

## ABSTRACT

This research discusses perceptions of eighth graders about peer collaboration in fostering their English-language skills at SMP Negeri 18 Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This study using a descriptive qualitative research design collected data from thirty-two students through the perception structured questionnaire, and eight purposively selected participants in the semi-structured interview. We conducted thematic analysis and identified four themes, reduced anxiety when speaking, communicative confidence is equally as important, usefulness of peer feedback and enhanced motivation to communicate. Text in bold The results show that students have a very positive positive view of peer collaborative speaking activities on all four dimensions, where usefulness of peer feedback gets the highest percentage for a positive macro (84.4%), communicative confidence (81.3% ), reduction of speaking anxiety (78.1%), and motivation to communicate (75.0%). Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development, the findings confirm that peer collaboration draws on a psychologically safe and communicatively enriching environment to address affective and linguistic impediments that EFL learners experience in developing their oral skills. The implications of this study for teaching junior-secondary EFL in Indonesia are substantial, that provide significant basis for integrating peer collaborative strategies into EFL speaking pedagogy systemically.

**Keywords:** *peer collaboration, English speaking skills, EFL learners, speaking anxiety, descriptive qualitative*