



Improving EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency through Peer Discussion Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of peer discussion activities in improving the speaking fluency of EFL learners, to explore learners' perceptions of peer-based speaking practice, and to identify the pedagogical factors that influence its successful implementation. Key concepts underlying this research include speaking fluency as a core component of communicative competence, Communicative Language Teaching, and socio-constructivist learning. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants were Grade VIII students in an Indonesian junior high school. Data were collected through speaking fluency tests administered before and after the intervention, learner perception questionnaires, and classroom observations during peer discussion activities. The findings indicate that structured peer discussion activities significantly improved learners' speaking fluency, as evidenced by increased speech rate, reduced hesitation, and smoother speech continuity. Learners also reported positive attitudes toward peer discussion, particularly in terms of reduced speaking anxiety, increased confidence, and greater classroom engagement. However, the study faced challenges related to limited intervention duration and a relatively small sample size. Based on these findings, the study recommends the systematic integration of peer discussion activities into EFL speaking instruction, with careful attention to task design and discussion format.

Contribution:

This study contributes to EFL pedagogy by providing empirical evidence on the role of peer discussion in developing speaking fluency and by reinforcing communicative and socio-constructivist frameworks within the context of junior high school EFL instruction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has firmly established itself as a global lingua franca, functioning as the primary medium of international communication in education, business, technology, and intercultural exchange. The ability to communicate orally in English is no longer considered an additional skill but a fundamental competence required for academic and professional participation in a globalized society

(Dauber & Spencer-Oatey, 2023). Consequently, English language education worldwide has increasingly emphasized speaking proficiency as a core learning outcome. Speaking proficiency, however, goes beyond grammatical accuracy; it involves fluency, spontaneity, confidence, and the ability to convey meaning effectively in real-time interaction (Hui & Yunus, 2023). Among these components, speaking fluency is widely regarded as a key indicator of communicative competence because it reflects learners' ability to produce continuous speech with minimal hesitation and appropriate pacing.

Despite its importance, speaking fluency remains one of the most challenging aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In many instructional contexts, learners demonstrate adequate receptive skills and grammatical knowledge but struggle to express ideas orally in a fluent and confident manner. This challenge is often attributed to the dominance of traditional, teacher-centered instructional practices that prioritize form-focused instruction, memorization, and written exercises over meaningful oral interaction (Mortini et al., 2025). Fauzi and Ridwan (2025) argue that such approaches limit students' opportunities to engage in authentic communication, thereby hindering the development of speaking fluency. When learners are rarely encouraged to speak freely and spontaneously, their oral production becomes slow, hesitant, and overly dependent on memorized structures (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).

In addition to pedagogical factors, affective variables play a crucial role in shaping learners' speaking performance. Research consistently shows that anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence significantly inhibit learners' willingness to speak in EFL classrooms (Lam, 2024). Many learners experience apprehension when required to speak in front of the whole class, particularly in contexts where accuracy is emphasized over meaning. This anxiety often results in avoidance behavior, minimal participation, and reduced speaking practice, which in turn negatively affects fluency development (Maher & King, 2022). As speaking fluency can only be improved through frequent and sustained oral practice, limited opportunities for interaction pose a serious challenge to EFL instruction.

These issues are particularly evident in the Indonesian EFL context. Although English has been taught as a compulsory subject for many years, Indonesian learners frequently report difficulties in speaking English fluently. Rahmawati, Herlina, and Lustyantje (2025) note that many students possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge but lack the confidence and communicative experience needed to articulate ideas orally (Rahmawati et al., 2025). Classroom observations in Indonesian schools often reveal passive learning environments, where teachers dominate classroom talk and students play a largely receptive role. As a result, learners have limited exposure to meaningful speaking practice, especially in junior high school settings where large class sizes and curriculum demands further constrain interaction.

In response to these challenges, contemporary language pedagogy has increasingly turned toward communicative and learner-centered approaches. One of the most influential frameworks in this regard is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction, authentic language use, and learner participation as central components of language learning. CLT views language not merely as a system of rules but as a tool for communication, thereby prioritizing fluency and functional language use alongside accuracy (Qasserras, 2023). Within this framework, classroom activities are designed to encourage learners to negotiate meaning, express personal opinions, and engage in real-life communication tasks.

Complementing CLT, socio-constructivist theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for the use of peer interaction in language learning. From a socio-constructivist perspective, learning is understood as a socially mediated process that occurs through interaction with others. Language development is facilitated when learners collaboratively construct meaning, share ideas, and receive feedback within a supportive social environment. Peer interaction, therefore, plays a crucial role in creating opportunities for learners to practice language in low-anxiety settings, enabling them to develop fluency through repeated and meaningful use of the target language (Tran et al., 2024).

One instructional strategy that aligns closely with both CLT and socio-constructivist principles is peer discussion. Peer discussion refers to structured or semi-structured speaking activities in which learners interact with classmates to exchange ideas, solve problems, or complete communicative tasks. These activities can take various forms, including pair work, small-group discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. Unlike teacher-fronted instruction, peer discussion shifts the focus of classroom interaction from the teacher to the learners, thereby increasing speaking opportunities and promoting active participation. Lam (2024) emphasizes that peer discussion creates a less threatening environment for

learners, as speaking with peers is often perceived as less intimidating than speaking in front of the entire class (Lam, 2024).

Empirical studies conducted in recent years provide substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of peer discussion activities in improving EFL learners' speaking skills. International research indicates that regular peer interaction enhances learners' fluency, confidence, and willingness to communicate. Ha (2024), for instance, found that Vietnamese EFL learners who engaged in daily peer conversations demonstrated significant improvement in speech continuity, vocabulary use, and confidence (Ha, 2024). Similarly, Tran, Hoang, and Phung (2024) reported that authentic conversational tasks conducted through peer interaction fostered greater learner engagement and fluency development (Tran et al., 2024).

Research conducted in Asian EFL contexts further highlights the role of peer discussion in reducing speaking anxiety and promoting spontaneous speech. Lam (2024) revealed that students participating in structured peer interaction activities reported lower levels of anxiety and greater confidence when expressing ideas in English (Lam, 2024). These findings suggest that peer discussion not only provides linguistic benefits but also addresses affective barriers that commonly impede speaking performance.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have explored the use of peer discussion and collaborative learning to enhance speaking skills. Sari (2021) found that small-group discussions improved pronunciation and sentence organization among junior high school students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels (Sari, 2021). Although these findings demonstrate the potential of peer discussion, existing research in Indonesia has largely focused on general speaking performance rather than specifically examining speaking fluency as a measurable construct.

Despite growing interest in peer discussion activities, several critical research gaps remain. *First*, many previous studies assess speaking improvement holistically, without systematically measuring speaking fluency indicators such as speech rate, pauses, and hesitation. As fluency is a defining feature of communicative competence, the lack of focused investigation limits our understanding of how peer discussion specifically contributes to fluency development. *Second*, much of the existing research has been conducted at the senior high school or university level, leaving junior high school EFL learners underrepresented in the literature. This gap is significant, as early adolescence is a critical period for developing communicative confidence and oral proficiency.

Third, most peer discussion interventions reported in the literature are short-term, often lasting only a few weeks. Such limited duration makes it difficult to determine whether observed improvements in speaking fluency are sustainable over time. Long-term investigations are needed to assess the lasting impact of peer discussion activities on learners' oral performance. Finally, few studies compare different peer discussion formats, such as pair work versus small-group discussion, to identify which interaction patterns are most effective in fostering speaking fluency.

Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of structured peer discussion activities in improving speaking fluency among Indonesian EFL learners at the junior high school level. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the effect of peer discussion on measurable aspects of speaking fluency, explore learners' attitudes and perceptions toward peer-based speaking practice, and identify pedagogical and contextual factors that influence the success of peer discussion activities in the classroom. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions: (1) What effect do structure peer discussion activities have on EFL learners' speaking fluency? (2) How do learners perceive the use of peer discussion as a tool for practicing English speaking? and (3) What factors facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of peer discussion activities in improving speaking fluency?

The significance of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to communicative and socio-constructivist theories of language learning by providing empirical evidence on how peer interaction supports the development of speaking fluency. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for EFL teachers seeking effective strategies to create interactive and learner-centered speaking classrooms. By identifying effective peer discussion formats and task designs, this study provides concrete pedagogical guidance for improving oral fluency instruction. From a policy perspective, the results support curriculum initiatives that emphasize communicative competence and student-centered learning. In the Indonesian EFL context, where speaking proficiency remains a persistent challenge, this research offers evidence-based recommendations for integrating peer discussion activities into classroom practice and teacher training programs.

2. METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of peer discussion activities on EFL learners' speaking fluency. The mixed-methods design was selected to allow for the measurement of observable changes in learners' speaking fluency while simultaneously capturing learners' perceptions and classroom interaction dynamics. Quantitative data provided empirical evidence of fluency development, whereas qualitative data offered deeper insights into learners' attitudes, experiences, and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of peer discussion activities. This combination is considered appropriate for EFL classroom research, as speaking proficiency is both a measurable linguistic outcome and a socially constructed practice shaped by interaction and affective variables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021).

The research was conducted in a junior high school EFL context in Indonesia, where English is taught as a compulsory subject. The participants consisted of Grade VIII students enrolled in one intact English class. The class comprised approximately 30 students, reflecting a typical classroom size in Indonesian public schools. The participants had relatively similar English proficiency levels based on school placement and prior instructional experience. This setting was selected because junior high school represents a critical stage in learners' oral language development, yet it remains underrepresented in empirical studies on speaking fluency and peer interaction.

To collect the research data, three primary instruments were employed: a speaking fluency test, a questionnaire, and an observation checklist. The speaking fluency test was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to measure changes in learners' oral fluency following the peer discussion intervention. The test required students to perform short monologic or dialogic speaking tasks based on familiar topics. Learners' performances were assessed using fluency indicators such as speech rate, length of pauses, frequency of hesitation, and overall speech continuity. These indicators were selected because they are widely recognized as core components of speaking fluency in EFL research (Skehan, 2020).

The questionnaire was designed to explore learners' attitudes and perceptions toward peer discussion activities as a tool for practicing speaking. It consisted of Likert-scale items addressing learners' confidence, anxiety, engagement, and perceived usefulness of peer discussion, as well as several open-ended questions to allow students to express their views more freely. The questionnaire data were intended to complement the quantitative fluency results by capturing learners' subjective experiences during the intervention.

In addition, a classroom observation checklist was used to document interaction patterns and student participation during peer discussion sessions. The observation focused on indicators such as the frequency of student talk, peer collaboration, willingness to initiate conversation, and responsiveness during discussion tasks. Observations were conducted throughout the intervention to ensure that the implementation of peer discussion activities aligned with communicative and learner-centered principles.

The data collection procedure was conducted in several stages. First, a speaking pre-test was administered to establish learners' baseline speaking fluency prior to the intervention. Following the pre-test, students participated in a peer discussion intervention conducted over several instructional sessions. During this phase, learners engaged in structured peer discussion activities, including pair work, small-group discussions, and role-play tasks. The activities were designed to encourage equal participation, promote spontaneous speech, and reduce speaking anxiety by shifting the focus from teacher-fronted interaction to peer-to-peer communication.

After the completion of the intervention, a speaking post-test was administered using tasks comparable to those in the pre-test. This procedure aimed to identify changes in learners' speaking fluency attributable to the peer discussion activities. Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed to gather learners' perceptions of the peer discussion experience. Classroom observations conducted during the intervention further supported the interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative findings.

The data analysis was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the speaking pre-test and post-test were analyzed descriptively to identify changes in fluency indicators such as speech rate and hesitation patterns. Comparisons between pre-test and post-test results were used to determine the extent of improvement in learners' speaking fluency following the intervention. Qualitative data obtained from questionnaire responses and classroom observations were analyzed thematically. This process involved coding recurring patterns related to learners' attitudes, confidence, anxiety, and classroom interaction,

allowing for a nuanced interpretation of how peer discussion activities influenced learners’ speaking development.

To provide a clear overview of the methodological framework employed in this study, the following figure illustrates the data analysis process. It outlines the sequential stages through which the collected data were systematically examined, from initial data collection and organization to coding, analysis, and interpretation. This visual representation is intended to clarify how quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to ensure analytical rigor and coherence.

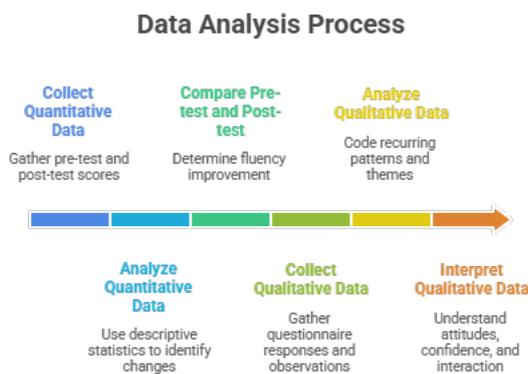


Figure 4 Data Analysis Process

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that structured peer discussion activities produced a noticeable improvement in learners’ speaking fluency, learners’ affective responses toward speaking practice, and overall classroom interaction patterns. Data obtained from speaking fluency tests, questionnaires, and classroom observations consistently demonstrate that peer discussion created a more interactive learning environment and facilitated more fluent oral production among EFL learners.

Speaking Fluency Improvement

Quantitative analysis of the speaking pre-test and post-test results reveals a clear improvement in learners’ speaking fluency after the implementation of peer discussion activities. Prior to the intervention, many learners exhibited slow speech delivery, frequent pauses, and prolonged hesitation when attempting to express ideas orally. Their speech was often fragmented, indicating difficulty in maintaining continuous verbal output. Following the peer discussion intervention, learners demonstrated a more sustained flow of speech, with reduced interruptions and improved continuity.

One of the most prominent changes was observed in learners’ speech rate. Post-test performances showed that learners were able to produce a greater number of words per minute compared to the pre-test. This increase in speech rate suggests that learners became more comfortable retrieving lexical items and organizing ideas in real time (Liu, 2023). Such findings are consistent with recent studies emphasizing that frequent peer interaction allows learners to automatize language production processes, leading to more fluent speech delivery (Washington-Nortey et al., 2022).

In addition to speech rate, a significant reduction in hesitation phenomena was observed. During the pre-test, learners frequently relied on fillers, long pauses, and repeated self-corrections, reflecting uncertainty and lack of confidence. In contrast, post-test recordings revealed fewer silent pauses and a decrease in hesitation markers. Learners appeared more willing to continue speaking even when unsure about grammatical accuracy, prioritizing meaning over form. This shift aligns with communicative-oriented pedagogy, which encourages fluency development through risk-taking and message-focused communication (Hui & Yunus, 2023).

Furthermore, the length and frequency of pauses between utterances decreased noticeably. Learners were better able to link ideas across sentences, resulting in more coherent and continuous speech. This improvement suggests that peer discussion activities provided learners with repeated exposure to spontaneous speaking situations, enabling them to develop greater control over speech planning and execution. Similar

findings have been reported in recent EFL studies indicating that interaction-rich environments support the gradual reduction of cognitive load during speaking tasks, thereby enhancing fluency (Yuan, 2025).

Overall, the improvement in speaking fluency indicators demonstrates that peer discussion activities had a positive impact on learners' oral performance. The results indicate that learners not only spoke faster but also spoke more smoothly and confidently, reflecting genuine progress in communicative competence rather than mere memorization of language forms.

Learners' Perceptions of Peer Discussion Activities

Qualitative data from the questionnaire reveal generally positive learner perceptions toward peer discussion activities as a tool for practicing English speaking. Most learners reported that speaking with peers felt more comfortable and less intimidating than speaking in front of the whole class. This perception is particularly important in EFL contexts where fear of making mistakes often discourages learners from participating actively in oral tasks.

Learners expressed favorable attitudes toward peer discussion, emphasizing that it provided more opportunities to speak and share ideas. Many respondents indicated that they felt encouraged to speak because their peers were facing similar challenges. This sense of shared struggle appeared to reduce the perceived pressure associated with speaking English. Recent research supports this finding, suggesting that peer interaction fosters a supportive learning atmosphere that normalizes errors as part of the learning process (R. Li & Lin, 2025).

Another prominent theme emerging from the questionnaire data was the reduction of speaking anxiety. Learners reported feeling less nervous during peer discussions compared to teacher-led speaking activities. Several students noted that they were less afraid of being judged or corrected when speaking with peers. This reduction in anxiety is significant, as affective barriers have been identified as major obstacles to speaking fluency development in EFL classrooms (Hijra et al., 2024). When anxiety decreases, learners are more likely to take risks, speak more frequently, and sustain longer turns in conversation.

In addition to anxiety reduction, learners reported increased confidence in their speaking ability. Many students indicated that repeated engagement in peer discussion helped them become more accustomed to expressing ideas in English. This growing familiarity appeared to enhance learners' self-efficacy, as they gradually perceived speaking English as a manageable and achievable task. Such findings align with recent studies demonstrating that peer-based speaking activities contribute to positive changes in learners' self-perception and willingness to communicate (L. Li et al., 2025).

Learners also highlighted the engaging nature of peer discussion activities. Tasks such as role-plays and small-group discussions were frequently mentioned as enjoyable and motivating. Learners appreciated the opportunity to discuss familiar topics and solve problems collaboratively. This increased engagement likely contributed to higher levels of participation and sustained speaking practice, which are essential conditions for fluency development (Z. Li & Li, 2022).

Classroom Interaction Patterns

Classroom observation data provide further evidence of the impact of peer discussion activities on interaction patterns. During traditional teacher-centered lessons observed prior to the intervention, classroom interaction was largely dominated by the teacher, with limited student talk. Only a small number of students actively participated in speaking activities, while the majority remained passive listeners. This pattern is consistent with previous findings on EFL classrooms where teacher talk occupies a substantial portion of instructional time (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).

Following the implementation of peer discussion activities, a noticeable shift in classroom interaction dynamics was observed. Participation levels increased significantly, with a larger proportion of students actively engaged in speaking tasks. During pair and small-group discussions, most learners were involved in exchanging ideas, asking questions, and responding to peers. This increase in participation suggests that peer discussion effectively redistributed speaking opportunities among learners, reducing reliance on teacher-led interaction.

Peer collaboration emerged as a key feature of classroom interaction during the intervention. Learners were observed assisting one another by providing vocabulary suggestions, clarifying meanings, and encouraging peers to continue speaking. Such collaborative behaviors reflect the socio-constructivist view of

learning as a shared process, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction (Chang-Tik, 2022). The presence of peer support appeared to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, enabling learners to engage more confidently in speaking tasks.

Moreover, learners demonstrated greater initiative in initiating conversations during peer discussions. Unlike teacher-led sessions, where students often waited to be called upon, peer discussion activities encouraged learners to take turns naturally and respond spontaneously. This shift toward learner-initiated interaction is particularly important for fluency development, as it mirrors real-life communication more closely than controlled classroom exchanges (Hui & Yunus, 2023).

Observations also indicated that the quality of interaction improved over time. As learners became more familiar with peer discussion routines, they engaged in longer exchanges and displayed greater responsiveness to peers' contributions. This development suggests that repeated exposure to interactive speaking tasks helped learners internalize communicative norms and build conversational competence. Similar patterns have been reported in recent studies highlighting the cumulative benefits of sustained peer interaction on oral proficiency (Akhter, 2025).

Taken together, the classroom observation findings reinforce the quantitative and questionnaire data, demonstrating that peer discussion activities positively influenced both the quantity and quality of classroom interaction. Increased participation, enhanced collaboration, and greater learner autonomy collectively contributed to a more communicative learning environment conducive to speaking fluency development.

The results of this study indicate that structured peer discussion activities had a positive impact on EFL learners' speaking fluency, affective responses, and classroom interaction patterns. Learners demonstrated measurable improvements in speech rate, reduced hesitation, and smoother speech delivery. They also reported positive attitudes toward peer discussion, characterized by reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and heightened engagement. Classroom observations further revealed increased participation and collaborative interaction among learners. These findings provide strong empirical support for the use of peer discussion as an effective instructional strategy for enhancing speaking fluency in EFL classrooms (Namaziandost et al., 2020).

Analytical Discussion: Peer Discussion as a Catalyst for Speaking Fluency Development in EFL Contexts

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence that structured peer discussion functions as a powerful pedagogical mechanism for enhancing speaking fluency among EFL learners. From a theoretical standpoint, the observed improvement in learners' speech rate, reduction of hesitation phenomena, and increased continuity of oral production can be meaningfully interpreted through contemporary perspectives on second language acquisition (SLA), particularly those grounded in interactionist, socio-cognitive, and affective-filter frameworks. Rather than merely serving as a supplementary classroom activity, peer discussion emerges in this study as a central mediating process through which learners gradually internalize linguistic knowledge and transform it into fluent, spontaneous speech.

From the perspective of the Interaction Hypothesis, frequent peer discussion provides learners with sustained opportunities for negotiation of meaning, clarification requests, and confirmation checks, all of which are essential for language development (Ramadan Elbaoui Shaddad & Jember, 2024). The noticeable increase in learners' speech rate after the intervention suggests that repeated engagement in interactive speaking tasks allowed learners to automatize lexical retrieval and syntactic encoding processes. According to recent SLA research, fluency development is closely linked to the proceduralization of declarative knowledge, a process that is accelerated when learners are placed in communicatively demanding yet low-stakes environments such as peer discussions (Lăpădat et al., 2024). In this sense, peer discussion operates as a rehearsal space where learners can repeatedly access linguistic resources without the intense cognitive pressure often associated with teacher-fronted performance.

The reduction in hesitation markers and silent pauses observed in post-test performances further supports a cognitive fluency interpretation. Contemporary fluency theory distinguishes between cognitive fluency (mental processing speed), utterance fluency (observable speech features), and perceived fluency (listener judgments) (Suzuki & Kormos, 2023). The present findings indicate that peer discussion positively influenced all three dimensions. As learners engaged in spontaneous exchanges with peers, they gradually reduced the cognitive load associated with speech planning. This aligns with recent evidence suggesting that interaction-rich

environments facilitate the chunking of language and the development of formulaic sequences, which in turn reduce planning time and enhance speech continuity (Astika, 2025).

Equally important is the affective dimension revealed by learners' perceptions of peer discussion activities. Drawing on Affective Filter Theory, the reported reduction in anxiety and increased comfort during peer interaction suggest that peer discussion effectively lowers learners' affective filters, thereby allowing greater intake of linguistic input and more fluent output (Arenillas Montoya & Quezada Vivanco, 2025). Unlike teacher-led speaking activities, which often position learners as evaluative subjects, peer discussion creates a psychologically safer space in which errors are perceived as part of a shared learning process. This collective normalization of error-making is particularly crucial in EFL contexts, where fear of negative evaluation has been consistently identified as a major barrier to oral participation (Troussas & Virvou, 2020).

The learners' increased confidence and self-efficacy reported in the questionnaire data can also be interpreted through Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the role of mastery experiences and social modeling in shaping self-beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Through repeated peer discussions, learners experienced incremental success in expressing ideas, sustaining turns, and being understood by others. Observing peers with similar proficiency levels successfully manage speaking tasks further reinforced learners' beliefs that fluent speaking was attainable. This enhanced self-efficacy likely contributed to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), a construct increasingly recognized as a key predictor of speaking development in EFL settings (T. Zhang, 2024).

From a socio-constructivist perspective, the classroom interaction patterns observed during the intervention underscore the role of peer discussion in transforming the classroom into a collaborative learning community. Vygotskian theory posits that learning occurs first at the social level before being internalized at the individual level (Taber, 2025). The frequent instances of peer scaffolding observed—such as vocabulary support, meaning clarification, and encouragement—illustrate how learners collectively constructed linguistic knowledge within their zones of proximal development (ZPD). This collaborative scaffolding not only facilitated immediate task completion but also contributed to long-term fluency development by gradually shifting responsibility for speech production from external support to internal control.

The shift from teacher-dominated interaction to learner-initiated communication represents a critical pedagogical transformation. Traditional EFL classrooms often limit speaking opportunities to controlled question-answer sequences, resulting in minimal output from most learners (Chen et al., 2023). In contrast, peer discussion redistributed speaking turns more equitably, allowing a wider range of learners to actively participate. This increased quantity of learner talk is significant, as recent SLA research emphasizes that fluency development is strongly associated with the amount of meaningful oral production rather than mere exposure to input (Mayo, 2025).

Moreover, the observed improvement in the quality of interaction over time suggests that peer discussion has cumulative effects. As learners became more familiar with discussion routines, they engaged in longer exchanges and demonstrated greater responsiveness to peers' contributions. This gradual sophistication of interaction reflects the development of interactional competence, which encompasses turn-taking, topic management, and responsiveness—skills that are central to real-world communication but often underemphasized in form-focused instruction (Y. Zhang et al., 2025). Peer discussion, by simulating authentic conversational dynamics, enables learners to practice these skills in a context that closely resembles natural language use.

Importantly, the findings of this study resonate with recent pedagogical arguments advocating for a shift from accuracy-dominated instruction toward fluency-oriented pedagogy. While grammatical accuracy remains an important component of communicative competence, excessive emphasis on correctness can inhibit spontaneous speech and increase learner anxiety (Sosa López, 2025). The present study demonstrates that peer discussion encourages learners to prioritize meaning over form, a shift that is essential for fluency development. Over time, as fluency increases, learners are better positioned to refine accuracy through feedback and reflection, suggesting that fluency and accuracy are not opposing goals but sequentially complementary processes (J. Zhang et al., 2026).

In synthesis, the analytical integration of quantitative results, learner perceptions, and classroom observations reveals that peer discussion operates at multiple levels of the language learning process—cognitive, affective, and social. It accelerates the automatization of speech production, lowers affective barriers, enhances learner confidence, and restructures classroom interaction in ways that promote

sustained oral engagement. These multidimensional benefits position peer discussion not merely as an instructional technique but as a theoretically grounded strategy for fostering speaking fluency in EFL classrooms (Al-khresheh, 2024).

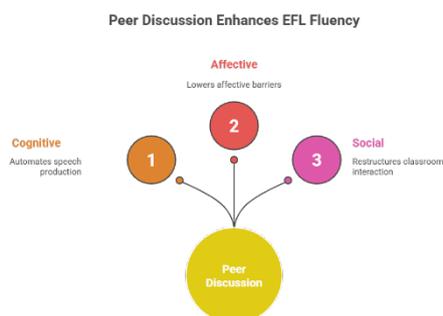


Figure 5 Peer Discussion Enhances EFL Fluency

Ultimately, the findings support the growing body of contemporary SLA research that views language learning as an emergent phenomenon arising from meaningful interaction rather than isolated practice of linguistic forms. By embedding speaking practice within structured peer discussion, teachers can create learning environments that are not only more interactive but also more humane, empowering learners to develop fluency through collaboration, risk-taking, and shared meaning-making. This study therefore reinforces the pedagogical imperative to integrate peer discussion systematically into EFL speaking instruction, particularly in contexts where opportunities for authentic language use are limited.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of structured peer discussion activities in improving EFL learners' speaking fluency, to explore learners' perceptions of peer-based speaking practice, and to identify pedagogical factors influencing its successful implementation. The findings provide a clear and affirmative answer to the research questions. *First*, structured peer discussion activities were found to have a positive and measurable effect on learners' speaking fluency, as reflected in increased speech rate, reduced hesitation, and improved continuity of oral production. These improvements indicate that learners developed greater automaticity in spoken language use, moving beyond fragmented and hesitant speech toward more fluid and communicative performance.

Second, the study reveals that learners generally perceived peer discussion as a supportive and effective medium for practicing English speaking. Learners reported reduced speaking anxiety, increased confidence, and higher engagement during peer discussion sessions compared to teacher-centered speaking activities. These affective gains are not peripheral outcomes; rather, they constitute essential conditions that enable sustained speaking practice and fluency development. The findings thus reinforce the view that speaking fluency is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' emotional readiness and willingness to communicate.

Third, the study identifies task design and discussion format as critical factors influencing the effectiveness of peer discussion activities. Pair discussions were particularly effective in encouraging participation among quieter learners, while small-group discussions facilitated richer interaction and negotiation of meaning. Similarly, structured tasks supported lower-proficiency learners by providing linguistic scaffolding, whereas semi-structured tasks promoted greater spontaneity among more proficient learners. These findings suggest that pedagogical flexibility and contextual sensitivity are essential for maximizing the benefits of peer discussion.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to Communicative Language Teaching by providing empirical support for its core assumption that fluency develops through meaningful interaction rather than form-focused drills alone. The findings also strengthen socio-constructivist accounts of language learning by demonstrating how peer interaction enables learners to co-construct meaning, scaffold each other's performance, and gradually internalize communicative competence. By foregrounding speaking fluency as a

distinct and measurable outcome, this research extends existing CLT-based studies that have often focused on general speaking ability.

Practically, the findings offer important implications for EFL teachers and curriculum designers. Peer discussion activities can be systematically integrated into speaking instruction to create low-anxiety, learner-centered classrooms that promote active participation and sustained oral practice. Teachers are encouraged to vary discussion formats and task structures in response to learners' proficiency levels and classroom dynamics. In contexts such as Indonesian junior high schools, where speaking opportunities are often limited, peer discussion provides a feasible and pedagogically sound strategy for enhancing oral fluency.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single classroom with a relatively small number of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the intervention was implemented over a limited period, making it difficult to assess the long-term sustainability of fluency gains. The analysis of speaking fluency also relied primarily on descriptive indicators, without incorporating more fine-grained acoustic or longitudinal measures.

Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, extend the duration of peer discussion interventions, and employ more sophisticated fluency measurement tools. Comparative studies examining different instructional contexts, proficiency levels, and cultural settings would further enrich understanding of how peer discussion contributes to speaking fluency development. Longitudinal research is particularly needed to determine whether fluency gains achieved through peer discussion are maintained over time.

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