

Investigating Peer Interaction in Enhancing English Speaking Skills Among Senior High School Students

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Received: 14 July 2025

Accepted: 12 July 2026

Published: 28 July 2026

Abstract

English speaking ability is a crucial yet challenging skill for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This study aims to investigate the impact and specific mechanisms of peer interaction in enhancing English speaking skills among Indonesian senior high school students. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected students from a class characterized by frequent peer-based activities. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving systematic coding and constant comparative analysis to ensure interpretive rigor. The results indicate that peer interaction exerts a positive holistic impact, with 67% of participants reporting improvements in technical aspects such as fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical accuracy. Beyond linguistic gains, the analysis revealed that success is driven by an interconnected set of mechanisms. The foundation is Emotional Support in a Supportive Environment, which fosters increased motivation and psychological safety. This dynamic is further enhanced by Motivation Through Interaction Via Competition and put into practice through Active Engagement and Knowledge Exchange Through Feedback, culminating in tangible speaking skill enhancement. The study concludes that peer interaction is an invaluable pedagogical strategy that synergistically combines emotional support and collaborative practices to master a new language.

Keywords: English speaking skills, peer interaction, qualitative case study, senior high school students, thematic analysis

To cite this article: Dzukhriyah, L. A., & Siswana. (2026). Investigating peer interaction in enhancing English speaking skills among senior high school students. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 7(1), 86–107. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v7i1.2302>

DOI: 10.35961/salee.v7i1.2302



1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, English has emerged as the dominant language of global communication. Proficiency in English is a critical factor for accessing educational opportunities, advancing in careers, and participating in the global economy (Zamhari, 2023). This reality is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where the government has prioritized English language education within the national curriculum to equip students with essential 21st-century skills (Government of Indonesia, 2003). However, despite this emphasis, fostering effective communication skills, particularly in speaking, remains a significant challenge. Traditional classroom instruction often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary acquisition, leaving limited room for the authentic oral interaction necessary for true language development.

This pedagogical gap is noteworthy because language acquisition is not solely dependent on formal instruction; it is profoundly influenced by social interaction. As Crystal (2003) aptly notes, language "exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users" (p. 7), highlighting its inherently social nature. For adolescents, this social learning often occurs outside the classroom through interactions with peers, music, and online media, which provide rich, informal opportunities for language practice (Collin Baker, 2001). Within these peer groups, students can develop fluency and expand their vocabulary in a supportive and engaging environment, free from the fear of judgment often associated with formal classroom settings.

The effectiveness of peer interaction is supported by well-established learning theories. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky et al., (1978) emphasized that learning is a social process where students, through collaborative activities and peer scaffolding, can achieve higher levels of proficiency than they could individually. Furthermore, Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory highlights the motivational benefits of peer groups. Observing peers successfully communicate in English can boost a student's self-efficacy, while positive feedback and encouragement act as powerful motivators that foster a sense of competence and a desire for improvement.

Despite the theoretical and anecdotal evidence, there remains a notable gap in research specifically investigating peer interaction among Indonesian senior high school students. While the importance of peer interaction in language development is widely acknowledged (Q. Dang, 2019; Ky Nhan, 2024), prior research has primarily focused on general learning outcomes such as fluency, confidence, and motivation, with limited attention to specific interactional dimensions like frequency, quality, or the distinction between formal and informal contexts (Fikry and Zuraida Zuraida, 2025; Rahman et al., 2026). In the Indonesian EFL context, speaking difficulties are also shaped by socio-cultural factors such as students' reluctance to speak, fear of making mistakes, and limited use of English in daily interaction (Fachrunnisa and Nuraeni, 2022). However, these factors, including hierarchical teacher-student relationships, are rarely integrated into studies on peer-based learning effectiveness.

Furthermore, recent research has largely emphasized psychological variables such as self-efficacy, enjoyment, anxiety, and emotional intelligence, without addressing the role of competitive dynamics within peer interaction (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2025; Lin and Wang, 2025). As a result, little is known about how different forms of peer interaction, particularly those involving competitive elements, operate within specific socio-cultural contexts to

influence students' willingness to communicate and speaking proficiency. Consequently, the mechanisms and motivational drivers of peer interaction, especially the role of friendly competition remain underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by examining how peer interaction, including friendly competition, influences the English speaking proficiency of Indonesian senior high school students. It contributes by integrating competitive dynamics within socio-cultural contexts to provide a more nuanced understanding of peer interaction.

1.1. Research question

This study explores the influence of peer interaction on English speaking proficiency among senior high school students. Based on this focus, the research is guided by the following question:

- (1) How does peer interaction influence the English speaking skills of senior high school students in one of the senior high schools in Jakarta?
- (2) What specific aspects of peer interaction most influence the enhancement of English speaking skills?

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Peer interaction

Peer interaction, broadly defined as collaborative exchanges between individuals of relatively equal status, is a cornerstone of effective learning across diverse educational contexts. It creates a supportive environment conducive to knowledge co-construction, skill development, and deeper cognitive engagement by allowing learners to articulate ideas, challenge assumptions, and provide mutual scaffolding (Kutnick and Blatchford, 2014). This process is fundamentally rooted in Vygotsky's et al. (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that higher psychological functions, including language acquisition, originate in social interaction. Learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as individuals collaborate with "more knowledgeable others" which significantly includes peers to internalize concepts and skills they could not master independently.

In language learning environments, peer interaction becomes particularly salient as it provides meaningful opportunities for communication, negotiation of meaning, and active participation. Through collaborative learning activities, students work together to solve problems, exchange ideas, and construct understanding, transforming learning into a dynamic social process rather than a passive one (Smith and Macgregor, 1992; Li and Lam, 2005). Additionally, structured peer-based tasks such as discussions, debates, and group work encourage students to engage more actively and take responsibility for their learning. Elements of friendly competition within peer interaction, such as group-based quizzes or debates, can further enhance motivation and participation when balanced with cooperation (Dindar et al., 2021; Thi Binh et al., 2024).

Recent empirical studies consistently affirm the effectiveness of peer interaction in English language learning. Dewantoro et al. (2022) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between structured peer interaction and overall English proficiency. Similarly, structured collaborative activities, such as peer assessment within debate instruction, have been shown to significantly

improve students' speaking abilities and critical thinking (Sako and Shinozaki, 2023). Furthermore, peer interaction fosters a low-anxiety environment that encourages students to practice speaking more freely, ultimately enhancing both confidence and communicative competence (Chen, 2023). Thus, peer interaction serves as a central mechanism through which cognitive, social, and affective aspects of language learning are facilitated.

1.2.2. English speaking skills in EFL contexts

Speaking is a complex and multifaceted productive skill that involves the dynamic interplay of conceptualization, formulation, and articulation (Suzuki and Hanzawa, 2022). Its characteristics extend beyond linguistic knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) to include cognitive processing and sociocultural understanding, enabling effective communication in diverse contexts (Paula Winke and Brunfaut, 2021). This complexity requires learners to simultaneously manage multiple processes, such as generating ideas, selecting appropriate language forms, and adapting their speech to the communicative situation. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context like Indonesia, senior high school students often face challenges such as low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited opportunities for authentic practice, and an instructional focus that prioritizes accuracy over fluency. These challenges can hinder students' willingness to participate, ultimately slowing the development of their speaking proficiency over time.

To address these challenges, speaking development must balance both fluency and accuracy. Fluency can be enhanced through regular, low-stakes conversational practice and interactive tasks that promote spontaneous communication (Khatib et al., 2022). Meanwhile, accuracy can be improved through focused instruction and corrective feedback, particularly from peers, which has been shown to refine pronunciation and grammatical precision (H. Wu et al., 2022). In addition, integrating both aspects within meaningful communication tasks allows learners to develop not only correctness but also flexibility in language use. Creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment is therefore essential, as it enables students to take risks and actively engage in speaking activities, ultimately improving their overall communicative competence (Marathus et al., 2023). Such environments also encourage sustained participation, which is crucial for long-term speaking development.

1.2.3. Motivation leading to confidence in speaking

Motivation is a critical psychological construct in language acquisition, encompassing the desire, effort, and persistence individuals exhibit toward a goal (Dörnyei, 2001). It can be categorized into intrinsic motivation, which is driven by internal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external rewards such as grades or recognition. In peer learning contexts, both types of motivation are significantly shaped through interaction and social engagement. Through continuous interaction, learners are exposed not only to linguistic input but also to social dynamics that influence their attitudes toward learning. The presence of peers creates a learning environment where goals are shared, progress is visible, and effort is socially reinforced. This social dimension makes motivation more dynamic, as it is constantly negotiated and influenced by group norms, expectations, and collaborative experiences.

Peer interaction enhances motivation by providing meaningful communication opportunities, encouragement, and a sense of shared learning. Positive feedback and support from peers act as external motivators, while enjoyable collaborative activities foster intrinsic motivation (Dr. Bushra Naz et al., 2024). In addition, the interactive nature of peer learning allows students to experience immediate responses and validation, which further sustains their engagement in the learning process. This increased motivation is closely linked to self-efficacy, or learners' belief in their ability to succeed, which ultimately strengthens their confidence in speaking. As students become more motivated, they are more willing to participate actively and take risks in using the target language, leading to improved speaking performance. Over time, this cycle of motivation, participation, and positive outcomes contributes to more consistent and sustained language development.

1.2.4. Emotional support within a supportive environment

Emotional support plays a crucial role in language learning, particularly in reducing anxiety and fostering a safe environment for communication. Anxiety and fear of negative evaluation can significantly hinder students' willingness to speak, as learners often become overly concerned with making mistakes or being judged by others. As Maher and King (2023) explain, anxious learners often experience fear related to social judgment, which leads them to avoid participation and remain silent during speaking activities. This avoidance not only limits opportunities for practice but also slows the development of communicative competence, as consistent engagement is essential for language improvement. Therefore, addressing emotional barriers is as important as developing linguistic skills in promoting effective speaking performance.

A supportive classroom environment, shaped largely by peer interaction, helps reduce these negative emotions. When students receive encouragement, empathy, and validation from their peers, they develop a sense of belonging and psychological safety. This reduces their affective filter and allows them to engage more freely in language use (Juhana, 2023). Studies have shown that peer interactions characterized by mutual encouragement and camaraderie significantly decrease anxiety and promote active participation (Namaziandost et al., 2024). Consequently, emotional support not only enhances students' comfort but also directly contributes to their confidence and willingness to communicate (Hilte et al., 2020).

1.2.5. Knowledge exchange through peer feedback

Knowledge exchange through peer feedback is a key mechanism within peer interaction that supports language development. Peer feedback facilitates dialogic scaffolding, enabling learners to co-construct meaning and develop linguistic competence through interaction (Iwashita and Dao, 2021). Through this collaborative process, learners are not only exposed to alternative linguistic forms but are also encouraged to negotiate meaning and clarify misunderstandings in real time. By engaging in the processes of giving and receiving feedback, students become more aware of their language use and identify areas for improvement. This interactive exchange fosters deeper cognitive engagement, as learners must actively process, interpret, and respond to feedback, thereby strengthening both their receptive and productive language skills.

Peer feedback provides immediate, relatable, and comprehensible input, making it particularly effective in improving speaking skills (Ding and Zhu, 2025). It also promotes reflective learning, as students evaluate both their own and others' performance, leading to increased metacognitive awareness (Li and Hebert, 2024). In addition, the reciprocal nature of peer feedback encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their learning and become more autonomous over time. This process helps learners notice the gap between their current proficiency and target language forms, thereby enhancing both accuracy and fluency (Gonzalez-Torres and Sarango, 2023). As a result, peer feedback serves as a crucial cognitive pathway through which speaking skills are developed.

1.2.6. Integrated conceptual framework

The constructs discussed above peer interaction, motivation, emotional support, and peer feedback are not independent elements but are dynamically interconnected in influencing students' English speaking skills. Peer interaction serves as the central variable that activates multiple learning processes simultaneously (Shao et al., 2024). Through interaction, students engage in collaborative learning, receive emotional support, exchange feedback, and develop motivation, all of which contribute to the improvement of their speaking abilities. This indicates that peer interaction does not only have a direct effect on speaking skills but also plays a crucial role in shaping other supporting factors. In this framework, peer interaction is positioned as the independent variable, speaking skills as the dependent variable, and motivation, emotional support, and peer feedback as mediating variables.

Motivation functions as a mediating factor that enhances students' confidence and willingness to speak, while emotional support helps reduce anxiety and creates a safe environment for active participation. In addition, peer feedback contributes to the development of linguistic accuracy and fluency by allowing students to reflect on and improve their performance. Therefore, speaking skill development can be understood as the result of a complex interplay between social (peer interaction), affective (motivation and emotional support), and cognitive (peer feedback) factors (Kotkavuori, 2025). This integrated perspective highlights that effective language learning occurs when these elements work synergistically within a supportive and interactive environment.

1.2.7. Conceptual model of the study

The conceptual model of this study positions peer interaction as the central variable that is expected to influence students' speaking skills both directly and indirectly, with speaking skills as the outcome variable and motivation, emotional support, and peer feedback as mediating variables that explain the underlying processes of this relationship. In this model, peer interaction is associated not only with increased opportunities for speaking practice but also with improvements in speaking performance through affective and cognitive pathways, including enhanced motivation, reduced anxiety supported by emotional encouragement from peers, and improved linguistic performance facilitated through peer feedback. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study, illustrating the proposed relationships among the variables and how the mediating factors are assumed to operate within the overall framework.

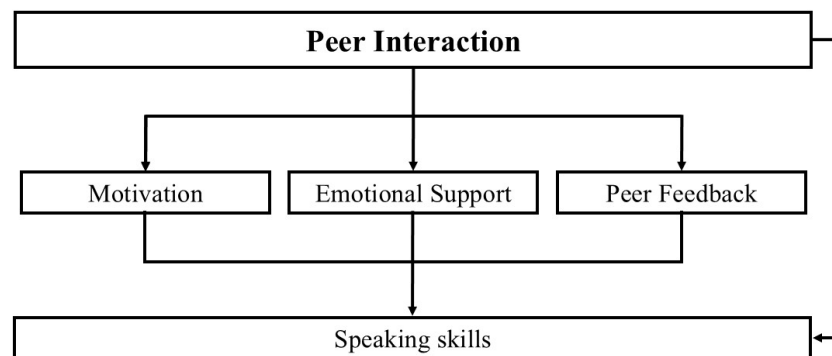


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

2. Method

2.1. Research method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore peer interactions in enhancing English speaking skills among senior high school students, as framed by the research title Investigating Peer Interaction in Enhancing English Speaking Skills Among Senior High School. Collection involved semi-structured interviews to explore the relationship between peer interaction and the improvement of English speaking skills among senior high school students. Interviews will utilize open-ended questions, allowing students to elaborate on their experiences with peer interaction in English, perceived impact of these interactions on their speaking confidence and fluency. This approach will provide rich, descriptive data that captures the nuances of students' perspectives and experiences. Thematic analysis by Creswell and David Creswell (2018) will be employed to identify key themes and patterns in the data, describing the common practices and strategies students utilize when engaging with peers in English. This study aims to provide a comprehensive account of peer interactions and their impact on English-speaking skills enhancement.

2.2. Research participants

The participants in this study were Indonesian senior high school students. The researcher specifically selected class 10-B as the sample group because its students frequently participated in peer-based speaking activities, making their experiences highly relevant to the research objectives. From this class, six participants were selected as the research sample. Although the sample size may appear limited, it is considered appropriate in qualitative research, which prioritizes depth of data rather than breadth. The relatively small number of participants enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of each individual's experiences, allowing for rich and meaningful insights into peer interaction in speaking activities, which is a fundamental principle of qualitative inquiry. The sample size was also deemed sufficient as data saturation was achieved, where no new significant themes emerged from the interviews (Creswell and David Creswell, 2018).

Consistent with qualitative principles emphasizing in-depth understanding within natural settings, purposive sampling Etikan (2016) was employed to select participants who had direct experience with peer interaction in English speaking activities. This method ensures that the

data collected is rich, detailed, and aligned with the research objectives, while also allowing flexibility in selecting individuals who can provide diverse perspectives within the same context. To identify students who best fit the specific criteria central to the research focus, the researcher consulted closely with the students' English teacher. All selected students consented to take part in the study. The group consisted of six individuals - three male and three female participants.

2.3. Research instruments

The primary research instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview guide, meticulously designed to explore the nuances of students' experiences with peer interaction in English-speaking activities. The guide was structured thematically, with open-ended questions focused on collaborative speaking practices, the exchange and impact of peer feedback, and how peer interaction in enhancing speaking skills. To ensure the instrument's validity, the interview questions were developed and adapted from established literature in the field, particularly drawing on previous studies on peer interaction and speaking skills (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025), and were carefully refined for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. During the data collection phase, all interviews were conducted with participant consent, audio-recorded on encrypted digital devices for security, and later transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness and integrity of the data for a thorough thematic analysis.

2.4. Collecting data procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with high school students over a focused three-day period from May 20 to 22, 2025. Participants engaged in individual interviews using a flexible interview guide centered on their experiences with peer interaction in English language activities, which allowed for exploratory dialogue while ensuring key topics-such as small group learning, perceived benefits, and challenges-were systematically covered. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy for subsequent thematic analysis.

2.5. Data analysis procedure

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed through a thematic analysis approach Creswell and David Creswell (2018) using systematic stages. This study began with collaborative planning with the students' English teachers to identify six participants who met predetermined criteria (e.g., diversity in speaking ability, frequency of peer engagement, and willingness to participate). Semi-structured interviews were then conducted individually, which allowed the participants to share their experiences and perceptions of peer speaking activities. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in a comprehensive document file for analysis. The data processing stage involved a careful review of the transcriptions, followed by systematic coding to detect recurring themes (e.g., confidence building, error correction, peer feedback). The coding process began with initial (open) coding, in which meaningful segments of the data were identified and labeled. These initial codes were then grouped into categories based on similarities and patterns through a process of axial coding. Subsequently, broader themes were developed by organizing and refining these

categories to represent key patterns across participants' responses. Through constant comparative analysis, the coded segments were reduced and organized into broader constructs and subconstructs, allowing for cross-referencing and thematic refinement. To ensure rigor, triangulation validates emerging patterns through peer debriefing or cross-method verification. Finally, data interpretation contextualizes the findings with the research objectives, synthesizing implications for pedagogical strategies. This process culminated in a structured report featuring thematic summaries, representative statements and evidence-based conclusions on the role of peer interaction in the development of speaking skills.

2.6. Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, this study applied several established criteria, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through member checking, in which participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations to verify the accuracy of their responses and meanings. Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process, where all stages of the study, including research design decisions, participant selection, interview procedures, and data analysis steps, were systematically documented to ensure consistency. Confirmability was achieved through coding transparency, in which the researcher clearly described the coding process and demonstrated how themes and categories were derived from the data, while also minimizing bias by grounding interpretations in participants' actual statements.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

This section presents the results from the analysis of student interviews on the role of peer interaction in enhancing their English speaking skills. The analysis examines the general influence of peer interaction on these skills and identifies the specific mechanisms of this interaction that are most influential. The findings are organized into six key themes that directly correspond to the study's two research questions. The first three themes, which answer the first research question, illustrate the overall impact: (1) Speaking Skill Enhancement, (2) Increased Motivation Leading to Confidence, and (3) Active Engagement Through Collaborative Learning. The subsequent three themes answer the second research question by pinpointing the specific mechanisms at play, identified as (4) Emotional Support in a Supportive Environment, (5) Motivation Through Interaction Via Competition, (6) Knowledge Exchange Through Feedback, and (7) Theoretical and Practical Contributions.

3.1.1. Speaking skill enhancement

Table 1. Speaking skill enhancement

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
1	Speaking Skill Enhancement	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		4	67%

Based on Table 1, the analysis reveals that a significant majority of participants perceived a direct improvement in their speaking abilities through peer interaction, addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1). Four out of six students (67%), identified as P1, P2, P3, and P6, reported that engaging with peers contributed positively to their speaking development. Beyond indicating improvement, these findings suggest that peer interaction functions as an effective learning mechanism that facilitates language development through authentic communicative practice. Participants reported gains in vocabulary, fluency, and grammatical accuracy, as illustrated by P1, P3, and P6, indicating that interaction enables learners to practice language in meaningful contexts rather than in isolation. From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through a social constructivist framework, where learning occurs through interaction and shared meaning-making. The participants' experiences reflect processes such as scaffolding and exposure to more proficient peers, which support language development. For instance, P3's interaction with more fluent peers suggests that learners benefit from higher-level language input, while P6's improvement in grammar indicates the role of noticing and self-correction during interaction. These findings imply that peer interaction not only supports speaking practice but also serves as a central mechanism through which learners actively construct and refine their speaking abilities.

3.1.2. Increased motivation leading to confidence

Table 2. Increased motivation leading to confidence

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
2	Increased Motivation Leading to Confidence		✓	✓		✓		✓		3	50%

According to the data in Table 2, peer interaction served as a crucial catalyst for increasing students' motivation and confidence, indirectly contributing to the enhancement of speaking skills and addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1). Three out of six participants (50%), identified as P2, P3, and P5, reported that interaction with peers enhanced both their motivation and self-confidence. Beyond merely indicating positive perceptions, these findings suggest that peer interaction creates a psychologically supportive learning environment that facilitates active engagement in speaking activities. Participants' responses reveal that this effect operates primarily through the reduction of anxiety and the establishment of a safe space for communication. For instance, P2 described peer interaction as "more enjoyable" with a "more relaxed" atmosphere, while P3 highlighted that confidence emerges more strongly when interacting with peers of similar proficiency, as opposed to more fluent speakers who may induce fear of making mistakes. Similarly, P5 emphasized that small-group interaction increases comfort and encourages active participation without fear of error. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that peer interaction lowers learners' affective barriers and enhances their willingness to communicate, thereby enabling more frequent and meaningful speaking practice. Thus, motivation and confidence can be understood not merely as outcomes of interaction, but as mediating factors that strengthen the overall impact of peer interaction on speaking skill development.

3.1.3. Active engagement through collaborative learning

Table 3. Active engagement through collaborative learning

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
3	Active Engagement Through Collaborative Learning	✓		✓	✓			✓		3	50%

As shown in Table 3, collaborative learning was identified as a key factor in promoting active student engagement, providing further insight into Research Question 1 (RQ1). Three of the six participants (50%), namely P1, P3, and P4, reported that working collaboratively encouraged them to participate more actively in speaking activities. Beyond simply indicating increased participation, these findings suggest that collaborative learning creates meaningful opportunities for language use through both structured academic tasks and informal interactions. In formal contexts, activities such as group discussions and brainstorming sessions were perceived as effective in enhancing fluency and performance, as reflected in P1's experience of improved speaking ability during presentations and P4's sense of contributing more actively within group work. At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of informal, everyday communication in English as a means of developing authentic fluency, with P1 highlighting its use in casual peer interactions and P3 emphasizing the role of real-life communication in understanding contextual language use. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that collaborative learning facilitates active engagement by providing authentic communicative contexts and opportunities for meaningful language practice. Thus, engagement is not merely a result of participation in tasks but emerges from learners' involvement in both structured and spontaneous interactions, which together support the development of speaking skills.

3.1.4. Emotional support in a supportive environment

Table 4. Emotional support in a supportive environment

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
4	Emotional Support in a Supportive Environment	✓	✓	✓					✓	3	50%

The data in Table 4 highlights the importance of a positive peer environment in providing emotional support, a key factor related to Research Question 2 (RQ2). Three of the six participants (50%), namely P1, P2, and P3, reported experiencing a supportive environment characterized by encouragement and a sense of psychological safety. Beyond simply indicating the presence of support, these findings suggest that peer interaction fosters a low-anxiety learning context that enables students to participate more confidently in speaking activities. Participants emphasized that this support operates through both explicit and implicit mechanisms. Explicitly, a non-judgmental atmosphere allows students to make mistakes without fear, as reflected in P1's description of an environment where peers correct each other

constructively and P3's concern about feeling judged when interacting with more fluent speakers. Implicitly, emotional support is conveyed through actions such as peers responding in English, which P2 perceived as a form of validation, and through trust-based behaviors, such as being nominated as a group representative, which P1 interpreted as encouragement to improve. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that emotional support reduces learners' affective barriers and promotes a sense of belonging, both of which are essential for active participation and willingness to communicate. Thus, a supportive peer environment not only enhances emotional well-being but also functions as a critical factor in facilitating speaking skill development.

3.1.5. Motivation through interaction via competition

Table 5. Motivation through interaction via competition

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
5	Motivation Through Interaction Via Competition	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	4	67%

Based on Table 5, the element of competition within peer interaction was found to be a powerful motivator for a majority of students, directly addressing Research Question 2 (RQ2). Four out of six participants (67%), namely P1, P3, P4, and P5, reported that competitive aspects of peer activities increased their motivation to improve their speaking skills. Beyond simply indicating increased motivation, these findings suggest that competition functions as a psychological driver that stimulates effort, self-improvement, and engagement in speaking activities. Participants' responses indicate that this motivation operates through both informal and formal mechanisms. Informally, social comparison with more proficient peers encourages learners to strive for improvement, as reflected in P4's and P5's statements describing competition as a source of challenge and personal drive. Formally, structured competitive activities such as contests also enhance motivation, with P1 emphasizing the desire to win as a motivating factor, while P3 highlighted competition as a means of building confidence, recognizing personal limitations, and learning from feedback. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that competition within peer interaction not only increases motivation but also promotes self-regulated learning and reflective practice. Thus, competition can be understood not merely as a performance-oriented activity but as a constructive mechanism that encourages learners to actively develop their speaking abilities.

3.1.6. Knowledge exchange through feedback

Table 6. Knowledge exchange through feedback

No	Findings	Participants						RQ 1	RQ 2	Total	%
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6				
6	Knowledge Exchange Through Feedback	✓		✓		✓			✓	3	50%

Finally, Table 6 demonstrates that the process of knowledge exchange through feedback is a significant factor influencing students' motivation, directly addressing Research Question 2 (RQ2). Three of the six participants (50%), identified as P1, P3, and P5, reported that they gained knowledge and improved their speaking skills through giving and receiving peer feedback. Beyond simply indicating improvement, these findings suggest that peer feedback functions as an effective learning mechanism that supports both knowledge acquisition and skill refinement within interactive learning contexts. Participants' responses indicate that this process occurs through two main pathways: acquiring new linguistic knowledge and improving existing performance through corrective feedback. For instance, P1 highlighted that interacting with peers from different backgrounds enriched vocabulary, while P3 described actively seeking more knowledgeable peers to expand linguistic competence. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of immediate corrective feedback, with P3 expressing a preference for peer correction as it enhances confidence, and P5 noting that direct feedback helps identify and understand errors effectively. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that peer feedback facilitates both cognitive processes, such as noticing and reflection, and affective development, such as increased confidence. Therefore, feedback within peer interaction can be understood not only as a tool for correcting errors but also as a central mechanism through which learners actively construct, evaluate, and improve their speaking abilities.

3.2. Discussion

This study investigates how peer interaction encourages the enhancement of English-speaking skills among senior high school students. Using a qualitative approach with thematic analysis, data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed to uncover patterns of peer interaction and their influence on spoken language proficiency. Guided by the theoretical lens of social constructivism, the findings reveal that structured peer interaction activities such as peer feedback, and cooperative tasks trigger improvements across all three dimensions of student engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive). For instance, students demonstrated increased behavioral engagement by actively participating in speaking tasks; emotional engagement by expressing greater confidence and enjoyment; and cognitive engagement by self-monitoring their language and attending to feedback. These results align with recent studies showing that social interaction strategies, such as peer feedback, significantly improve speaking skills in adolescent EFL learners. For instance, study by Dagnew Chekol (2020) reported statistically significant gains in overall speaking achievement after multiple peer feedback sessions, with students expressing strong positive attitudes toward the process.

3.2.1. Speaking skill enhancement

This study's qualitative findings provide a detailed understanding of how peer interaction functions as a key catalyst in enhancing students' speaking skills while extending existing theoretical perspectives. Rather than functioning merely as a supplementary activity, peer interaction emerges as a central mechanism through which learners actively construct and refine their linguistic competence. Communicative practice not only improves vocabulary and grammar but also demonstrates that these elements are socially constructed through interaction. The findings extend Dang and Dao (2024) by showing that vocabulary acquisition is facilitated through peer-driven interaction, particularly as learners are exposed to varied lexical input in

meaningful communicative contexts, and refine Rifamole et al. (2023) by revealing the real-time processes through which learners co-construct grammatical understanding. In the Indonesian context, where teacher-centered approaches may limit low-stakes practice, peer interaction appears to function as a compensatory mechanism, particularly in environments where opportunities for spontaneous speaking are constrained.

Furthermore, this study extends Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim et al. (2023) by showing that reduced cognitive load is experienced as increased confidence and spontaneity, indicating that fluency development is both cognitive and affective. It also refines Wulf (2021) by demonstrating how peer interaction bridges declarative and procedural knowledge through repeated, socially mediated practice. Although the risk of error fossilization exists, the findings challenge this concern by showing that increased confidence and motivation may outweigh such drawbacks. This suggests that communicative fluency development may, in some contexts, take precedence over immediate grammatical accuracy in the early stages of interaction. Error fossilization has long been recognized in second language acquisition as the persistence of incorrect linguistic forms despite exposure to correct input (Tian et al., 2025). Therefore, peer interaction is not only a supportive strategy but also a transformative mechanism that plays a crucial role in shaping speaking development in EFL contexts, particularly within Indonesia.

3.2.2. Increased motivation leading to confidence

Beyond technical skill enhancement, the findings reveal that peer interaction plays a crucial role in shaping the affective domain of language learning, particularly by fostering motivation and self-confidence. This highlights that speaking development depends not only on linguistic input but also on the emotional conditions of learning. This study indicates that motivation arises from a dual mechanism. Firstly, the collaborative and structured nature of interaction alleviates anxiety by fostering mutual support, enabling learners to participate without the pressure typically associated with teacher-fronted evaluation, which helps explain the increased participation noted by Alcivar Llor et al. (2024). Secondly, motivation is driven by positive social comparison. The presence of more proficient peers provides aspirational models that encourage learners to improve, as they benchmark their progress against observable peer performance, aligning with Intang et al. (2023), who found that observing successful peers can enhance self-efficacy.

This enhanced motivation is closely linked to the development of self-confidence, which is rooted in the psychological safety of the peer group. In such environments, learners feel a greater sense of acceptance and reduced fear of negative evaluation, allowing them to engage more freely in speaking activities. Students reported feeling more comfortable practicing and taking risks when interacting with peers, as reduced evaluative pressure minimizes fear of negative judgment and encourages more spontaneous language use. This sense of security, linked to reduced anxiety Annisa et al. (2023) and trust within small groups Ali and Ismail (2023), creates space for experimentation, where making mistakes is seen as a natural part of learning rather than failure. As a result, learners are more willing to express ideas, test new linguistic forms, and sustain participation in communicative tasks. Over time, these experiences contribute to increased self-confidence, reinforcing learners' belief in their

communicative abilities. Therefore, the pedagogical implication is clear: fostering an effective peer learning environment is not merely about encouraging collaboration, but about designing a social ecosystem that balances psychological safety with positive, aspirational challenges to support both emotional and linguistic development.

3.2.3. Active engagement through collaborative learning

This study reveals that active engagement, a critical driver of speaking proficiency, manifests in two complementary forms: structured, task-oriented collaboration and unstructured, informal conversation. These two forms operate synergistically, with structured interaction supporting accuracy and informal interaction enhancing fluency, thereby creating a balanced foundation for speaking development. Within a formal academic context, peer interaction through tasks such as group discussions provides a platform for collaborative planning and rehearsal. This process allows students to pool their linguistic resources and co-construct knowledge, thereby improving the clarity and complexity of their spoken output while also strengthening their ability to organize ideas effectively. This finding aligns with Sun Park (2021), who identified collaborative planning as a key factor in enhancing lexical complexity, and Mulyadi et al. (2024), who note that co-constructing arguments requires precise and persuasive language use.

Complementing this structured practice is the equally important role of informal, daily conversation in habituating language use. Such interaction provides low-pressure opportunities for repeated exposure, which is essential for developing automaticity in speech production over time. These relaxed, authentic exchanges also create space for developing pragmatic competence and conversational fluency, as supported by Crisianita and Mandasari (2022), particularly in adapting language to different social contexts. The participants themselves recognized the importance of this out-of-class practice, suggesting that meaningful language learning extends beyond formal instruction into everyday communication settings, which resonates with Sari and Maharini (2023), who emphasize that informal talk provides the extensive exposure necessary for true fluency. Therefore, a key pedagogical insight emerges: a holistic approach to developing speaking skills must bridge the gap between classroom activities and real-world communication.

3.2.4. Emotional support in a supportive environment

This study's findings underscore a foundational element underlying the benefits of peer interaction: the creation of a supportive emotional environment. Without such an environment, the effectiveness of peer interaction in promoting speaking skills may be significantly limited. The analysis reveals that psychological safety is not merely an incidental benefit but a prerequisite for meaningful engagement and linguistic risk-taking. In a non-judgmental atmosphere, students feel empowered to experiment with language, viewing errors as a natural part of learning rather than as failures. This reframing of errors plays a critical role in reducing performance anxiety. The importance of this safety is further highlighted by the finding that its absence particularly the fear of judgment from more proficient peers acts as a major barrier, as supported by Hong et al. (2022), who link upward social comparison to increased language anxiety. Conversely, Juhana (2023) indicates that a high degree of psychological safety not only fosters willingness to speak but also increases receptiveness to corrective feedback,

suggesting that emotional security directly influences both participation and learning effectiveness.

Beyond an explicitly non-judgmental climate, support is also conveyed through subtle, implicit actions that build trust and rapport. One important mechanism is reciprocal action, where peers validate a speaker's effort by responding in the same language. This form of linguistic accommodation strengthens interpersonal connection and encourages continued communication, as explained by Hilte et al. (2020). Furthermore, the supportive environment is reinforced by mutual trust and shared academic values. Recent findings by Woreta et al. (2025) support this, showing that peer encouragement can directly enhance students' self-efficacy and engagement. Therefore, the pedagogical implication is clear: the design of effective peer learning must address not only instructional strategies but also emotional dynamics. Cultivating mutual respect and trust becomes a critical foundation, as it creates the conditions necessary for developing linguistic confidence and sustained participation.

3.2.5. Motivation through interaction via competition

While the previous sections highlighted the importance of a supportive environment, this study also reveals that a healthy sense of competition and aspirational social comparison serves as a potent motivational driver. This indicates that motivation in language learning is shaped not only by internal factors but also by social dynamics within the learning environment. This is consistent with social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate their abilities by comparing themselves with others, and that such comparisons can enhance motivation and performance (Tong and Shakibaei, 2025). This motivation manifests in two related forms. First, it arises organically through interaction with more capable peers. In this context, learners observe not only outcomes but also the strategies used by more proficient peers, contributing to deeper learning. This dynamic, often seen in peer tutoring, provides personalized guidance and encouragement (Trang, 2022). More than simply receiving help, observing successful peers offers a tangible model for success, which, according to Torres et al. (2024), can trigger important self-development goals and aspirations.

This implicit drive is further amplified by the introduction of structured competition. Such competition creates a sense of purpose, encouraging students to actively demonstrate their abilities. Classroom activities such as games, quizzes, and debates harness students' desire to perform well, increasing their effort and engagement, a finding consistent with research on gamification (Thi Binh et al., 2024). However, the analysis reveals a more nuanced benefit beyond simply winning. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, students begin to reflect on their progress and identify areas for improvement. As Ma and Chen (2024) argue, well-framed competitive tasks serve a vital function in self-assessment, allowing students to gauge their abilities and build self-efficacy through measurable achievement. Therefore, these findings challenge the view that learning environments must be purely collaborative. Instead, they suggest that effective pedagogy can harness the motivational power of competition when it is framed not as a zero-sum contest, but as a constructive opportunity for self-assessment, aspirational modeling, and skill refinement.

3.2.6. Knowledge exchange through feedback

This study highlights that peer interaction functions as a dynamic marketplace for knowledge exchange, facilitating linguistic development through the dual processes of knowledge acquisition and corrective feedback. In such an interactive environment, learning does not occur in isolation; instead, it emerges through continuous social negotiation, where meaning is co-constructed and refined collaboratively. Learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but actively engage in shaping and reshaping their understanding through dialogue. As a result, they simultaneously assume the roles of contributors and recipients, creating a reciprocal learning dynamic that sustains ongoing development. Firstly, interaction serves as a powerful engine for vocabulary acquisition, as students are exposed to diverse peer-generated expressions through natural conversation, thereby expanding their lexical repertoire. This process operates within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where more knowledgeable peers act as valuable learning resources. This finding is consistent with Le Vu Ngan (2024) and is illustrated by the concept of peers functioning as “lexical sources” (Zhang et al., 2025).

Complementing this acquisition process is the equally important role of knowledge refinement through peer feedback. This allows learners to continuously adjust and improve their language use during interaction. Peer correction is particularly effective because it is perceived as less formal and less threatening than teacher feedback, aligning with Gonzalez-Torres and Sarango (2023), who argue that low-anxiety environments reduce the affective filter and enhance receptivity to correction. From a cognitive perspective, feedback helps learners notice the gap between their current performance and the target form, a process identified by Shaddad and Jember (2024) as essential for language development. Therefore, peer interaction is not merely a practice ground but a dynamic learning ecosystem where knowledge is actively co-constructed and refined. This underscores the need for pedagogical designs that intentionally promote both knowledge sharing and constructive peer feedback to maximize linguistic development.

3.2.7. Theoretical and practical contributions

This study contributes to theory by extending the social constructivist perspective on second language learning through an integrated model of peer interaction grounded in its findings. This contribution highlights the dynamic nature of learning as a process shaped by continuous interaction rather than isolated individual effort. In line with Y. Wu et al., (2025), who emphasize that learning occurs through social interaction and the co-construction of knowledge, this study demonstrates that peer interaction not only facilitates cognitive development but also activates affective mechanisms, including motivation, emotional support, and confidence building. This dual impact underscores the importance of integrating cognitive and emotional dimensions in language learning, supporting the findings of Putri and Rengko (2025), who argue that affective factors such as motivation and anxiety significantly influence language acquisition. By providing qualitative evidence from the Indonesian EFL context, this study offers a more holistic understanding of how speaking skills develop through socially mediated processes, particularly by illustrating the interconnected nature of cognitive and affective dimensions during peer interaction. This perspective further aligns with sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is shaped through social interaction and mediated by collaborative activities (Ibrokhimovna, 2025).

In terms of practical contribution, this study provides pedagogical insights derived from observed classroom practices. These insights emphasize the need for intentional instructional design that prioritizes interaction and student engagement. The findings highlight the importance of structured peer interaction activities, such as collaborative tasks, peer feedback sessions, and interactive discussions, in enhancing speaking proficiency. Additionally, the study demonstrates that creating a supportive and psychologically safe classroom environment plays a critical role in fostering confidence and reducing anxiety during speaking activities, suggesting that emotional factors should be treated as central components of instructional planning. The findings also indicate that integrating elements of healthy competition and informal interaction can further strengthen student engagement and motivation. Therefore, this research offers a contextually grounded framework for improving speaking instruction, particularly in teacher-centered environments such as those commonly found in Indonesia, while providing practical guidance for balancing structure, interaction, and learner autonomy.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms that peer interaction functions as a sophisticated and multifaceted pedagogical strategy for enhancing English-speaking skills among senior high school students, demonstrating that its benefits transcend mere technical linguistic gains such as fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical accuracy to address crucial affective domains like motivation and confidence. The findings reveal that this success is driven by a triad of interconnected mechanisms: a non-judgmental environment that establishes the psychological safety necessary for linguistic risk-taking, a dual-engine of collaborative and competitive motivation, and a dynamic "marketplace" for knowledge exchange facilitated through peer feedback and meaning negotiation. Consequently, the research underscores that when students learn together, they do not merely share information but actively co-construct the confidence and procedural knowledge essential for mastering a new language in a foreign language context. Pedagogically, these results necessitate a fundamental shift in instructional design, suggesting that educators must move beyond viewing peer work as a supplementary activity and instead architect structured environments that balance collaborative task planning with "friendly rivalry" and social comparison. By integrating systematic peer feedback and informal group discussions as regular classroom features, teachers can leverage the innate social drivers of adolescents to mitigate linguistic anxiety and promote the habituation of the target language. This approach effectively bridges the gap between the formal acquisition of grammar and the real-world application of speech, transforming the classroom into a supportive ecosystem where social validation from peers acts as a primary catalyst for both intrinsic and extrinsic engagement. However, the study is subject to specific limitations, notably its small sample size of six purposively selected participants from a single class in Jakarta, which restricts the broader generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported qualitative data through semi-structured interviews reflects student perceptions rather than objective, longitudinal measurements of proficiency, and the study acknowledges a latent risk of error fossilization in unmonitored peer groups where mistakes might be left uncorrected. To address these constraints, future research should pursue longitudinal quantitative investigations to measure objective gains over time, examine the impact of technology-mediated peer

interaction, and explore targeted teacher intervention strategies that optimize the delicate balance between student autonomy and linguistic accuracy.

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