

# Negotiating Sociocultural Constraints Through Self-Efficacy: An Ethnographic Study of English as a Foreign Language Learners in Indonesian *Pesantren*

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**Abstract**—Although previous studies have examined self-efficacy in language learning, little is known about how it operates within sociocultural constraints, particularly in faith-based educational settings. This study explores how speaking self-efficacy shapes English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' negotiation of sociocultural constraints in Indonesian *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Using an ethnographic approach, the research involved prolonged observation and in-depth interviews with EFL learners who had lived in *pesantren* for more than three years. The analysis identified five major sociocultural constraints: educational, time-management, environmental, personal–psychological, and policy-related, and five interrelated factors that facilitate constraint negotiation: mentorship and support systems, autonomous learning initiatives, technology and sociocultural adaptation, emotional regulation and self-belief, and the influence of cultural learning environments. Learners employed several negotiation strategies, such as prayer, peer support, English circles, self-reliance, and limited technology use to enhance their speaking self-efficacy. A conceptual model is proposed to illustrate the dynamic interplay between efficacy beliefs and sociocultural constraint negotiation in the *pesantren* context. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of learner agency and provide pedagogical implications for fostering autonomy and resilience in collectivist language learning environments.

**Index Terms**—self-efficacy, sociocultural constraint negotiation, EFL learners, *pesantren*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering speaking skills in a foreign language is rarely simple. Learners' success depends on how they manage challenges they face. Previous studies have identified vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and pronunciation as the main linguistic obstacles to speaking (Mao, 2022), while psychological and environmental aspects form invisible barriers that are harder to detect. Developing speaking proficiency in a second language is demanding (Jamshidnejad, 2020), especially for those studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Chen et al., 2024). Students face sociocultural constraints, including educational, temporal, personal, psychological, institutional (Mansouri et al., 2021), and environmental factors (Pérez & Lissen, 2022). Gender differences play a role: female learners often struggle with emotional restraints, whereas male students tend to be limited by a narrower linguistic repertoire (Ismail et al., 2018; Taqdir et al., 2025). Both linguistic and non-linguistic barriers shape how EFL learners develop speaking skills (Mao, 2022). The cultural dimension within learning contexts shapes how language is perceived and practised, while stereotypes and value systems in educational settings can reinforce or challenge learners' engagement with the target language (Taqdir, 2025).

Among non-linguistic influences, self-efficacy plays a decisive role in determining how learners approach and persist in overcoming language learning challenges. Self-efficacy affects how students interpret difficulties, set goals, and sustain motivation. Teachers should help learners build positive self-perceptions and realistic expectations of language learning (Genc et al., 2016). Research shows strong links between self-efficacy, learner autonomy, and academic performance (Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011), as well as between self-efficacy and sociocultural adaptation (Gajdzik, 2005). Studies on effective language learners highlight how personal initiative and strategic behaviour contribute to language growth (Griffiths, 2013). However, most studies have focused on learners in conventional homes and classrooms. Little is known about how students in restrictive or faith-based settings negotiate learning barriers (Rassaei, 2014). Although researchers have begun examining how learners manage constraints (Shakerkhoshroudi et al., 2020), the role of self-efficacy in negotiating sociocultural limitations remains underexplored (Domysheva & Kopylova, 2021). Digital culture has transformed how learners experience language and identity, requiring new forms of critical awareness in intercultural communication (Arafah et al., 2023). As social media evolves, it enables people to interact with anyone from any country (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). With many internet users in Indonesia, social media becomes an arena for social identity construction and language transformation (Hasjim et al., 2026).

In Indonesian *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools), students (*santri*) live under religious guidance from *kyai* (religious teachers). The curriculum includes classical Islamic texts, Arabic, law, and logic, alongside daily rituals and communal responsibilities. Historically, *pesantren* developed from Javanese *pondokan* and share similarities with *pondok* in Malaysia and *madrasas* in South Asia. These institutions emphasise discipline and collective living, nurturing obedience and religious devotion among students (Solichin, 2019; Silfiana, 2020). Whether modern or *Salaf* in orientation, *pesantren* shapes learners' independence and offers a sociocultural space for examining how self-efficacy supports English-speaking practice (Firdaus & Al Husaeni, 2023).

This study explores how speaking self-efficacy influences EFL learners' negotiation of sociocultural constraints in *pesantren*. It focuses on Indonesian learners who have lived in *pesantren* for over three years and passed through what Hartshorne et al. (2018) describe as a critical period for foreign language acquisition (CFLA). Their daily lives involve routines from religious obligations to academic and linguistic challenges that require self-regulation. The research centres on *Salaf pesantren*, which combine Islamic education with the *Salafi manhaj* (path) governing thought and behaviour (Wahid, 2015). Autonomy is essential for learners' adaptation and development (Benson, 2014). This study investigates how *santri*, who internalise religious values as part of their identity, use self-efficacy to navigate sociocultural constraints and strengthen English-speaking skill. Since English is international, English-speaking competence has become a need in this era (Kaharuddin et al., 2023).

Through an ethnographic lens, this study aims to shed light on the intersection of self-efficacy and sociocultural constraint negotiation among EFL learners in *pesantren* settings. These findings are expected to deepen our understanding of how self-efficacy operates as a mediating force in faith-based collectivist educational settings. Beyond theoretical insights, this study offers practical implications for fostering learner autonomy and motivation in contexts where language learning is strongly influenced by social, cultural, and institutional factors.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Sociocultural Constraint Negotiation for EFL Learner in Pesantren

*Pesantren* learners not majoring in English face linguistic and non-linguistic barriers in developing speaking skills. Linguistic barriers are prominent, including phonological, intonational, grammatical, and lexical difficulties (Kormos & Csizér, 2014). However, challenges extend to gender differences. Being a woman means following male-dominated culture (Asri et al., 2023). Female *pesantren* students face stronger institutional and personal constraints than males, including fear, shyness, and cultural norms restricting their interaction and confidence in speaking English. Social perceptions make it difficult for them to find speaking partners in *pesantren* environments. Some view English as eroding cultural heritage and traditional language (Takwa et al., 2024). Meanwhile, traditions and beliefs remain preserved within society, resistant to modernisation (Effendy et al., 2025). Cultural values are still actively incorporated during learning (Arafah et al., 2025).

Practical constraints complicate learning. Students have limited time for English due to demanding religious and academic schedules. Financial limitations may reduce motivation to continue studies. Their perception of English as difficult discourages engagement. Moreover, interpreting English can yield multiple meanings with metaphor or figurative language (Baa et al., 2023). The difference in cultural knowledge between first and second languages correlates strongly (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Prior language-learning experiences influence constraints; beginners struggle more than those with exposure. Studies show interactive and collaborative environments enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency and motivation, suggesting peer communication can reduce sociocultural barriers (Kaharuddin et al., 2025). The learning medium in restrictive contexts like *pesantren* shapes students' engagement. Research shows traditional or printed materials remain effective when adapted to context, learner needs, and pedagogical goals (Arafah et al., 2023). In *pesantren* settings with limited technology access, printed or contextually localised resources sustain learner autonomy. These findings align with calls for context-sensitive materials reflecting local culture and communicative goals.

Yasmin and Sohail (2018) found factors inhibiting spoken English performance: learners' lack of independent learning, limited English exposure, exam-oriented mindset, low motivation, overdependence on teachers, limited proficiency, and

ineffective resource use. Teacher-related factors, including limited confidence in students and traditional methods, contribute to these challenges. These findings align with sociocultural barriers to learner autonomy, including teacher bias, lack of autonomy awareness, and intolerance toward students' creativity (Yasmin et al., 2020). Teachers hold an important role in providing feedback (Suparti et al., 2025). Learning environments' effectiveness depends on how teachers deliver feedback, whether explicit or implicit, as this affects learners' confidence (Kuswanty et al., 2023). Verbal persuasion and constructive feedback are crucial tools for fostering motivation among EFL learners in religious and collectivist contexts.

Literary works introduce appealing English content into learning (Arafah et al., 2023). They increase learners' awareness of environment and interpretation of characters' language (Manugeran et al., 2023; Yudith et al., 2023). The cultural content in English textbooks is debated across sociocultural contexts. Ahmad (2015) notes linguists oppose textbooks with target-culture materials, arguing they conflict with local cultural values. These debates show sociocultural constraints extend beyond classroom practices to include ideological and policy dimensions. As technology evolves, AI-assisted learning systems support learner autonomy and individualized feedback, enhancing motivation and linguistic confidence (Kaharuddin et al., 2024). Mobile applications enable interactive language learning (Idhan et al., 2025). Although *pesantren* environments limit digital tools, AI-based pedagogy highlights adaptive feedback and reflective learning systems aligning with learners' needs. Using Chan's (2010) framework, four key constraints influence learner autonomy: (a) policy limitations, referring to language education guidelines; (b) institutional restrictions, such as rules, exams, or curricula; (c) language perceptions, referring to societal attitudes toward English; and (d) pedagogical approaches, determining acceptable methods and practices. Oxford (2015) conceptualized autonomous learners through a sociocultural lens, identifying them as cognitively apprenticed, mediated, strategic, invested, socio-politically free, and self-efficacious. This shows how *pesantren* learners negotiate institutional, cultural, and psychological constraints while developing English proficiency.

### B. The Role of Efficacy in Sociocultural Constraint Negotiation

Self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks. Bandura (1977) describes multiple dimensions of efficacy: task efficacy (confidence in executing actions), performance efficacy (belief in maintaining quality), coping efficacy (handling difficulties), collective efficacy (group's shared belief), and self-regulatory efficacy (control over emotions and motivation). Learners with strong self-efficacy are persistent and goal-oriented, interpreting obstacles as manageable challenges (Doran & Pomfret, 2019).

Bandura (1997) identified four sources of efficacy belief. First is enactive mastery experience, where successful performance strengthens confidence. Second is vicarious experience, where observing others' achievements enhances belief in success (Bandura, 1991). Third is verbal persuasion, including encouragement that reinforces persistence. Verbal persuasion and vicarious experience interact, as feedback from teachers and peers amplifies capability. Finally, affective and physiological states influence efficacy, with positive emotions strengthening it while anxiety may weaken it. In EFL learning in *pesantren*, these sources of efficacy are highly relevant. Learners deal with social pressures while achieving English proficiency. Their success depends on mastery experiences, encouragement, and emotional regulation. Parents' active support influences their process (Sunyoto et al., 2022). Positive feedback enhances persistence.

As Bandura (1997) emphasised, self-efficacy beliefs influence how individuals evaluate performance and approach challenges. *Pesantren* learners with high self-efficacy remain confident in reaching proficiency levels under restrictive conditions. They develop negotiation-efficacy skills to manage constraints and maintain motivation. Self-efficacy contributes to psychological hardiness, enabling learners to reinterpret difficulties as opportunities. This hardiness reflects students' ability to adapt and sustain autonomous learning despite constraints.

## III. METHODS

Ethnography is one of the most used qualitative approaches in social research because it allows researchers to explore social interactions, cultural practises, and their meanings in context. This approach involves collecting data through prolonged field engagement, mainly through observations, interviews, and learning logs. As Fetterman (2010) explains, ethnographic writing emphasises detailed descriptions in narrative form, enabling readers to understand events from participants' perspectives. Similarly, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) note that ethnographic reports should include vivid accounts, quotations, and interpretive reflections to illuminate social and cultural dynamics.

In this study, ethnography examined how EFL learners in a *pesantren* environment negotiate sociocultural constraints while developing English-speaking proficiency. The researcher acted as an etic outsider, observing and analysing participants' behaviour without becoming part of the cultural group. This position allowed objective viewing of the phenomenon while maintaining sensitivity to participants' experiences and learning context. The ethnographic approach captured learners' interactions among themselves and with the researcher, providing insights into how sociocultural constraints manifest in learning situations.

### A. The Participant and the Context

The participants consisted of ten EFL learners residing in a Salafi *pesantren* in Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria: (a) English proficiency as determined by test results, (b) minimum three years of

*pesantren* residence, (c) provincial diversity for representation from various regions, (d) age range between 16-25 years, (e) balanced gender representation (five male and five female), and (f) evidence of autonomous learning behaviour.

All participants were pursuing undergraduate degrees at a private university in Indonesia. They came from different provinces and spoke different local languages, resulting in varied Indonesian accents, the main language used in university and *pesantren* settings.

The study aimed to understand how these students successfully learned English despite *pesantren* restrictions. As Salaf *pesantren* traditionally prohibit digital technology, students had no access to digital devices or online resources during the pandemic. Their learning opportunities were limited by religious and institutional obligations. Despite these constraints, the participants exhibited higher English proficiency than the *pesantren* average, as confirmed by their self-reported scores. Data were collected over two years from a Salafi *pesantren* in Indonesia.

### B. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed a process of coding, categorizing, and theme construction. The raw data from recorded interviews, field observations, and learning logs were first coded using words or phrases that captured key meanings related to autonomous learning behaviour. This process involved multiple coding cycles to ensure analytical depth and reliability. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories to identify relationships and patterns in the dataset. Each category was interpreted to uncover themes that reflected how learners negotiated constraints and demonstrated self-efficacy in learning processes. The themes were synthesized into narrative explanations, supported by quotations, tables, and figures.

An example of this process is presented in Table 1, which shows how data from different sources were analyzed and categorized.

TABLE 1  
THE EXAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data Source	Research Question	Original Data	Subcategory Code	Category Code
Interview, and Learning logs	What language learning activities shape students' autonomous learning behavior based on the dimensions of the autonomous learning model?	I volunteer join the English course offered in <i>Pesantren</i>	Dimension of ALM-Orientation Individual Growth	School opportunities Creativity Personal development program
	What socio-cultural constraints do students face in autonomously learning English communicative skills in <i>pesantren</i> ?	We are not allowed to use any technology in <i>pesantren</i>	Socio cultural constraint-Policy Constraint Institutional Constraint	Rule Regulation
Observation	How do students develop autonomous learning behavior related to their oral communicative skills?	The students interacted each other and scooped in a pleasant manner by using English language	Autonomous Learning behavior domain	Social domain of autonomous learning model-Interaction Collaboration communication
	What is the influence of students' self-efficacy on the negotiation of sociocultural constraints in developing speaking skills in <i>pesantren</i> ?	Some of the students tried to present many times in delivering their idea to get the best result of video taking after experiencing failure	Efficacy activated processed-Cognitive process Motivational process	Goal Capacity Plan Action

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Results

Five main categories of sociocultural constraints emerged from the data: educational, time management, personal and psychological, policy, and environmental. These factors collectively influenced the learners' ability to develop English-speaking autonomy in the *pesantren* context, as discussed below. Self-efficacy played a vital role in how learners negotiated these constraints across all categories. However, it worked in conjunction with other internal factors such as perseverance, motivation, and endurance. The interplay of these elements reflects how students adapt to structural and cultural limitations while pursuing English-learning goals.

#### (a). Educational Constraints

Educational constraints were the most prominent challenges identified by the participants. These included limited opportunities for English learning, restricted participation in extracurricular programmes, and a lack of institutional support for English learning. These barriers hinder students' access to English-learning materials and programmes. Several participants mentioned the absence of a structured English learning system within the *pesantren* and the lack of access to resources such as books and English language programmes:

We need a lot of support from *pesantren*; they should be incorporated into the system. It can then support those who want to learn English as a second language. Even though it is a kind of force, I believe that they will gradually gain something from it. It should be incorporated into the learning system, for example, through daily conversations. We can create a special region for learning English as a second language. (S1, Edc1)

There is no library; every santri must possess their own dictionary. Now, in my *pesantren*, some students have it. (S6, Edc 2)

There is no access to the English language, such as books and programs designed for learning English, but they also do not forbid us from learning English. We can join any program as long as it is not far from the *pesantren*. (S5, Edc 3)

We had many restrictions; we could not join many things; we were forbidden from joining anything. I cannot join an English course. (S4, Edc4)

These excerpts illustrate how structural limitations within the *pesantren* learning system restrict students' exposure to English language learning. Although some students attempted to create informal learning spaces, institutional support remained minimal.

#### (b). Time Management Constraints

Time management emerged as a significant issue that affects student autonomy. Learners must balance their religious duties, academic obligations, and personal study time to succeed academically. The demanding schedule in *pesantren* limited their opportunities for consistent English practice, which, in turn, affected their confidence and motivation to learn English. As one participant explained:

In addition to learning English, we must study religious texts. We must manage our time effectively. I also kept a store and studied at the university. The period from morning to noon is referred to as Diniyah. After that, I kept the store, and I had to memorize the Quran in the *pesantren*. (S7, Tmc1)

We had a problem with time; we had so many activities in the *pesantren*. We feel very tired. (S8, Tmc2)

Interestingly, despite these challenges, some students acknowledged that the *pesantren*'s structured routine helped them improve their discipline and focus on their studies. However, balancing spiritual and academic responsibilities remains a central tension in their learning experience.

#### (c). Personal and Psychological Constraints

Students also faced strong emotional and psychological pressures that shaped their learning experiences. Feelings of stress and fatigue and an imbalance between religious and worldly knowledge often lead to decreased motivation. Several students described internal conflicts between their spiritual devotion and academic ambitions.

There are discrepancies between the knowledge of the world and the hereafter. It was a culture shock for me after moving to the village; we had different points of living, one of which is important for our lives. What kind of knowledge is important? Both types of knowledge are important. It was unbalanced. The problem we face with hardiness is that every student feels that knowledge for the future is more important than anything else. I tried to shift the paradigm; we also need to know the international, like what is. We should not limit our knowledge; we also need to know other cultures and the English language as a language that can connect to the global world. I did not receive sufficient support from my supervisor. They told us that prayer or reading the Quran was the most important thing for them. In my opinion, as long as it is good, why do we have to make a difference between what we learn in the world or for the hereafter? Time management was problematic. They told us that we had broken the time for praying. I have stayed in the *pesantren* for a long time. What is interesting about *pesantren* is that the students are good at ngaji, shalawat, and memorization. They will not see our English skills, he said. (S4, Ps1)

At one time, I was very down; I had to memorize many nadhom, and I had to go to the next level in the *pesantren*.

I almost gave up; I needed to focus on the *kitab kuning*. I got nothing; both of the things were bad. (S3, PS2)

These statements highlight that psychological constraints are not only emotional but also ideological. Learners struggled to reconcile their personal aspirations for global communication with *pesantren*'s emphasis on spiritual learning. Self-efficacy is a key factor in sustaining persistence in the face of such pressure.

#### (d). Policy Constraints

Institutional policies also influence learner autonomy. Although kyai (leaders) generally supported English learning, bureaucratic layers and committees often created barriers to policy implementation. Miscommunication and conflicting priorities among *pesantren* authorities limit students' external learning opportunities.

However, the policy does not support us in this regard. My kyai actually supports us. However, its implementation is still pending. They considered many factors for implementing English into the system.

However, this problem is extremely complicated. There are many considerations and concerns regarding this issue. Every part or region is stuck in its original place; it is not easy to build a new environment in which we can learn English freely and use it in our daily conversations. Providing a place to learn English is not a problem for schools. However, the overload part is always at the beginning, with up to 40 people in the group. Day by day, only four students continue learning will last only 4 students. However, we still enjoy it because they truly want it to be so. However, I have faced this rule many times when I want to go outside. We did not receive any permission to conduct the class. There was a lot of miscommunication among the committee members. (S1, Pc1) We also need support from the committee and the leader with the policy because there are some problems. (S7, Pc2)

These remarks reflect the complexity of policy dynamics within *pesantren* institutions, where leadership endorsement does not always translate into practical support for programmes.

(e). *Environmental Constraints*

Environmental factors represent both physical and social barriers to English practice. Participants mentioned the lack of an English-speaking environment, unsupportive peers, and restrictions on technology use as challenges. While students expressed a strong desire for immersion, they were discouraged by the mockery or indifference of their peers to their efforts. As participants shared:

An English-speaking environment is required. If we are forced and encouraged to speak English in *pesantren*, I believe that our speaking skills will improve significantly. We can do this if there is pressure. Training is also important, especially because we need to train ourselves mentally to speak properly. If we made a mistake when talking to a foreigner and it was all right, there would be no problem if we talked to other people. There is nothing to worry about in this regard. (S1, Ec1)

I have to be brave because my environment uses Madurese and Javanese language; sometimes when I speak English, they laugh when I speak in English. The environment does not support me either. (S7, Ec2)

I want to speak more and more English right now, like before, facing the same environment. But it doesn't. It was not the same as before. (S6, Ec3)

The environment does not support me either. There are only a few students who like English, and this negatively affects me. No books or partners are available. (S5, Ec4)

Environmental factors means that the more we speak English, the faster we can. (S10, Ec5)

Thus, environmental constraints extended beyond material limitations to include sociocultural attitudes that discouraged English communication in the workplace. Despite these barriers, students who exhibited higher self-efficacy were more likely to persist by initiating small peer speaking groups and self-directed practice sessions.

TABLE 2  
THE SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ON SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS THE STUDENTS FACED IN LEARNING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL AUTONOMOUSLY IN *PESANTREN*

Main RQ	Theme	Categories	Data	Participants
What sociocultural constraint do the students face in learning English speaking skills autonomously in <i>pesantren</i> ?	Educational constraint	Learning system constraints	The students need a lot of support in term of learning system	S1
		Gender limitation	Restriction in joining some activities	S4, S5
		Limited resources	Limited resources, there is no access toward English language	S6
	Time management constraint	Learning focus	They need be able to manage time for learning focus in <i>pesantren</i>	S7, S8
	Personal/psychological constraint	Stress, pressure, learning balance	The different paradigm of learning focus being faced, the student almost gave up in learning English due to the duty of the task in <i>pesantren</i>	S3, S4
	Policy constraint		There is a gap in decision-making between the leader and the committee.	S1, S7
	Environmental constraint	Need analysis	The need of English environment	S1, S5, S6, S10
		Language barrier	The language used in <i>pesantren</i>	S7
			There is no partner when speaking English	S5

The findings reveal that sociocultural constraints in *pesantren* are multifaceted, shaped by educational structures, institutional norms, and personal beliefs. Despite these challenges, the learners demonstrated resilience and adaptability through self-efficacy, which enabled them to reinterpret their limitations as growth opportunities. The next section discusses how these findings relate to the existing theories of self-efficacy and sociocultural learning in EFL contexts.

B. *Discussion*

(a). *Exploring Speaking Self-Efficacy on the Sociocultural Constraints Negotiation in Pesantren Context*

Self-efficacy has long been recognised as one of the most influential predictors of learner performance and achievement in second or foreign language learning (Raooifi et al., 2012). In the *pesantren* context, speaking self-efficacy plays a

crucial role in how students negotiate sociocultural constraints while developing autonomous learning behaviours. The findings of this study reveal that five interrelated factors shape this process: (1) mentorship and support systems, (2) autonomous learning initiatives, (3) technology use and sociocultural adaptation, (4) emotional regulation and self-belief, and (5) the influence of the cultural learning environment. Together, these factors illustrate the dynamic interaction between sources of self-efficacy and the negotiation of sociocultural barriers.

### 1. Empowering Mentorship and Support System

Navigating sociocultural constraints on English learning within *pesantren* is challenging. While many students struggle, some manage to succeed, largely because of strong mentorship and supportive social systems. Mentorship from *kyai* and *ustadz* (teachers) provides not only guidance but also a model of perseverance and discipline that students can emulate in their lives. Once learners find a suitable mentor, they internalise this figure as a role model and begin to set personal learning goals.

This process aligns with the notion of vicarious experience, one of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy. By observing the success of others, especially those with whom they identify, learners build confidence in their ability to achieve similar outcomes (Flammer, 2015). The participants in this study described how seeing their mentors communicate confidently in English inspired them to take risks and express their ideas more freely. Initially, they spoke imperfectly but gradually gained fluency and enjoyment through repeated practice.

Verbal persuasion also strengthens this process. Encouragement from mentors and peers' functions as a motivational trigger that sustains learners' persistence in the face of challenges (Won et al., 2017). Students began to perceive their mentors' prayers, advice, and reassurance as tangible support that reinforced their self-confidence. Ultimately, the combination of mentorship, modelling, and verbal persuasion led to higher self-efficacy, enabling students to persist in developing their speaking autonomy despite *pesantren*'s limitations.

### 2. Emerging Autonomous Learning Initiative

Learners' self-efficacy beliefs strongly influenced how they set goals, planned their learning strategies, and sustained their motivation (Flammer, 2015; Mary & Jebaseelan, 2014). In this study, the students demonstrated a growing awareness of the need to take ownership of their English-learning process. After recognising the institutional and environmental barriers in *pesantren*, they initiated autonomous learning practises, such as forming English circles and small peer groups where they practised speaking regularly.

These communities became emotional and cognitive anchors that nurtured the resilience of their members. Learners with higher self-efficacy remained more focused and persistent, interpreting obstacles as opportunities for growth rather than signs of failure. This corresponds to Bandura's (1997) concept of social persuasion, wherein mutual encouragement and shared commitment among peers enhance their motivation and perseverance. Participants in English circles reported that collective practice not only improved their speaking confidence but also helped them sustain consistent learning routines, illustrating how social support interacts with individual self-efficacy to build learner autonomy.

### 3. Utilising Technology and Sociocultural Adaptation

The role of technology in education is paradoxical; it can both empower and restrict learners (Chun et al., 2016; Luckin & Holmes, 2016; Warschauer & Meskill, 2013). In *salaf pesantren*, where digital devices are generally prohibited, students had limited access to online resources. Surprisingly, this restriction fostered a high degree of focus and creativity among students. Learners maximised the use of minimal tools, such as shared dictionaries, and developed affective strategies to compensate for the lack of digital access (Mostafavi & Vahdany, 2016).

These findings resonate with Oxford's (2015) sociocultural view of learner autonomy, which identifies self-efficacious learners as those capable of adapting to diverse social and material contexts in their learning. Students demonstrated sociocultural adaptation, a process of accepting limitations and transforming them into learning opportunities. This adaptive learning mirrors the principles of the Instructional Design for Online Learning (IDOL) model, which emphasises the context-sensitive integration of digital and non-digital materials to support learner autonomy and reflective engagement (Arafah et al., 2025). Although *pesantren* students operate in low-technology environments, their capacity to repurpose limited tools reflects the same learner-centred, adaptive mindset promoted by these models.

For instance, students who served as *abdi dalem* (assistants to the *kyai*) occasionally used mobile phones for administrative duties and leveraged this access to explore English learning applications, such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and language apps. In doing so, they exemplified self-regulated learning within restrictive environments, showing that sociocultural constraints can inspire autonomy rather than hinder it. Through limited yet purposeful digital engagement, *pesantren* learners demonstrated that even under constraints, self-efficacy enables the meaningful and ethical use of technology to sustain language learning during the pandemic.

### 4. Managing Emotional Support and Belief in Self

Another critical theme emerging from the findings was the learners' ability to manage their emotions and maintain a belief in their own capabilities. Emotional regulation is central to sustaining motivation and persistence. This aligns with Dewaele et al. (2019), who emphasised the role of emotional intelligence in second-language success. Learners with strong self-reliance are internally motivated rather than dependent on external validation.

This process mirrors the autonomous learner model proposed by Betts et al. (2021), which integrates the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains. In this framework, emotional resilience enables learners to confront challenges, reflect on their experiences, and sustain their learning trajectories. Students who could balance emotions, cognition, and social engagement demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy and continued learning, even when institutional or social support was limited. Thus, emotional management is not only a psychological process but also a sociocultural skill essential for success in constrained learning environments.

#### 5. *Taking Advantage of the Impact of Cultural Environment on Learning*

Personal efficacy does not operate in isolation; it is shaped by and, in turn, shapes the environment. Learners' belief in their ability to influence their surroundings is a defining feature of strong self-efficacy (Flammer, 2015). In the *pesantren* context, students who initially lacked environmental support gradually transformed their surroundings into a learning space. Their determination to create an English-speaking environment demonstrated agentic behaviour, wherein efficacy beliefs drove environmental change.

Cultural expectations within *pesantren* traditionally prioritise religious education over secular subjects. However, some students sought to challenge this paradigm by advocating for an integrated perspective that valued both. Their actions reflect emerging intercultural awareness and a desire to position *pesantren* learners as globally competent individuals. This process mirrors the broader patterns of cultural negotiation found in the Indonesian context, where traditional and modern values intersect to create hybrid forms of learning and identity. For example, the Mowindahako ritual speeches of the Tolaki Mekongga ethnic group highlight how communication practises encode collective values such as respect, harmony, and perseverance – principles that also underpin *pesantren* learners' motivation and discipline (Takwa et al., 2025).

This shift illustrates how high self-efficacy can catalyse a broader cultural transformation that redefines *pesantren* education as compatible with global communication and English proficiency. The interplay between cultural rootedness and global aspirations demonstrates that efficacy development in *pesantren* is not only cognitive but also deeply sociocultural, grounded in the local traditions of moral discipline, cooperation, and resilience.

#### (b). *Conceptual Model*

The conceptual model developed in this study was adapted from Doran and Pomfret (2019) (Figure 1) and it integrates three interconnected segments: (1) types of sociocultural constraints, (2) the influence of self-efficacy on learners' perceptions of constraint negotiability, and (3) the negotiation strategies employed to overcome these barriers to participation.

The first segment identified five overlapping sociocultural constraints: educational, time management, environmental, personal, psychological, and policy-related. These constraints vary in nature but are often interdependent. For example, institutional rules (policy constraints) may reinforce educational and environmental obstacles.

The second segment illustrates that the perception of constraint negotiability depends on learners' self-efficacy levels. Those with high self-efficacy reinforced by the four efficacy sources (verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, emotional regulation, and sociocultural adaptation) develop stronger negotiation skills. Learners who initially entered with low self-efficacy tended to rely heavily on these sources to build their confidence in their abilities. Over time, experiences of success, mentorship, and collective learning enhanced their self-efficacy and their negotiation skills.

Finally, the third segment outlines the negotiation strategies found to be effective in this context: prayer, social and institutional support, encouragement, English circles, peer communities, selective use of technology, self-reliance, and persistence. Successful negotiations lead to decreased perceptions of restriction and increased confidence, whereas failed negotiations weaken self-efficacy and, in some cases, cause learners to disengage from the learning process.

The conceptual model underscores that self-efficacy functions as both a mediating and transformative mechanism in negotiating sociocultural constraints to physical activity. As learners' efficacy beliefs grow, they reinterpret limitations as manageable challenges, thereby sustaining their motivation and engagement in their autonomous learning journeys.

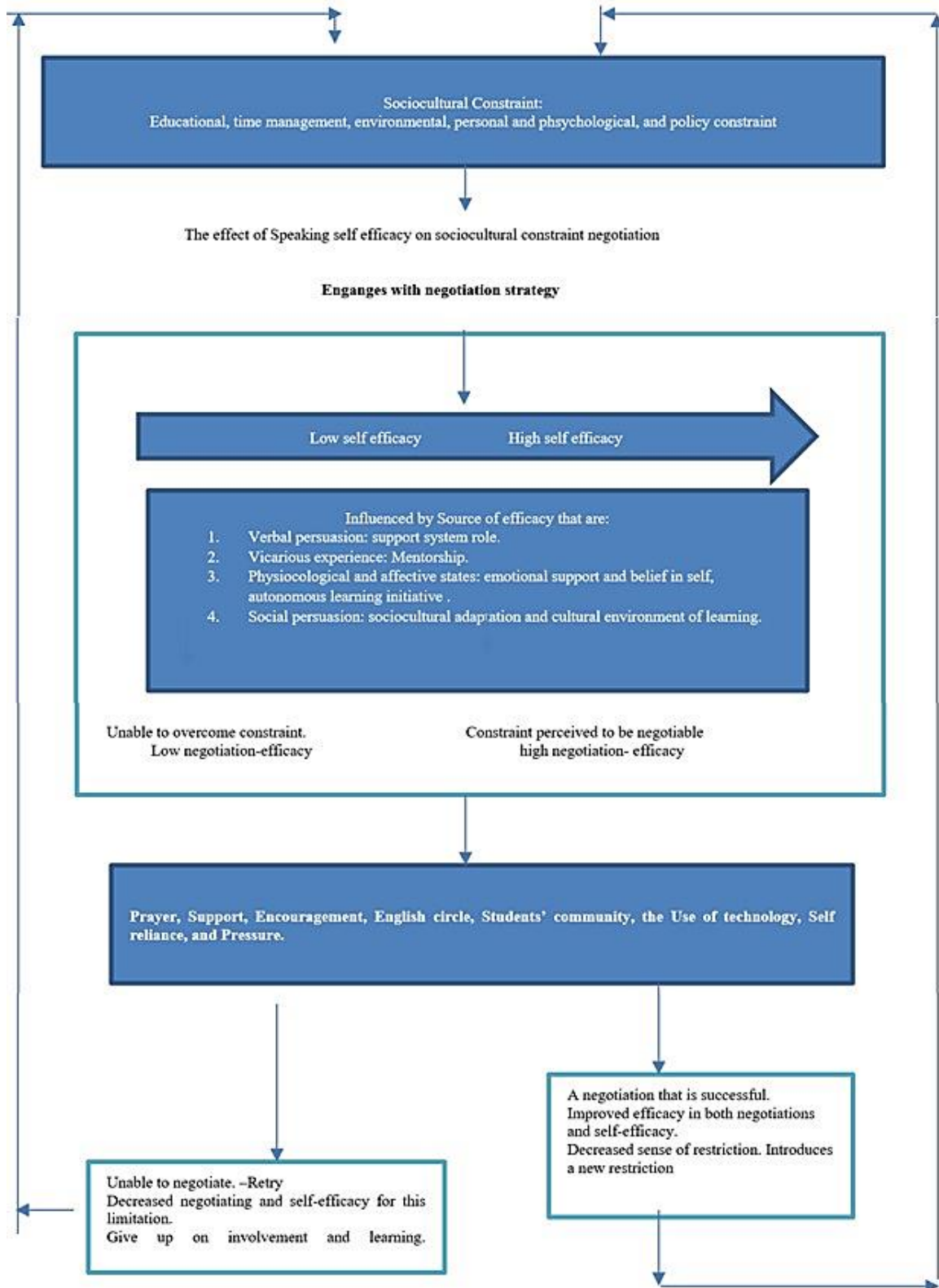


Figure 1. Conceptual Model: The Effect of Speaking Self-Efficacy on the Sociocultural Constraint Negotiation Process for EFL Learner in *Pesantren* Context

V. CONCLUSION

This study deepens understanding of how self-efficacy and related factors shaped the negotiation of sociocultural constraints among college students learning English in the *pesantren* context in Indonesia. While previous research (e.g., Doran & Pomfret, 2019) focused on identifying constraints before participation in learning activities, this study examines

how learners negotiated and adapted to these constraints throughout the learning process. Unlike earlier studies that concentrated on female learners (Doran & Pomfret, 2019; Fendt & Wilson, 2012; Wilson & Little, 2005), this study integrates a mixed-gender perspective, showing how male and female *pesantren* students develop resilience and autonomy.

The findings revealed five major categories of sociocultural constraints—educational, time management, environmental, personal, psychological, and policy-related—and their interaction with learners' self-efficacy beliefs during English-speaking development. Several negotiation factors emerged as crucial: mentorship and support systems, autonomous learning initiatives, technological and sociocultural adaptation, emotional regulation and self-belief, and cultural learning environments' influence on learning. These elements collectively determine whether learners perceive constraints as barriers or as manageable challenges. Through an ethnographic approach, this study captured students' lived experiences and how they transformed external limitations into opportunities for self-directed learning during the pandemic. The roles of *kyai*, peer networks, and cultural adaptation were essential in shaping individual and collective efficacy, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive strategies for learner autonomy. Despite addressing a research gap, this study acknowledges its context-specific findings.

Future research should explore various *pesantren* settings and conduct gender-focused analyses to uncover differences in learning agency and constraint negotiation. Further investigation into how persistence, motivation, and personality traits interact with self-efficacy may offer insights into sustaining autonomous language learning under socio-cultural limitations. This study emphasises that self-efficacy is not merely a psychological trait but a sociocultural capacity enabling learners to reinterpret challenges, mobilise support, and construct pathways toward language mastery within restrictive educational systems.

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