general fluency and the reduction of speaking anxiety. Very few studies have specifically investigated how autonomously student-managed language club environments influence structural accuracy and spoken grammar acquisition. Furthermore, prior research centered on secondary education learners, leaving an empirical void regarding the cognitive

dynamics of university-level students who face more complex academic syntactic demands.

This research strategically positions itself to bridge these theoretical and empirical gaps. By situating the English Speaking Club (ESC) as the locus of investigation, this study goes beyond merely measuring fluency; it dissects the transitional mechanisms of how a tension-free environment facilitates the grammatical shift from declarative theory to procedural practice.

## **A. METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to empirically explore the mechanisms of grammar mastery enhancement through the English Speaking Club (ESC) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was selected because it allows for an in-depth investigation of the transitional dynamics from declarative to procedural knowledge within a naturalistic, non-formal learning environment. The research was conducted at Hamzanwadi University. The target participants were active members of the ESC. To ensure the richness and relevance of the data, a

purposive sampling technique was utilized. The inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of one semester of membership and active attendance. Based on these parameters, selected students served as the primary participants, providing representative and in-depth insights into the research questions.

Data collection was conducted through the integration of multiple qualitative instruments to ensure the comprehensiveness and credibility of the findings. The primary researcher acted as the key instrument, supported by semi-structured interview guides and participant observation protocols. Observations were specifically designed to capture real-time instances of peer-correction and grammatical automatization during student debates, while in-depth interviews were employed to explore their affective perceptions, such as language anxiety and confidence levels. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The procedure commenced with an observation phase, followed by consecutive interview sessions to delve deeper into the observed phenomena without

disrupting the natural flow of the club's activities.

The gathered data were systematically processed and analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical procedure encompassed several iterative stages: transcribing the field data, reducing the data through initial coding, categorizing emerging themes related to peer scaffolding and implicit grammar acquisition, and drawing final conclusions. To establish the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, data validity was strictly maintained through methodological and source triangulation, comparing observational field notes directly against the participants' interview transcripts.

## **B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The qualitative thematic analysis of the observational data and in-depth interviews revealed two primary mechanisms through which the English Speaking Club (ESC) facilitates grammar mastery: the substantial reduction of psychological barriers and the implicit proceduralization of grammar through peer scaffolding. First, the data

indicated a sharp contrast between students' affective states in formal classrooms versus the club environment. Participants consistently reported that the informal setting of the ESC dismantled the fear of academic evaluation. As illustrated by one participant's statement, "In class, I overthink my grammar because the lecturer might reduce my grade. Here, we just talk, and making mistakes is a normal part of the joke." Observation field notes further corroborated this, showing that spontaneous utterances flowed more naturally during club debates, with instances of prolonged hesitation dropping significantly compared to formal class settings.

Thematically, these findings validate the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), demonstrating that when language anxiety and defensiveness are minimized, learners become highly receptive to linguistic input. The ESC functions as a psychological safe space, enabling students to bypass the emotional blocks that typically hinder language production in EFL contexts. This confirms and expands upon previous empirical studies which posited that non-formal learning communities

significantly reduce speaking anxiety (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, moving beyond mere fluency and anxiety reduction, the current study observed a critical cognitive phenomenon: the transformation of grammatical knowledge.

The second major finding highlights how grammatical accuracy is refined implicitly. The data showed that when grammatical errors occurred during communicative activities, participants engaged in spontaneous peer-correction. Unlike explicit teacher correction, peer feedback in the ESC was casual, negotiated, and less face-threatening. For example, during a debate session, when a student misused a past tense verb, a peer subtly repeated the sentence with the correct syntactic form, prompting the speaker to self-correct seamlessly. From a theoretical standpoint, this dynamic perfectly encapsulates Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory of peer scaffolding. The findings argue that the ESC does not merely serve as a practice ground, but as an active cognitive incubator where declarative grammatical knowledge is tested, negotiated, and ultimately automated

into procedural skills (DeKeyser, 2015). This addresses the gap identified in previous literature, providing empirical proof that autonomously managed student clubs foster complex syntactic accuracy at the university level.

The insights drawn from this investigation offer substantial theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study bridges cognitive SLA with sociocultural frameworks, proving that informal peer interaction is a critical catalyst for implicit grammar acquisition. Practically, the findings urge higher education institutions to formally recognize and strategically integrate extracurricular language clubs like the ESC as co-curricular extensions.

Despite its robust insights, this study acknowledges certain limitations. Due to the qualitative case study design focusing exclusively on one university club, the findings are deeply contextualized and may not be generalizable to all EFL populations. Furthermore, the reliance on subjective perceptions over a limited timeframe restricts the ability to track long-term grammatical retention. Therefore, future research is strongly

encouraged to conduct longitudinal mixed-methods studies across multiple institutions.

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