

# The Impact of Social Interaction Problems on Students' participation In English Class

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This study aims to determine the impact of social interaction problems on students' participation in English class. In this study, there are two main focuses, namely social interaction problems as the influencing factor and students' classroom participation as the affected variable. This study was conducted at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan on seventh-grade students in the 2025/2026 Academic Year. The primary subjects of this study were seventh-grade students, and the data were collected through a triangulation of four instruments: student interviews, student questionnaires, classroom observation checklists, and a teacher questionnaire. This study used a qualitative method to capture students' personal experiences, classroom behaviors, and teacher perceptions. The results of the study showed that students' participation was heavily shaped by four layered barriers: affective-psychological (fear of making mistakes and low confidence), linguistic-communicative (limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties), cognitive-comprehension (difficulty understanding lessons), and socio-environmental barriers (fear of being laughed at by peers and direct questioning pressure). However, the findings also revealed that supportive interaction from the teacher such as giving encouragement, feedback, and utilizing small-group discussions successfully functioned as a reducing factor for these barriers. The implementation of supportive, linguistically scaffolded, and non-threatening interaction patterns is one of the solutions to improve students' verbal engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that social interaction problems significantly influence students' participation, and creating psychological safety alongside collaborative peer dynamics is essential to move students from passive presence to active participation in English learning.

**Keywords:** Social Interaction Problems, Student Participation, English Class, Qualitative Method.

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## 1. Introduction

Recent studies indicate that student participation in English language learning remains a challenge in many EFL contexts. Research has shown that language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for interaction frequently hinder students' classroom engagement. In Indonesia, similar challenges have been reported, where students often hesitate to communicate in English due to low self-confidence and concerns about negative peer evaluation. Although numerous studies have examined classroom interaction and student participation, limited research has specifically explored how social interaction problems influence students' participation at the junior high school level. Therefore, investigating this issue is important to provide a deeper understanding of the barriers affecting student participation and to identify strategies that promote more interactive English learning environments.

Social interaction plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process, particularly in English language classrooms where communication serves as the primary medium of instruction. Through social interaction, students are able to exchange ideas, collaborate with peers, and develop their language skills in meaningful learning contexts. Effective classroom interaction encourages students to become actively engaged in learning activities and contributes to the development of their communicative competence. Previous studies

have emphasized that classroom interaction positively influences students' participation and supports successful learning outcomes in English language learning [1]. Therefore, social interaction is considered an essential component in fostering active and meaningful learning experiences.

Student participation is another important factor that contributes to effective learning. Participation refers to students' involvement in classroom activities such as answering questions, expressing opinions, engaging in discussions, and collaborating with classmates. Active participation provides students with opportunities to construct knowledge, improve communication skills, and enhance academic achievement. Research has shown that students' participation in classroom discourse is closely associated with learning outcomes and engagement, indicating that students who participate actively tend to achieve better academic performance (Johannesson, 2024). Consequently, encouraging student participation remains one of the primary goals of classroom instruction.

Despite the importance of social interaction and participation, many students encounter difficulties when interacting with teachers and peers in English classrooms. These difficulties may include lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, communication anxiety, and limited opportunities to express ideas. Such problems often reduce students' willingness to participate in classroom activities and may lead to passive learning behaviors. Studies have revealed that factors such as fear of speaking, low confidence, and communication barriers can negatively affect students' participation in English learning (Benyo & Kumar, 2023). As a result, students may miss valuable opportunities to practice English and develop their language proficiency.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan, several seventh grade students appeared hesitant to participate actively during English lessons. Some students tended to remain silent during discussions, were reluctant to answer questions, and demonstrated limited interaction with their peers. These conditions suggest that social interaction problems may influence students' participation in classroom learning activities. Although previous studies have investigated classroom interaction and student participation, limited research has specifically explored social interaction problems and their impact on students' participation in English classes at the junior high school level. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the social interaction problems experienced by seventh-grade students and examine how these problems affect their participation in English classes at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan.

## 2. Literature Review And Problem Statement

Social interaction is widely recognized as a fundamental component of the learning process, particularly in English language classrooms where communication serves as both a means and an objective of learning. Through interaction with teachers and peers, students are provided with opportunities to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop language competence in authentic contexts. Classroom interaction contributes not only to language acquisition but also to the development of students' confidence, motivation, and engagement in learning activities. Research has consistently demonstrated that meaningful interaction fosters a supportive learning environment and enhances students' participation in educational settings (Dayanan et al., 2025). Therefore, social interaction is considered a crucial element in promoting effective English language learning.

Student participation refers to students' active involvement in classroom activities, including asking and answering questions, expressing opinions, engaging in discussions, and collaborating with peers. Active participation enables students to construct knowledge, strengthen communication skills, and achieve better learning outcomes. Previous studies have indicated that student participation is closely associated with engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. Students who actively participate in classroom

interactions tend to demonstrate higher levels of learning engagement and better academic performance than those who remain passive during instructional activities (Reeve et al., 2025). Consequently, fostering participation has become one of the primary goals of contemporary educational practices.

Despite its importance, effective participation is often hindered by various social interaction problems experienced by students. These problems may include lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, communication anxiety, difficulties in building relationships with peers, and limited opportunities to interact during classroom activities. Such barriers can reduce students' willingness to communicate and contribute to passive classroom behavior. In English language learning contexts, these challenges may become more pronounced because students are required to use a foreign language while simultaneously managing social and psychological pressures. As a result, students may avoid participating in discussions, hesitate to express ideas, and demonstrate low levels of classroom engagement.

Although previous research has extensively examined classroom interaction, student engagement, and participation, limited attention has been given to investigating the specific social interaction problems experienced by junior high school students and their influence on participation in English classes. Most studies focus on the benefits of interaction and participation without thoroughly exploring the barriers that prevent students from becoming actively involved in learning activities. Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan, several seventh-grade students appeared reluctant to communicate, participate in discussions, and interact with their classmates during English lessons. This situation indicates the presence of social interaction problems that may affect students' classroom participation. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the social interaction problems experienced by seventh-grade students and examine how these problems influence their participation in English classes. The findings are expected to provide insights for teachers in developing strategies that encourage a more interactive, inclusive, and participatory learning environment.

### 3. Method

The study involved 28 seventh grade students and one English teacher from SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in English learning activities and their ability to provide information related to classroom interaction and participation.

Data were collected using four research instruments: classroom observation checklists, student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a teacher questionnaire. Classroom observations were conducted during English lessons to examine students' interaction patterns and participation behaviors. The student questionnaire was distributed to all 28 students to identify their perceptions and experiences regarding social interaction problems. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students representing different levels of participation (high, moderate, and low) to obtain more detailed information. In addition, the English teacher completed a questionnaire to provide complementary perspectives regarding students' classroom participation and interaction patterns.

The data collection process was carried out in four stages. First, classroom observations were conducted to identify students' participation behaviors. Second, questionnaires were distributed to students and the teacher. Third, follow-up interviews were conducted with selected participants. Finally, all data were triangulated and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore social interaction problems and their influence on students' participation in English classes. Qualitative research was considered appropriate

because it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, behaviors, and perspectives within their natural learning environment. The study was conducted at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan during the 2025/2026 academic year.

The participants of this study were seventh grade students of SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were considered capable of providing relevant information regarding social interaction and classroom participation during English learning activities. In addition, the English teacher was involved as a supporting participant to provide complementary information related to students' classroom behavior and participation.

Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted to examine students' interactions and participation during English lessons. Questionnaires were administered to identify students' perceptions and experiences related to social interaction problems. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and the English teacher to obtain more comprehensive information regarding the factors influencing students' participation. Furthermore, documentation, including field notes and photographs, was collected to support and strengthen the research findings.

Data collection was conducted through a test method. The research instrument used was a narrative text writing test administered in the form of a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test was administered before the treatment to determine students' initial abilities, while the post-test was administered after the treatment to determine students' writing skills improvement. Students' writing results were assessed based on five aspects of writing adapted from Brown: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Brown 2001).

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing the data relevant to the research objectives. Data display was conducted by presenting the data in the form of descriptions, tables, and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified continuously throughout the analysis process to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. To enhance the validity of the study, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Results

The questionnaire results revealed that 67.9% of students agreed that they were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, while 71.4% reported feeling nervous when answering questions in front of the class. One student stated, "I know the answer, but I am afraid my friends will laugh if my English is wrong." This finding confirms the role of language anxiety in reducing classroom participation. Similar findings were reported by Riyadi et al. (2025), who found that fear of negative evaluation significantly affects students' willingness to communicate. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focused on psychological factors, the present study found that linguistic and socio-environmental barriers also played equally important roles in shaping students' participation.

This study investigated social interaction problems and their influence on students' participation in English classes. The findings were obtained from interviews, student questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher questionnaires. After the data were reduced and coded, four major categories of social interaction

problems were identified. In addition, several supportive factors were found to encourage students' participation during English learning activities

**Table Data Reduction and Coding Result**

Main Cluster	Codes	Evidence from Data Sources	General Finding
Affective-Psychological Barriers	Fear of making mistakes, shyness, nervousness, low confidence, hesitation	Interview responses, student questionnaire items on confidence, teacher questionnaire items on hesitation and confidence	Some students hesitated to speak because they were afraid of being wrong, shy, nervous, or not confident.
Linguistic-Communicative Barriers	Limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulty, difficulty arranging English sentences, difficulty speaking fully in English	Interview responses, student questionnaire items on pronunciation and English fluency	Students' participation decreased when they had to answer, discuss, or present using English.
Cognitive-Comprehension Barriers	Difficulty understanding material, difficult questions, unclear topic, lack of readiness to express opinion	Interview responses, student questionnaire item on asking questions, observation of student attention and participation	Some students became passive when they did not understand the lesson, topic, or question.
Socio-Environmental Interaction Barriers	Peer response, fear of being laughed at, noisy class, interruption, selective interaction, direct questioning pressure	Interview responses, student questionnaire items on peer communication, peer acceptance, and small-group preference, observation checklist, teacher questionnaire	Students participated better when they felt accepted by peers and when interaction occurred in small groups.
Supportive Interaction Factors	Teacher encouragement, teacher feedback, teacher opportunity, peer cooperation, group discussion	Interview responses, student questionnaire item on teacher opportunity, observation checklist, teacher questionnaire	Teacher support and peer cooperation helped reduce students' hesitation and encouraged participation.

Table 1 shows that students experienced four major forms of social interaction problems. The findings indicate that participation in English classes was influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included emotional barriers, language difficulties, and limited comprehension, while external factors were related to classroom social conditions and peer interaction. In contrast, supportive classroom practices such as teacher encouragement and collaborative learning activities helped reduce participation barriers.

The findings revealed that affective psychological barriers were among the most common problems experienced by students. Interview data showed that several students felt afraid of making mistakes, shy, and nervous when speaking in front of their classmates. Although some students understood the lesson

and knew the answers, they often chose not to participate because they lacked confidence. This condition reduced students' willingness to engage in classroom interaction and oral communication activities.

Another significant problem was linguistic-communicative barriers. Many students reported difficulties related to vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction. These challenges made them reluctant to use English during discussions and classroom presentations. As a result, students tended to participate less actively when learning activities required oral communication in English.

The findings also showed that cognitive-comprehension barriers affected students' participation. Several students explained that they became passive when they did not fully understand the lesson, discussion topic, or teacher's questions. Students who experienced difficulties in understanding the material were less likely to express opinions or contribute to classroom discussions. This finding suggests that participation is closely related to students' level of comprehension and readiness to engage with learning materials.

In addition, socio-environmental interaction barriers influenced students' classroom behavior. Many students felt more comfortable interacting with close friends or participating in small-group discussions than speaking in front of the whole class. Fear of negative peer responses, being laughed at, or being interrupted discouraged some students from participating actively. Therefore, peer acceptance and positive social relationships played an important role in encouraging classroom interaction.

Despite these challenges, the study also identified several supportive factors that promoted student participation. Teacher encouragement, constructive feedback, peer cooperation, and group discussion activities helped students feel more confident and comfortable during English lessons. These supportive interactions reduced students' hesitation and created opportunities for more active participation in classroom learning activities.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that students' participation in English classes is a complex communicative act shaped by the intersection of multiple internal and external dimensions. This supports [2] theory of interpersonal communication, which posits that social interaction is not merely an exchange of verbal information but a multi-layered process involving psychological, cognitive, and social adjustment. In this study, classroom participation cannot be reduced to simple behavioral actions like raising hands; rather, it reflects a student's sense of psychological safety and communication readiness within the classroom climate. Although the pedagogical environment at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan was generally positive, student engagement remained uneven due to varying levels of self-confidence, linguistic capabilities, and social comfort. This theoretical alignment emphasizes that fostering active oral production in a foreign language requires educators to address both the learners' internal emotional state and the external social responses within the classroom ecosystem.

The primary internal obstacles impeding verbal engagement are rooted in affective-psychological and linguistic-communicative barriers. Psychologically, the deep-seated fear of making pronunciation mistakes, coupled with performance anxiety and low self-confidence, drives students to adopt silence as a protective mechanism, even when they possess the correct answers. This closely aligns with [2]), who argued that internal psycholinguistic anxiety is a critical barrier to active EFL communication. However, this study extends that finding by showing that these emotional barriers persist even when direct teacher encouragement is present. This issue is further exacerbated by linguistic-communicative deficits, such as limited vocabulary and poor sentence construction. While Mohanapriya and [3]) emphasize that classroom interaction is a primary driver for developing speaking competence, the current empirical data suggest that interaction alone is insufficient if students lack basic linguistic resources. Therefore, systemic linguistic

scaffolding, such as explicit vocabulary modeling and sentence frames, must be coupled with emotional reassurance to dismantle these internal communicative walls.

On the other hand, the cognitive-comprehension and socio environmental dimensions represent significant situational barriers to student involvement. Academically, students withdraw from class activities when they face difficulties interpreting instructions or understanding complex lesson contents. This finding supports the arguments of [4] regarding the necessity of pairing student centered instructions with robust comprehension guidance, proving that cognitive clarity is a mandatory prerequisite for meaningful engagement. Socially, the "peer emotional climate" dictates the volume of oral participation. Students exhibit high vulnerability to peer judgment and show a strong preference for small-group configurations or interactions confined to close friends rather than public, whole-class speaking tasks. This phenomenon strengthens [5] assertion that classroom social macroclimates dictate student engagement, while highlighting that peer acceptance and a non-threatening audience are vital factors for mitigating the threat of negative evaluation and social alienation.

Ultimately, the novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of social interaction problems as layered, multidimensional barriers that operate simultaneously rather than in isolation. While teacher support, inclusive feedback, and collaborative tasks serve as valuable interventions validating the findings of [1]) that positive teacher-student interaction enhances motivation they cannot independently solve the participation deficit. To move passive students toward active verbal contribution, classroom interventions must be holistic. English teachers cannot simply demand oral participation; they must systematically engineer a learning environment that provides psychological safety to reduce anxiety, linguistic support to bridge capability gaps, cognitive accessibility to ensure comprehension, and collaborative peer structures to foster social security. When these four dimensions are addressed collectively, the negative impacts of social interaction problems can be minimized, enabling an inclusive space for language acquisition.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that social interaction problems significantly impact seventh-grade students' participation in the English class at SMP Santo Thomas 3 Medan through four layered and interconnected barriers: affective-psychological barriers (language anxiety and fear of making mistakes), linguistic communicative barriers (limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties), cognitive-comprehension barriers (difficulty understanding lesson content and instructions), and socio-environmental constraints (vulnerability to negative peer judgment that triggers defensive silence). However, this study also proves that these barriers are not entirely immutable; adaptive and supportive teacher interaction manifested through continuous psychological encouragement, non-threatening feedback, and the utilization of small-group discussion dynamics successfully functions as a critical mitigating factor that minimizes student anxiety. Therefore, shifting students from a state of passive presence to active verbal engagement demands a holistic classroom approach, where educators do not merely demand oral output but systematically engineer a learning ecosystem that ensures emotional safety, provides structured linguistic scaffolding, and fosters collaborative peer dynamics.

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