

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH SPEAKING THROUGH OUTDOOR LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: This study explores students' perceptions of English speaking through outdoor learning activities in the English Language Education Study Program of Khairun University. Employing a mixed-methods approach, 30 students participated in the research. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results showed that outdoor English speaking activities can effectively enhance students' confidence, motivation, comfort, engagement, and vocabulary acquisition. Students also perceived that learning outside the classroom provides an opportunity for spontaneous interaction, reduces anxiety, and encourages authentic language use. Outdoor learning also created a supportive environment that encouraged collaboration among peers. These findings suggest that speaking activity in an outdoor setting is an effective teaching method and offers a holistic approach to language learning.

Keywords: *Students' perception, Speaking skill, Outdoor learning activities*

INTRODUCTION

English is widely acknowledged as the global language of communication, playing a crucial role in various fields such as education, technology, business, science, and diplomacy. In the modern globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English provides individuals with broader academic, professional, and social opportunities. According to Crystal (2012), English is a global lingua franca, which enables speakers from different languages to understand one another. The widespread use of English around the world reinforces the need to acquire English language skills, particularly for non-native speakers.

Among the four skills of English, speaking is the most direct and interactive means of communication. Speaking enables learners to express their thoughts, convey information, and interact in real-time. As Alhosni (2014) emphasized, speaking is the active use of language to convey meanings that others can comprehend. It is a productive skill that demands the ability to construct grammatically accurate sentences and the fluency and confidence to express them effectively. For EFL learners, acquiring speaking skills is often a challenging yet crucial goal of language education. Luoma (2009) notes that speaking involves a complex mental process requiring planning, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring. Speaking proficiency allows learners to participate in classroom discussions, deliver presentations, collaborate with peers, and engage in everyday conversations. Speaking is not only an academic prerequisite but also a life skill that supports social interaction and career readiness.

Speaking is considered one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. Many studies have highlighted various obstacles that hinder students' speaking proficiency. Psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and a lack of motivation. Tuan and Mai (2015) reported that speaking activities often provoke anxiety among students, making them reluctant to participate because of the fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers or teachers, reducing students' willingness to communicate. Linguistic challenges can also impede students' speaking development. EFL learners often struggle with limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and a lack of grammatical knowledge, which can affect their fluency in speaking. These difficulties also create hesitation when trying to

communicate in English, which causes students to pause frequently or rely on repetitive and simple expressions.

The conventional classroom setting often fails to address these challenges. Many language classes focus too much on grammar practice and written exercises, providing fewer opportunities for speaking practice. Munawar (2009) argues that monotonous and repetitive teaching methods can reduce learners' motivation and interest in learning. Without any variety in teaching delivery, students may feel restrained from speaking English freely and confidently.

In order to address these issues, language teachers need to create an innovative teaching method to enhance students' interest and motivation. One such innovative approach is outdoor learning. According to Beames, Higgins, and Nicol (2012), outdoor learning is grounded in experiential education and emphasizes real-world engagement, discovery, and reflection. It provides learners with firsthand experiences that connect theory to practice. In language learning, outdoor activities can range from simple conversations around the school buildings to structured programs such as English camps, field trips, and community-based projects. Such activities encourage learners to use English spontaneously and meaningfully in a guided setting.

Husamah (2013) defines outdoor learning as an educational activity outside the classroom designed to create natural interaction through nature to enhance language

development. These activities allow students to explore languages other than reading from textbooks. Outdoor learning activities allow students to engage with real-life objects, people, and situations. This form of learning promotes curiosity, creativity, and deeper understanding because they are puts students in an immersive setting and encourages them to speak, listen, and respond in real time.

The benefits of outdoor learning in language instruction are mentioned in many studies. Cooper (2015) explained that outdoor environments can promote students' cognitive development. Furthermore, students can move actively move which increase their physical activity and improve emotional state. All the proposed benefits will in turn reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence to speak.

Furthermore, outdoor learning supports vocabulary enrichment. Jacobi (2010) inferred that outdoor learning helps stimulate imagination and contextual understanding, which can help students to gain vocabulary more effectively. This way, students learn new vocabulary in a more memorable way than the traditional way.

Furthermore, learning outdoors promotes interpersonal and teamwork abilities. When students are gathered in an outdoor environment, they would collaborate in groups which promotes peer interaction. They practice problem-solving skills, negotiation, and turn-taking techniques that are important in real-world communication. However, implementing outdoor learning also poses several challenges for teachers. Sudjana and Rival (2010) explained that outdoor activities require careful planning, time management, and supervision to be effective. Teachers must ensure that learning objectives are accomplished while managing students' behavior and safety outside the classroom.

Despite these drawbacks, outdoor learning has benefits that make it a viable method for enhancing speaking abilities. Addressing the language and psychological obstacles that students encounter provides a more comprehensive and enjoyable educational experience. By extending learning beyond the conventional classroom, teachers may establish a dynamic and adaptable atmosphere that promotes language acquisition. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of English speaking through outdoor learning activities. This study was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program of Universitas Khairun. The research investigates how outdoor learning influences learners' speaking confidence, motivation, participation, and vocabulary acquisition. Understanding students' experiences and perceptions

can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of outdoor learning as an alternative teaching method.

The study will contribute to the literature on innovative language teaching practices and supports the integration learner-centered approaches in English classrooms. Teachers can be benefited from switching from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to more flexible, context-based learning outside the classroom. It is hoped that learners will feel more confident to speak, connect, and grow.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to understand students' perceptions regarding English-speaking outdoor learning activities comprehensively. A mixed-methods approach was chosen because it enables data triangulation, providing an in-depth analysis to the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015). This design allowed the researchers to identify general themes found through the questionnaire and then deepen the understanding through follow-up interviews.

The participants of this research were 30 students enrolled in the fourth semester of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Khairun. These students were selected purposively, considering that by the fourth semester, they had received basic training in English communication skills and were actively engaged in intermediate-level language courses. The participant group consisted of male and female students aged between 19 and 22. Most participants have completed general English courses and participated in prior outdoor-based speaking activities in the previous semester. Additionally, participants represented diverse academic performances, from moderate fluency to those who are still struggling in oral communication. This diversity allowed the researchers to obtain various perspectives related to speaking experiences in outdoor contexts.

Two main instruments were used to collect data: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A structured questionnaire consisting of 15 items was developed to measure students' perceptions of the impact of outdoor learning on their speaking skills. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" to assess areas such as confidence, motivation, comfort, vocabulary development, and classroom engagement (Sugiyono, 2016). The questionnaire items were adapted and refined based on existing instruments in second language acquisition research and reviewed by two expert lecturers to ensure content validity.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 participants selected randomly from the total respondents. The open-ended interview questions allowed students to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, feelings, and suggestions regarding outdoor speaking activities. Interviews were conducted in a relaxed setting to encourage participants to express their thoughts freely, and each session lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Data collection was conducted over two weeks. Initially, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. After providing informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire during one class session. Subsequently, interviews were scheduled with selected students at times convenient to them.

Outdoor speaking activities that served as the context for this study included role-plays, storytelling sessions, descriptive tasks, and conversational activities conducted at various

outdoor locations such as university gardens, public parks, and nearby cultural landmarks. These settings provided real-life communicative situations that differ from the typical classroom environment.

The data collected in this study were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand students' perceptions of outdoor learning activities.

Qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically to explore deeper insights into students' experiences. The thematic analysis followed the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include the processes of familiarization with the data, identifying themes, reviewing themes, describing themes, and producing the report from the results obtained. Through this method, reserachers can identify several themes including students' confidence, motivation, anxiety, engagement, and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, this analysis will capture how students perceive the benefits and challenges of speaking activities in outdoor setting. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data will be done to ensure the consistency of findings and enrich the interpretation from the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study present a detailed exploration of students' perceptions toward outdoor learning activities, based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The table below provides the results of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Questionnaire Results

No.	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	English outdoor learning activity makes me more motivated in learning	46,6%	43,3%	10%	0	0
	When learning English through outdoor activity, I understand the material easily	26,6%	53,3%	20%	0	0
3	When learning English through outdoor activity, I remember the material easily	23,3%	53,3%	23,3%	0	0
4	I am speaking more actively when learning English through outdoor activity	10%	56,6%	33,3%	0	0
5	Learning English outside classroom provide more comfortable interaction between students	56,6%	36,6%	6,6%	0	0
6	English outdoor learning activity makes mind and body become healthy	30%	46,6%	20%	0	0
7	Working in team is easier when learning outside the classroom	46,6%	36,6%	10%	6,6%	0
8	Learning English outside the classroom encourages me to speak English	36,6%	33,3%	30%	0	0

9	I felt this technique was very easy to make us communicative in learning speaking process	26,6%	63,3%	10%	0	0
10	When learning English outside the classroom, I speak fluently even though there are still errors in grammar	23,3%	56,6%	16,6%	3,3%	0
11	English Outdoor learning making us easy to adapt in learning speaking process	43,3%	56,6%	0	0	0
12	It is easier to elaborate ideas for speaking when learning English through outdoor activity	23,3%	70%	3,3%	3,3%	0
13	English outdoor learning activity helps to improve my pronunciation.	36,6%	53,3%	6,6%	3,3%	0
14	English outdoor learning activity helps me to improve my vocabulary knowledge	50%	40%	10%	0	0
15	I felt this technique makes me more confidence to be a good public speaker	30%	60%	10%	0	0

Quantitative results revealed a strongly positive trend in students' perceptions across several dimensions. The majority of students reported that outdoor learning significantly improve motivation to engage more actively in English speaking activities. 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed and 43.3% agreed that outdoor environments increased their learning motivation. This enthusiasm is further supported in their ability to understand the material more easily when learning outdoors, where 26.6% strongly agreed and 53.3% agreed. This data confirm that environmental factors played a role in cognitive processing.

Students also indicated that they remembered the learning material better through outdoor activities (76.6%). Although 33.3% students remained neutral about their activeness in speaking, 56.6% of them still agreed that they spoke more actively outdoors. Another major benefit reported is the ease of interaction among peers, with 56.6% strongly agreeing and 36.6% agreeing. Students mostly agreed that their interaction with classmates became more natural and more relaxed in an outdoor situation.

Another positive aspect with 30% strongly agreed and 46.6% agreed was that learning outside improved students' mental and physical well-being. Teamwork was also more easily achieved because of the less restrictive context in outdoor setting, as evidenced by the 83.2% of students who agreed that collaboration outside was simpler and more enjoyable.

In terms of linguistic competence, a significant number of students stated that outdoor learning activities encouraged them to speak English more frequently. Approximately 70% of participants agreed that the outdoor settings motivated them to speak English spontaneously. Moreover, 89.9% of students agreed that outdoor learning made them engage in meaningful speaking activities, and nearly 80% admitted they spoke more fluently even when minor grammatical errors occurred. It showed that students felt reduced anxiety about producing linguistic errors in a relaxed outdoor setting.

Adaptability to speaking tasks improved significantly, with all participants agreeing that outdoor activities enhanced their adjustment in the speaking process. Elaboration of ideas was another dimension highly supported by students, as 93.3% believed they could elaborate better in open environments compared to the confined traditional classroom.

Moreover, pronunciation and vocabulary development were also positively impacted. Almost 90% of students reported that outdoor activities helped them improve their pronunciation skills. Meanwhile, an equally high percentage of agreement was also recognized on vocabulary enrichment. Finally, 90% of students agreed that this kind of activity can help them build public speaking confidence. Students mostly felt more confident speaking publicly after participating in outdoor learning sessions.

To complement the quantitative data, the study also incorporated qualitative data through interviews with 10 fourth-semester students. The aim was to explore in greater depth students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in English-speaking outdoor learning activities. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed several recurring themes: increased freedom and motivation, enhanced vocabulary acquisition, support for pronunciation improvement, emotional impact and confidence, and environmental challenges.

Increased Freedom and Motivation in Speaking

Numerous participants reported that the more informal and natural environment of outdoor learning encouraged them to participate and enable them to talk more freely. Students emphasized the difference between indoor and outdoor environments, frequently characterizing that indoor conventional learner is inflexible and constricting.

"I feel freer and more free in expressing ideas when I learn outside the classroom... I feel more able to communicate with friends about broader topics." (MA)

"Learning outdoors is more fun. We get to meet a lot of people and we can share and discuss with them, whereas indoors is stuffy and we feel restricted." (NN)

"Learning outside is cool and fun... the atmosphere is better and it can support the learning process." (AS)

This finding aligns with the idea that environmental context influences willingness to speak, with outdoor settings supporting autonomy and reducing pressure.

Vocabulary Enrichment Through Contextual Experience

A crucial benefit mentioned by student through interview was about vocabulary improvement. By interacting and collaborating in real-world environments, students can see physical objects around them directly, engage with various topics, and interact with other students they rarely interact with in classroom setting. All these factors helped them learn new words more naturally.

"Learning to speak outside the classroom can also improve my vocabulary by seeing things in the surrounding environment." (MA)

"I might get new stories from friends and also new understandings from their fields... that vocabulary can all contribute to my insight." (RH)

"When we are outdoors, we see various kinds of objects... friends who are outdoors have a lot of vocabulary we most likely don't know." (NN)

This theme reflects principles of situated learning, where learners gain vocabulary through context-rich interaction and exposure.

Pronunciation Support Through Peer Interaction

Most students reported improvement in pronunciation due to immediate feedback from peers during spontaneous conversations. Students also pointed out the value of speaking with peers from different academic backgrounds, including those with stronger English skills, as they often provided correction and modeling.

"When we speak and there is a mispronunciation... someone corrects it." (MI)

"Some people in the community are English teachers, so when I mispronounce something, they can correct and provide input." (RH)

"Outside we meet many people... when our pronunciation is wrong, others help us correct it." (NN)

Even in casual settings, students need teacher direction, as one student (MTH) pointed out that although the informal setting allowed them to practice, it occasionally exposed them to incorrect pronunciation.

Emotional Responses: Confidence and Anxiety

Students described a mixture of increased confidence and nervousness. Many appreciated the less formal context can reduce their fear of being judged, while a few felt anxious due to the public nature of the space or fear of making mistakes.

"I feel happy, but also nervous because I'm afraid of mistakes in vocabulary and sentence structure." (TTS)

"Outside the room we are more free in expression... even though I sometimes feel nervous, but that is what challenges me." (TTS)

"I feel very excited because I can get new connections... if I only practice with myself I won't find progress." (RH)

Another emotional barrier mentioned was self-doubt, as one student feared being judged as less intelligent, which sometimes led to hesitation in speaking.

"I always assume that other people are smarter than me and I'm afraid of being criticized... if we keep thinking like that, we will stay stuck." (RH)

This theme underlines the importance of building a psychologically safe learning environment, even outside the classroom.

Environmental Challenges and Student Strategies

Although students were generally positive, nearly all acknowledged challenges, primarily noise and distractions in public spaces. They identified strategies such as finding quieter places or focusing internally to maintain concentration.

"The obstacle I encountered was noise... my way to overcome it is to find a place with fewer people." (MA)

"Noise due to vehicles can interfere with the learning process, so I try to find a quieter place." (AS)

"When the place is crowded and explanations aren't clear, I just try to focus myself."

(TTS)

Interestingly, one student (ZRM) reported no obstacles at all and expressed enjoyment of the outdoor experience, showing that the impact of environment varies by personality and learning style.

The results of the interview and questionnaire show a consistent pattern that suggests that outdoor learning activities greatly improve students' English-speaking skills by lowering anxiety, boosting motivation, expanding vocabulary, and offering real-world communication situations. In light of current ideas and empirical studies in language teaching, this discussion critically examines these findings, highlighting both the practical and pedagogical consequences.

One of the most striking outcomes from both data sources is the enhancement of student motivation through outdoor learning. The quantitative results showed that 89.9% of students felt more motivated to speak English outdoors, and this sentiment was echoed in interviews where students described outdoor learning as "fun," "exciting," and "refreshing." These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that motivation flourishes when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The outdoor environment appears to fulfill all three conditions: students have more freedom in how they express themselves (autonomy), receive informal feedback that reinforces skill development (competence), and engage in peer interaction that fosters a sense of community.

Furthermore, Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2019) research provides evidence to the idea that a high correlation exists between willingness to speak in a second language and positive feelings like enjoyment. By removing the formality of the classroom walls, the outside environment adds excitement and novelty to the learning process, which increases student involvement and speaking frequency. Closely related to motivation is the reduction of anxiety and the increase in self-confidence, both of which are essential for successful oral communication. Quantitative data indicated that a significant majority of student (90%) felt more confident speaking outdoors. The interviews provided nuanced insights: students mentioned feeling "free to express" themselves and less afraid of making mistakes in informal outdoor settings. These reflections resonate with the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 2010), which identifies fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension as major inhibitors of language use. Outdoor learning appears to mitigate these fears by offering a psychologically safer space for experimentation.

Recent studies confirm this effect. For example, Baran-Łucarz (2021) found that non-traditional learning environments can significantly reduce language anxiety by providing low-stakes interaction opportunities. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) advocate for creating emotionally supportive environments where learners feel comfortable taking linguistic risks—a condition clearly met in the outdoor learning experiences describe by students in this study.

Outdoor learning also enriches the authenticity of communication, an essential component of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Students in interviews frequently highlighted the value of interacting with peers and even strangers on diverse, real-world topics. One participant (RH) noted the exposure to vocabulary across various disciplines, including

medicine and engineering, demonstrating that the outdoor context facilitated interdisciplinary language learning. Another participant (NN) stated, "we are not focused on just one topic," reflecting the dynamic nature of language use in real life.

These insights are consistent with Littlewood's (2014) notion of communicative competence, which emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic interaction. Outdoor learning promotes all of these by allowing students to engage in conversations that are less scripted and more adaptable to the social context—much like real-world communication demands. This aspect also aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, particularly the idea that learning is socially mediated and context-dependent. The interviews clearly illustrate that students co-construct knowledge and language use through peer interaction in outdoor settings, allowing them to move within and beyond their current zone of proximal development.

Another major theme emerging from both the questionnaire and interview data is the improvement in vocabulary. The quantitative results showed that 90% of students agreed that outdoor learning helped them improve vocabulary, while interviews revealed that students benefited from real-life associations with physical objects, settings, and varied conversations. For instance, students noted that they acquired vocabulary from different fields and in more natural ways than through rote memorization.

This observation reflects the core principles of Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which proposes that knowledge is best acquired in contexts where it is applied. More recent research by Nation (2013) also supports the idea that incidental vocabulary learning—through meaningful exposure and use—is more effective and sustainable than isolated vocabulary drills. By learning vocabulary in context, students in this study reported stronger recall and applicability, contributing to their overall communicative competence. Pronunciation improvement was another commonly reported benefit. The survey revealed that nearly 90% of students believed outdoor learning helped their pronunciation, and interviews highlighted the role of peer correction on immediate feedback. Students noted that being corrected by peer during casual conversation helped them become more aware of their pronunciation errors and how to fix them.

This supports Derwing and Munro's (2015) assertion that pronunciation instruction is most effective when embedded in meaningful communication. Outdoor learning, as described by the participants, provides exactly that: it enables spontaneous speech, opportunities for feedback, and a focus on intelligibility rather than perfection. Furthermore, engaging in informal conversations with students from diverse backgrounds exposes learners to multiple pronunciation models, helping develop both perception and production skills.

However, some students also noted the risk of acquiring incorrect pronunciation from peers with similar or lower proficiency. This highlights the need for a balanced approach where outdoor learning is supplemented with occasional instructor guidance or corrective feedback to ensure accurate language input. The emotional impact of outdoor learning was frequently mentioned in interviews. Students described feeling "relaxed," "excited," and "less pressured." This emotional relief appears to contribute directly to cognitive gains. Rickinson et al. (2004) and more recently Becker et al. (2017) have shown that exposure to natural environments enhances cognitive function, attention, and emotional well-being—all of which are crucial for

effective language learning.

One participant (ZRM) stated, “I feel more relaxed, but I still take the learning seriously.” This suggests that emotional comfort does not compromise academic rigor but instead facilitates a better learning mindset. These outcomes align with the broader push toward holistic education, which values not just academic achievement but emotional and social development (UNESCO, 2020). Despite the many advantages, outdoor learning is not without its challenges. The most commonly reported obstacle was noise and environmental distraction, with several students indicating that crowded or noisy spaces interfered with focus and comprehension. Nevertheless, many students developed coping strategies, such as relocating to quieter areas or improving personal concentration. This resilience highlights the importance of learner agency in educational success (Bandura, 2006). The students' ability to adapt and problem-solve reflects a level of metacognitive maturity that outdoor learning may help cultivate. These findings underscore the necessity of careful planning by educators to balance flexibility with structure and to select environments that are conducive to learning.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the multifaceted benefits of outdoor learning activities in enhancing students' English-speaking skills within the context of an English Language Education Program. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research revealed that engaging in language learning beyond the conventional classroom not only enriches linguistic competence, particularly in vocabulary development and pronunciation but also fosters emotional resilience, confidence, and authentic communicative competence.

Students perceived outdoor learning as a liberating and motivating experience. The shift in environment provided a psychologically safer and more stimulating space for learners to express themselves with reduced anxiety and increased spontaneity. These findings underscore the importance of context in language acquisition, supporting theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and Situated Learning, which emphasize autonomy, authenticity, and social interaction in language learning processes.

Crucially, this study also highlights that the physical and emotional dimensions of learning are deeply intertwined. The outdoor setting contributed not only to cognitive engagement but also to well-being, collaboration, and self-efficacy. Students' ability to adapt to environmental challenges, such as noise or distractions, further reflects the development of metacognitive and problem-solving skills that are essential for lifelong learning.

While outdoor learning cannot entirely replace classroom instruction, it offers a powerful complementary strategy that addresses the limitations of traditional pedagogy. The evidence presented advocates for a more holistic, learner-centered, and contextually rich approach to speaking instruction in EFL settings. Educators are encouraged to integrate structured outdoor learning experiences into curricula to cultivate more confident, competent, and communicative learners.

Future research may benefit from longitudinal studies involving diverse institutions and learner profiles to assess the sustained impact of outdoor learning on language proficiency. Nevertheless, the present findings affirm that when language learning is brought into real-world spaces, it becomes not only more effective but also more meaningful and memorable for students.

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