

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Social Constructivism Theory

The theoretical framework used in this study is social constructivism, an approach developed by Lev Vygotsky, which views learning as a social process shaped through interaction with others. Social constructivism can be understood as the view that human intellectual development occurs through active participation in social activities and meaningful conversations, in which language plays a key role in building shared understanding. Vygotsky (1978) explains that learning is not merely an individual activity but rather the result of interaction with the social environment, such as friends or teachers, who help students construct new knowledge. In this context, students do not just passively receive information but actively shape it through dialogue and collaboration. For example, in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, students learn vocabulary or sentence structures not only from books but also from conversations with classmates, which makes learning more contextual and relevant to everyday life.

One of the central ideas in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the range between what students can do on their own and what they can achieve with support from someone more experienced. Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch (1991) emphasize that the ZPD is important because it shows students' unrealized potential, and social interaction helps bridge that gap. In EFL practice, this means that students who have difficulty speaking can progress more quickly if they receive help from friends or teachers, such as through examples or gentle corrections. This concept explains why group discussions are effective, as students learn from peer models, where more proficient students provide examples, allowing less proficient students to imitate and gradually improve their speaking skills.

In teaching English as a foreign language, social constructivism emphasizes that social interaction encourages students to improve their speaking skills through authentic communication, where they learn from examples set by their peers and from feedback. Costa (2007) and Donato and McCormick (1994) explain that in group discussions, this principle is realized through social scaffolding, which is gradual support from classmates where students share ideas, give advice, and correct each other. This not only builds fluency and confidence but also overall communication skills, such as negotiating meaning or completing tasks together. For example, when students discuss topics such as the environment, they learn new vocabulary and sentence structures through real conversations, which are more effective than individual exercises. This theory also supports research instruments, such as surveys on students' perceptions of cooperation and peer interaction, which help measure the social impact on learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

From the current researcher's perspective, social constructivism is relevant to English language learning, particularly in improving students' speaking skills through group discussions. Learning becomes more effective when students interact, as language requires active communication. Through group discussions, students can share ideas, learn from peers, and receive support within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This interaction helps improve not only linguistic competence but also students' confidence and motivation. Therefore, social constructivism provides a strong foundation for understanding the positive impact of collaborative learning on the development of students' speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

2. Speaking Skills in Language Learning

a. Definition and Component of Speaking Skills

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, speaking is a complex and dynamic process that involves not only producing spoken language but also managing communication in real-time interaction. Effective speaking ability depends on several

interrelated components. Ur (1996) emphasizes that successful oral communication requires mastery of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Fluency allows learners to speak smoothly and naturally, while accuracy ensures that grammatical structures are used correctly and meaning can be understood. Vocabulary provides the lexical resources needed to express ideas, and pronunciation, including stress and intonation, supports clarity of speech. These linguistic components form the foundation of intelligible spoken communication.

In addition to linguistic aspects, speaking also involves broader communicative abilities. Brown (2004) categorizes speaking skills into micro and macro skills. Micro skills refer to the accurate production of language features such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Macro skills, on the other hand, involve organizing ideas logically, using language appropriately in different social contexts, managing interaction, and applying communication strategies to maintain conversation. These skills reflect the communicative nature of speaking, where meaning is negotiated through interaction rather than produced in isolation.

Therefore, speaking in EFL learning can be understood as an integrated ability that combines linguistic competence, cognitive processes, and interactive skills. Learners need to produce language accurately and fluently, organize their ideas coherently, and adapt their speech to the social and conversational context. This comprehensive view of speaking provides the basis for identifying the components measured in this study.

b. Difficulties in Speaking for EFL Students

EFL students often face significant challenges in developing these speaking skills, especially since they are learning English in an environment where it is not the everyday language. One of the main obstacles is foreign language anxiety, where students feel nervous or embarrassed because they are afraid of making mistakes or being judged

negatively by others. Horwitz et al. (1986) and Woodrow (2006) describe this phenomenon as foreign language anxiety, which can cause students to avoid active participation. In addition, limited vocabulary and grammar often result in limited and inaccurate output, while cultural differences make students reluctant to engage in discussions. Alavi and Leidner (2001) explain that these cultural barriers can stem from different social norms, such as in Indonesia, where students may prefer to remain silent rather than speak in front of the class. Ellis (2009) adds that pronunciation difficulties are due to phonetic differences with the mother tongue. For example, sounds that do not exist in Indonesian can lower confidence and interfere with fluency. Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasize that this problem is exacerbated by a lack of opportunities to practice in real-life situations, making it difficult for students to apply speaking components such as vocabulary and pronunciation in authentic contexts. As a result, without proper support, EFL students' speaking skills can stagnate, which can frustrate them and demotivate them.

c. The Importance of Interactive Practice

To overcome this difficulty, interactive practices are crucial because they give students the opportunity to practice in communication scenarios that are similar to real life. Through activities such as group discussions or role-plays, students can respond spontaneously, adapt to their conversation partners, and receive feedback from classmates or teachers. Richards and Rodgers (2014) show that this practice improves fluency and confidence, as students learn to overcome anxiety through scaffolding, which is gradual assistance from teachers and constructive peer feedback. Without interactive practice, mechanical exercises such as word repetition alone are insufficient for building authentic communication skills (Newton and Nation, 2020). In the context of EFL, these interactive practices enrich language input and output, allowing students to practice elements such as pronunciation and vocabulary

through meaningful interactions. Goh and Liu (2023) emphasize that this approach supports the comprehensive development of speaking skills and helps students integrate all components in real social situations. Thus, they not only learn the language but also how to use it to interact effectively.

3. Group Discussion Method

a. Definition of Group Discussion

Group discussions are one of the most recognized collaborative learning strategies in language education, especially in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Saxiyeva (2025) defines small group discussion as a pedagogical method in which students are divided into small groups to engage in purposeful oral interaction, serving as an exchange of ideas, opinions, and information among group members for the purpose of problem solving, decision making, or conceptual exploration. This definition highlights two essential characteristics of group discussions that are particularly relevant in language learning: their inherent social nature and their goal-oriented structure. Unlike spontaneous conversations, Reséndez (2024) found that group discussions in an educational context are purposefully designed to guide students toward specific communication outcomes, making them structured yet dynamic activities that can be systematically integrated into classroom teaching. Kuliahana and Marzuki (2023) further explain that group discussions are a type of conversation in which several people participate and share their opinions on a topic, where each participant is free to express their views on the topic being discussed, and that this activity helps students express themselves verbally while giving them the opportunity to be more independent during speaking activities. Overall, these two perspectives show that group discussions are not merely additional activities in the classroom, but rather pedagogical strategies aimed at developing students' communicative confidence, verbal

independence, and collaborative language skills within a structured yet flexible framework of interaction.

From the current researcher's perspective, what makes group discussions a valuable pedagogical strategy in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is not merely the amount of speaking practice they provide, but the quality of interaction they generate. When students engage in group discussions, they do not simply produce language in isolation; they negotiate meaning, respond to classmates, adjust their utterances in real time, and navigate the social dynamics of collaborative communication processes that closely resemble the demands of real life interactions, which are ultimately the goal of EFL teaching. Furthermore, the small group format encourages a more equitable distribution of speaking turns compared to full class activities, ensuring that even less confident students have meaningful opportunities to participate and develop their oral skills. In this regard, group discussions serve not only as speaking practice activities but also as a mechanism for building confidence and a space for authentic language socialization. For these reasons, group discussions are considered in this study as the primary pedagogical strategy for improving the English speaking skills of Siliwangi University students.

b. Implementing Group discussion in Language Classes

The implementation of group discussions in language classes generally follows a structured sequence of stages. Aliksieieva et al. (2022) explain that the process of conducting discussion lessons involves several stages that guide teachers and students through these activities systematically.

The first stage is the preparation stage. At this stage, teachers determine discussion topics that are relevant, significant, and controversial enough to trigger an exchange of different views. Aliksieieva et al. (2022) emphasize that topics must not only be

important but also relevant to students and supported by literature that is accessible to them. In addition to selecting a topic, teachers prepare a discussion plan, identify the main issues and secondary issues, and select relevant material for students to study in advance. Group formation also takes place at this stage, where teachers divide the class into small groups based on the principle of complementarity, that is, each group must include students with diverse levels of knowledge and skills so that all members can contribute meaningfully. Before the discussion begins, students are also introduced to discussion rules, such as the importance of logical and consistent arguments, respecting opposing opinions, and the need to seek constructive solutions rather than personal conflicts.

The second stage is the discussion stage itself. This stage begins with an introductory speech by the teacher, in which the main issues of the lesson are formulated, the objectives are explained, and the rules of participation are outlined. Students then participate in discussions within their groups before presenting their arguments to the class as a whole. Alieksieieva et al. (2022) note that during this phase, the teacher's behavior must be carefully managed; the teacher should not interrupt speakers or intervene in the discussion unless a student completely strays from the topic. Instead, the teacher's role is to guide students' thinking toward the right conclusions, encourage them to form a common position, and cut out excessive or irrelevant information in students' contributions. Teachers can also ask additional questions if necessary and help students find the right solution to the problem being discussed.

The third stage is the closing and evaluation stage. After the discussion is complete, the teacher ends the activity by summarizing the main points discussed and facilitating the formation of a group consensus on the topic discussed. Alieksieieva et al. (2022) note that evaluation at this stage considers not only the content of students' answers, but also their ability to defend their positions, respond to opposing views, and actively participate in the exchange of opinions. It is important to

remember that students should not be punished for incorrect views, as this can inhibit future participation and undermine the communicative spirit of the activity.

Overall, these three stages form a coherent procedural framework that ensures group discussions are conducted in an organized, meaningful, and pedagogically appropriate manner.

c. Benefits and Challenges of Group Discussion

Group discussions as a pedagogical strategy in English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking classes offer a range of significant benefits that encompass linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions of learning. Rahmat and Jon (2023) conducted a qualitative study on the benefits and challenges of group discussions as a creative learning strategy in speaking classes and found three main benefits: increasing interaction and learning, encouraging student motivation, and developing students' respect for each other's ideas, showing that group discussions not only improve language performance but also foster interpersonal attitudes that are important for effective communication. In terms of linguistic development, group discussions provide students with many opportunities to practice speaking in a non-stressful environment, and Magfira et al. (2024) identified five benefits that students experience in group discussion activities, namely positive collaborative experiences, increased engagement, intellectually challenging and stimulating interactions, social interactions with peers, and exposure to various learning styles. In addition to individual speaking practice, group discussions also contribute to the development of critical thinking and broader communication skills. Aflah et al. (2023) found that small group discussion activities positively increased student engagement in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, strengthened critical thinking, increased motivation, and provided students with the opportunity to develop a more positive view of learning English. In a similar context,

Mejía and Loor (2023) found that group discussions improve students' speaking fluency, critical thinking, and decision-making, while encouraging active participation and supporting vocabulary and grammar development. Overall, these findings collectively demonstrate the multidimensional value of group discussions that go beyond mere speaking fluency, making them one of the most comprehensive and productive strategies available in EFL classroom teaching.

Despite its many benefits, the use of group discussions in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms is not without its challenges. Rahmat and Jon (2023) identified three main challenges that arise during group discussion activities, namely individual learning preferences, language issues, and issues related to student confidence, all of which are interrelated and can significantly affect the quality and productivity of discussions if not addressed by teachers. With regard to individual learning preferences, not all students are naturally inclined towards verbal interaction or group-based tasks, as some students prefer independent learning and may feel uncomfortable when required to speak and share ideas in front of their peers, which ultimately reduces their willingness to participate actively. The second challenge relates to language aspects, as limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and lack of grammar skills can hinder students' ability to express themselves clearly and fluently during discussions, preventing them from fully engaging in these activities as they may find it difficult to articulate their thoughts in English with the speed and accuracy required for natural conversation. The third challenge is student confidence, as noted by Rahmat and Jon (2023), who found that most students reported feeling hesitant and nervous during discussions due to low self confidence. This finding is consistent with broader EFL research, which consistently identifies fear of making mistakes and anxiety about negative peer evaluation as the most persistent barriers to oral participation, often causing students to remain silent or make only minimal contributions that undermine the

communicative purpose of the discussion activity as a whole. Overall, these challenges highlight that while group discussions have great potential as a method for developing EFL students' speaking skills, their effectiveness ultimately depends on how well teachers can identify and respond to the individual needs, linguistic limitations, and affective barriers that students bring to the classroom.

4. Students Perceptions

a. Definition of Perception

Perception is a fundamental concept in psychology and behavioral science that significantly influences how individuals understand and respond to their surroundings. Havik (2020) defines perception as the process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment, further emphasizing that human behavior is based on their perceptions of what is considered reality, not on reality itself. This distinction is particularly important in the context of education, as it means that how students experience a learning activity, whether positively or negatively, is not entirely determined by the activity itself, but by how each student interprets and understands the activity based on their background, attitudes, and prior experiences.

Robbins and Judge (2019) further explain that perception is influenced by three interrelated factors: the observer, the object being observed, and the situation. The personal characteristics of the observer such as attitudes, motives, interests, and past experiences shape how they interpret what they observe. The characteristics of the observed object, such as its uniqueness, similarity, or complexity, also influence which aspects of the object are noticed and remembered. Finally, the situational context in which perception occurs including time, environment, and social setting can significantly alter how the same object or event is interpreted by different individuals. In a language learning classroom,

these three factors interact continuously, as each student brings a unique set of attitudes and experiences to the same learning activity, experiences the activity in their own way, and is embedded in a specific social and academic context that influences their overall perception of the learning experience.

b. Students' Perceptions of Group Discussion in EFL Learning

Students' perceptions of group discussions in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) have been extensively researched in recent studies, with findings generally showing that students have a positive attitude toward this method, although they also acknowledge some difficulties. Nguyen and Bui (2024) conducted a qualitative study at a state university in Vietnam, analyzing the perceptions of both teachers and students to identify similarities and differences in their views on the implementation of effective group work. Their findings show that the benefits of group work are widely recognized by both parties as a common ground, indicating that group discussions are generally considered a valuable and productive classroom activity from the students' perspective.

More specifically, students tend to view group discussions positively in terms of the opportunities they offer for interaction, collaborative learning, and the development of confidence in speaking. Rahmat and Jon (2023) found that students in speaking classes recognize group discussions as a creative learning strategy that promotes interaction and learning, encourages motivation, and fosters respect for each other's ideas. This shows that when students feel their contributions are valued and the discussion environment is supportive, they are more likely to participate actively and gain linguistic benefits from the activity. Similarly, Magfira et al. (2024) found that EFL students had positive perceptions of group discussion activities, identifying collaborative experiences, increased engagement, and meaningful social interaction with peers as the most valued aspects of these activities.

However, students' perceptions of group discussion are not uniformly positive, and several studies have documented areas of concern that temper students' overall experience of the method. Rahmat and Jon (2023) noted that students also perceived group discussion as challenging due to limited language proficiency, individual learning preferences, and low self-confidence, all of which can make the experience feel uncomfortable or unproductive for certain learners. Nguyen and Bui (2024) further found that there were notable mismatches between teacher and student perceptions regarding key aspects of group work implementation such as group formation, the role of leadership within groups, and the use of peer assessment indicating that what teachers assume about student preferences and experiences does not always align with students' actual views. These mismatches highlight that student perceptions of group discussion are shaped not only by the activity itself, but also by the degree to which they feel they have agency and voice in how the activity is structured and managed. Taken together, the research on students' perceptions of group discussion in EFL learning reflects a generally positive but nuanced picture, underscoring the importance of teachers attending carefully to student perceptions as a core part of implementing group discussion effectively in the EFL classroom.

B. Study of Relevant Research

Several previous studies have explored the use of group discussions to improve speaking skills in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

Sudiro et al. (2022) conducted a survey of fifth-semester students at Yogyakarta University of Technology and found that most students had a positive perception of the Small Group Discussion Method, especially in terms of understanding course material, improving speaking skills, enthusiasm, and self confidence. However, their study only involved 34 participants and did not

explore specific speaking components such as pronunciation or grammatical accuracy, leaving room for more comprehensive research on how students view group discussions in relation to specific aspects of speaking proficiency. Similarly, Crisianita and Mandasari (2022) examined the use of small group discussions to improve speaking skills among vocational high school students in Lampung and found that students responded positively to the method, showing greater confidence and reduced anxiety through group-based activities that created a more supportive learning environment. However, their research was conducted at the secondary school level, which limits the generalization of their findings to the college context.

At the university level, Cempaka (2024) conducted a quantitative pre-test/post-test study and reported significant improvements in students' fluency, accuracy, and confidence after structured group discussion intervention. Although this study provides strong evidence of the measurable impact of group discussions on speaking performance, its experimental design focused primarily on learning outcomes rather than how students themselves viewed and experienced the method as a pedagogical strategy. Research by Susanti et al. (2021) also showed that the implementation of small group discussions resulted in a significant increase in junior high school students' speaking test scores after the intervention, further proving the positive effect of group discussions on classroom performance, although once again the focus was on outcomes rather than student perceptions. Meanwhile, Kuliahana and Marzuki (2023) found that group discussions not only improve fluency and confidence, but also encourage active student participation through peer interaction. Jacobs and Kimura (2013) further emphasize that group discussions facilitate social collaboration and engagement, an observation that is in line with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory.

Although these studies consistently prove that group discussions have a positive impact on students' speaking skills, most of them focus more on measuring the effectiveness or learning outcomes of group discussions rather than making students' perceptions the main focus of the research. Only a few have studied student perceptions in depth, especially in relation to how group

discussions contribute to specific aspects of speaking skills such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and confidence. In addition, studies that specifically use survey designs to investigate student perceptions of group discussions in the context of Indonesian higher education are still limited, and to the researchers' knowledge, there have been no previous studies that specifically examine this phenomenon among students at Siliwangi University. Therefore, more comprehensive and large-scale research is needed to provide deeper and more representative insights into how university students view group discussions as a strategy for improving their English speaking skills.

C. Research Hypothesis

Based on the formulation of the problem and the aim of the study, the hypothesis is proposed:

“Indonesian university students perceive group discussions positively in enhancing their English speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and confidence.”

This hypothesis aligns with the research problem, "What are Indonesian university students' perceptions of group discussions in enhancing their English speaking skills?" and the aim of the study, "To investigate Indonesian university students' perceptions of group discussions in enhancing their English speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and confidence."