
The Correlation Between Students' Motivation in Learning English and Their Speaking Ability Among Eighth-Grade Students

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Abstract: Speaking is one of the most important English skills for students, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). However, many students still face difficulties in speaking English confidently and fluently. Motivation is believed to be one of the key factors that can influence students' speaking performance. This study aims to explore the relationship between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability among eighth-grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Bekasi, Indonesia. This research used a quantitative correlational method with a total of 32 participants. The instruments included a motivation questionnaire, a speaking performance test, and classroom observation. To analyze the data, Spearman's rank-order correlation was applied, as the data did not meet the assumption of normality. The result showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.633$, $p < 0.05$) between students' motivation and their speaking ability. This indicates that students with higher motivation usually achieve better in speaking. These findings highlight how important motivation is for supporting students' speaking ability in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Students' Motivation; Speaking Ability; Spearman Correlation

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the ability to speak English has become more than just an academic requirement. It is now a practical skill needed for everyday life in a global society. As people around the world connect more easily through technology, business, education, and international events, English is often used as a common language. Among the four key language skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Speaking often considered as the hardest one (Kurniawan, 2025). Speaking allows learners not only to express their thoughts and feelings but also to engage in real conversations, which is essential in both formal and informal settings. However, in countries like Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, speaking often becomes the most difficult skill to develop, especially for students in junior high school.

One of the main reasons why many students struggle with speaking is not just a lack of practice, but also what happens inside the learner, factors such as mindset, beliefs, and motivation. Motivation, in particular, plays a central role in second language learning. It acts like a fuel that drives students to keep learning, take part in class, and try speaking even when it feels uncomfortable. Speaking activities often require learners to think and respond quickly, which can be stressful without strong motivation. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Tang, 2020), motivation in learning a language can be divided into two types. Integrative motivation happens when students genuinely want to connect with the culture and

community of the language they are learning. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is more practical, students are motivated by goals like getting a good job, passing exams, or gaining social respect.

Later, Deci and Ryan developed a more complete view of motivation through what is known as Self-Determination Theory. They explained that people can be motivated for different reasons. Some are intrinsically motivated, meaning they enjoy learning for its own sake, while others are extrinsically motivated, doing something to get a reward or avoid failure. (Van Lange et al., 2012)

To evaluate students' speaking skills, it is important to understand what makes good oral communication. Harris (1969, as cited in Islami et al., 2021) suggested that speaking performance depends on five main components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These elements are all linked and must work together for a speaker to communicate effectively. In addition, Brown (2004) defines speaking as the ability to articulate thoughts, emotions, and ideas verbally. Students must be able to organize their thoughts, choose the right words, and respond in real time while also managing the pressure that can come with speaking in a foreign language.

The connection between students' motivation and their language performance has been a popular subject in many research studies. Several findings have shown that students who are more motivated tend to perform better in speaking. For example, Ratnawati et al. (2019) found that highly motivated students in an East Java senior high school were more successful in English-speaking tasks. Likewise, Puspitasari and Rahmawati (2019) reported a strong and positive relationship between motivation and speaking performance in vocational school students. In another study, Lismiyati et al. (2021) noted that students with greater intrinsic motivation were more active during class discussions and oral presentations. While these findings confirm that motivation has a real impact on speaking ability, most of the studies took place in different types of schools and at different educational levels. However, few studies have specifically focused on junior high school students, especially those studying in state Islamic schools (madrasah) in Indonesia.

In addition, several previous studies have explored students' motivation to speak English, providing useful insights into how motivation supports speaking skills in various learning settings. However, the relationship between motivation and speaking ability still requires further exploration, especially when considering classroom conditions and student behavior. Therefore, this study aims to explore the correlation between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability among eighth-grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Bekasi, a

public Islamic junior high school in Indonesia. This setting is important to study because students at this school must manage both academic subjects and religious education, along with various extracurricular activities. These unique learning demands may influence their motivation and language performance in ways that differ from students in general schools. Through this research, the writer hopes to provide insights that may be useful for teachers, school leaders, and education planners in supporting students' speaking development. Based on this background, the research question of this study is: Is there a significant correlation between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability among eighth-grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Bekasi?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlational method to investigate the relationship between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability. The correlational method was chosen because the study aimed to examine whether a significant relationship exists between the two variables without applying any intervention (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This method allows the researcher to observe how these variables interact in a real classroom setting, reflecting the natural learning process. The research took place at MTsN 2 Kota Bekasi, a public Islamic junior high school in West Java, Indonesia, where English is taught as a mandatory subject alongside general academic and Islamic studies.

The participants in this study were eighth-grade students studying at the same school. Out of a total population of 224 students, one class of 32 students was chosen through cluster sampling. This method was chosen to efficiently represent the larger group while keeping the sample manageable and focused. Referring to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), at least 30 participants are needed in a correlational study for the results to be seen as valid (as cited in Sattar et al., 2023).

To collect the data, this study used three main instruments: a motivation questionnaire, a speaking performance test, and classroom observation. The motivation questionnaire was adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and consisted of 20 items measuring both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The items were written in Indonesian using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Prior to the main study, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability, and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.883, indicating high consistency.

Students' speaking ability was assessed using a speaking task where they were asked to describe an object using at least four sentences. Their performance was scored using a rubric

adapted from David P. Harris (1969, as cited in Rani & Thakar, 2014), which included five components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Each component was rated on a 1–5 scale, with a maximum total score of 25. The score was then converted to a 10-point scale for clarity in interpretation. Additionally, classroom observation was carried out to strengthen the validity of the findings. The researcher used an observation rubric consisting of ten indicators of motivation-related behavior during speaking activities, such as confidence, voluntary participation, initiative, and responsiveness. This observation served as a triangulation tool to enrich the data and confirm patterns of student engagement in class.

For the data analysis, the motivation questionnaire and the speaking performance test were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were first generated to summarize the students' motivation levels and speaking scores. To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between students' motivation and their speaking ability, the researcher applied Spearman's rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho). This non-parametric test was chosen because the data did not meet the assumptions of normality and it is appropriate for analyzing ordinal data and rank-based relationships. According to Alsaqr (2021), non-normally distributed data should be analysed using correlation methods that rely on ranked values rather than raw scores. The formula used to analyze the data is as follows:

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \sum d^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

r_s = Spearman's rank correlation coefficient

d = the difference between each pair of ranks

n = number of data pairs

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative research was carried out in several steps. It started with a pre-research stage from May 22 to May 23, 2025, where the instruments were tested for validity and reliability. After the instrument confirmed to be valid and reliable, the main data collection was done from May 27 to June 3, 2025, at MTsN 2 Kota Bekasi, involving eighth-grade students as participants. The main goal of this study was to find out whether there is a relationship between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability. In this research, motivation is the independent variable, and speaking ability is the dependent variable. Since the study focused on finding the connection between these two variables, the first part of the

results presents the correlation analysis. After that, the assumption test is explained to show why the Spearman rank-order correlation was used. Finally, the results from the motivation questionnaire, speaking test, and classroom observation are described to give more understanding of the findings.

1. The Correlation between Students' Motivation in learning English and Students' Speaking Ability

This main purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability. To analyze this relationship, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was conducted, since the data did not meet the assumption of normality. The result of the correlation analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation between Students' Motivation in Learning English and Speaking Ability

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Motivation & Speaking Ability	32	0.633	0.0

As shown in the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.633 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Based on the interpretation of correlation strength by Sugiyono (2013, as cited in Sukarana et al., 2024), this value indicates a strong positive correlation between students' motivation and their speaking ability. In other words, students who are more motivated in learning English tend to achieve better performance in speaking. These results support the idea that motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking skills, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the junior secondary school level. Before conducting the correlation analysis, assumption tests were carried out to determine the appropriate statistical method, as described in the following sections.

2. Normality Test

Before conducting the correlation analysis, normality tests were performed to determine the appropriate statistical method. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are below:

Table 2
Normality Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk Sig.
Motivation Score	.014	.012
Speaking Score	.010	.054

As suggested by Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012), the Shapiro-Wilk test is more accurate and appropriate for small sample sizes ($n < 50$). In this study, the significance values for both variables in both normality tests were below 0.05, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. As a result, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used to analyze the relationship between students' motivation and their speaking ability.

3. Linearity Test

To determine whether the relationship between students' motivation and their speaking ability follows a linear pattern, a linearity test was conducted using the ANOVA table. This test helps identify whether changes in one variable increase or decrease consistently with the other. A linear relationship is important to consider when selecting the appropriate statistical test. In this study, although the data did not meet the assumption of normality (as previously discussed), testing for linearity was still relevant to examine the structure of the relationship between the two variables. The results of the linearity test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Linearity Test Results

Source of Variation	F	Sig.
Linearity	25.925	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	1.245	0.343

Based on the table, the significance value for Linearity is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This means there is a significant linear relationship between students' motivation and their speaking ability. Also, the significance value for Deviation from Linearity is 0.343, which is higher than 0.05. This shows that there is no significant deviation from the linear pattern, so the relationship is linear and consistent. In the linearity test, the F value shows how strong the linear relationship is. A higher F value means stronger evidence of a linear relationship. However, the F value alone is not enough. It must also have a small significance value (p-value) to show that the result is statistically meaningful. In this case, the F value is high (25.925)

and the p-value is very small (0.000), so the result is statistically significant. Even though the data show a linear pattern, the normality assumption was not fulfilled. For this reason, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was used, because it is more suitable for data that are not normally distributed.

4. Descriptive Statistics

The total number of participants in this study was 32 eighth-grade students. The data collected include students' motivation scores from the questionnaire and their speaking scores from the performance test. The descriptive statistic of both variables is shown below.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Motivation in Learning English and Speaking Ability

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Motivation	32	6	9	7.21	1.06
Speaking	32	6	9	6.96	0.89

As seen in Table 4, students' motivation ranged from 6 to 9 on a 10-point scale, with a mean score of 7.21. This indicates that most students showed a moderate to high level of motivation in learning English. Similarly, the speaking scores ranged from 6 to 9 on a 10-point scale, with a mean of 6.96, suggesting that students' speaking ability was moderate overall, with a few students achieving higher performance levels.

5. Classroom Observation Findings

In addition to the statistical results, classroom observation was conducted to support and confirm the findings of the questionnaire and speaking test. Several aspects of students' behavior were observed, such as their participation, initiative, confidence, and responsiveness during speaking activities. The observation showed that students with higher motivation were generally more active, confident, and willing to speak. In contrast, students with lower motivation tended to be passive, hesitant, and less engaged in class. These observation results are consistent with the quantitative findings and indicate a strong positive correlation between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability. In other words, students who were more motivated were also more involved and performed better during speaking activities. This supports the conclusion that motivation plays an important role in enhancing students' speaking performance in the EFL classroom..

4. CONCLUSION

This study found a strong positive relationship between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking ability. The results suggest that students with higher levels of motivation are more likely to perform better in speaking tasks. These findings underline the significant influence of motivation in supporting students' speaking skill development, especially for junior secondary school learners in the EFL context. Therefore, encouraging students' motivation is an important step in helping them improve their speaking ability. For future research, it is suggested to involve a broader group of participants, apply different research designs, or examine other motivational factors to provide a deeper understanding of how motivation impacts speaking performance.

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