THE CORRELATION BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP ENVIRONMENT AND SPEAKING COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is a crucial skill in language learning, enabling students to communicate ideas effectively. However, many learners face challenges in developing strong speaking skills. Previous research has explored various factors influencing speaking ability, but limited studies have specifically examined the correlation between the friendship environment and speaking competence. To address this gap, this study investigates whether there is a significant correlation between the friendship environment and students' speaking competence. This research employs a quantitative method with a correlational design. A total of thirty-five students from class VII.6 during the 2024/2025 academic year were selected using cluster sampling. Two instruments were used: a questionnaire to measure the quality of the friendship environment and a speaking test to assess students' speaking ability. Validity and reliability tests were conducted, and since the data were not normally distributed, the Spearman correlation test was applied. The results revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.413$) with statistical significance ($p = 0.023$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that a supportive friendship environment contributes to the development of speaking ability. Future research should explore other influencing factors, such as self-confidence and frequency of social interactions, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' speaking competence.

Keywords: friendship environment, speaking competence, correlation research

Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental aspect of language learning, as it plays a key role in enabling learners to express ideas, build connections, and engage in meaningful communication. Of the four language skills, speaking is considered one of the most crucial to master in learning English, as it enables individuals to convey information more efficiently than through writing (Riau Kepulauan et al., 2024) In fact, speaking competence is regarded as one of the most important English language skills that students must acquire at all educational levels (roa parupalli, 2019). In the context of

Indonesia, English speaking competence is especially important as a foreign language, as it relates to various aspects of modern life. Recognizing its significance, the Indonesian government has included English as a key subject in the national curriculum, taught from junior high school to the college level (SUARNAJAYA, 2013). According to (Richards & Renandya, 2022), students need to struggle to speak in English in that effective oral communication needs the ability to use language appropriately in social interactions. However, based on real life, EFL students are anxious as they have to face challenges in speaking English such as lack of frequency of speaking practice and lack of vocabulary (Khan et al., 2018). In reality, students prefer to communicate with their friends using their native language. Therefore, they are afraid of making mistakes in speaking English (Riadil, 2020). As a result, this can decrease their interest in practicing spoken English (Aulia & Apoko, 2022).

Speaking Competence

Speaking is an important component of daily life as a way of communication. Being part of any aspect of life, whether social or personal, always needs effective communication. (Miftahul Jannah, Baso Jabu, 2024). In the context of education, students who are able to speak well can express their thoughts clearly and may be more so considered smart, depending on how correctly they use language. Walter (2004) highlights that because language primarily functions as a means of communication, it is crucial to help students apply all aspects of the language they have mastered, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Speaking plays a crucial role in human language, allowing individuals to interact and communicate through language learning and proficiency. But many second language and foreign language learners still find it difficult to use English in their daily lives. (Dewi & Wilany, 2022).

In fact, communication skills greatly affect the success of interpersonal interactions and are crucial in building strong relationships. These skills are also among the most important factors for achieving success at work and in everyday life. With the increasing importance of effective communication in today's society, the ability to speak clearly and confidently has become crucial. (Miftahul Jannah, Baso Jabu, 2024) To organize a better future, English language skills are crucial for students who are ready to complete their education. (Riau Kepulauan et al., 2024). This competence is highly needed when entering the workforce, where employees are expected to communicate effectively (Riau Kepulauan et al., 2024) However,

Indonesian students still face challenges in speaking English as a foreign language. Common problems include difficulty in listening and speaking, limited vocabulary, lack of focus, inhibition (such as fear of making mistakes or embarrassment), having nothing to say, and low participation (Pardede et al., 2022). As a result, students tend to speak less, struggle to think critically, and fail to express their thoughts or emotions (Sinaga, 2019)

Based on previous studies, it can be concluded that the challenges students face in speaking good English are not limited to junior high school, these challenges are often present at all levels of education and among EFL learners around the world. The researcher concludes that English teachers should apply proper teaching methods, especially to improve students' speaking ability. Teachers should also implement proper ways to actively involve students during speaking practice. In speaking, there are several aspects that must be considered, such as how the speaker pronounces a word, how the speaker chooses grammar, and how to convey ideas. Actually, speaking has several components that must be understood in speaking ability. According to Harris (1977), there are several components in speaking: Pronunciation, involving vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation, Grammar, the skill to use sentences in general and structurally, Vocabulary concerns the use of correct and appropriate words, Fluency is the ease and speed of speaking, Comprehension is the skill to respond to speech as well as to initiate speech. Thus, by applying some of the above components, the speaker can convey what he wants to convey. According to Heriansyah, some students have trouble in speaking, such as lack of vocabulary, not confident to speak, not familiar with speaking in class, and difficulty expressing words or sentences. Moreover, students are afraid to speak and stay silent more for afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of the class. Sometimes, when students make mistakes in speaking English, other friends in the class will laugh at them. Netty and Yuni stated that the problems that discourage students from speaking are inhibitions, nothing to say, low or inequal participation, and the use of mother tongue. Therefore, teachers should use learning strategies to help students be more active in teaching and learning activities.

Friendship Environment

A supportive friendship environment often brings motivation, which plays an important role in helping to shape students' speaking ability. Support and positive

constructive feedback from friends can improve students' confidence, minimize anxiety, and create a more comfortable situation for practicing their English speaking skills. Motivation is an important factor in language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). Learning a language outside the classroom from different sources such as family or friends has an impact that upgrades language skills (Palfreyman, 2011). peer pressure from friends can have a positive impact on language learning if friends support and motivate each other to improve their language skills. A study by Hu et al. (2017) found that peer support can result in significant progress. In English language skills, exposure to language from friends who are fluent in English is also very important for language learning outcomes. Ellis and Shintani (2013) state that exposure to authentic language use in social settings can create better language learning outcomes. In addition, friends can also impact social identity and language use. If one's friends identify deeply with the English language and culture, they may encourage and support the use of English in social situations, leading to improved motivation and engagement in language learning (Kim & Elder, 2020). However, social norms related to language use can also be influenced by friends. Trofimovich et al. (2018) found that social norms and expectations influence second language pronunciation, indicating that friends who use non-standard English can negatively impact on second language learning.

Previous research indicates that students can learn language better when they speak English with their friends. Related to improving students' language ability, the findings also indicate that friends can create a friendly environment for practicing language. In addition, this study indicates that students prefer to learn and practice English with the support of their friends rather than teachers. In another study by Yang and Guo (2018) (Al-dalawi et al., 2023) found that support, especially from friends, can significantly affect learners' motivation in language acquisition. Many students encounter problems in improving their language skills; motivation is considered to be one of the elements that impact the language learning process. As a result, students show up to ask questions or practice language skills with their friends, and when they see great results, they become more motivated. When they see great results, they become more motivated to improve their language skills. This shows a research gap to explore the relationship between friendship environment and sepaking competences. The research question of this research is "Is there a significant correlation between friendship environment and speaking competencies?"

Methods

This study uses a quantitative correlational approach to analyze the relationship between the independent variable which is friendship environment and the dependent variable which is English speaking ability. This design was chosen because the purpose of this study was to analyze the degree and direction of the relationship between two variables without manipulating them. Cluster sampling was used for practical reasons, as it allowed for organized data collection from representative groups within schools. This research was conducted on students of SMP 21 Batam, the research population is all students of SMP 21 Batam in the academic year 2024/2025, consisting of VII, VIII, and IX grade students with the sampling technique using cluster sampling. At this stage, the population was grouped by class, with each class becoming one cluster. Of the many VII classes available, namely VII-1 to VII-9, the cluster randomly selected was class VII-6 (class 76). All students in class VII-6 were sampled in the study.

The instruments used in this study were questionnaires and speaking tests. The instrument used to measure the friendship environment was a questionnaire adapted from (Cohen, 2003), and to measure students' speaking competence, researchers used five aspects of speaking assessment adapted from (Nurhjanah, 2011). The five aspects of the assessment are 1) Pronunciation, 2) Grammar, 3) Vocabularry, 4) Fluency, 5) Comprehension.

The research process began with selecting participants and designing the instruments, which included questionnaires and speaking tests. After developing these instruments, the researchers evaluated their validity and reliability. To ensure the speaking test accurately assessed the skill in question, construct and content validations were conducted. Once the instruments were deemed valid, they were administered to the students. After collecting the data, the researchers assessed the reliability of the speaking assessment system. Reliability was analyzed using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC). The results of the analysis showed that the speaking assessment system was highly consistent and reliable.

Non-parametric statistical methods were used to analyze the data and test the research hypothesis. This approach was chosen because the data consisted of ratio data that did not follow a normal distribution. To test the relationship between the two variables, Spearman correlation was used through SPSS Version 27. The results

of the study were determined based on the following hypotheses: 1) Ha is accepted if sig < α, which indicates a significant relationship between friendship environment and speaking ability; 2) Ho is accepted if sig > α, which indicates there is no significant relationship between friendship environment and speaking ability. In this data analysis, researchers conducted a normality test to determine whether the data was normally distributed or not, a normality test using Shapiro-Wilk was carried out. The results of the normality test are shown in the following table:

Table 1

Result of Shapiro Wilk Normality Test

Speaking test	.844	30	<,001
Friendship kuesioner	.963	30	.368

From the table above, it can be seen that the speaking ability variable has a significance value of <0.001 in the Shapiro-Wilk test. the value is smaller than 0.05, which indicates that the data is not normally distributed. Meanwhile, the friendship environment variable has a significance value of 0.368 in the Shapiro-Wilk test, which is greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the friendship environment data is normally distributed. Because one of the variables was not normally distributed, the correlation analysis was carried out using the Spearman test.

Findings and Discussion

This study collected data on friendship environment and speaking ability. To test the relationship between friendship environment and speaking ability, the Spearman correlation test was used. The results of the correlation test are shown in the following table:

Table 2

Spearman Correlation between Friendship Environment and speaking competence

	Speaking Test	Friendship Kuesioner

Speaking Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.445*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	30	30
Friendship Kuesioner	Correlation Coefficient	.445*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	30	30

The analysis shows a moderate but significant positive correlation between the friendship environment and speaking ability. This shows that students who are part of a communicative, supportive, and interactive peer group tend to demonstrate better speaking ability. Basically, a healthy friendship environment contributes significantly to students' ability to express themselves verbally.

Although the correlation is moderate (r = 0.445), it still has significant implications. This shows that although the friendship environment is not the only factor that influences speaking skills, it plays a significant role in shaping them. This is in line with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), which emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction in language and cognitive development.

Students who communicate frequently with their peers are more likely improve their speaking skills because they are part of meaningful exchanges that involve expressing ideas, providing feedback, and negotiating meaning. These interactions build confidence, vocabulary, fluency, and the ability to articulate thoughts clearly.

Previous studies also support this view, highlighting that group activities such as study groups or informal discussions among peers can improve students' confidence and fluency in speaking. In a supportive peer environment, learners receive both encouragement and corrective feedback, which gradually improves their communicative abilities.

From a practical perspective, a positive social environment supports the learning process by providing a safe space to practice language skills. This reduces anxiety associated with public speaking and creates conditions that support meaningful communication. Teachers and educators can take benefit of this by

promoting collaborative activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and debates that build social interaction and speaking skills.

In conclusion, this study shows that a supportive peer environment can improve students' speaking skills. These findings highlight the crucial role of peer interaction not only for social development but also for academic growth, especially in the context of language learning. Teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that build social bonds and a rich communication environment to support students' verbal development.

Conclusion

According to research conducted at SMPN 21 Batam, there is a strong positive correlation between friendship environment and students' speaking ability. Students' speaking quality, including fluency, vocabulary, and clarity in conveying ideas, improved significantly when they were in a supportive social environment. Factors such as active interaction, group discussions, and support and feedback from peers contribute to the development of their speaking skills. The main conclusion of this study is that a positive peer environment not only impacts social aspects, but also plays an important role in improving students' speaking skills by providing opportunities for them to be more confident in expressing their opinions and practicing speaking naturally.

The main contribution of this research to the field of education is the affirmation that a conducive social environment can help improve students' speaking skills, especially at the secondary school level. By encouraging meaningful interactions, providing opportunities to speak in various situations and building a supportive atmosphere, teachers can help students become more confident and effective communicators.

In addition, with advances in digital technology, future research may consider how online platforms such as video conferencing, discussion forums, and interactive applications can improve students' social environment and speaking skills. Integrating social interaction with digital tools can provide innovative strategies for communication-based learning outside the classroom.

However, this study has several limitations. It was conducted using a relatively small sample size, and its design was correlational, meaning that it cannot prove a

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causal relationship. These limitations suggest caution in generalizing the findings of this study to a wider population.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers be more active in creating an interactive and collaboration-based learning atmosphere. This can be done through methods such as group discussions, debates, role plays and other speaking activities that involve interaction between students. Further studies could examine the impact of the social environment on the long-term development of speaking skills, how factors such as personality and confidence levels affect the effectiveness of social interaction in improving speaking skills, and how digital technology can be used to support communication-based learning in the classroom.

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