

Examining the Relationship between Socio-Emotional Competence and Speaking Skills in EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Although students' speaking skills have been widely discussed from cognitive and instructional perspectives, empirical evidence on its relationship with socio-emotional competence in EFL junior high school contexts remains limited. This study aims to examine the relationship between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills in an EFL classroom.

Methods – This study employed a quantitative correlational design involving 30 seventh-grade EFL students at rural private junior high school. Data were collected using a socio-emotional competence questionnaire and a speaking skill test and were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation.

Findings – The analysis revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between socio-emotional competence and speaking skill ($r = 0.452$, $p < .05$). It signifies that socio-emotional competence functions as a meaningful psychosocial resource that supports speaking performance rather than as a direct determinant. The statistically significant association reinforces the view that speaking skill is not merely a cognitive-linguistic outcome but is co-constructed through emotional regulation, social interaction skills, and self-awareness. However, the results do not imply a causal relationship between the variables.

Research Implications – The findings suggest that socio-emotional competence is meaningfully associated with students' speaking skill and therefore deserves attention in the design of speaking instruction. Teachers may integrate collaborative tasks, confidence-building activities, and emotional awareness strategies to support students' oral participation. However, this study with a small sample size and the focus on a single junior high school context limit the generalizability of the finding. Future studies with larger samples and experimental designs are recommended to explore potential causal mechanisms across different educational settings.

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Introduction

Speaking is closely linked to communicative competence, which plays a crucial role in students' academic participation and social interaction, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where opportunities for authentic communication are limited, yet one of the most challenging to master. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires real-time processing, integration of linguistic knowledge, and the ability to manage interactional demands (pragmatic skills), such as turn-taking and responding appropriately to interlocutors (Bylkova et al., 2021; Goh & Burns, 2012). These dimensions emphasize that speaking is not merely a question of fluency, but also accuracy, coherence, appropriateness, and strategies to overcome communication barriers. This indicates that the development of speaking skills is linked to learners' cognitive and emotional aspects, such as self-regulated learning strategies, goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (Alsarairih, 2022). While cognitive skills support language processing and accuracy, affective regulation determines learners' willingness to speak and sustain interaction in communicative contexts (Lightbown, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). Consequently, these strategies together suggest that the development of speaking skills cannot be separated from students' ability to manage their emotions, interact with others, and make responsible choices leading to increased motivation and confidence.

Recent studies in EFL education increasingly acknowledge the importance of socio-emotional competence in supporting language learning. Socio-emotional competence, commonly conceptualized within the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, encompasses five interrelated dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023; Ng, 2024). These competencies are closely related to learners' confidence, anxiety regulation, peer interaction, and classroom engagement, all of which are essential for successful speaking skill development. Empirical evidence suggests that students with stronger socio-emotional skills tend to participate more actively in speaking tasks and demonstrate higher levels of communicative confidence (Ateş & Niymet, 2022; Aulia & Apoko, 2022; Eni et al., 2024; Zhao & Wang, 2025). Within this affective domain, socio-emotional competence has increasingly been recognized as a crucial factor influencing learners' oral communication. In this study, socio-emotional competence is conceptualized within the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework in order to enable learners to regulate emotions, respond appropriately to others, and maintain confidence during interaction. Moreover, learners with stronger socio-emotional competence are therefore more likely to engage in speaking activities, manage communicative breakdowns, and express ideas more effectively, which eventually strengthens confidence, anxiety management and effectiveness in speaking (Ariyan et al., 2022; Esmaeeli et al., 2018; Ghiffari et al., 2025; Zilva, 2023). Hence, students with strong socio-emotional competence are better able to

express themselves, respond appropriately in interaction, and forge much healthier interpersonal relationships.

Despite its importance, existing studies present mixed findings regarding the strength of the relationship between socio-emotional factors and speaking performance. While some studies report strong associations between self-confidence, emotional intelligence, motivation, social skills and oral proficiency (Aulia & Apoko, 2022; Handayani, 2023; Kuluşaklı & Genç, 2024; Rémeau & Borst, 2026; Sara et al., 2025), others indicate that affective variables alone cannot sufficiently predict speaking achievement when linguistic proficiency and instructional quality are taken into account (Maricel & Jamillia, 2025). This inconsistency suggests that socio-emotional competence may function as a facilitating rather than determining factor in speaking development, interacting with other cognitive and contextual variables, particularly at the junior high school level in Indonesia. Moreover, the preliminary classroom observations in a private junior high school in Indonesia revealed that many students still struggle to express ideas and opinion in English, have a poor communication effectiveness such as difficult managing interaction, and respond appropriately or interpret others' feelings during conversations. It is often accompanied by low motivation to use English such as self-doubt and embarrassment, which reduced students' willingness to engage in speaking activities, especially in EFL context. Students' socio-emotional problems are made worse by an unsupportive setting where they feel condemned or unsupported by peers and teachers. In addition to students' mother tongue interference when they speak the same language at home, they are more likely to utilize it since it is simpler and less intimidating, which reduces the amount of time they spend practicing English. Such conditions suggest that socio-emotional factors may play a crucial role in shaping students' willingness to speak (Adrienko et al., 2020). These kinds of challenges indicate how the expected level of speaking competence differs from the actual performance of students, especially concerning their ability to manage socio-emotional aspects. Addressing with this gap involves deeper understanding of how socio-emotional competence correlates with speaking performance. This indicate that students' speaking difficulties are not merely linguistic in nature but are closely intertwined with affective and interpersonal dimensions of learning.

Furthermore, much of the existing research tends to examine isolated affective variables such as motivation, anxiety, or self-confidence, rather than conceptualizing socio-emotional competence as a multidimensional construct grounded in the SEL framework. As a result, there remains limited empirical evidence on how overall socio-emotional competence, as an integrated construct, relates to speaking performance in EFL classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level. In the Indonesian context, studies on speaking skills have largely focused on teaching techniques or linguistic outcomes, while systematic investigations of socio-emotional competence as a

correlational variable remain scarce. Contextual conditions in rural private schools may further complicate this relationship. Limited exposure to English, restricted opportunities for oral interaction, and teacher-centered instructional practices may reduce the extent to which socio-emotional competence can be improved speaking performance. Therefore, there is a gap of empirical research that comprehensively in examining the relationship between socio-emotional competence and speaking skills within such settings may provide insights into how emotional and social readiness interacts with structural learning constraints.

Based on these considerations, rather than the casual effect, this study seeks to address the following research question: Is there a significant relationship between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills in an Indonesian EFL junior high school?. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills, while the null hypothesis assumes no statistically significant relationship between the two variables by using a correlational approach. The expected results shall provide deeper insights into how socio-emotional factors contribute to speaking competence and offer implications for designing pedagogical approaches that foster both language development and socio-emotional growth.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills in an EFL context. A correlational approach was selected to identify the strength and direction of association between the two variables without implying the causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Given the relatively small sample size, this study is positioned as an exploratory correlational investigation rather than a basis for broad generalization. The population of this study consisted of approximately 115 students enrolled in a rural private junior high school, distributed across Grades VII to IX. Due to time and accessibility constraints, the sample was drawn from Grade VII students only. A simple random sampling technique was applied by listing all Grade VII students and selecting 30 participants using a random number generator to ensure that each student had an equal probability of selection. The final sample included 10 male and 20 female of seventh-grade students. Although random sampling was implemented, the small sample size and single-school context limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations (Noor et al., 2022).

Two primary instruments were used as data collection: a socio-emotional competence questionnaire and a speaking test. Students' socio-emotional competence was measured using a questionnaire adapted from the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional

Learning (CASEL), which consists of five core domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The adapted instrument consisted of 50 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The adaptation process involved translation, contextual modification to suit junior high school learners, and expert judgment by two EFL educators to ensure content relevance and clarity. Construct validity was examined using item-total correlation, and items with correlation coefficients above 0.30 were retained. The validity test confirmed that 32 out of 50 questionnaire items were valid, and 30 of the most representative items were retained as the final instrument. Internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.941$, indicating excellent internal consistency of the questionnaire and deemed acceptable reliability for research purposes. Meanwhile, Students' speaking skills were assessed through an individual oral performance task in which students were asked to describe a familiar topic related to daily activities for approximately 2–3 minutes. Speaking performance was evaluated using an analytic scoring rubric adapted from Goh & Burns (2012), covering four dimensions: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Each dimension was rated on a scale from 1-5 (very poor) to 21-25 (excellent), resulting maximum score of 100. To ensure data quality and reduce subjectivity in scoring, single trained rater using an analytic scoring rubric independently evaluated the speaking performance. Although inter-rater reliability could not be established, the use of a standardized rubric was intended to minimize subjectivity. The reliability of the speaking assessment rubric was examined using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis indicated good internal consistency of 0.87, confirming the suitability of the instrument for data collection.

Data collection was conducted during regular English class sessions. Students first completed the socio-emotional questionnaire under the supervision of the researcher and classroom teacher to ensure comprehension of all items. The speaking test was administered on a separate day, and students' oral performances were audio-recorded for scoring purposes. All participants were informed that the data would be used solely for research purposes and would not affect their academic grades. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' socio-emotional competence and speaking scores. Prior to correlation analysis, assumption tests were conducted. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess normality, and ANOVA-based linearity tests were conducted to verify linear relationships between variables (Aslam & Ullah, 2023; Gravetter et al., 2020). Since both variables indicated that socio-emotional scores ($p = 0.155$) and speaking skill scores ($p = 0.053$) were normally distributed, moreover both variable demonstrated that the relationship between socio-emotional aspects and speaking skills was statistically significant ($p = 0.017 < 0.05$), with no significant deviation from linearity ($p = 0.611 > 0.05$) indicated the variables X and Y in this study is linear. Therefore, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Pearson correlation was selected because it is suitable for continuous interval data and provides information about both the strength and direction of linear relationships between two variables. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

Result

1. Descriptive Statistic Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of students' socio-emotional competence and speaking skills. The results indicate sufficient variability in both variables reflects individual differences among students, allowing for further inferential analysis, as shown in table below:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Socio-Emotional Competence and Speaking Test Score

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Socio-Emotional	30	56	127	2548.00	84.9333	14.25389
Speaking Test	30	60	95	2205.00	73.5000	9.99914
Valid N (listwise)	30					

From the results of socio-emotional competence questionnaire above, it showed varied responses across the five dimensions, with students demonstrating a range of tendencies from low to high socio-emotional competence. Students' socio-emotional competence scores ranged from 56 to 127, with a mean score of 84.93 (SD = 14.25), suggesting a moderate level of socio-emotional development among EFL learners. Meanwhile, the speaking test results revealed that students' speaking scores ranged from 60 to 95, with a mean score of 73.50 (SD = 9.99), indicating moderate level of speaking proficiency overall. Hence, the dispersion of scores in both variables reflects individual differences among students, which is essential for examining correlational relationships.

2. Inferential Statistic Analysis

The second inferential statistical correlation analysis test. Prior to correlation analysis, assumption tests were conducted and the results confirmed that the data met the assumptions of normality and linearity, indicating that Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was appropriate for this study. The results obtained are:

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Test Result

		Socio-emotional (X)	Speaking Test (Y)
Socio-emotional (X)	Person Correlation	1	.452
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012
	N	30	30
Speaking Test (Y)	Person Correlation	.452	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	
	N	30	30

Based on the table 2, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills ($r = 0.452$, $p = 0.012$, $N=30$) with a significant 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.11 to 0.69. This result indicates that students with higher socio-emotional competence tend to demonstrate better speaking performance. In educational research, a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.452$ represents a meaningful relationship, suggesting that socio-emotional factors contribute substantially to students' speaking skills, although they are not the sole determining factor. Further analysis showed that socio-emotional competence accounted for approximately 20.4% of the variance in students' speaking skills ($r^2 = 0.204$). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the pedagogic competence of educators and student learning outcomes. The results are further illustrated by the scatter plot presented below:

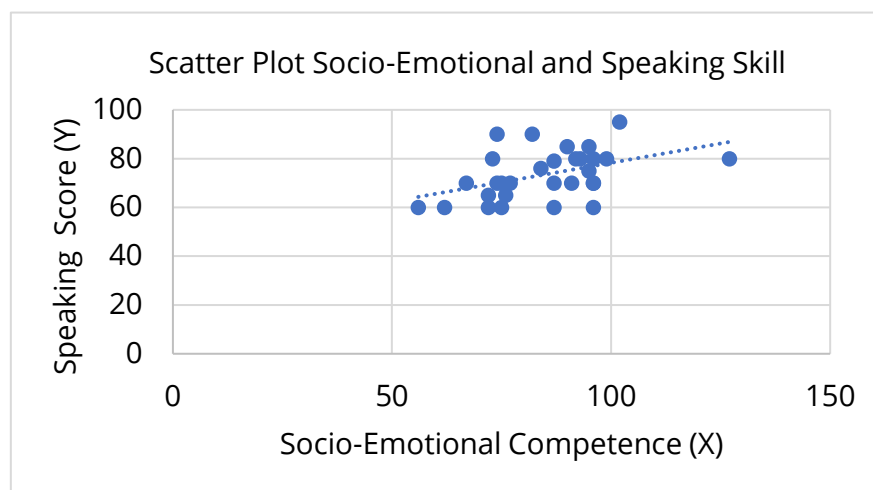


Figure 1. Correlation Analysis Test Result

The scatter plot illustrates a general upward trend between socio-emotional aspects (X) and speaking achievement (Y), supporting the positive direction of the relationship, even though the data points are not perfectly aligned. However, the distribution of data points shows noticeable dispersion around the regression line, indicating that students with similar levels of socio-emotional competence do not always achieve comparable speaking scores, and vice versa. While some variability is evident that students with moderate socio-emotional scores demonstrate either relatively high or low speaking performance. These deviations suggest that the correlation is not driven by isolated cases but reflects a consistent pattern across participants such as linguistic proficiency, prior exposure to English, classroom interaction patterns, or individual learning strategies. Therefore, while socio-emotional competence contributes meaningfully to speaking performance, the scattered pattern reinforces that it accounts for only a portion of the variance, aligning with the moderate correlation coefficient and the explained variance of 20.4%. This dispersion highlights the multifactorial nature of speaking development and cautions against interpreting the observed relationship as deterministic.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a moderate positive relationship between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills in a private junior high school context. This result highlights that students who demonstrate better emotional regulation, social awareness, and interpersonal skills tend to perform more effectively in speaking tasks, especially in EFL context. Rather than functioning as a sole determinant, socio-emotional competence appears to act as a facilitating factor that supports students' willingness and readiness to engage in oral communication. This interpretation aligns with the view that speaking is not merely a linguistic activity but a socially situated process that requires emotional awareness and adaptive interaction for better academic and linguistic performance (Imama, 2023; Jitaru et al., 2023). Although the present findings align with Darojah & Aminin (2023) in supporting a holistic view of language learning, the moderate correlation ($r = 0.452$) indicates that socio-emotional competence alone does not fully account for variations in speaking performance. Approximately 20.4% of the variance in speaking skills can be associated with socio-emotional factors, while the remaining variance is likely influenced by other variables not examined in this study. These may include students' linguistic proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, exposure to English outside the classroom, and instructional practices employed by teachers. Consequently, even students with strong socio-emotional competence may experience limitations in speaking performance if they lack sufficient language input or a socially embedded practice that requires emotional regulation and responsiveness to interpersonal communication. This finding supports previous research emphasizing that affective factors alone are insufficient to produce high levels of speaking proficiency without complementary linguistic and pedagogical support (Handayani, 2023; Maricel & Jamillia, 2025).

Based on the finding, several contextual and methodological considerations may also have shaped the results. Although, it reveals socio-emotional competence positively influences communication outcomes, confirming the notion that emotional and social factors should be integrated into language pedagogy. However, the study was conducted in a single rural private junior high school and small sample size, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. In addition, socio-emotional competence was measured using a self-report questionnaire, which may be subject to response bias and students' subjective perceptions, potentially affecting the strength of the observed correlation. Combined with the single-school context, this limitation may have constrained score variability and contributed to the moderate relationship identified. These limitations suggest that the observed relationship should be interpreted cautiously and highlight the need for future research involving multiple schools, larger samples, and mixed-method approaches to better capture the complexity of socio-emotional competence in speaking development. Despite these limitations, the

findings yield clear specific pedagogical implications for EFL speaking instruction in the junior high school level. Given that socio-emotional competence accounts for approximately 20.4% of the variance in students' speaking performance, suggest that the teacher should integrate socio-emotional learning into speaking instruction to create a more supportive environment for oral communication and interpersonal engagement. For instance, classroom practices such as collaborative speaking tasks, peer interaction, reflective activities, and emotionally supportive feedback may help reduce anxiety, build resilience and increase students' confidence to speak. Moreover, socio-emotional learning should not be treated as an isolated instructional goal, but rather embedded systematically within communicative language activities that simultaneously address linguistic accuracy and emotional readiness. Such an integrated approach has the potential to foster more sustainable speaking development among EFL learners, as students are empowered both cognitively and affectively, teachers can create a learning environment to facilitate more sustainable improvement in EFL speaking skills. Hence, incorporating socio-emotional learning strategies into language teaching is highly recommended.

Conclusion

Based on data analysis and discussion of research results on the relationship between socio-emotional competence and students' speaking skills in EFL learner. This study found a moderate positive correlation between students' socio-emotional competence and their speaking skills ($r = 0.452$, $p = 0.012$), indicating that students with higher socio-emotional competence tend to demonstrate better speaking performance. However, given the correlational design, the small sample size ($N = 30$), and the single-school context, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and cannot be generalized broadly or interpreted as causal. The results suggest that socio-emotional competence may function as a supporting factor rather than a determining factor in speaking development. Pedagogically, EFL teachers may integrate socio-emotional learning into speaking activities to create supportive learning environment through structured pair and group work, role plays, peer feedback sessions, and confidence-building oral tasks that promote cooperation and emotional safety in classroom interaction. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, apply longitudinal or experimental designs, and examine how specific socio-emotional interventions influence speaking development over time.

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