

EXPLORING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE REGULAR ENGLISH- SPEAKING PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES AT PESANTREN

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Abstract: *This study explored students' lived experiences of participating in regular English performance activities at a Pesantren in Pamekasan. It aimed to investigate the challenges students encountered, the self-management strategies they employed, and their attitudes toward the activities. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, involving five female students from the advanced class. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that regular English performance activities enhanced students' confidence, courage, fluency, and willingness to speak English in front of an audience. However, participants also experienced challenges, including nervousness, fear of making mistakes, limited preparation time, and difficulties with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. To address these challenges, students applied various self-management strategies, such as practicing regularly, understanding the topic, memorizing key points, staying calm, and practicing with peers. Overall, the study suggests that regular English performance activities provide meaningful opportunities to support students' speaking development and foster a positive learning environment in the Pesantren EFL context.*

Keywords: *Speaking skill, students' experiences, EFL learners, regular performance.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The ability to communicate orally is often considered an indicator of successful language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, share information, and interact effectively with others (Nunan, 1995). However, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for many EFL learners. Marzulina et al. (2021) reported that students frequently experience limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation problems, and lack of fluency, which make them hesitate and struggle to communicate confidently. In addition to these linguistic difficulties, EFL learners often face limited exposure to authentic English communication, insufficient opportunities to practice, and psychological barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence (Gao, 2022). These challenges may hinder students' speaking development and reduce their willingness to communicate in English (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024).

This study was conducted at an English Language Institute in a *Pesantren* in *Pamekasan*, where students participate in regular English performance activities every Friday morning. During these activities, students perform speeches, drama, poetry recitation, storytelling, and conversations, either individually or in groups, before teachers and fellow students. The program aims to improve students' speaking ability while strengthening their confidence in public speaking. Although these activities provide meaningful opportunities to practice English, students still encounter several challenges, including limited preparation time due to busy academic and *Pesantren* schedules, language-related difficulties, and speaking anxiety (Areta & Purwanti, 2021; Diana et al., 2024; Rampeng et al., 2025). Nevertheless, continuous participation in these activities enables students to gradually improve their speaking ability and confidence.

One instructional approach that supports speaking development is performance-based learning. According to Svihla et al. (2019), performance-based activities require students to demonstrate their language ability through authentic communication rather than passive learning. Previous studies have shown that role plays, dialogues, presentations, and other performance-based activities improve students' speaking skills, confidence, and participation while reducing public speaking anxiety (Fadila & Trisno, 2025; Lestari et al., 2025). In addition, students' attitudes toward speaking activities are equally important because positive attitudes encourage learners to participate actively, enjoy the learning process, and become more willing to communicate in English (Wahidiyati et al., 2025).

Although previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of performance-based speaking activities, most have focused on measuring learning outcomes quantitatively. Only a limited number of studies have explored students' lived experiences, particularly within the context of regular English performance activities in a *Pesantren*. Qualitative studies have shown that speaking anxiety and low self-confidence remain major barriers to students' speaking performance (Manda & Irawati, 2021; Wisrance & Kristanti, 2024). However, little is known about how students experience these activities, the challenges they encounter, the self-management strategies they employ, and the attitudes they develop while participating in regular English performance activities.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of advanced EFL students participating in regular English performance activities at a *Pesantren* in *Pamekasan*. Specifically, the study investigates the speaking challenges they encounter, the self-management strategies they employ to overcome those challenges, and their attitudes toward participating in the activities. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how regular English performance activities support students' speaking development and confidence in an EFL context.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What challenges and strategies do students in the advanced class at the *Pesantren* face in participating in regular performance activities?
2. What are the attitudes of students in the advanced class at the *Pesantren* toward participating in regular performance activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Skill in EFL Context

Speaking is one of the most important productive skills in learning English as the ability to speak English is one of the primary goals of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively. Richards (2008) emphasizes that speaking proficiency is a major objective for EFL learners. However, many students have limited opportunities to use English in their daily lives. Therefore, meaningful speaking practice is essential for developing communicative competence.

Producing spoken language requires learners to express ideas spontaneously while organizing their thoughts and responding appropriately in real-time communication. Unlike writing, speaking provides little time for planning or revising, requiring learners to process language quickly and accurately (Magyari et al., 2017). Effective oral communication also depends on several interconnected components, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension, which together contribute to successful communication (Yan et al., 2024).

Successful oral communication is influenced by psychological and environmental factors. Self-confidence, motivation, anxiety, and opportunities for meaningful practice all play important roles in developing learners' speaking ability. Holandyah et al. (2022) argue that a supportive learning environment helps reduce learners' fear of making mistakes and encourages them to participate more actively in speaking activities. Therefore, providing regular opportunities for authentic speaking practice is essential for improving students' speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Performance – Based Activities (PBA)

Performance-Based Activities (PBA) is a learning approach that emphasizes learning through authentic tasks and real performances. Instead of relying mainly on memorization, this approach enables students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by completing meaningful tasks that reflect real-life situations (Svihla et al., 2019). Such activities commonly include public speaking, debates, role plays, presentations, and other communicative tasks that encourage learners to use English in authentic contexts (Alfatihah et al., 2022). In EFL classrooms, this approach provides meaningful opportunities for students to communicate actively while developing their confidence, creativity, and learning autonomy. Moreover, it is closely aligned with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as it promotes interaction, problem-solving, and authentic communication in meaningful contexts (Nikbakht et al., 2024).

This approach offers several benefits for EFL learners, particularly in improving speaking skills and confidence. By participating in authentic speaking tasks, students gain direct learning experiences and become more confident in expressing their ideas before an audience. They also use English for meaningful communication rather than mechanical language practice. For example, role-play activities have been shown to enhance students' self-confidence and encourage greater participation in classroom learning (Arifin & Alaydrus, 2020). Nevertheless, implementing this approach can be challenging because it requires careful planning,

sufficient preparation time, and appropriate assessment to ensure that learning objectives are achieved effectively (Al-Thani & Ahmad, 2025).

Speaking Challenges and Strategies

Speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be challenging because learners are required to communicate spontaneously while using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Harmer (2007) states that learners are often reluctant to speak because they are shy, fear making mistakes, and lack confidence. These challenges are generally categorized into linguistic factors, such as limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties, and psychological factors, including anxiety and nervousness, which may affect students' speaking performance (Paraguas, 2025).

To overcome these challenges, learners apply various speaking strategies before and during speaking activities. According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies are techniques that help learners improve their language skills. Common strategies include regular practice, preparation, note-taking, and memorizing key points. These strategies help learners reduce anxiety, improve fluency, and increase confidence when speaking English (Lestari et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Self-Management Strategies

Self-management refers to an individual's ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to achieve specific goals (Zimmerman, 2000). In language learning, self-management helps students monitor their learning, manage emotions, and apply appropriate strategies to overcome learning difficulties. In speaking activities, effective self-management enables students to cope with anxiety and nervousness, prepare themselves adequately, and maintain confidence while speaking in front of an audience (Alvandi et al., 2025).

To manage speaking challenges, students may employ various self-management strategies, such as practicing regularly, preparing materials, engaging in positive self-talk, and seeking support from peers. Repeated practice or drilling helps learners improve pronunciation and develop automatic language use (Mendrofa & Wijaya, 2022; Ghazi-Saidi & Ansaldo, 2017). In addition, rehearsal before performing enables students to organize their ideas, reduce nervousness, and improve speaking fluency, leading to greater confidence during speaking performances (Al Ghaniy, 2023; Nurjihan et al., 2026).

METHOD

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns or themes in qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). This method was selected because it allowed the researcher to explore and interpret students' lived experiences of participating in regular English performance activities. The analysis was conducted systematically to ensure that the findings accurately represented the participants' experiences.

The analysis began by transcribing all audio-recorded interviews verbatim. The researcher then read and re-read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data and gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. During this process, the researcher paid attention to participants' expressions, emotions, and recurring ideas related to speaking challenges, self-management strategies, and attitudes toward the activities. Important words, phrases, and sentences were then highlighted and assigned initial codes.

After the coding process, similar codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the participants' shared experiences. The researcher continuously reviewed and refined the themes by comparing them with the interview transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the data. Finally, member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary interpretations with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings and avoid misinterpretation. This process enhanced the credibility of the analysis and ensured that the final themes genuinely reflected the participants' lived experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study, focusing on students' experiences in regular English performance activities, including their challenges, strategies, and emotional responses. Each finding is described in detail and supported by data from the participants.

This section presents the findings of the study based on the participants' interview responses. The findings are organized into several themes related to students' experiences in regular English performance activities. These themes cover the challenges faced by students, the strategies they used during the activities, and the benefits they gained from participating in the activities. The findings are supported by data from the participants' interviews.

Speaking Difficulties during Performance Activities

The interview findings showed that participants experienced several challenges during regular English performance activities. The main challenges included limited practice time, language-related difficulties, and fear of making mistakes.

Quotation 1

"The difficulty I face is managing practice time in the middle of the busy Pesantren schedule."
(Interview, P1)

The quotation shows that participants had limited time to prepare because of their busy academic and *Pesantren* activities.

Quotation 2

"The difficulty is usually in pronunciation and being afraid of making grammar mistakes."
(Interview, P2)

Quotation 3

"The difficulty is lack of vocabulary and being afraid of making mistakes." (Interview, P4)

These quotations indicate that pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes were common language-related challenges experienced by the participants.

Quotation 4

"The difficulty is remembering the material and speaking fluently." (Interview, P3)

Quotation 5

"The difficulty is speaking fluently and not stammering." (Interview, P5)

These findings suggest that many participants also struggled with remembering the material and speaking fluently during their performances.

Students' Self-Management Strategies During Performance Activities

The interview findings showed that participants experienced several challenges during regular English performance activities. The main challenges included limited practice time, language-related difficulties, and fear of making mistakes.

Regarding practice time, one participant explained that the busy academic and *Pesantren* schedule limited the time available for preparation before the performance.

Quotation 6

"The difficulty I face is managing practice time in the middle of the busy Pesantren schedule." (Interview, P1)

Several participants also reported language-related difficulties, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. These challenges often made them feel afraid of making mistakes and less confident while performing.

Quotation 7

"The difficulty is usually in pronunciation and being afraid of making grammar mistakes." (Interview, P2)

Quotation 8

"The difficulty is lack of vocabulary and being afraid of making mistakes." (Interview, P4)

Quotation 9

"The difficulty is remembering the material and speaking fluently." (Interview, P3)

Quotation 10

"The difficulty is speaking fluently and not stammering." (Interview, P5)

Overall, the findings indicate that limited preparation time, language-related difficulties, and fear of making mistakes were the main challenges experienced by participants during regular English performance activities.

Students' Attitudes Toward Regular English Performance Activities

The interview findings showed that participants had positive attitudes toward regular English performance activities. Although they initially found the activities challenging, they gradually became more confident, braver, and more comfortable speaking English through regular participation.

Quotation 11

"This activity really helps train my mentality, especially in building courage when speaking in front of many people." (Interview, P4)

The quotation indicates that regular participation helped participants develop greater confidence and courage when speaking before an audience. Participants also described the activities as enjoyable, although they still experienced nervousness and fear during their performances.

Quotation 12

"I think this activity is enjoyable, but it can also be a bit challenging. When I have practiced well, I feel more confident. However, if I am not well prepared, I usually feel less confident." (Interview, P1)

Quotation 13

"I feel happy but sometimes I am afraid when I have to perform." (Interview, P2)

These quotations show that participants had mixed feelings toward the activities. They enjoyed participating, but they still experienced nervousness and fear, especially when they felt unprepared.

Participants also shared what they liked and disliked about the activities. They appreciated the opportunity to improve their confidence and speaking ability, although they mentioned the busy schedule and limited practice time as challenges.

Quotation 14

"I like this activity because it helps me learn and become more confident. However, I do not really like it because the schedule is quite busy, so sometimes it feels tiring." (Interview, P3)

Quotation 15

"I like this activity because it can make me braver to speak English. But I do not like it because the practice time feels less than optimal." (Interview, P5)

The findings indicate that participants viewed the regular English performance. The findings showed that regular English performance activities helped students improve their confidence and speaking ability. However, students still faced several challenges, including limited practice time, fear of making mistakes, and language-related difficulties such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. These findings support Shen and Chiu (2019), who state that anxiety and fear of making mistakes are common barriers for EFL learners. Similarly, Shintel and Faust (2018) explain that limited vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation can negatively affect speaking performance. In addition, limited preparation time reduced students' readiness and confidence before performing.

To deal with these challenges, students used several self-management strategies, such as practicing regularly, understanding the topic, preparing notes, and staying calm

before performing. These strategies helped them feel more prepared and confident during speaking activities. This finding is consistent with Holandyah et al. (2022), who found that managing anxiety is important for improving speaking performance. Overall, students had positive attitudes toward the activities because they believed that regular participation improved their confidence, speaking ability, and courage to speak English in front of others. These findings suggest that regular English performance activities can effectively support students' speaking development in an EFL context.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study explored students' lived experiences of participating in regular English performance activities at a *Pesantren*. The findings revealed that the activities provided meaningful opportunities for students to practice speaking English and gradually improve their confidence, courage, and fluency. However, students also encountered several challenges, including nervousness, fear of making mistakes, limited practice time, and language-related difficulties such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. To cope with these challenges, they employed various self-management strategies, including regular practice, understanding the topic, preparing notes, memorizing key points, and managing their emotions before performing.

The findings indicate that regular English performance activities positively influenced students' speaking development and attitudes toward speaking English. Although the participants continued to experience challenges, they perceived the activities as beneficial because they helped them become more confident and comfortable speaking in front of an audience. Therefore, regular performance activities can serve as an effective approach to supporting speaking development while fostering confidence and active participation in EFL learning.

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