

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In this age of globalization, what learners know about English-speaking is an essential factor, notably affecting their academic performance, career opportunities, and intercultural interaction (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Horwitz, 2021). Despite its significance, speaking is also the most difficult skill for English as a Foreign Language supporters to perform, especially at the junior secondary level, if oral competencies are formally developed for the first time. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, speaking anxiety, limited exposure to authentic and communicative speaking, and teacher-centred teaching practices that focus on grammar and accuracy rather than fluency inhibit meaningful learners' oral language development (Namaziandost et al., 2021; Widiati & Cahyono, 2021).

Therefore, peer collaboration is a theoretically informed and empirically validated pedagogical response to address these fundamental challenges. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of proximal development, this approach views social interaction as the primary engine for language acquisition and enables learners to co-construct knowledge with others, negotiate meaning, and provide/receive mutual corrective feedback while performing authentic oral tasks. Theoretical assumptions are supported by empirical studies: For instance, Zhang and Liu (2022) meta-analyzed 47 primary studies in which peer collaborative speaking was implemented across different EFL contexts and reported moderate-to-large effect sizes for these interventions. Similarly, Pham and Bui (2021) also demonstrated that involving secondary EFL students in organized peer collaboration significantly improved fluency besides accuracy. Table 5 depicts the coefficient/loading (e) and fit indices of both models. fear of speaking and enhanced learner motivation, peer collaboration, demonstrably reduce affective preconditions for oral development to continue (Tseng et al., 2022; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2020).

Yet there are important gaps in the current literature. The majority of studies have taken place in higher education or adult EFL educational contexts, and very little has yet been done with junior secondary learners for whom developmental

trajectories and institutional cultures differ markedly. Moreover, Hyland and Wong (2021) suggested that research findings from peer collaboration studies cannot necessarily be generalized across sociocultural contexts without context-specific empirical validation. No specific exploration of peer collaboration effects on speaking development has been conducted in the Indonesian junior secondary context, especially in linguistically diverse urban contexts such as Medan.

For that reason, this Study fill those voids by analyzing what peer collaboration does to create English speaking skills at eighth grade students on SMP N 18 Medan. The originality of this study stems from its simultaneous investigation of speaking proficiency outcomes, speaking anxiety, and learner perceptions of peer collaborative processes in a culturally specific Indonesian junior secondary EFL context: a rapprochement between variables that has received precious little empirical attention within the existing scholarship (see, for example, Harumi and Shimizu 2018; Huang & Van Naerssen 1987). It then aims to provide meaningful theoretical contributions and practical pedagogical recommendations for Indonesian junior secondary EFL practitioners.

1.2 Problems Identification

From the background of the study, based on accademic framework, some interdependent problems can be identified that become obstacles to develop speaking skills of English learning in eighth-class students at SMP N 18 Medan. First of all, it is pedagogically known that students demonstrate markedly high levels of foreign language speaking anxiety, deterring them from partaking in oral communicative tasks (Horwitz, 2021). Second, existing teacher-centered teaching styles offer students few opportunities for genuine peer interaction, which can result in inadequate access to authentic spoken English (Namaziandost et al., 2021). Third, the failure to structure peer collaborative activities in systematised ways within classroom practice limits learner potential for co-constructed linguistic development (Pham & Bui, 2021). Taken together, these conditions highlight an urgent need for a pedagogical intervention based on peer collaboration.

1.3 Research Problems

Based on the problem identification, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does peer collaboration influence the development of English-speaking skills among eighth-grade students at SMP N 18 Medan?
2. How do students perceive the implementation of peer collaborative activities in developing their English-speaking skills at SMP N 18 Medan?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

In accordance with the research problems stated above, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the extent to which peer collaboration influences the development of English-speaking skills among eighth-grade students at SMP N 18 Medan.
2. To explore students' perceptions of the implementation of peer collaborative activities in developing their English-speaking skills at SMP N 18 Medan.

1.5 Research Significance

On the theoretical level, this study contributes to the international literature on peer collaborative learning in Indonesian EFL junior secondary contexts and applies Vygotskian sociocultural perspectives to speaking skill development. This is all that the guidance researchers practically better equip EFL teachers at SMP N 18 Medan with strategies to overcome speaking anxiety in their classrooms and advance oral communicative competence through evidence-based peer collaboration. Implications: This study has implications for institutional stakeholders and curriculum developers who seek evidence-based recommendations to promote peer collaboration in junior secondary English pedagogical frameworks.

1.6 Literature Review

Based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, peer collaboration provides learning opportunities to develop English-speaking skills through purposeful social interaction and negotiated meaning-making. Recent empirical

studies endorse the effectiveness of oral collaborative tasks: Zhang and Liu (2022) found important learning gains in students' speaking proficiency as a result of performing collaborative oral tasks; similarly, Pham and Bui (2021) showed that collaborative task design facilitated fluency and accuracy improvements in secondary school EFL classrooms. Next, Tseng et al. (2022) consequently determined that working with peers significantly lowered speaking anxiety, resulting in more communicative confidence. These studies, when taken together, provide evidence for the use of peer collaboration to enhance EFL oral communicative competence among junior secondary learners.

1.7 Novelty of the Study

This study is novel in three unique aspects. It firstly explores peer collaboration in an Indonesian junior secondary EFL context, a field remains largely neglected in most peer interaction studies that mostly focus on tertiary or adult learners. Second, it simultaneously investigates linguistic outcomes (proficiency in speaking) and affective dimensions (anxiety when speaking), thus providing a more comprehensive analytical framework than previous studies that focused on one variable only. Third, it links quantitative measurement to qualitative exploration of the perceptions of learners, generating triangulated evidence that neither approach could produce alone. As a whole, these dimensions produce novel context-sensitive insights, thus contributing in significant ways to the understanding of peer collaborative pedagogy and EFL speaking learning.