

Community-Based English Clubs: English Practice and Social Change Outside the Classroom

Two widely held beliefs are that English is one of the most important global languages and that knowledge of English leads to expanded career opportunities, salary increases, and improvements in living standards. Countries around the world recognize that to remain competitive in the global economy, their citizens must learn English.

To that end, governments make policy changes that support the teaching and learning of English. As examples, consider the introduction of English in Tunisia beginning in grade five (Afia 2006) and the adoption of English as an official language in Rwanda (Malu 2013). In countries where English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught in schools and universities, language learners study oral and written language. Yet language learners from Turkey to the Democratic Republic of the Congo tell us that learning English in classroom settings is not sufficient. They want opportunities beyond the classroom to practice English.

This article addresses that desire by defining and providing a rationale for the creation of community-based English clubs. We offer strategies that individuals can use to create and sustain English clubs, and we suggest meeting activities that will engage members in conversations and potential community action on a range of topics such as democracy, gender equality, and environmental protection.

DEFINITION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED ENGLISH CLUB

The “club” concept is a worldwide phenomenon. Book clubs are a venue for talking about books; school- or university-based clubs such as debate clubs, foreign-language clubs, and sports clubs offer members opportunities to engage in activities of interest to them. Membership in such clubs may be voluntary or based upon qualifications or expertise.

Community-based English clubs are similar to these clubs. They are informal gatherings of individuals who meet regularly and often voluntarily and who come from different parts of a community, town, or village for the express purpose of practicing English. Members may be professionals or students at secondary and university levels. Members commit to speaking in English during meetings as they engage in activities that support and encourage them to use the language.

There are various models of community-based English clubs. In countries that we

are familiar with, some clubs are created by EFL teachers who charge membership fees that supplement their modest teacher salary. But not all clubs charge fees. Local artists create clubs whose goal is to gather like-minded individuals seeking to advance their careers or expand their contacts globally. Local activists create clubs and use English as a vehicle to discuss politics, cultural norms, and important community issues. Some clubs simply provide a safe place where members practice English.

The primary goals of English clubs are communicating and practicing English. English club activities may incorporate reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking; however, the focus of community-based English clubs is on practicing oral language skills—speaking and listening to English. In general, members engage in activities relevant to the immediate community or region of a country. These activities may address national concerns or global challenges, and they are more meaningful when they are member-focused. Members also interact collaboratively and cooperatively, practicing English by discussing real-life issues and expressing themselves in the safety of the club environment.

RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ENGLISH CLUBS AND EFL TEACHER PARTICIPATION

There are numerous reasons why EFL educators should consider creating and supporting community-based English clubs. In many countries, students have EFL class a few hours per week—enough time for studying vocabulary, grammar, and written English, with little time to concentrate on oral language. Students often leave school with strong knowledge of the written language and a thirst for gaining fluency and confidence in

spoken language. EFL teachers who support community-based English clubs can help address this knowledge gap.

EFL teachers—particularly those who are non-native speakers and lack opportunities to sustain their language proficiency—also benefit from the clubs because they can practice English. Members may include individuals who have studied or worked in an English-dominant environment, and clubs may invite international, native English-speaking visitors to share ideas and information.

Besides the practical reasons for creating English clubs, theory and research also suggest that EFL teachers should support and promote English-language clubs. For instance, Au (1998) argues that language acquisition is most effective when individuals use language for meaningful purposes and connect experience, knowledge, and culture through authentic language use. Because members discuss topics that are meaningful to them, they have opportunities to connect their knowledge to language. Having the space to make such connections allows members to socially construct language and thought—two essential ingredients in learning (Vygotsky 1987). Meaningful topics and materials also produce lively and engaging club meetings and ensure that members remain committed to the club over an extended period of time.

Additionally, research suggests that when individuals use a foreign language, they are more likely to make judgments that are different from those they would make in their native, first, or primary language (Costa et al. 2014). Thus, conversations about moral dilemmas can lead club members to develop new and different ways of viewing and judging situations and individuals.

The focus of community-based English clubs is on practicing oral language skills—speaking and listening to English.

If we acknowledge that language learning is a lifelong activity, English clubs can play a key role in sustaining this learning, and EFL teachers who actively participate can play an important part.

THE CLUB LEADER

For community-based English clubs to succeed, there needs to be a club leader. This individual need not have extensive knowledge of English, but he or she needs to have leadership qualities, including strong interpersonal, collaborative, and organizational skills. The leader's role is to recruit or invite members to join (and encourage members to do the same); establish and maintain club membership and club rules; and plan, organize, and lead club meetings.

A local EFL teacher or university professor may be ideally positioned to organize an English club or at least play an advisory role. However, this individual must take care not to assume the role of teacher or professor during club meetings. The most effective club leader assumes the role of facilitator, coach, or guide. In this role, the leader must be supportive, flexible, and nurturing because the effectiveness and sustainability of a club will depend, in large part, on how well the leader and members meet in a spirit of cooperation. If an educator is selected as leader, it is essential that this individual remain mindful that members are not students—the club is not a classroom.

The identification and selection of a club leader may take time. For instance, a group of individuals may want to form a club, but initially none may want to lead. Until the club is established and a leader emerges, individual members may assume the role of leader on a rotating basis, or leadership may be shared. Individuals who want to start a club might invite an English language professional to serve as club facilitator for the first few meetings until the club can select a leader.

CLUB MEMBERS

Club membership should be open to everyone. Participation should be encouraged from as wide and diverse a group as possible. Anyone committed to practicing English regularly for a few hours should be welcomed into the club. Members might include young people and professionals, workers and housewives, grandparents and grandchildren—anyone who wants to practice speaking English. Key requirements should be members' availability and commitment to attend club meetings.

CLUB MEETING SITE

American Spaces—established by U.S. embassies in many countries—and community libraries naturally support and complement the goals of English clubs. These sites often have materials and technology that clubs can use. Absent such a space, members can meet in schools, parks, or members' houses. Attendance will be maximized if locations are easily accessible via public transportation.

THE FIRST CLUB MEETING

We suggest a weekend date be chosen for the first meeting so that as many potential members as possible can attend. At the first meeting, members should select a mutually convenient time for subsequent meetings. If most members are in school, a Friday evening meeting may work well. But if members have full-time jobs, Saturday or Sunday afternoons may be best. If most or all members attend religious services, members may meet before or after a service. Schedules and availability may differ between men and women, and these differences should be addressed. The key element is this: clubs that consider the needs and desires of their members have a greater chance of long-term success.

SELECTION OF CLUB LEADERSHIP

At the first meeting, members should select a club leader. As mentioned above,

CLUB ELECTION PROCEDURES

1. Members receive advance notice of the election date.
2. On the date, club members meet. A Timekeeper is chosen to keep time and supervise the election. The Timekeeper may not run for office. Ballots (small pieces of paper, with a distinct mark on each) are created and held by the Timekeeper.
3. Club members either self-nominate or nominate members as candidates for leadership positions: Leader [President], Assistant Leader [Vice President], and Secretary.
4. Candidates accept—or decline—the nomination.
5. Candidates for Leader [President] stand before the members and explain why they want the position. (We suggest these speeches be no more than three minutes.)
6. Candidates answer questions from club members. The Timekeeper sets a reasonable length of time for questions and answers.
7. Steps 5 and 6 are repeated for the positions of Assistant Leader [Vice President] and Secretary.
8. The Timekeeper asks for two volunteers (they may *not* be candidates) to help distribute the ballots—one to each member, including all the candidates—and witness the tally count.
9. Members vote in silence, writing the names of their choices for each of the three positions on the ballot.
10. Members deposit their ballots in a box at the front of the meeting room and return to their seats.
11. When all members have deposited their ballots, the Timekeeper and two volunteers open and read aloud the names on each ballot.
12. The Timekeeper makes a public tally of each vote (preferably on a chalkboard or paper chart) in view of all club members.
13. The Timekeeper counts the votes and announces the winners.

Note: Ballots with any errors (e.g., more than three names, or names of two candidates for the same position) must be eliminated from the tally. These ballots are not counted because of these errors.

Table 1. Club election procedures

temporary options such as shared leadership or a time-fixed rotation can be used until the club becomes established.

Once a club is established, members can officially select their leadership. This is an ideal opportunity to conduct a democratic election. In Table 1, we list simple procedures that can ensure a democratic election process.

CREATION OF CLUB RULES

At the first club meeting or within the first few meetings, it is important to create the club rules. These rules should come from the members and should address roles, responsibilities, and procedures that club members will follow. They do not need to be complicated or sophisticated. The most effective club rules support and promote

the goals and values of the club members. Sample club rules are:

- Members must be on time.
- Members must respect all opinions.
- Members must be conscious that men and women participate equally.
- Members must avoid topics that arouse heated controversy (e.g., partisan politics, religion, or the names of government officials).
- Members who cannot attend a meeting must tell another member.
- When the club leader is absent, the assistant leader leads the meeting.
- Members must respect each other.
- Club meetings are not the place for finding a husband or wife. (This rule was created for a university club by several young women who felt uncomfortable with the behavior of some of the young men in the club.)

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Despite club rules, members may experience challenges during meetings. Table 2 presents challenges and solutions that club members have identified.

SMALL-GROUP MEMBER ROLES

When clubs have trouble giving everyone equal time to speak and practice English, we encourage members to take on conversation roles or responsibilities, similar to those used in the classroom-management approach called *literature circles* (Daniels 1994). Although we

suggest roles below, club members should modify these roles for their particular club needs. Here are possible roles that club members might assume in small-group conversations:

- Group Director—makes sure everyone speaks and listens to one another
- Note-taker—takes notes on the small-group conversation and reports to the entire club
- Timekeeper—makes sure the group stays on task within the time frame assigned and helps the Group Director make sure that everyone has equal time to speak
- Vocabulary Collector—notes vocabulary questions and seeks answers from other members or does research after the meeting and reports findings at a subsequent meeting
- Grammarian—keeps track of grammar questions and seeks answers from other members or does research after the meeting and reports findings at a subsequent meeting

CLUB MEETING ACTIVITIES

Club meeting activities should be selected based on the interests of the members. Initially, the club leader organizes and plans the first few meetings in consultation with the members. As the members get to know each other, responsibility for activity selection shifts from the club leader to the members. Meanwhile, simple activities may evolve into community-action projects. In fact, the kinds of activities a club chooses will be limited only by the creativity of the club members themselves. In our experience, topics that clubs find appealing include democracy,

The kinds of activities a club chooses will be limited only by the creativity of the club members themselves.

Challenge	Possible Solutions
A few members monopolize the meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members decide on the length of time each member can speak—generally three minutes. • Members select a timekeeper who is responsible for telling members when time is up.
Men speak more than women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club leader, in private conversations, encourages women to speak more. • Some meetings have separate discussion groups, in separate meeting rooms, for men and women. • Some meetings are for “men only” or “women only.” • Club meetings present role plays or skits that focus on this problem and follow up with discussions of strategies that will encourage equal participation. • Club meetings have child-care provisions for members who may have responsibility for young children.
Some members attend occasionally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club leader checks that the meeting time and place are convenient. • Club leader takes care that conversations are respectful and safe. • Members create a “buddy chain” to remind others about upcoming meetings.
Members argue about English language problems such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club secretary notes the problem and seeks assistance. • Club meetings have time at the end for talking about English language problems. • Club members volunteer to research the issue(s) and report their findings at the next meeting.
A member is disrespectful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club leader speaks to the member in private, referring to the club rules as appropriate. • Club leader reviews club rules at the beginning of the meeting. • Club members talk about this problem openly in a club meeting and add or revise club rules. • As a last resort, member is sanctioned and barred from attending a number of meetings—or dismissed from the club—as appropriate.
Some members want to argue about controversial issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club leader reminds members that the purpose of the club is to practice English. • If the club is for members of a religious community, then religion may be an acceptable discussion topic—otherwise, the club leader reminds members that religion is not a club discussion topic, particularly in cases where conversations suggest recruitment or proselytization.

Table 2. Challenges and possible solutions

freedom of speech, civil rights and civil society, human and children's rights, current events—at local, national, and international levels—gender issues including domestic violence and sexual abuse, cultural traditions, love, and personal and family relationships.

Below we present four basic activities that, in our experience, club members have found enjoyable. Each of these activities can be designed to focus on the topics listed above.

Activity 1: Skits

A skit is a short performance or sketch. Skits include conversations between two or more people and can be humorous or serious. In some countries these are called “drama.” Skits are similar to a theater play but take only a few minutes to perform. Anyone can write a skit. Members benefit when the skit focuses on authentic, locally relevant themes (Thomas 2014). If the issue is controversial, members may have motivation to talk and practice English.

The club meeting begins with the leader asking members to volunteer to play characters in the skit. After volunteers are selected, they plan and practice the skit in private. When ready, the volunteers perform the skit in front of the members. At the end, the leader checks that members understand the skit, and then they talk about the skit. Depending on the club's size, members may break into small groups for discussions focusing on the skit's theme. Members can also share thoughts about what might happen after the time frame of the skit or what might have happened before. Members may share personal experiences that are similar to those of the characters in the skit.

Skits can be written about an event that members may experience in their daily lives. Or kits can be developed using a story, novel, newspaper article, or online news report. Together, a group of members can write a skit using, for example, the following online news report:

Yesterday, parents, children, and community members from a local apartment building demonstrated in front of the management office. The demonstration was peaceful, and

no arrests were made. The parents reported that they had visited the management office several times during the past two months and no action had been taken. Parents expressed concern that the building had chemicals that were causing their children to get sick. Children had headaches and stomach problems, and parents demanded that the management clean the building immediately. When questioned, a management official told this reporter that the management was trying to address the health concerns of the parents. Parents noted that Ms. Smith, their local community organizer, was extremely helpful in directing the parents to take action.

To write the skit, members identify characters and create dialogues based on the story. Table 3 shows an example of a skit script based on this news report. Character roles are listed at the top of the skit. This is one of many skits that can be written using this news report.

At the end of the skit, club members talk about it. Here are generic questions that members can use to talk about any skit:

- Did you identify with any of the characters in the skit? Explain your answer.
- What can you learn from this skit and use in your community? Explain.
- Does the skit remind you of an event or person in your life? Explain.
- What feelings did you have as you watched the skit?
- If you have a similar experience, what actions might you take?
- If someone in your community has a similar problem, what might you do?

Activity 2: Role plays

Role plays are similar to skits; the main differences are that many members can participate in role plays, and role plays do not use a script. Each role play is different

A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER IN ACTION

N = Narrator **P1** = Parent #1 **P2** = Parent #2 **P3** = Parent #3 **MS** = Ms. Smith

N: Ms. Smith was 25 years old when she came to work with a poor community in an apartment building. She was a community organizer. The skit begins at an apartment meeting.

MS: Listen, everybody. We've made some good progress. We organized neighborhood cleanups and street repairs.

P1: Yeah. Remember when you came? You were just a young girl, and now look. You're a different person.

MS: Maybe that's true, but I'm still not satisfied. We have lots more work to do. Last night you told me there was a problem in the building—a health problem. You told me you spoke to the management office and they didn't listen to you.

P2: So what can we do?

MS: You have the right to have the problems in your building fixed, especially if they affect your health and your children's health.

P2: You still didn't answer my question. What do we do now?

P1: Let's go to the manager's office next Monday.

MS: But first we need to organize. We need lots of parents to come because the problem affects all the children's health. Who will get all the parents to come?

P2: I will call the parents.

P3: Me, too. I'll call parents, and I will call the television station and tell them there is a problem in the building and we are going to the manager's office to ask about it.

MS: Good. We will meet on Monday at one o'clock at the manager's office.

N: On Monday, parents go to the manager's office. When they get to the office, no one is there. The parents wait, and more parents come. The television crew arrives, and the police come. The parents stay calm. At the end of the day, the parents talk to each other about the events.

P1: We were successful. The manager will see the news and fix the problem.

P2: We learned a lot.

P3: Yeah, can you believe it? We're great. And Ms. Smith is great too!

MS: Well, you were all great. You were prepared. You were clear about what you wanted. You stayed focused, and you stayed calm. You were organized.

N: Soon, the problems in the building were fixed. The parents, children, and community members now feel their building is safe and their children's health is protected.

Table 3. Sample skit script

because the role play depends on the interpretation of each person who plays the assigned role.

To begin, the club leader or members choose an issue. They describe the scene, the people or characters involved, and the issue. Members volunteer to play the characters in the role play. The volunteers practice the role play in private and then perform it in front of the club or in small groups. Afterward, members talk about the role plays.

We have found that role plays are most effective when issues selected are relevant to the lives of club members. In several clubs, members have talked about friends who were drug users. We watched as club members identified the issue and volunteered to play various roles. Members told us afterward that the role play was important because they seldom had opportunities to discuss this topic freely in a safe environment. The club role plays gave them an opportunity to explore issues and consider ways to solve them.

Table 4 shows a description of a sample role play. The club leader sets the scene by presenting the introduction. Members volunteer for roles and leave the meeting room to practice. If props are needed, the volunteers improvise or create them out of available materials. When the volunteers are ready, each group presents its role play.

Club members can talk about each role play when it is finished, or they can wait to talk about all the role plays at the end. Each role play may be different, so it is important that members discuss the different ways each play examined the issue. Here are generic questions members can use to talk about role plays:

- Did this role play examine a problem in the community? If yes, explain. If no, what community problem is similar to or different from the one in this role play?
- Did the role play offer practical solutions to the problem? If yes, explain. If no, why not?

- Did the role play give members new ideas for understanding this problem? Explain.
- Can members work together to solve this problem or a similar one in the community? How might they be able to work together?

Activity 3: Debates

When used with a structured format, debates enable club members to present two sides of controversial issues. Information and personal experiences can emerge from debates that may challenge club members to reconsider points of view without forcing them to adopt, change, or assume a position or opinion they disagree with. Numerous websites offer information about structured debates (see, for example, <http://how-to-teach-english.ontesol.com/teaching-speaking-skills-debates-in-the-esl-classroom>). Below we give one format with suggestions for timing that club members may find helpful.

Debate format

The club meeting begins with members choosing the debate topic. The topic needs a “pro” and “con” side and should explore a theme that is relevant to members. Here are possible topics with pro and con positions:

- Violence is needed to bring about peace. / Violence is never an acceptable road to peace.
- Media influence real-life events. / Media have no influence on real-life events.
- Democracy is the best form of government. / Democracy is not the best form of government.
- Fathers should stay home and take care of babies. / Fathers should not stay home and take care of babies.

After club members select a topic, they volunteer for the debate teams. Each volunteer is placed on either the pro team

MOUNTAIN FLOODS

These role plays take place in a town. It has been raining for three days, and the river flowing into town from a nearby mountain is getting deep and dangerous. The raging waters threaten the town.

Role Play 1

- Father:** He is worried that the floods may destroy their home. He wants his wife and children (Joseph and Suzanne) to leave.
- Mother:** She is worried. Joseph is sick. She wants to keep him at home so he can rest.
- Joseph:** He is 3 years old. He is not happy. He wants to go outside to play.
- Suzanne:** She is 10 years old and happy because she received good grades in school. She wants to study.

Role Play 2

- Radio Announcer:** She reports the weather forecast and predicts more rain. She must announce this forecast on the radio. But the phone rings each time she tries to speak on the radio. She is the only person at the radio station.
- Caller 1:** She is worried because she cannot leave her house. It is surrounded by the river, and her house will be destroyed soon. She calls the radio station because the police are not answering their phone.
- Caller 2:** He is angry. Last year he told the government that the town needed to protect against the rains. No one listened. Now he wants to warn all the people to leave town. He calls the radio station. He wants to convince the announcer to broadcast this warning.

Role Play 3

- Doctor in Hospital:** She knows many people will be hurt in the floods. She wants to prepare the hospital for many patients. She wants to call a meeting, and she wants to meet in 10 minutes.
- Nurse:** He wants to go home. His family lives near the river and needs help. He has worked at the hospital for 24 hours. He is tired and worried.
- Ambulance Driver:** She checked the ambulance, and it has no gas. She wants to leave the hospital to get gas. The gas station is near the river, so she must leave now.

Table 4. Sample role plays

or the con team. Volunteers are given a few minutes to decide their role and prepare their positions.

- Speaker 1 for each team introduces—and later summarizes—the major points of the debate.
- Speaker 2 for each team presents additional points and argues the points presented by Speaker 1 of the opposing team.
- Speaker 3 for each team argues against the points presented by Speakers 1 and 2 of the opposing team.

When the teams are ready, the club leader chooses a member to serve as Timekeeper.

The role of the Timekeeper is important because each speaker must respect the time frame (see Table 5).

When the debate is over, members in the audience question the debate teams. Members then take a few minutes to decide how they will vote. Votes can be cast on the quality of the arguments, the level of knowledge and expertise of the debate team (pro or con), or which team was more convincing. The goal of this activity is to have a lively discussion in a controlled setting that gives as many members as possible opportunities to express themselves in English, using a structured format.

Debate Time Frame	
Pro—Speaker 1	Presentation of debate points (3 minutes)
Con—Speaker 1	Presentation of debate points (3 minutes)
<i>One-minute time-out for teams to strategize</i>	
Pro—Speaker 2	Additional points and arguments (3 minutes)
Con—Speaker 2	Additional points and arguments (3 minutes)
<i>One-minute time-out for teams to strategize</i>	
Pro—Speaker 3	Arguments against points of Con Speakers (3 minutes)
Con—Speaker 3	Arguments against points of Pro Speakers (3 minutes)
<i>Two-minute time-out for teams to strategize</i>	
Pro—Speaker 2	Additional arguments against points of Con Speakers (2 minutes)
Con—Speaker 2	Additional arguments against points of Pro Speakers (2 minutes)
<i>Two-minute time-out for teams to strategize</i>	
Pro—Speaker 1	Summary of most important debate points (2 minutes)
Con—Speaker 1	Summary of most important debate points (2 minutes)
Club members question Pro Speakers and Con Speakers (10 minutes each team)	
<i>Two-minute time-out for club members to decide which team to vote for</i>	

Table 5. Debate time frame

English clubs offer creative opportunities for communities to experiment and play with language and to practice using English in an atmosphere that is supportive, encouraging, and respectful.

Activity 4: Social change

Social-change activities may be the most important activities that community-based English clubs can perform. Social change begins when club members discuss issues that are critical in their communities. When members take actions to change their society, they are invested in and committed to improving lives, especially those in their communities. While social-change activities can be paired with activities such as debates, skits, or role plays, they should follow a basic three-step format.

The first club meeting should serve to identify the problem or issue that members want to address. One way to do this is to brainstorm. Here are basic rules for brainstorming:

1. Accept all ideas—without commenting, criticizing, or debating them.
2. Remember that all ideas are equal—no idea is good or bad.
3. Build on each other's ideas—use an idea to come up with a new or different idea.
4. Remember that it is better to have lots of ideas rather than a few.
5. Feel free to be creative—crazy or funny—because such ideas can lead to a new, clever, or useful idea.

Members should brainstorm for at least ten minutes and preface the actual brainstorming with an imaginary exercise. For example, members might imagine that on the previous night there was an accident. A truck carrying 1,000 pounds—a half ton—of cotton balls spilled out its load onto the road. Now the town is filled with cotton balls. What can the club members imagine doing with them?

After brainstorming playfully and creatively, members are ready to generate a list of problems they have in their community. Either a member or the leader should record the list where it is visible to everyone. Next, the members divide into groups, and each group selects one problem to talk about. These conversations should focus on the reasons for the problem, possible changes that might solve the problem, identification of an expert to speak with the club about the problem, and other individuals or groups also interested in this problem.

Next, members need to learn as much as possible about the problem. In a follow-up meeting, an expert might address the club, providing information about ways they might go about solving the problem. This invited guest might give a brief background of the problem; discuss the current status of the problem, including attempts made to resolve it; and suggest possible solutions and actions to take.

Once members better understand the problem, they should create an action plan. A variety of action-plan templates is available online, and club members can modify a template to meet their own requirements. Small groups can fill out an action-plan template and present it to the members. By consensus or vote, members should agree on the specific steps they will take and assign tasks to members. These steps should lead to changes that will resolve the problem. UNICEF (2015) designed a template that we modified (see Table 6) and encourage clubs to use.

ADDITIONAL CLUB ACTIVITIES

Besides the four basic club activities presented above, there are many more that clubs can use. Here are four:

Action Plan

The problem we want to solve is ...

We will solve the problem by ...

Complete the boxes to create the action plan. If more work boxes are needed, add more below. If fewer are needed, leave boxes empty.

What	Who	When	How	Results	Complete
Work	People responsible	Timeline	Materials needed	Solutions	Work completed (Yes/No)
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Table 6. Action-plan template (adapted from UNICEF 2015)

- Some clubs begin their meetings by learning and singing a song.
- Clubs may like to regularly discuss “In the News” items, where members volunteer to present and lead a discussion about a recent national or international news event.
- Listening to podcasts and discussing them is another enjoyable club activity. A wide variety of podcasts can be found at the Voice of America website (www.voanews.com).
- Watching and discussing short video clips or TV shows at meetings are also fun.

CLUB ATMOSPHERE

Community-based English clubs are designed for groups of people to come together primarily to practice language. They are not classrooms with teachers and students. They are safe, nurturing, supportive environments where those who wish to immerse themselves in English for a few hours can do so. Again, it is important that the club leader assumes the role of guide or facilitator—and not of a teacher who focuses on error correction. English clubs offer creative opportunities for communities to experiment and play with language and to practice using English in an atmosphere that is supportive, encouraging, and respectful. Clubs also offer members the chance to use English and join a group of like-minded individuals interested in pursuing a common goal. Furthermore, English clubs offer possibilities for community action if members take ownership of their club. It is theirs, and meetings are theirs for them to do with as they wish. Taking this approach offers members the opportunity to be as adventurous—or playful and creative—or serious as they wish.

We urge readers to consider creating community-based English clubs, which not only support English language acquisition

outside the classroom, but also promote discussion and concern about important issues and thereby strengthen civil society.

REFERENCES

- Afia, J. B. 2006. English clubs: Introducing English to young learners. *English Teaching Forum* 44 (2): 20–23.
- Au, K. H. 1998. Social constructivism and the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Literacy Research* 30 (2): 297–319.
- Costa, A., A. Foucart, S. Hayakawa, M. Aparici, J. Apestegui, J. Heafner, and B. Keysar. 2014. Your morals depend on language. *PLOS ONE* 9 (4): 1–7. <http://psychology.uchicago.edu/people/faculty/MoralForeign.pdf>
- Daniels, H. 1994. *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Malu, K. F. 2013. Exploring children’s picture storybooks with adult and adolescent EFL learners. *English Teaching Forum* 51 (3): 10–18.
- Thomas, C. 2014. Meeting EFL learners halfway by using locally relevant authentic materials. *English Teaching Forum* 52 (3): 14–23.
- UNICEF. 2015. Voices of Youth Connect—Tools and Resources: Action Plan. www.voicesofyouth.org/en/connect/tools-and-resources
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1987. Thinking and speech. In *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of general psychology*. Translated by N. Minick and edited by R. W. Reiber and A. S. Carton, 39–285. New York: Plenum. (Orig. pub. 1934.)

Kathleen F. Malu was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Rwanda she was a Peace Corps volunteer and more recently a Fulbright Scholar. She is a professor of education at William Paterson University of New Jersey, a Research fellow at the University of South Africa, and an English Language Specialist for the U.S. Department of State.

Bryce Smedley, PhD, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya. He has served as an English Language Fellow in the Union of the Comoros and as a Senior English Language Fellow in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the Congo American Language Institute. He is currently an Assistant Professor of education at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho.