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The Student Experience in Winning English Competition : A Case Study at LIPS of Nurul Jadid

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the success of students in English competitions at LIPS Nurul Jadid by identifying the institutional support and learning strategies involved. A qualitative case study approach was employed to explore the lived experiences of winning students within the Language and Islamic Public Speaking (LIPS) program at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, supported by observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. Prolonged engagement enhanced the credibility of the findings. Data were collected through two main methods: observation and interviews, which provided in-depth insight into students' achievements and institutional contributions. Thematic analysis revealed that the extracurricular English program contributed significantly to the improvement of students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Key enabling factors included mentoring, peer tutoring, structured coaching, and emotional encouragement. Key challenges identified were time constraints, pronunciation difficulties, and performance anxiety, which were addressed through disciplined practices, self-motivation, and collaborative support. The study concluded that the English language competition experience fostered not only linguistic competence but also students' self-confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning. These findings underscore the transformative role of performance-based extracurricular activities in shaping learners' academic engagement and identity in a multilingual educational environment.

Kata kunci: English Competition, Student Experience, LIPS Nurul Jadid

1. Introduction

The student experience in junior high school represents a critical period of transition marked by significant cognitive, social, and emotional development. Academically, students are introduced to a broader curriculum and a more rigorous pace compared to elementary education (Walker, 2002). They begin to engage with specialized subjects such as mathematics, science, English, and history, each typically taught by different subject-specific teachers. This shift necessitates greater adaptability and encourages students to become more self-reliant in their learning. Furthermore, the academic workload increases, with a higher volume of homework, assessments, and project-based tasks (Crisp, 2022). These responsibilities play an essential role in helping students develop key skills in time management, organization, and independent study. Despite the growing expectation for autonomy, teachers continue to provide structured guidance and support, facilitating a smoother transition into this new stage of academic life (Hashmi & Fayyaz, 2022).

Emotionally, junior high school is a formative period characterized by significant personal growth and self-exploration (Dar et al., 2023). During this stage, students begin to experience a broader range of emotions with increased intensity. They often start to reflect more deeply on their personal identity, values, and their place within both their peer group and the wider society. It is common for students to encounter emotional challenges such as stress, anxiety, or confusion as they navigate these internal changes. Consequently, the development of emotional regulation skills becomes essential (S. Li & Akram, 2023). Learning to recognize and manage emotions, seek support from trusted adults, and ask for help when necessary are important aspects of emotional development during this transitional phase.

Simultaneously, students in junior high school begin to develop a greater sense of personal responsibility in their daily lives (Everhart, 2022). They are increasingly expected to manage their own academic tasks, such as tracking homework assignments, organizing school materials, and preparing for the school day independently. Many students also begin to navigate the challenge of balancing their academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities and personal interests (King et al., 2021). This gradual increase in autonomy fosters essential life skills,

including time management, self-discipline, and organizational ability. Such growing independence serves as a critical foundation for the more complex demands of high school and future educational or personal endeavors.

Recent years, English competitions have gained increasing popularity among students, particularly in the context of junior and senior high schools (Jiang et al., 2021). These competitions, which may include speech contests, debates, storytelling, and essay writing, serve as valuable platforms for students to enhance their English language proficiency, demonstrate their academic talents, and build confidence. Participating in such events often requires not only linguistic skills but also critical thinking, creativity, and strong emotional resilience. Winning an English competition, therefore, is not merely a result of technical language mastery, but also of sustained effort, preparation, motivation, and personal growth (Knapp, 2024).

From an educational perspective, competitions represent an extension of the classroom, offering real-life challenges that stimulate student engagement and holistic development (Tariq & Sergio, 2025). The experience of winning can significantly impact a student's academic motivation, self-perception, and future aspirations. It may also foster a deeper interest in English as a subject and encourage further participation in similar events. However, while much research has focused on the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning strategies, fewer studies have explored the lived experiences of students who achieve success in English competitions.

Therefore, dealing with the importance of English existence as a language necessary in learning, Nurul Jadid Boarding School, one of the biggest Pesantren in East Java, provides a language institution as receptacle for students to master foreign language. The provided language institution is delivered into two ways, they are formal and non-formal institutions. The formal institution includes BPK (Badan Pembinaan Khusus of MTs Nurul Jadid), LIPS (Intensive Program of SMP. Nurul Jadid), LA (Language Acceleration of SMA Nurul Jadid). The non-formal institution includes LPBA Nurul Jadid (Lembaga Pengembangan Bahasa Asing Nurul Jadid). From those institutions, LPBA Nurul Jadid is a central institution that focuses on learning foreign languages exactly English and Arabic language.

Language Intensive Programs (LIPS) at SMP Nurul Jadid is a distinguished initiative administered under the auspices of islamic boarding school of Nurul Jadid Paiton, located in Probolinggo. This program is meticulously designed to enhance students' proficiency in foreign languages, with a particular emphasis on English and Arabic. By employing an intensive and structured pedagogical approach, LIPS seeks to cultivate not only academic excellence but also advanced communication skills in foreign languages. The overarching objective of this program is to produce a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also proficient in linguistic communication, thus preparing students for success in a globalized society.

The Language Intensive Programs (LIPS) at SMP Nurul Jadid represent one of the institution's premier educational initiatives, strategically designed to enhance students' proficiency in foreign languages, with a particular focus on English and Arabic. This program extends beyond traditional academic instruction by integrating the development of students' communicative competencies and personal character. Employing an intensive and systematically structured approach, LIPS aims to foster holistic growth, equipping students with the linguistic and interpersonal skills necessary to thrive in both academic and real-world contexts.

Historically, the institution was established in 2002, following its designation by the Department of Education as a school expected to possess a distinctive identity. In response to this mandate, the administrative body of SMP Nurul Jadid collectively resolved to emphasize language proficiency and religious education as the school's defining characteristics. This strategic focus was informed by two key contextual factors: the school's proximity to the Pantura highway, a major transportation route, and its location near industrial facilities such as the PLTU, which have the potential to draw international visitors to the area.

In an effort to enhance students' proficiency in bilingual communication, the school implemented an initiative to accommodate selected students within a single dormitory environment. This initiative was further refined in 2008 through the integration of these students into a designated class cohort. Such structural organization facilitated more effective coordination of program activities by appointed supervisors.

The language program was conceived not only to serve as a defining characteristic of SMP Nurul Jadid but also to provide students with practical linguistic competencies. Additionally, it aimed to prepare them for participation in competitive events at the local, district, and national levels, thereby fostering both academic and extracurricular excellence.

In practice, several critical challenges have been identified that significantly influence students' preparedness and performance in competitions (Zimmerman, 2023). A primary issue is the limited availability of time for students, stemming from the demanding schedule within the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment. In addition to fulfilling their obligations in formal academic programs, students are also required to participate in a range of religious activities (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). This dual commitment divides their attention and impedes their ability to engage in focused and effective competition preparation.

Another considerable constraint lies in the shortage of teaching personnel with near-native proficiency in the target language. The lack of instructors with advanced expertise, particularly in the area of pronunciation, presents a substantial barrier to the development of students' natural speaking abilities (Tiwari, 2023). Compounding this issue is the restricted access to digital learning resources, such as YouTube, due to institutional regulations governing internet usage within the pesantren setting. These combined factors create a learning environment that is less conducive to the cultivation of high-level language skills necessary for competitive success.

Another significant issue pertains to the ineffective implementation of supplementary (extracurricular) classes designed to prepare students for competitions. In practice, these programs are neither conducted on a regular basis nor delivered with sufficient intensity. Rather, they tend to be activated only in the period immediately preceding a competition, and typically after students have been formally designated as participants. This pattern reflects a lack of sustained and systematic coaching, which is essential for the development of competitive competencies.

Moreover, a high level of student dependency on mentors in the preparation of speech scripts or competition texts has also been observed. This reliance becomes particularly problematic in competitions that require spontaneous speech or impromptu delivery. Students who are accustomed to memorizing pre-written scripts often experience difficulties in adapting to formats that demand real-time language production and autonomous speaking skills.

The previous studies discuss the experiences and challenges faced by students. These studies are different from the current study, especially in the context of their perspectives. The current study mainly discusses students' experiences in winning English competitions at LIPS of Nurul Jadid, while the previous studies mainly discuss students' improvement in English speaking, teachers' teaching competition experiences, and the process of English speech coaching in several secondary schools. The previous studies also closely resemble the researcher's study, especially in terms of the challenges faced by students.

This study aims to analyze the factors contributing to success in English competitions at the Intensive Study Development Institute (LIPS) Nurul Jadid. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the forms of institutional support and the learning strategies implemented at LIPS Nurul Jadid to enhance students' English proficiency and achievements in competitive settings.

As a result of fairly high commitment to improve the directed learning process, the students of LIPS Nurul Jadid intently get some achievements. The students attentively participate in various competitions such as, speech, storytelling, Olympiad and debate, not only in term of region and province but also in term of national or even international competition. Certainly, in achieving those accomplishments, there are some factors rely behind the successful of the students, one of them is learning from the experience of LIPS students in winning some competitions.

Dealing with behind the students experience, the researcher is interested in knowing what are the experience of LIPS Nurul Jadid students in winning some English competitions regarding the students' achievements gotten by them while some previous researchers conducted a study in formal institution. By then, this research presents in non-formal institution.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design to explore the lived experiences of students who have won English competitions at the Language and Islamic Public Speaking (LIPS) program of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because it allows for the exploration of complex social phenomena through rich, contextualized data (Rose & Johnson, 2020). In this case, the goal was to uncover how students make sense of their experiences what motivates them, how they prepare, and what challenges they overcome in the process of competing and winning.

The use of a case study design was considered particularly appropriate for this research. Case studies are well-suited to inquiries that aim to understand bounded systems, such as a specific group of students within a particular institutional context (Cresswell, 2013). This design enabled the researcher to focus deeply on a defined unit the LIPS program while capturing the individual stories and perceptions of its successful participants. The case study framework also provided flexibility in data collection, allowing the researcher to employ multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and documents to build a holistic narrative.

3. Results and Discussion

a. Improvement of English Skills Through Extracurricular Programs

This study aimed to explore the perceived impact of extracurricular English programs at LIPS Nurul Jadid on students' language skills. Through qualitative analysis of interviews with five participants, the findings illuminate the multidimensional benefits of these programs, particularly in enhancing speaking, listening, writing, and reading competencies, as well as promoting confidence and learner motivation.

Participants consistently reported improvements in oral fluency and auditory comprehension. Activities such as speech practice, public speaking clubs, and listening exercises using English videos and podcasts contributed substantially to this growth. The role of interactive speaking and listening tasks in enhancing real-time language processing. These findings are supported by Kruk (2021), who identified interactivity and authentic exposure as catalysts for oral proficiency development (Han et al., 2024). Digital media used for listening drills can simulate native interaction and provide rich contextual input essential for comprehension.

The significant gains in writing skills, particularly in terms of grammar and sentence structuring (Bezbaruah, 2025). Structured activities such as essay writing, summaries, and translation tasks, coupled with consistent feedback from mentors, created opportunities for students to revise, reflect, and refine their writing. These findings align with Rassaei (2020), who noted that sustained written practice, especially with feedback mechanisms, cultivates grammatical accuracy and expressive clarity (Zahler, 2020).

An emergent theme from the interviews is the enhancement of learner self-confidence and the reconstruction of learner identity. The supportive and non-judgmental learning atmosphere provided by LIPS programs encouraged students to engage with English more freely. The role of community and belonging in shaping learner agency and identity, reinforcing the idea that affective support is as vital as academic scaffolding (Gregersen & Mercer, 2022).

A comprehensive array of language activities that collectively enhanced speaking, reading, writing, and listening. This mirrors the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where real-world language use is central. Tuan (2022) noted that extracurricular settings grounded in authentic tasks and interaction foster more holistic language development than isolated skill instruction (Hung et al., 2025).

The research also illustrates the culturally inclusive nature of the programs, which allowed students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Madurese speakers, to thrive. Such inclusivity has been emphasized by Al-Tamimi & Lin (2020), who argue that culturally responsive learning environments play a key role in maintaining learner motivation and performance, especially among minority groups (Al-Tamimi & Edwards, 2022).

These insights collectively demonstrate that the extracurricular English programs at LIPS Nurul Jadid go beyond skill enhancement to support affective, social, and motivational dimensions of language learning. The research findings affirm the critical role of extracurricular spaces in complementing formal education and fostering sustainable second language acquisition (SLA) trajectories.

b. Support and Guidance from Teachers and Mentor

The interview findings reveal that mentorship and emotional support play a pivotal role in empowering students to succeed in English competitions. These findings are consistent with a growing body of research that emphasizes the multifaceted influence of teacher-student interactions, peer support, and emotionally intelligent guidance in second language learning and performance contexts.

Several participants, including the vital role of emotional encouragement and motivational support in maintaining persistence during competition preparation. Fuad recalled moments of exhaustion and self-doubt, countered by affirmations from mentors and teachers. These insights are aligned with Dewaele et al. (2022), who argued that emotional support and psychological safety provided by educators can significantly influence language learners' performance under pressure. Similarly, the teacher encouragement fosters resilience and academic self-efficacy among EFL learners, especially in performance-based environments (Y. Li & Zhang, 2024).

Support from senior students, as both a technical aid and a source of social motivation. This kind of peer mentoring not only facilitates practical learning such as speech delivery, time management, and handling competition stress but also reinforces a sense of belonging within the learner community. This observation echoes the findings of Alghamdi & Ahmed (2022), who demonstrated that peer-led communities of practice can promote language engagement, reduce anxiety, and enhance collaborative learning outcomes (Alghamdi, 2024).

Participants consistently referenced technical support such as grammar correction, pronunciation guidance, structured materials, and mock interviews. These interventions resonate with the pedagogical practices advocated by Richards (2019), where targeted language coaching through modeling and feedback is key to oral performance preparation. Furthermore, studies like that of Lin & Lan (2021) show that scaffolded speaking practice and task rehearsal, when accompanied by feedback, substantially improve learner confidence and linguistic accuracy (Darmawansah et al., 2025).

The impact of individualized coaching, where mentors provided one-on-one sessions to help him improve delivery and reduce anxiety. This personal mentoring approach aligns with the concept of "instructional responsiveness" described by Derakhshan et al. (2022), which refers to teachers' ability to adapt support to the learner's affective and cognitive needs (Derakhshan et al., 2025). Such practices, especially when integrated into competition preparation, foster a learner-centered environment that enables deeper engagement and performance readiness.

Finally, the participants' reflections suggest that the support received was not just instrumental for winning, but for developing confidence, communication skills, and self-awareness. This growth-oriented perspective aligns with the framework of transformative learning theory, wherein learners reinterpret experiences and challenges into opportunities for personal development through the guidance of mentors (Kokkos, n.d.).

Overall, the study highlights how teacher and mentor support in English competition settings at LIPS Nurul Jadid serves not only as a technical scaffolding but also as a psychosocial anchor. This combination of emotional, technical, and peer-based guidance fosters not only language skill acquisition but also self-efficacy, resilience, and identity development critical elements in second language learner success.

c. Challenges in Preparing for Competitions

The findings from participant interviews reveal a set of recurring challenges experienced during English competition preparation, including time management, emotional regulation, pronunciation difficulties, and performance anxiety. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated effective coping strategies grounded in motivation, mentorship, self-discipline, and social support. These findings resonate with contemporary literature on learner psychology, motivation theory, and second language acquisition.

A major challenge cited by participants was balancing academic responsibilities with competition preparation. This aligns with findings by Pham & Lim (2022), who identified "role strain" as a critical stressor among high-performing language learners involved in extracurricular activities. Time management issues often emerge when students are expected to fulfill academic duties while preparing for high-stakes language tasks. As shown in this study, strategies such as micro-planning (e.g., Prayoga's weekly study plan) and support-seeking were employed to mitigate overload consistent with recommendations by Zimmerman's (2021) self-regulated learning model.

Several participants spoke about experiencing stress, nervousness, and self-doubt during preparation. They described moments of frustration and internal questioning, especially when comparing his experience with peers who had more leisure time. This phenomenon aligns with studies by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2021), who found that foreign language anxiety and social comparison can inhibit performance unless mediated by personal motivation and emotional regulation strategies (Dewaele et al., 2023).

Some participants also faced technical difficulties in pronunciation, facial expressions, intonation, and stage performance. To overcome these, they employed practical tools such as native speaker audio files and mentor-led training consistent with Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development," wherein learners advance through scaffolded interaction. By noting that repeated auditory exposure and modeling improve learners' prosodic control and speaking confidence (Shao et al., 2023).

d. Impact on Academic Performance and Confidence

Social support from mentors, peers, and family members served as a critical factor in overcoming challenges. For instance, how understanding from his environment helped him find the space and focus to prepare effectively. Similarly, the group study highlights the role of collaborative learning in reducing anxiety. These findings echo Alghamdi & Ahmed (2022), who reported that peer collaboration and teacher affirmation enhance learner well-being and mitigate the isolating effects of academic stress.

Importantly, all participants expressed growth-oriented reflections about their challenges. The setbacks as opportunities to grow in discipline and perseverance. As part of a journey to prove her capability. Such attitudes reflect the psychological concept of a growth mindset, which research by Mercer (2020) links to language learner success, particularly in performance-based settings (Fathi et al., 2024).

The qualitative data show that while English competition preparation poses significant challenges ranging from time pressure and emotional strain to technical difficulties students at LIPS Nurul Jadid demonstrate resilience and agency through personal motivation, structured planning, social support, and a growth mindset. These adaptive behaviors are not only crucial for short-term success but also contribute to long-term learner development, confidence, and autonomy.

The results indicate that participating in English competitions has positively influenced students' academic performance, linguistic confidence, classroom engagement, and personal development. Each participant described both affective and cognitive gains, aligning with recent research on learner-centered pedagogies, performance-based assessment, and self-efficacy development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

All participants reported a significant increase in self-confidence when using English, both during and after competitions. The participants emphasized reduced fear of making mistakes and increased courage to speak in public. These findings align with MacIntyre & Wang (2021), who argue that learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is significantly enhanced when they engage in authentic, high-stakes language tasks such as

competitions. Moreover, Mercer (2020) found that success in public language use can reinforce learner identity and positively influence motivation and performance.

Academic benefits, including improved English grades and presentation skills. These observations are supported by Widiastuti et al. (2021), who found that participation in language-based extracurriculars contributes to academic performance through enhanced cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Özer & Akçayoğlu, 2021).

English competitions provided a platform for participants to develop not only verbal fluency but also critical thinking. Through activities like speech organization, argument structuring, and audience engagement, learners enhanced their expressive competence components also discussed by Tuan (2022) in his study on EFL speech training (Chowdhury & Tuan, n.d.). These improvements echo the findings of Zhang & Zhang (2021), who linked competition-based learning with increased language performance and analytical reasoning skills.

The perseverance despite uncertainty illustrates the formation of a growth mindset, where learning is viewed as an ongoing process rather than a win-lose outcome. Learners who embrace a mastery-oriented motivation tend to persist longer and achieve better long-term outcomes. English competitions act as a catalyst for this transformation by placing students in authentic communicative situations that challenge and shape their learner identity.

The sense of responsibility and engagement seen in the participants' experiences where they become more active in class and even assist peers reflects what describe as internalization of learning goals (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Through competition, students internalize values of preparation, articulation, and collaboration, which extend beyond extracurricular activities into regular classroom dynamics.

Participating in English competitions at LIPS Nurul Jadid fostered learners' confidence, academic growth, communication skills, and self-identity. The transformative impact transcends contest results, equipping students with the confidence to perform, the clarity to express, and the motivation to keep growing. These findings reinforce the importance of embedding performance-based extracurricular programs within broader EFL education frameworks.

e. Influence on Motivation and Future Aspirations

The findings reveal that participating in English competitions significantly influences students' motivation, self-concept, and career aspirations. The experiences did not only enhance language skills but also provided clarity regarding learners' future goals. These findings are consistent with the literature emphasizing the interplay between experiential learning, language identity, and long-term academic motivation.

Participants expressed that exposure to diverse, talented peers during competitions sparked inspiration and reflection. The meeting students from different areas made him see English as a bridge to global opportunities. This aligns with Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2019), which posits that contact with ideal L2 user images and peer models can stimulate integrative motivation. The competitions served as a form of real-world engagement, fostering the kind of ideal self that learners aspire to become.

The competition context encouraged them to reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement. This form of self-assessment leads to deeper motivation to engage in learning for personal development rather than for external validation. Learners who set personal, meaningful goals tend to develop more sustainable intrinsic motivation. One of participants comment that it's "not just about winning anymore" reflects a shift toward mastery goals and self-regulated learning.

Multiple participants helped them clarify career goals, including aspirations in international relations, English education, and translation. This suggests that English competitions act as a platform for exploring future selves. Norton (2021) emphasizes that learner identity is shaped by the social contexts in which language is used. When learners participate in authentic performance settings, they begin to envision how English might be used in their future professional lives.

When learners perceive success in a challenging context, they are more likely to pursue further learning independently. Competitions act as a catalyst, transforming passive classroom learning into active goal-oriented behavior, reinforcing learners' beliefs in their ability to learn and achieve in the target language.

Overall, the interviews suggest that English competitions act as turning points moments of realization that learning English has both personal and professional relevance. Long-term language motivation is best sustained when learners experience real-life relevance and opportunities for identity expansion. The desire to contribute back to their school community, also reflects values-based motivation a powerful driver in educational persistence.

Participation in English competitions at LIPS Nurul Jadid has done more than improve language performance it has catalyzed personal growth, goal formulation, and sustained motivation. The findings reinforce the argument that performance-based extracurriculars can serve as motivational anchors, helping students translate language learning into meaningful aspirations and lifelong goals.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of students at LIPS Nurul Jadid who have succeeded in English competitions and examined how extracurricular programs contribute to their language development, confidence, and future aspirations. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research provides an in-depth look into how non-formal learning environments support EFL learners beyond classroom instruction. The findings demonstrate that participation in extracurricular English programs significantly enhances students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Activities such as debate clubs, speech practices, storytelling, and listening exercises using digital media created dynamic and meaningful learning opportunities. The guidance of mentors and emotional encouragement from teachers and peers played a crucial role in fostering students' confidence and performance readiness. Students encountered several challenges during competition preparation, including time constraints, emotional stress, and technical difficulties such as pronunciation and stage expression. However, they overcame these barriers through adaptive strategies such as self-regulated planning, the use of audio models, and peer collaboration. Resilience and social support emerged as key factors in their success and persistence. Moreover, competition experiences proved to be transformational. Students not only improved academically but also developed stronger learner identities and clearer visions for their future. Many were inspired to pursue careers in English-related fields such as education, translation, or international relations, driven by their achievements and the motivation they gained from participating in competitions. The extracurricular English programs at LIPS Nurul Jadid play a vital role in shaping students' linguistic competence, confidence, and long-term goals. Winning competitions served as more than just an academic achievement; it became a meaningful journey of personal growth, identity formation, and intrinsic motivation. Such performance-based programs should be strengthened and expanded to support holistic student development in EFL contexts.

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