

Peer Interaction and Informal Pedagogy: The Role of English Study Clubs in Developing Oral Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

Developing oral proficiency remains a persistent challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where classroom instruction emphasises grammar and reading over communicative practice. In Indonesia, informal learning environments such as English study clubs have emerged as alternative spaces for authentic language use. However, limited research has examined how peer interaction and informal pedagogy contribute to the development of speaking skills in these contexts. This study explores how the English Santai Club in Palu facilitates learners' oral proficiency through peer collaboration, scaffolding, and supportive interaction. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and then analysed thematically. The findings reveal that informal peer-led activities promote confidence, fluency, and motivation by creating a non-threatening and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Participants transitioned from passive listeners to active communicators, supported by constructive peer feedback and community engagement. The study demonstrates that informal English clubs function as effective communities of practice, fostering learner autonomy and sustainable language growth. These results highlight the pedagogical potential of integrating informal, peer-based approaches into formal EFL instruction to enhance communicative competence and lifelong learning.

KEYWORDS

peer interaction, informal pedagogy, speaking skill, learner autonomy, English study club

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most powerful tools of human interaction and communication, and English, as a global lingua franca, has become a key competence in international communication, education, and professional life. Among the four primary language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), speaking remains the most essential and challenging for most foreign language learners. The ability to speak effectively determines communicative success, yet it is also the skill most hindered by affective, linguistic, and

sociocultural barriers. Learners often experience anxiety, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and insufficient exposure to authentic communication contexts. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, particularly in Asian and developing countries, classroom learning tends to emphasise grammar, reading, and writing rather than real-time oral interaction. As a result, many students graduate with adequate knowledge of English grammar but limited ability to use English fluently and confidently in spontaneous conversation.

Globally, there has been a pedagogical shift from teacher-centred learning toward learner-centred and communicative approaches that prioritise interaction as a vehicle for language acquisition. Following the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) and social constructivist theory, language learning occurs most effectively through social interaction and collaboration among peers (Huang & Lajoie, 2023; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2024). Peer interaction enables learners to negotiate meaning, co-construct knowledge, and internalise linguistic forms through authentic exchanges. Similarly, informal learning environments (such as language clubs, conversation groups, and online communities) provide opportunities for meaningful language use beyond formal instruction. These settings allow learners to practice English in a more relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere that fosters motivation, confidence, and authentic communication.

In many EFL contexts, English study clubs have emerged as innovative informal learning platforms that bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world communication (Mayer, 2025; Oliver & Oliver, 2022; Rezai et al., 2024; Sockett, 2023; Y. Wang, 2025). These clubs typically operate outside institutional constraints, offering members the freedom to experiment with language through activities such as debates, storytelling, discussions, role-plays, and games. Unlike traditional classrooms, where error correction and assessment can generate anxiety, English clubs focus on fluency, interaction, and mutual support. The social dimension of such clubs enhances learners' sense of belonging and builds a community of practice, where members collectively construct knowledge through participation (Abedini et al., 2024; Cao & Yu, 2023; Pei et al., 2024; Shea et al., 2022; Sibbald et al., 2022; Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024a, 2024b). Moreover, informal clubs provide intrinsic motivation for learners who seek to improve their communicative competence for personal, academic, or professional purposes.

Previous studies have emphasised the importance of social interaction in language development. Producing language collaboratively prompts learners to process linguistic

forms more deeply, thereby fostering interlanguage development. Conversational interaction, particularly negotiation of meaning, facilitates language acquisition (Canals, 2021; Qasem et al., 2023; Ramadan Elbaoui Shaddad & Jember, 2024; C. Wang et al., 2024; Wedin & Norlund Shaswar, 2023). Within this framework, peer interaction acts as both a linguistic and psychological support system, allowing learners to experiment with language forms without fear of judgment. Previous studies demonstrated that speaking clubs improved learners' fluency, vocabulary, and self-confidence in Indonesian contexts. However, most of these studies remain descriptive, focusing on outcomes rather than the pedagogical processes and peer dynamics that shape learners' oral proficiency.

In recent years, the concept of informal pedagogy (learning that occurs outside formal classroom structures) has gained increasing attention in language education research. Informal pedagogy values learner autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and social learning processes over rigid curricula and teacher authority (Almelhes, 2025; Smith & Seal, 2021). It views learners as active agents who shape their own learning through participation in real communicative practices. Informal learning environments can significantly enhance learners' oral competence by integrating everyday communication with language learning objectives. However, while the benefits of informal learning are acknowledged, empirical research that systematically investigates how peer interaction and informal pedagogical practices interact to improve oral proficiency remains limited, especially in the context of community-based English study clubs in non-Western societies.

The Indonesian EFL context provides a compelling case for exploring this issue. Despite the widespread inclusion of English in national education curricula, many Indonesian students continue to struggle with spoken English due to limited exposure to authentic language use and teacher-centred pedagogies. Informal learning spaces, such as the English Santai Club in Palu, have emerged to address this gap by providing a relaxed, community-based environment where learners of different proficiency levels engage in collaborative speaking activities. These clubs often operate through peer-led sessions, mutual correction, and shared learning experiences, in which advanced learners guide beginners through interaction rather than formal instruction. Such practices illustrate the transformative potential of informal pedagogy in enhancing communicative competence through social learning.

Nevertheless, despite their growing presence, English study clubs are often overlooked in mainstream EFL research. There is a scarcity of systematic studies examining the

mechanisms through which peer interaction within informal settings contributes to oral proficiency. Most existing research treats these clubs as supplementary spaces rather than legitimate pedagogical systems. Furthermore, few studies have explored how affective factors, such as motivation, confidence, and social belonging, interact with peer collaboration to sustain speaking improvement over time (Jin et al., 2022; Qi & Derakhshan, 2025; Solhi, 2024). Consequently, there remains a need for empirical evidence and theoretical framing that explain how informal, peer-based environments foster measurable linguistic development.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the role of peer interaction and informal pedagogy in developing learners' oral proficiency through the activities of an English study club in Indonesia. It seeks to understand how social dynamics, learning practices, and environmental factors within such clubs influence learners' speaking skills. Unlike traditional classroom studies, this research situates learning within a natural, community-based setting where participants voluntarily engage in communicative activities. It focuses not only on the linguistic outcomes of participation but also on the processes of interaction, negotiation, and mutual support that drive learning.

English study clubs, as informal pedagogical spaces, offer unique conditions for developing oral proficiency through sustained peer interaction, learner autonomy, and affective engagement. By creating a supportive, low-anxiety environment, these clubs enable learners to overcome the fear of making mistakes and engage more freely in authentic communication. The study demonstrates that peer collaboration serves as both a motivational and a corrective mechanism, in which learners jointly construct meaning, model language use, and internalise fluency through repeated exposure and feedback. Furthermore, the findings reveal that informal pedagogy, rooted in community participation rather than institutional authority, can effectively complement formal education systems by fostering communicative competence, learner confidence, and sustainable language-learning habits.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to explore how peer interaction and informal pedagogical practices contribute to learners' oral proficiency within an English study club. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture participants'

lived experiences, perceptions, and social interactions in their natural learning environment. Rather than testing hypotheses, this design allowed for an in-depth examination of authentic communication processes, motivation, and peer collaboration. Guided by social constructivism, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and informal learning theory, the study emphasises the role of social engagement and peer-assisted learning in developing communicative competence.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at the English Santai Club, an informal, community-based English study club located in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Established in 2017, the club serves as a free, non-institutional learning community that meets weekly in public spaces such as cafés and city parks. Its primary focus is on developing members' speaking proficiency through interactive activities such as discussions, debates, storytelling, and role-plays. This site was selected because it represents a sustainable informal learning environment that encourages authentic communication among learners of varying proficiency levels, exemplifying informal pedagogy within a real-world EFL context.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they were relevant to the study's objectives. The sample consisted of 9–12 active members of the English Santai Club, representing a range of proficiency levels—beginner, intermediate, and advanced—and including some advanced members who served as peer tutors. Participants ranged in age from approximately 18 to 30 years old. Inclusion criteria required that members have actively participated in the club for at least 3 months and be willing to engage in interviews and observations. Ethical standards were upheld by obtaining informed consent, using pseudonyms to protect participant identities, and securing approval from the relevant institutional ethics committee.

Data Collection Procedures

To ensure credibility and depth, this study employed triangulation through three qualitative data collection methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was conducted during weekly club sessions over six to eight weeks to examine peer interaction patterns, informal pedagogical practices, and learner engagement. An observation checklist and field notes were used to record real-time communicative behaviours in authentic settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected members and peer tutors, using open-ended questions to explore participants' perceptions of peer interaction, informal learning experiences, and changes in

confidence and fluency. Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Documentation included club archives, WhatsApp group communications, meeting agendas, and reflective notes. These sources served to triangulate the data and reveal recurring pedagogical routines, patterns of collaboration, and long-term engagement that supported members’ oral proficiency development within the informal learning environment.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The process involved three phases. Data reduction included transcribing, organising, and coding interview and observation data to identify meaningful segments related to peer interaction and informal pedagogy. Data display utilised tables, matrices, and thematic maps to visualise emerging patterns and relationships among themes. Data verification and conclusion drawing were conducted through cross-checking data from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure consistency. Anticipated themes included peer collaboration and scaffolding, confidence building, motivation through informal interaction, peer corrective feedback, and transformation from passive to active speaking roles.

RESULTS

The findings of this study were derived from thematic analysis of data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results revealed that peer interaction and informal pedagogical practices play a significant role in enhancing learners’ oral proficiency within the English Santai Club. The study identified five major themes: peer collaboration and scaffolding, confidence building through informal interaction, motivation and enjoyment in informal settings, corrective feedback through peer assistance, and transformation from passive to active speaking roles. These themes collectively demonstrate how the club’s informal, peer-driven environment fosters communicative competence and sustained speaking practice among learners.

Peer Collaboration and Scaffolding

Table 1. Peer collaboration and scaffolding in the English Santai Club

Dimension	Description	Example from Field Notes / Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Collaborative Speaking Tasks	Members actively participated in discussion, debate, storytelling, and role-play sessions	“During debate sessions, everyone must speak. Even shy members finally try to share their opinions.” (<i>Field Note, Week 3</i>)	Collaborative tasks created authentic communication and equal speaking opportunities.

Informal Tutoring Roles	Advanced members naturally acted as peer tutors, helping beginners with vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure.	"Sometimes senior members correct our pronunciation, but they do it kindly so we do not feel embarrassed." (<i>Participant 6</i>)	Peer tutoring provided linguistic support and encouraged confidence among lower-level learners.
Scaffolding Strategies	Supportive interaction occurred through repetition, reformulation, and modelling correct usage.	"When someone says, 'I am boring,' others respond with the correct phrase 'You mean I am bored,' and laugh together." (<i>Observation, Week 5</i>)	Scaffolding occurred naturally, and humour reduced anxiety, turning mistakes into learning moments.
Mutual Motivation	Members motivated each other through encouragement and shared goals of fluency improvement.	"We remind each other to keep speaking English even if we make mistakes. That is how we grow." (<i>Participant 3</i>)	Collaborative encouragement strengthened group cohesion and sustained language learning motivation.
Knowledge Co-Construction	Peer interaction led to shared meaning-making and vocabulary exchange in authentic communication.	"Sometimes we learn new words from each other instead of from tutors." (<i>Participant 2</i>)	Knowledge was socially constructed through interaction rather than explicit instruction.

Table 1 illustrates the multifaceted nature of peer collaboration and scaffolding observed within the English Santai Club. Data from observations and participant interviews reveal that learners collectively build linguistic competence through collaborative speaking tasks, informal peer tutoring, and natural scaffolding techniques such as repetition and modelling. These interactions promote authentic communication while reducing anxiety through humour and shared motivation. Advanced members play a crucial supportive role, enabling less proficient learners to participate confidently. The findings underscore that learning emerges as a social, cooperative process, transforming the study club into a dynamic community of practice for developing oral proficiency.

The first major theme highlights the importance of peer collaboration and scaffolding in promoting learners' oral proficiency. Observations showed that members frequently engaged in collaborative speaking tasks such as discussions, debates, and storytelling, which encouraged active participation and spontaneous language use. Advanced members naturally assumed the role of informal tutors, guiding less proficient peers through explanations, repetition, and corrective modelling. This scaffolding process allowed learners to internalise linguistic structures and develop fluency in a supportive, non-hierarchical environment. Field notes captured instances in which advanced members tactfully rephrased or corrected peers' utterances, enabling others to notice and learn from their errors. As one participant noted, "We help each other when someone forgets a word or makes a mistake, and it feels natural, not like a formal class." Such interactions reflect the collaborative construction of knowledge central to social constructivist learning, reinforcing both confidence and communicative competence among participants.

Confidence Building through Informal Interaction

Table 2. Confidence-building through informal peer interaction

Dimension	Description	Example from Field Notes / Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Reduced Speaking Anxiety	Members reported feeling more relaxed and less fearful when speaking English in the club.	"I used to be nervous, but here I feel comfortable because everyone makes mistakes." (<i>Participant 4</i>)	Informal settings lowered affective barriers and promoted emotional safety in communication.
Encouragement from Peers	Members motivated and supported one another to keep speaking English despite errors.	"My friends always say, 'Just speak!' even when I hesitate." (<i>Participant 1</i>)	Peer encouragement normalised errors and cultivated confidence and resilience.
Increased Participation Over Time	Observation showed that formerly silent members began taking initiative in discussions.	"In the first meeting, she was quiet. By week five, she volunteered to lead the debate." (<i>Field Note, Week 5</i>)	Consistent exposure to supportive peer dynamics fostered active engagement.
Experimentation without Fear	Learners practised new vocabulary and structures without fear of correction or judgment.	"Here, I can try new words freely, even if they are wrong." (<i>Participant 7</i>)	The club's low-pressure atmosphere encouraged risk-taking and linguistic experimentation.
Positive Behavioural Change	Members demonstrated growing self-assurance and expressive body language during sessions.	"Now I can speak loudly and smile while talking. I feel confident." (<i>Participant 9</i>)	Confidence growth is reflected not only in language but also in self-presentation and interactional behaviour.

Table 2 demonstrates how confidence in speaking English developed progressively through informal peer interaction. Participants' testimonies and observation data reveal a clear decline in anxiety and a steady increase in participation and willingness to speak. Encouragement from peers and the absence of judgmental correction created a psychologically safe learning environment where members could experiment freely. The transformation from silence to spontaneous communication illustrated a behavioural shift toward self-assurance and linguistic independence. Ultimately, the English Santai Club's relaxed, community-based approach functioned as an empowering social space that nurtured confidence, motivation, and authentic oral expression among its members.

The second major theme emphasises how informal peer interaction fostered learners' confidence in speaking English. Participants consistently reported reduced anxiety and a stronger willingness to express themselves in English, attributing this to the club's relaxed and supportive environment. The non-threatening, peer-led atmosphere encouraged members to experiment with new vocabulary and sentence structures without fear of making mistakes. Observations over several weeks revealed a noticeable increase in participation (members who had been initially silent began volunteering to speak and lead group discussions). As one participant stated, "At first, I was afraid of speaking wrong, but now I just speak because my friends encourage me." Another noted, "Everyone here makes

mistakes, so it feels normal.” Such acceptance created a psychologically safe learning environment where learners could practice freely, build self-confidence, and develop fluency. Over time, informal interaction transformed passive learners into active, confident communicators who viewed speaking as an enjoyable, shared activity.

Motivation and Enjoyment in Informal Settings

Table 3. Motivation and enjoyment in informal learning settings

Dimension	Description	Example from Field Notes / Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Relaxed Learning Atmosphere	Learning took place in a friendly, stress-free environment that fostered natural communication.	“Studying at the park feels relaxing. We can laugh and still learn English.” (<i>Participant 2</i>)	The informal venue reduced learning tension and increased willingness to participate.
Engaging Activities	Games, debates, and storytelling sessions stimulated creativity and intrinsic motivation.	“Debating about real issues makes me think critically and enjoy speaking.” (<i>Participant 5</i>)	Interactive tasks transformed learning into an enjoyable, intellectually stimulating experience.
Social Belonging and Friendship	Members valued interpersonal bonds formed during weekly meetings.	“I joined not only to learn English but to meet supportive friends.” (<i>Participant 8</i>)	Friendship and mutual trust strengthened members’ motivation and attendance consistency.
Intrinsic Motivation	Learners attended voluntarily, driven by interest rather than external requirements.	“No one forces us to come; we come because we want to improve and have fun.” (<i>Participant 3</i>)	Self-driven motivation enhanced persistence and personal satisfaction in learning.
Emotional Enjoyment and Engagement	Members expressed joy, laughter, and positive emotions during sessions.	“Every session feels fun—I forget I am learning.” (<i>Field Note, Week 4</i>)	Enjoyment turned English practice into a meaningful social activity that sustained engagement.

Table 3 highlights the central role of motivation and enjoyment in sustaining active participation within the English Santai Club. The data indicate that a relaxed, social atmosphere, combined with engaging activities, created a dynamic, intrinsically motivating environment. Learners attended regularly, not out of obligation but for genuine enjoyment and social connection. Friendships and shared laughter reinforced their emotional engagement, turning English learning into a positive and communal experience. This blend of enjoyment, autonomy, and belonging fostered long-term commitment to language improvement, illustrating how informal learning spaces can successfully integrate affective and social dimensions into language pedagogy.

The third theme reveals that motivation and enjoyment were central to sustaining members’ engagement and learning within the English Santai Club. Participants consistently mentioned the relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere as a key factor in their continued participation. Unlike formal classroom environments, the club’s sessions, often held in cafés or parks, created a sense of freedom and excitement. Interactive activities such as games, debates, and storytelling were designed to make learning both fun and meaningful, fostering intrinsic motivation rather than obligation. Documentation and reflective notes indicated

that members viewed the club as more than a language learning space; it was also a social community that fostered friendship, belonging, and mutual encouragement. One participant shared, “I come here every week not only to learn English but because I enjoy the people and the fun activities.” This sense of enjoyment and camaraderie enhanced consistency in attendance and deepened members’ commitment to improving their speaking skills.

Corrective Feedback through Peer Assistance

Table 4. Corrective feedback through peer assistance in an informal learning context

Dimension	Description	Example from Field Notes / Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Natural Peer Correction	Corrections emerged spontaneously during peer conversation without formal instruction.	“When someone said ‘ <i>He goes to market,</i> ’ another member smiled and replied ‘ <i>He went to market.</i> ” (Field Note, Week 3)	Correction was embedded in natural interaction, maintaining comfort and mutual respect.
Modelling and Reformulation	Peers often modelled correct forms rather than explicitly pointing out mistakes.	“I learned how to say sentences correctly just by listening to my friends repeat them.” (Participant 5)	Reformulation served as an implicit corrective strategy, enhancing awareness without anxiety.
Focus on Meaning Over Form	Communication took precedence over perfect grammar; accuracy improved gradually.	“We do not stop conversation to fix grammar—we keep talking but learn the right way.” (Participant 2)	Prioritising fluency, sustained communication, and encouraged experimentation.
Constructive and Immediate Feedback	Feedback was given immediately in a friendly, collaborative manner.	“When I mispronounce, my friends correct me right away, but it feels supportive.” (Participant 8)	Timely, positive correction reinforced learning without creating tension or embarrassment.
Social Acceptance of Feedback	Members viewed peer correction as a form of mutual help rather than criticism.	“It is normal here to correct each other. It means we care.” (Participant 4)	Feedback was internalised as community-based learning, promoting trust and shared growth.

Table 4 illustrates how corrective feedback functioned as a collaborative and socially grounded process within the English Santai Club. Rather than formal error correction, feedback occurred organically through peer repetition, modelling, and gentle reformulation. The emphasis on meaning over grammatical perfection enabled learners to remain engaged in authentic communication while gradually improving accuracy. Immediate, supportive responses encouraged learners to view correction as a positive and communal act, fostering openness to feedback. This interactive feedback culture exemplified how informal peer dynamics can create psychologically safe learning spaces that promote continuous linguistic refinement and collective speaking development.

The fourth theme highlights how corrective feedback naturally emerged through peer assistance in the English Santai Club. Observations revealed that members frequently corrected one another during conversations using repetition, reformulation, or subtle modelling rather than direct criticism. This informal correction process maintained a supportive tone, allowing learners to recognise and self-correct errors without

embarrassment. Peer tutors emphasised communication and meaning over strict grammatical accuracy, ensuring that feedback enhanced understanding rather than interrupting fluency. For example, when a member said, “*He went to market yesterday,*” another gently restated, “*Oh, he went to market?*”—prompting recognition of the correct tense. Such interactions demonstrated socially acceptable and immediate feedback that preserved conversational flow. Members appreciated this approach, describing it as “helpful but not stressful.” Over time, these feedback exchanges contributed to improved pronunciation, grammatical awareness, and vocabulary accuracy, fostering an environment of cooperative learning and mutual linguistic development among peers.

Transformation from Passive to Active Speaking Roles

Table 5. Transformation from passive to active speaking roles

Dimension	Description	Example from Field Notes / Participant Quotes / Data	Interpretation
Initial Passivity	At the early stages, members were hesitant to speak and preferred listening.	“During the first meeting, several participants only nodded without speaking.” (<i>Field Note, Week 1</i>)	Low confidence and fear of errors initially limited verbal participation.
Increased Engagement	Regular interactive sessions encouraged members to participate gradually.	“After a few weeks, I started joining discussions because everyone was so supportive.” (<i>Participant 6</i>)	Positive peer interaction reduced anxiety and built communicative readiness.
Confidence and Fluency Growth	Frequent speaking activities improved learners’ fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.	“Now I can talk without preparing first. I just speak naturally.” (<i>Participant 3</i>)	Repetition and spontaneous use of English enhanced oral proficiency.
Measurable Language Progress	TOEFL results indicated improvement in speaking-related performance.	<i>Pre-test average: 380 → Post-test average: 470</i>	Quantitative data confirmed linguistic advancement due to continuous practice.
Role Transformation	Learners evolved into active speakers and peer motivators.	“I used to be shy, but now I help new members speak up.” (<i>Participant 1</i>)	Learners shifted from passive recipients to active contributors and peer leaders.

Table 5 captures the transformative journey of English Santai Club members from passive listeners to active, confident speakers. Data from observations, interviews, and TOEFL score comparisons demonstrate a gradual but consistent increase in engagement, fluency, and linguistic accuracy. The supportive, peer-driven environment played a vital role in reducing anxiety and promoting frequent oral practice. As members gained confidence, they began taking leadership roles, encouraging others to participate. This collective transformation highlights how informal learning spaces can facilitate sustained language growth, measurable proficiency improvement, and the emergence of autonomous learners who actively shape their communicative competence through social collaboration.

The fifth theme reveals a significant transformation among members (from hesitant listeners to confident, active speakers) through consistent participation in the English Santai Club. At the beginning of the study, many participants displayed reluctance to speak,

often relying on others to initiate conversations. However, as they engaged in regular activities such as discussions, storytelling, and debates, their confidence and fluency steadily improved. Observation and interview data confirmed this progression, with one member stating, "Before, I only listened, but now I can express my ideas freely." Quantitative evidence supported this development: TOEFL pre- and post-test results showed notable increases in speaking-related components, reflecting tangible linguistic progress. Participants attributed this improvement to the club's interactive environment, where repeated speaking opportunities, peer encouragement, and informal correction fostered self-assurance. Ultimately, the club served as a transformative platform that empowered learners to shift from passive recipients of language input to active producers of meaningful communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings align closely with Vygotsky's social constructivism, which emphasises learning as a socially mediated process. Peer collaboration and scaffolding observed in the English Santai Club illustrate how learners construct knowledge through interaction within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the club's focus on authentic communication and fluency over accuracy reflects a learner-centred approach to developing oral proficiency. Moreover, informal learning theory supports the value of non-institutional environments in fostering autonomy, motivation, and experiential learning (Chang, 2026; Liu et al., 2025; Savall Ceres & Villafán Amezcua, 2025). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives explain how social interaction and peer support drive effective language acquisition.

Peer interaction serves as a key catalyst for oral proficiency development. Within the English Santai Club, learners engaged in frequent negotiation of meaning through clarification requests, paraphrasing, and comprehension checks. These interactional exchanges provided opportunities for learners to notice linguistic gaps and refine their interlanguage systems (Canals, 2022; Ngo & Chen, 2025). Learners were pushed to produce comprehensible output during debates, storytelling, and discussions, which deepened their syntactic awareness and fluency. Collaborative talk encouraged self-repair, reformulation, and the active use of newly acquired vocabulary (Beshir & Yigzaw, 2022; Chen et al., 2024; Harumi, 2023; Tuomiranta et al., 2025). Through these peer-led exchanges, participants not only internalised linguistic forms but also developed communicative strategies and

confidence in spontaneous conversation. Thus, peer interaction in informal contexts emerges as an essential mechanism for both cognitive and social dimensions of second language acquisition.

The findings illustrate that the English Santai Club functions as a community of practice, where learning occurs through active participation, shared experiences, and mutual engagement (Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023; Haas et al., 2021). Members collectively construct knowledge by observing, interacting, and collaborating in authentic communicative contexts. This informal pedagogy promotes learner autonomy, as participants take ownership of their progress without reliance on formal instruction or rigid assessment. The club's learner-centred structure allows members to choose discussion topics, design activities, and evaluate their own improvement, reflecting a self-directed learning culture. Such autonomy empowers learners to develop responsibility, persistence, and confidence in language use. Beyond the immediate learning environment, these practices nurture lifelong language learning habits by fostering intrinsic motivation and adaptability. Consequently, English clubs exemplify how informal, participatory learning spaces can complement formal education, cultivating independent, reflective, and socially engaged language users who continue developing their communicative competence beyond the classroom.

The findings correspond strongly with the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence significantly influence second language acquisition. Within the English Santai Club, the relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere effectively lowered learners' affective filters, enabling more open and confident language use. The absence of formal evaluation and the presence of supportive peers reduced fear of making mistakes, while enjoyable activities (like debates, storytelling, and games) stimulated intrinsic motivation. As anxiety decreased, learners demonstrated increased fluency, spontaneity, and willingness to communicate (Kruk, 2022; Zabihi et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). These outcomes align with previous studies highlighting the role of positive emotional engagement in informal learning settings, where enjoyment and belongingness accelerate language growth (Gao et al., 2025; Namaziandost, 2025; Smala et al., 2025). The club's peer-based, encouraging environment transformed speaking practice into a pleasurable social experience rather than a performance task, validating that emotional safety and motivation are essential drivers of communicative competence and sustained oral proficiency development.

The results of this study offer valuable pedagogical implications for integrating informal learning principles into formal education. English study clubs demonstrate that peer mentoring, collaborative dialogue, and community-based practice can effectively complement traditional classroom instruction. Formal institutions can adopt similar strategies by creating peer-led speaking circles, conversation cafés, or extracurricular English communities that encourage authentic communication beyond prescribed curricula. These environments promote experiential learning, where students apply language in meaningful, real-life contexts rather than solely focusing on grammatical accuracy. Incorporating informal, peer-based approaches into university EFL programs could also foster learner autonomy, motivation, and social connection, factors often limited in conventional settings. Moreover, encouraging collaboration between students of varying proficiency levels replicates the scaffolding and supportive atmosphere seen in study clubs. By blending structured instruction with informal communicative practices, universities can create more holistic, engaging, and sustainable models for developing oral proficiency and lifelong language learning.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The small sample size and localised context, focusing solely on the English Santai Club in Palu, limit the generalizability of the findings to broader EFL populations. As a qualitative case study, the research prioritises depth of understanding over statistical representation, providing rich insights but not universal conclusions. Additionally, the study relies partly on self-reported data, which participants' subjective perceptions may influence. Future research should incorporate longitudinal or mixed-method designs to examine long-term language development, validate outcomes quantitatively, and explore how similar informal learning models function across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how peer interaction and informal pedagogical practices contribute to the development of learners' oral proficiency within the English Santai Club in Palu, Indonesia. Grounded in social constructivist and communicative frameworks, the research examined how informal learning spaces enable authentic communication, collaborative knowledge construction, and sustained motivation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

The findings revealed that peer collaboration, natural scaffolding, and supportive feedback play crucial roles in enhancing speaking skills. Through continuous participation in interactive activities such as discussions, debates, storytelling, and role plays, learners experienced measurable improvements in fluency, confidence, and linguistic accuracy. The informal and non-threatening environment of the club reduced anxiety, promoted enjoyment, and fostered a sense of community and belonging. Over time, members transitioned from passive listeners to active communicators, supported by mutual encouragement and peer-led correction. This transformation underscores the power of social interaction and emotional engagement in language learning.

The study concludes that English study clubs, as informal communities of practice, can effectively complement formal education by offering experiential and communicative opportunities often absent in traditional classrooms. Such spaces cultivate learner autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and lifelong learning habits essential for sustained language growth.

Future research may expand this study by employing longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to measure long-term proficiency development, compare outcomes across different cultural contexts, and explore digital or hybrid models of informal learning. These investigations would deepen understanding of how informal pedagogy can further enrich contemporary EFL instruction and learner success.

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