

**PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS**

THESIS

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THESIS

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**Students' Voices on Joining Student's Exchange Programs to Improve
Speaking Skills**

adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya. Apabila terdapat kesalahan dan kekeliruan didalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggungjawab saya. Demikianlah surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.

Banda Aceh, 15 Januari 2026

Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan,



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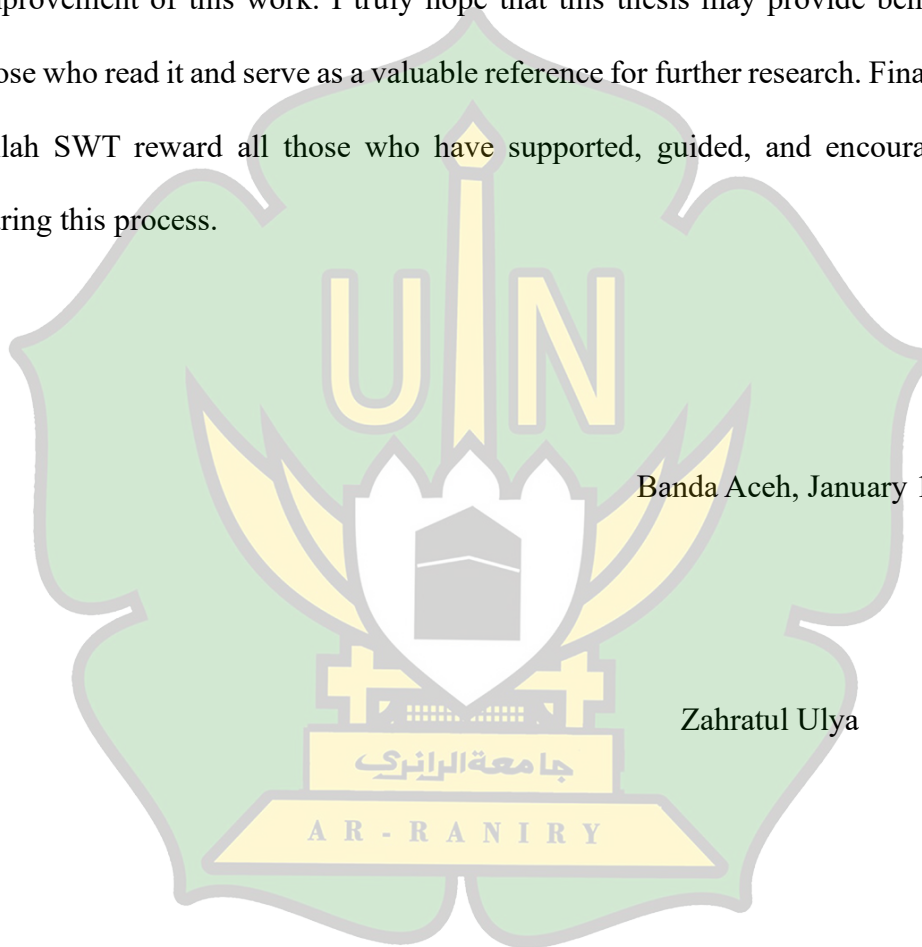
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ABSTRACT

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This study explored students' perspectives on joining student exchange programs and their influence on the development of English speaking skills among EFL learners and the alumni. The study aimed at understanding students' experiences during the exchange programs and identifying the aspects they considered most influential in improving their speaking ability. A qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was employed to capture students' life experiences in using English in real communication contexts. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five students from the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry who had participated in student exchange programs in different countries. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and recurring themes based on participants' perspectives. The findings revealed that students experienced noticeable improvement in their English speaking skills after joining the exchange programs. Continuous exposure to English in daily activities helped students become more fluent and confident in speaking. Interaction with native speakers and international peers enhanced students' sociolinguistic awareness, pronunciation, and ability to adapt their speaking styles in different contexts. In addition, psychological development, such as increased self-confidence and reduced fear of making mistakes, played an important role in supporting speaking improvement. This study concluded that student exchange programs provided meaningful and immersive language environments that effectively supported the development of English speaking skills. The findings suggested that immersion, social interaction, and emotional support should be integrated into language learning programs to enhance students' communicative competence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
A. Background of Study	1
B. Research Questions	4
C. The Aims of Study	4
D. Significance the Study	4
E. Terminologies	6
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	9
A. Theoretical Structure	9
B. Relevant Study	14
C. Synthesis and Research Gap	17
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	21
A. Research Design	21
B. Research Participants	22
C. Data Collection Technique	24
D. Data Analysis Techniques	25
CHAPTER IV FINDING AND DISCUSSION	28
A. Findings from the Analysis of Data	28
B. Discussion	38
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION	47
A. Conclusion	47
B. Suggestions	50
REFERENCES	53
APPENDICES	56
AUTOBIOGRAPHY	58

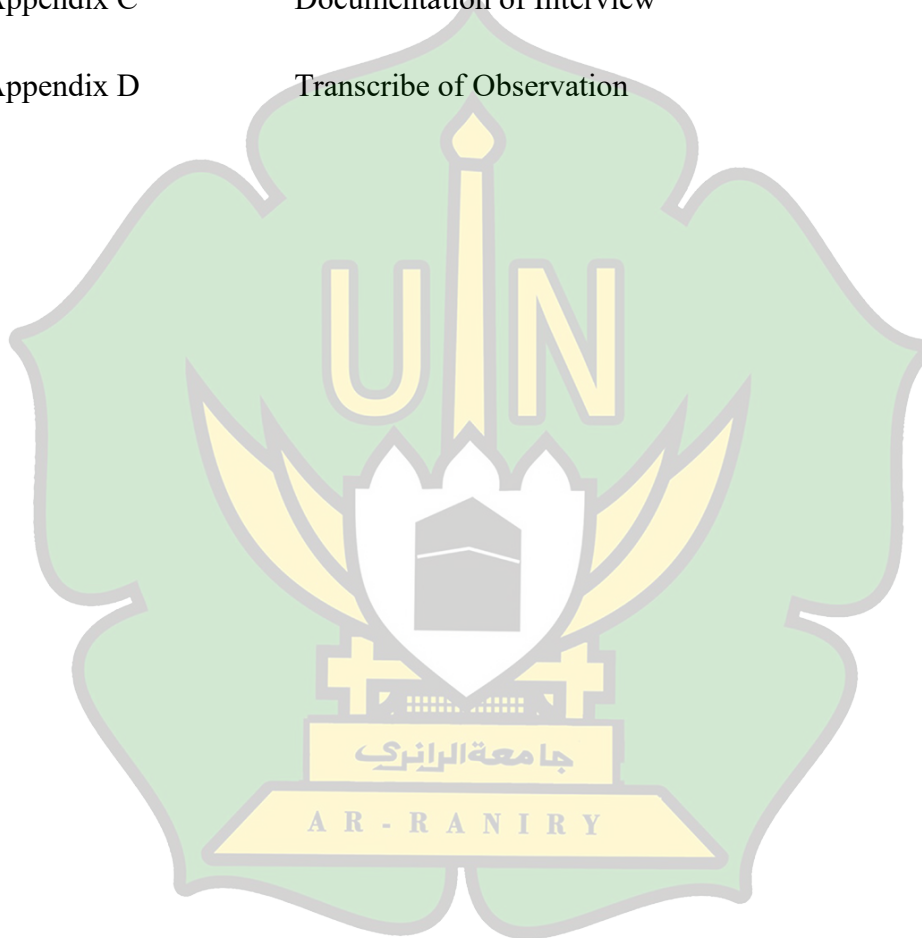
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Summary of Findings from Participant's Experiences on Speaking..... 34



LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Appointment Letter of Supervisor
Appendix B	Data Participant of Observation
Appendix C	Documentation of Interview
Appendix D	Transcribe of Observation



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

In the era of globalization, English has become the lingua franca of academic, professional, and social communication. The ability to communicate effectively in English, particularly in speaking, is regarded as a crucial skill for students to participate in international collaboration and cross-cultural exchange. Speaking skills, which involve fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and interactional competence, are often considered the most challenging yet the most necessary component of English learning for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In the Indonesian context, speaking competence remains a significant hurdle for many students despite years of formal instruction. Common barriers include limited opportunities to practice with native or proficient speakers, classroom environments that prioritize written tests over oral communication, and psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes (Franscy & Ramli, 2022).

In response to these challenges, student exchange programs have emerged as one of the promising ways to enhance students' speaking skills. By immersing learners in authentic English-speaking environments and encouraging real-life communication with diverse interlocutors, such programs allow students to practice English more naturally and meaningfully beyond classroom settings. Student exchange experiences also contribute to the development of intercultural

competence, self-confidence, and learner autonomy, which are essential for effective oral communication. Therefore, exploring students' voices on their experiences in joining exchange programs is important to understand how these programs contribute to improving speaking skills, as well as to identify the opportunities and challenges students encounter during the process.

According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2024, Indonesia is ranked 80th out of 116 countries and regions with a score of 468 out of 700, which places the country in the Low Proficiency category (Education First, 2024). This ranking illustrates that the overall English proficiency level of Indonesian learners remains relatively low compared to many other countries. Previous studies have also highlighted that English education in Indonesia faces persistent challenges in terms of teaching quality and learning outcomes (Mariani, et.al., 2024). Such a condition reinforces the urgency of finding more effective strategies to improve students' English-speaking competence. Therefore, practical and immersive approaches are needed to help learners bridge the gap between language knowledge and real communication skills.

Based on research findings from several experts, immersive learning experiences outside of formal classrooms have been proven to be more effective in improving foreign language speaking skills compared to relying solely on classroom learning. One proven effective way to improve speaking skills is through student exchange programs. This programs provides students with the opportunity to use English in an authentic social environment, interact with friends from diverse cultural backgrounds, and understand the language in a real-world context. Recent

research indicates that participation in student exchange programmes can significantly improve students' speaking skills and confidence (Saito & Hanzawa, 2022; Fang & Baker, 2023). Additionally, cross-cultural experiences also broaden students' sociolinguistic horizons, which ultimately contributes positively to the development of their speaking skills.

In addition to these benefits, student exchange programs expose learners directly to natural language use, sociolinguistic variations, and diverse cultural communication styles. Unlike classroom learning, the student exchange context requires learners to negotiate meaning, adapt to different speech communities, and interact with speakers with diverse accents and language varieties. Such experiences can significantly improve speaking skills, confidence, and pragmatic competence. However, despite the growing popularity of student exchange programs, there is still a lack of research particularly in the Indonesian context on how students perceive the sociolinguistic influence of such experiences on their English speaking skills.

However, not all students benefit equally, in which some show rapid progress, while others face challenges, such as limited interaction, difficulty understanding diverse accents, or reluctance to communicate. This difference indicates the influence of sociolinguistic factors, such as interaction frequency, communication readiness, and the ability to adapt to different communication styles (Luo & Zhang, 2021). Unfortunately, research on how these factors are perceived by Indonesian students in the context of study abroad is still limited.

Based on the above background, this research focuses on the perceptions of Indonesian EFL students who have participated in student exchange programs, as Indonesia represents an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context where opportunities for authentic English interaction are limited. This study aims to explore the participants' experiences, challenges, and sociolinguistic factors that contribute to the development of their speaking skills during exchange programs. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic theory and provide practical input for educational institutions and study abroad programmer organizers in supporting the improvement of English language learning quality in Indonesia.

B. Research Questions

What aspects of student exchange programs do students consider most influential in enhancing their speaking skills?

C. The Aims of Study

To explore the aspects of the student exchange programs that they consider most influential in enhancing the speaking skills.

D. Significance the Study

This research has both theoretical and practical significance in the fields of sociolinguistics and second language acquisition.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of sociolinguistic factors, such as patterns of interaction, intercultural communication, and adaptation to diverse communicative norms, as perceived by Indonesian EFL students during their participation in study abroad programs. By focusing on students' perceptions, the study highlights the role of authentic language exposure and social interaction in shaping students' English-speaking fluency. This perspective enriches existing literature by emphasizing the social and cultural dimensions of language learning, which are often underexplored in comparison to classroom-based instruction.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this research are expected to provide several benefits: for students, the study can serve as a reference to better understand the opportunities and challenges they may encounter during study abroad, helping them prepare to maximize their learning experiences; for language educators and academic institutions, it offers insights into how study abroad programs can be optimized to support the development of communicative competence, particularly speaking fluency; and for policymakers and study abroad program coordinators, the results can be used as a guideline for designing programs that integrate sociolinguistic training and provide both pre-departure and post-program support to ensure participants gain maximum linguistic and cultural benefits.

E. Terminologies

1. Students Perceptions

In this study, student perceptions were defined as the participants' personal interpretations, reflections, and evaluations of their experiences in participating in student exchange programs, particularly regarding the perceived influence of these programs on their English speaking fluency and confidence. Student perceptions reflected learners' subjective understandings of sociolinguistic factors, such as interaction with speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, exposure to authentic communication contexts, and changes in confidence when using English in real-life situations. This definition was consistent with the concept of students' voices, which referred to learners' expressions, reflections, and feedback on their learning experiences and were considered essential for understanding learners' engagement and perceived learning outcomes (Rahmania, Suharjito, & Hudori, 2023). Therefore, in the context of this qualitative case study, student perceptions were used to capture participants' opinions, reflections, and judgments regarding their study abroad experiences and how these experiences were perceived to influence their English speaking development.

2. Student Exchange Programs

As explained by Susandi, Rusanti, and Wisnadewi (2023), student exchange programs are structured opportunities for students to study and interact in different academic or cultural environments, either in physical or virtual settings, with the aim of enhancing their language skills, cultural awareness, and personal development. These programs create authentic spaces for communication and

interaction in English, which are essential for language learning. In this research, student exchange programs are understood as intercultural and academic platforms where students can actively practice English, thus contributing to their fluency and communicative competence.

3. Speaking Skills

Zhou (2023) defines speaking skills as learners' oral abilities that involve fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and the willingness to communicate effectively in various contexts. Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners since it requires real-time processing and interaction. In this study, speaking skills are specifically interpreted as the students' ability to use English fluently, confidently, and appropriately in oral communication, particularly as an outcome of their participation in student exchange programs.

In this study, speaking skills were not only understood as the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but also as the ability to communicate meaningfully and naturally in social interactions. Speaking skills included fluency in expressing ideas, confidence in participating in conversations, appropriate use of vocabulary, and the ability to adjust language use according to different social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, speaking skills in this research referred to students' oral communication development as influenced by their participation in student exchange programs. Through frequent exposure to English-speaking environments, intercultural interactions, and authentic communication situations, students were

expected to improve their confidence, spontaneity, and pragmatic competence in speaking English. Therefore, speaking skills in this study emphasized both linguistic performance and sociolinguistic competence gained from real-life communication experiences during the exchange program.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Structure

In conducting this research, theory plays a crucial role in clarifying and strengthening the main concepts being discussed. Each important term used in the research needs to have a clear conceptual definition to avoid ambiguity. Therefore, the theoretical framework serves as the foundation by explaining the underlying theories and their relevance to the research focus. The explanation of this theoretical foundation will be presented in the next section.

1. Student Exchange Programs

Student exchange programs are educational initiatives that allow students to study abroad temporarily, often for a semester or academic year, in order to experience different cultural, social, and linguistic environments. These programs aim to enhance not only academic knowledge but also intercultural competence, personal growth, and language proficiency (Dwyer, 2004). By immersing students in a new context, exchange programs provide authentic opportunities to practice English communication in meaningful, real-life situations.

Participation in student exchange programs offers multiple benefits. First, learners develop English speaking skills through daily interactions with native or proficient speakers, classroom discussions, and social activities (Shi et al., 2024). This exposure enhances vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatic competence, while fostering confidence in using English in varied contexts.

Second, students gain intercultural competence, learning to adapt to new cultural norms, communicate effectively across cultures, and develop empathy and open-mindedness (Deardorff, 2006). Third, these programs support personal development, including independence, self-regulation, problem-solving, and resilience, as students navigate unfamiliar environments and challenges (Phạm, 2023).

Research also highlights the role of students' voices in understanding the effectiveness of exchange programs. Handayani (2024) found that Indonesian students who engaged in online or immersive intercultural exchanges reported improvements in speaking fluency, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate. Orawiwatnakul and Wichadee (2021) observed that learners' expressed experiences in exchange or collaborative programs reflected increased motivation and engagement, which in turn positively influenced their English proficiency. Students' feedback provides insights into which aspects of the program are most effective, including teaching methods, social interactions, and cultural exposure.

In conclusion, student exchange programs serve not only as international academic exchanges but also as transformative experiences that integrate language proficiency, cultural understanding, and personal development. The benefits of these programs are evident in improved speaking skills, intercultural awareness, and broader life skills that transcend classroom boundaries. Thus, student exchange

programs are invaluable for students seeking to enhance their language skills, understand other cultures, and develop themselves holistically.

2. English Speaking Skills

English speaking skills refer to learners' ability to express ideas, opinions, and feelings orally in English in a clear and understandable way. Speaking is not only about producing words, but also about conveying meaning and interacting with others in real communication. Brown (2007) explains that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. This means that when learners speak, they are not only talking, but also listening, responding, and adjusting their language based on the situation and the people they communicate with.

Speaking skills consist of several important components that work together. One of the most basic components is vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to the words and expressions that learners know and use when speaking. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners may understand what others say but find it difficult to respond or express their ideas. Nation (2013) states that vocabulary knowledge is essential for effective communication because it allows learners to choose appropriate words and convey meaning more accurately. Learners with a wider range of vocabulary tend to speak more confidently and fluently in various topics and situations.

Another important aspect of speaking skills is grammar. Grammar helps learners arrange words into meaningful and understandable sentences. Although spoken language does not require perfect grammatical accuracy, basic grammar

knowledge is still necessary to avoid misunderstanding. Harmer (2007) argues that grammar plays an important role in spoken communication because it supports clarity and meaning. In speaking activities, learners are expected to use grammar naturally while focusing on communication rather than memorizing rules.

Pronunciation is also a key element in English speaking skills. Pronunciation involves how sounds, words, and sentences are spoken so that listeners can understand them. According to Gilakjani (2016), good pronunciation does not mean speaking exactly like a native speaker, but producing speech that is intelligible and understandable. Incorrect pronunciation may cause confusion even when vocabulary and grammar are used correctly. Therefore, clear pronunciation helps learners communicate their messages effectively.

Fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly with an appropriate speed and without too many pauses or hesitations. A fluent speaker can maintain the flow of speech and express ideas continuously. Thornbury (2005) explains that fluency is often more important than accuracy in real communication because listeners usually focus on meaning rather than minor errors. Fluency develops through frequent practice and exposure to authentic speaking situations. In addition to fluency, accuracy is also an important aspect of speaking skills. Accuracy relates to the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Ellis (2008) states that effective speaking requires a balance between fluency and accuracy. Learners need opportunities to speak freely as well as feedback to improve the correctness of their language use. Both aspects support successful oral communication.

Speaking skills also involve discourse competence, which refers to the ability to organize ideas logically and coherently in spoken language. Discourse competence allows learners to connect sentences, maintain topics, and deliver messages in an organized way. Brown (2007) emphasizes that discourse competence is important for activities such as discussions, presentations, and storytelling, where ideas need to be expressed in a clear sequence.

Furthermore, pragmatic competence plays a significant role in speaking. Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts. Learners need to know how to speak politely, how to make requests, how to give opinions, and how to respond in different situations. Kasper and Rose (2002) explain that misunderstandings in communication often occur not because of grammar mistakes, but because of inappropriate language use in certain contexts.

Psychological factors also influence speaking skills. Confidence, motivation, and anxiety can affect how well learners perform in speaking activities. Many learners experience fear of making mistakes or being judged by others. MacIntyre et al. (1998) point out that learners' willingness to communicate is closely related to their confidence and emotional condition. Learners who feel comfortable and motivated are more likely to participate actively in speaking activities.

The learning environment also contributes to the development of speaking skills. Opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful and authentic situations help learners improve their oral ability. Harmer (2007) states that speaking skills

develop more effectively when learners are involved in interactive activities such as discussions, role plays, and real-life communication. Programs like student exchange or study abroad provide natural environments where learners can practice English in daily interactions.

In conclusion, English speaking skills are complex and involve various linguistic, psychological, and social aspects. Speaking requires vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, clear pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and the ability to use language appropriately in context. In addition, learners' confidence, motivation, and learning environment play important roles in speaking development. Therefore, speaking skills should be viewed as an integrated ability that develops through practice, interaction, and meaningful communication.

B. Relevant Study

Research conducted by Susandi et al. (2023) conducted a study entitled “The Role of Student Exchange Programs in Enhancing EFL Learners’ Speaking Proficiency”, explores how participation in student exchange programs provides opportunities for authentic communication and language practice. The study emphasizes that students benefit from exposure to new cultural and linguistic environments, which fosters speaking confidence and fluency. The similarity with the present study is the shared focus on student exchange as a medium for speaking improvement. The difference lies in the approach: Susandi et al. Measured speaking proficiency outcomes quantitatively, while the current study focuses on students’ voices and qualitative experiences.

Maturidi (2025) conducted a qualitative study entitled Investigating Students' Foreign Exchange Experience on Their English Learning Journey at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The study aimed to explore how students' participation in a foreign exchange program influenced their English learning experiences. Specifically, the research focused on alumni of the Kennedy–Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (KL-YES) program, one of the international exchange programs that sends Indonesian students to the United States.

The participants of the study consisted of ten alumni from Aceh who had participated in the KL-YES program. To gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, the researcher employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their personal experiences, challenges, and reflections related to their English learning during the exchange program. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes emerging from the participants' narratives.

The study was theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in language learning. Based on the findings, Maturidi (2025) reported that students experienced noticeable improvement in their English learning, particularly in listening comprehension and oral proficiency. These improvements were mainly attributed to continuous exposure to English in an English-speaking country, frequent interaction with native speakers, and exposure to a variety of English accents and vocabulary. The study concluded that foreign exchange programs can function as

effective alternative learning environments that support English learning beyond formal classroom instruction.

Research by Zhang (2022), with the title “Student Exchange Experiences and Oral Communication Skills Development”, highlights how learners perceive the role of peer interaction and host family communication in shaping their speaking ability. Zhang’s study shows that informal conversations often provide more meaningful practice than formal classroom activities. The similarity with the current research is the exploration of students’ perspectives on speaking development. The difference lies in the scope: Zhang’s study was limited to Asian student participants in one exchange program, while the present research covers a broader range of contexts and focuses specifically on students’ voices.

Research conducted by Nugroho (2022), entitled “Students’ Reflections on English Speaking Improvement through Short-Term Exchange Programs”, investigates learners’ self-reported experiences in developing their oral communication skills. The study found that short-term exchanges contribute to reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing learners’ willingness to communicate. The similarity with this study is that both analyze students’ voices and reflections on their speaking improvement. The difference is that Nugroho’s research only examined short-term exchange programs, whereas this research considers both short- and long-term exchange experiences.

Research by Lee (2021), with the title “Voices from Student Exchange: Narratives of Language Growth and Cultural Learning”, examines how students

narrate their experiences of language development during exchange programs. The study emphasizes the importance of intercultural exposure and daily communication practices in fostering oral competence. The similarity with the present study is the direct focus on students' voices and narratives. The difference is that Lee's study places equal emphasis on cultural learning and language development, while the present research narrows its scope to language skills, specifically speaking.

C. Synthesis and Research Gap

1. Synthesis

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that study abroad programs have a positive impact on students' English speaking fluency through immersive experiences and sociolinguistic interactions. Heinzmann (2024) emphasizes the importance of students' social contacts in different contexts, showing that students who engage more intensively with native speakers and diverse social groups tend to achieve greater improvements in English speaking skills. Similarly, Higuchi (2023) provides empirical evidence that study abroad participation significantly enhances language proficiency, particularly in speaking, due to exposure to authentic communication situations.

Kaya (2021) highlights that active interactions within host communities are a critical factor in language development, stressing the role of real-life social engagement in acquiring pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence. Rahayu (2021) focuses on students' perceptions, demonstrating that positive attitudes and self-evaluation of language development influence motivation and subsequent language

use. Collectively, these studies suggest that both the quantity and quality of social interactions, along with students' perceptions and attitudes, are crucial determinants of English speaking fluency during study abroad programs.

Drawing from the findings of Maturidi (2025), it can be synthesized that students' foreign exchange experiences play a significant role in shaping their English learning journey. The study demonstrates that immersion in an English-speaking environment encourages students to use English not only for academic purposes but also for daily communication. This constant use of English creates meaningful learning opportunities that allow students to develop their listening comprehension and oral proficiency naturally through real-life interaction.

Furthermore, the synthesis of the study highlights the importance of social interaction in English learning. Through interaction with native speakers, students are exposed to authentic language use, including different accents and vocabulary. These interactions align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which views language learning as a socially mediated process. In this context, students learn English through participation in social activities and engagement within the host culture rather than through formal instruction alone.

Overall, the synthesized findings suggest that English learning during foreign exchange programs occurs as a result of continuous exposure and social engagement in an English-speaking environment. The study positions foreign exchange programs as alternative learning spaces where students can develop their English skills through authentic communication experiences. However, the

synthesis also indicates that the study primarily emphasizes general English learning outcomes, particularly listening comprehension and oral proficiency, without providing a more detailed focus on specific aspects of speaking skills.

2. Research Gap

Despite the clear evidence of positive outcomes, several gaps remain. First, most existing studies emphasize either quantitative measurements of language proficiency (e.g., Higuchi, 2023) or generalized perception surveys (e.g., Rahayu, 2021), but few studies combine qualitative, in-depth exploration of students' perceptions with direct observation of sociolinguistic interactions in real-life contexts. Second, there is limited research on how students perceive the sociolinguistic influences, such as exposure to multiple English varieties, pragmatic norms, and intercultural communication strategies, on their speaking fluency. Third, most studies focus on specific programs (e.g., Erasmus in Europe) or specific national contexts, leaving a gap in understanding students' experiences in diverse international study abroad environments.

Contributions of the study conducted by Maturidi (2025), several limitations can be identified that justify the need for further research. First, although the study reports improvements in listening comprehension and oral proficiency, it does not specifically examine English speaking skills in detail. Aspects such as speaking fluency, confidence in speaking, and the ability to manage communication in different social situations are not explored as distinct areas of analysis. Consequently, there is a need for research that places speaking skills as the main focus rather than treating them as part of general English learning outcomes.

Second, the research context of Maturidi (2025) is limited to a foreign exchange program conducted in a native English-speaking country, namely the United States. While this context provides rich exposure to English, it does not represent exchange programs conducted in different sociolinguistic environments. Therefore, the way English is used and developed in exchange programs outside native English-speaking contexts remains unexplored.

Third, although students' experiences are discussed, the study does not explicitly emphasize students' voices and perceptions regarding how their social interactions influenced their English speaking development. The analysis focuses more on learning outcomes than on students' personal reflections on communication challenges, interaction patterns, and language use in social settings. As a result, further research is needed to explore students' perceptions of the sociolinguistic factors influencing their English speaking skills during exchange programs.

Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by exploring students' perceptions of the sociolinguistic influences of study abroad programs on their English speaking fluency using qualitative methods, including direct observation and in-depth interviews, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social interactions and cultural immersion contribute to language development.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was not to measure variables statistically, but to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic impact of study abroad programs on their English speaking fluency. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore meanings, interpretations, and contextual factors that shape individuals' experiences (Creswell, 2018).

The study specifically adopted a case study design because it focused on a bounded system, namely a group of students and alumni from the English Language Education program at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry who had participated in international student exchange programs. According to Yin (2018), a case study is appropriate when a researcher seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. In this research, English speaking fluency could not be separated from the sociocultural and linguistic environments experienced by the participants during their study abroad programs.

In line with Yin, Stake (1995) emphasized that a case study focuses on understanding the uniqueness and complexity of a particular case in depth. This study treated the participants as a single case with multiple embedded units, as they

shared similar academic backgrounds but participated in different international programs and sociolinguistic contexts. The case was bounded by the research setting (UIN Ar-Raniry), the participants (students and alumni of the English Language Education program), and the phenomenon under investigation (study abroad experiences and English speaking fluency).

Furthermore, Creswell (2018) stated that a qualitative case study enables researchers to collect detailed information using multiple sources of data over a sustained period of time. Although this study primarily relied on interviews, the in-depth nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to capture detailed narratives of participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the qualitative case study design was considered suitable and relevant for addressing the research questions of this study.

B. Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of five students and alumni from the English Language Education program at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, who had previously participated in international student exchange programs. To maintain confidentiality and protect personal identities, the participants were assigned pseudonyms and labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5.

The participants were selected because they had experienced studying and interacting in international academic and sociocultural environments where English was used as a medium of communication. These experiences exposed them to various sociolinguistic factors, such as interaction with speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, adaptation to new cultural norms, and the use of English in

authentic communicative situations. As a result, the participants were considered appropriate and information-rich sources of data for this study.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the participants. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method in which participants are deliberately chosen based on specific characteristics that are relevant to the research objectives (Obilor, 2023). The criteria used to select participants in this study were as follows:

1. The participants were active students or alumni of the English Language Education program at UIN Ar-Raniry.
2. The participants had completed an international student exchange or study visit program abroad.
3. The participants were willing to participate voluntarily and share their experiences openly and honestly.

Based on these criteria, five participants were selected. The participants were involved in different international programs with varying durations, which enriched the data by providing diverse sociolinguistic contexts. Participant P1 took part in the Korean Language Course at Hoseo University, which lasted for approximately six months in South Korea. Participant P3 participated in the WAEJ University Consortium program, which also lasted for around six months in Australia. Meanwhile, Participants P2, P4, and P5 joined short-term international programs with durations of approximately two to three weeks, namely the DAAD Study Visit to Germany, which was conducted in Germany.

The number of participants was considered appropriate for a qualitative case study, as the primary goal was to achieve depth of understanding rather than generalization to a larger population (Stake, 1995). This number allowed the researcher to explore each participant's experiences in detail while ensuring that the data analysis remained manageable and systematic.

C. Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique used in this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to use guiding questions while maintaining flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This technique was suitable for capturing participants' reflections on their study abroad experiences and the sociolinguistic factors influencing their English speaking fluency.

Each interview was conducted for approximately 25 to 50 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses. The interviews were conducted using both face-to-face and online methods to accommodate participants' availability and logistical considerations.

Regarding the interview settings, Participant P2 was interviewed face-to-face at Bimbel Teknos, while Participant P3 was interviewed face-to-face at Rumah Makan Cut Bit. Meanwhile, Participants P1, P4, and P5 were interviewed online through voice note communication. This online method was selected due to geographical

distance and scheduling constraints, while still enabling participants to provide reflective and detailed responses.

Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the aim of the interview, stating that the interview was conducted for research purposes as part of an undergraduate thesis. The researcher also explained that the participants were selected because they met the research criteria and had relevant experiences in international student exchange programs. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences openly and honestly, and they were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that all data would be used solely for academic purposes.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it is a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was considered appropriate for examining participants' narratives and for uncovering recurring themes related to sociolinguistic influences on English speaking fluency within the context of student exchange programs.

The process of data analysis followed six systematic stages, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, familiarization with the data was conducted. At this stage, the researcher transcribed all interview recordings verbatim and read the transcripts repeatedly to gain a thorough understanding of the content. This process

enabled the researcher to become deeply immersed in the data and to identify preliminary ideas relevant to the research focus.

Second, initial coding was carried out by systematically identifying meaningful segments of data and assigning descriptive codes to them. The coding process focused on significant sociolinguistic aspects emerging from the participants' experiences, such as interaction with native and non-native speakers, confidence development, cultural adaptation, exposure to different accents, and opportunities for authentic communication.

Third, searching for themes was conducted by grouping related codes into broader categories. These categories represented potential themes that reflected recurring patterns across participants' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic impact of the exchange programs on their English-speaking fluency.

Fourth, reviewing themes was undertaken to ensure that each theme accurately represented the coded data and the overall dataset. At this stage, themes were refined, combined, or separated when necessary to maintain coherence, internal consistency, and relevance to the research questions.

Fifth, defining and naming themes was conducted by clearly identifying the essence and scope of each theme. Each theme was given a concise and meaningful name that reflected its core idea and sociolinguistic significance, allowing for clearer interpretation and discussion.

Sixth, producing the report involved interpreting the finalized themes in relation to the research questions and relevant sociolinguistic theories. In this stage, the

findings were presented descriptively and analytically. Direct quotations from participants were included to enhance the credibility of the findings and to authentically represent participants' perceptions of their experiences during the exchange programs.



CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings from the Analysis of Data

This section presents the findings related to the research question: “What aspects of student exchange programs do students consider most influential in enhancing their speaking skills?” The findings are drawn from semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 20 to 50 minutes with the same five participants who joined student exchange programs in different countries. Rather than focusing only on the improvement of speaking skills as an outcome, this section specifically explores the aspects of the exchange experience that participants perceived as the most influential in supporting that improvement.

Overall, the findings indicate that participants did not see speaking development as the result of a single factor or isolated activity. Instead, they viewed the exchange program as a holistic learning experience, where several interconnected aspects worked together to support their speaking development. Participants emphasized that daily exposure to English, continuous social interaction, and psychological and emotional support formed a strong learning environment that encouraged natural and sustained speaking practice. These aspects helped participants move away from seeing English merely as an academic subject and toward using it as a living language for real communication in daily life.

Through repeated exposure, frequent interaction, and emotional adjustment, participants felt that their speaking skills improved gradually but consistently.

Speaking became less forced and more automatic, and participants reported increased fluency, confidence, and communicative awareness. From the analysis, three main aspects emerged as the most influential: daily language exposure through immersion, social interaction with others, and psychological and emotional support. Each aspect is discussed in detail below.

1. Daily Language Exposure as the Most Influential Aspect

One of the most frequently mentioned aspects by the participants was daily exposure to English through immersion. All participants emphasized that constant and unavoidable exposure to English throughout the exchange program played a crucial role in improving their speaking skills. The exchange environment placed them in situations where English had to be used continuously, making speaking practice a daily necessity rather than an optional activity.

Unlike traditional classroom learning, where English use is often limited to scheduled lessons, the exchange program required participants to use English in both academic and non-academic contexts. English was used not only during classes, workshops, or formal discussions, but also in everyday activities such as social gatherings, volunteering, and casual conversations. This continuous exposure helped participants develop fluency because they were required to think, respond, and express ideas in English spontaneously. Over time, frequent use reduced hesitation, increased speaking speed, and made speaking feel more natural.

This experience is illustrated by P1, who joined the program in South Korea: "Workshops and cultural events with international students from Germany, Vietnam, and Turkey meant that I had to speak English every day because that's the

only language we had in common. I had to describe my thoughts during a group discussion, which increased my speaking speed and vocabulary." This statement shows that English use emerged out of necessity rather than choice. Because English was the only shared language, P1 was required to use it actively and consistently. This situation created an authentic learning environment where speaking improvement occurred naturally through repeated use. The need to explain ideas in group discussions also encouraged vocabulary development and clearer expression.

Similarly, P3 described daily exposure as something that happened naturally through a wide range of activities in Australia: "When it came to discussions or workshops, it's more like a generalized activity, but apart from that, it's really, really social, coffee, group hikes, or literally just chilling' with people, talking' about stupid stuff." This quotation highlights that speaking English was not limited to formal learning contexts. Casual conversations during informal activities allowed participants to practice speaking without pressure. These relaxed interactions helped participants become more comfortable using English in everyday situations, which supported fluency development.

Participants from Germany also emphasized that hands-on activities and volunteering played an important role in daily exposure. P5 stated: "Social in conversation talks in volunteering, useful in real life chores, no academics, hands-on." This experience shows that speaking English during real-life tasks encouraged spontaneous communication. Without academic demands or fear of evaluation, participants could focus on meaning and interaction rather than grammatical

accuracy. Overall, daily immersion made English part of participants' daily routines, strengthening speaking fluency through natural and continuous practice.

2. Social Interaction with Others as a Key Driver of Speaking Improvement

Another important aspect identified by the participants was social interaction with others, including native speakers and international peers. Participants believed that interacting with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds helped them improve their speaking skills more effectively than classroom-based learning. These interactions required participants to use English for real communication purposes, such as sharing ideas, expressing emotions, negotiating meaning, and building relationships.

Several participants highlighted the value of interacting with native speakers. P4 explained: "Interacting with local people at the community center helped me pick up European idioms and adjust my pronunciation." This interaction exposed P4 to authentic language use, including idiomatic expressions and natural pronunciation patterns. Through real conversations, participants were able to observe how English is used in everyday communication, which supported their speaking accuracy and naturalness.

P3 also described meaningful experiences with native speakers in Australia: "Interacting with native speakers, like the group from Sydney, really pushed me to listen more carefully to their idioms. One guy gently corrected my Aussie slang during our beach trips." This experience shows that real interaction increased listening awareness and encouraged self-correction. Gentle feedback from native

speakers helped participants improve without increasing anxiety, making learning more effective and supportive.

At the same time, interaction with international peers was described as equally, if not more, influential especially in non-English-speaking environments. P3 shared: "In Australia, we shared tips on pronunciation while hiking with students from Japan, Brazil, and Germany." This interaction created a supportive learning space where all participants were non-native speakers. Because everyone faced similar challenges, participants felt less pressure and were more willing to experiment with language.

Peer support also strengthened confidence and motivation. P5 explained: "Going together with my friend made me braver to practice. We often discussed daily experiences, and then that helped me to be more fluent." Having familiar companions encouraged participants to speak more frequently and take risks. In addition, participants developed communicative flexibility. P1 stated: "In the case of native speakers, I tried to match their speed and vocabulary. In the case of non-native speakers, I slowed down and used simpler words." This shows that participants learned to adjust their speaking strategies based on their interlocutors, which is an important component of communicative competence.

3. Psychological and Emotional Support as a Supporting Aspect

The third influential aspect identified in the findings was psychological and emotional support. Participants explained that emotional growth, increased confidence, and reduced fear of making mistakes played a significant role in

improving their speaking skills. This aspect interacted closely with immersion and social interaction to create a positive learning cycle.

Many participants described initial anxiety and fear, particularly related to grammar and pronunciation. P1 stated: "At first, I was really afraid to speak because I felt my grammar was bad. But after some time, I realized that people are more interested in understanding me rather than in perfect grammar." This realization helped shift participants' focus from accuracy to communication. As a result, they became more willing to speak and express ideas freely.

P2 shared a similar experience: "Before joining the program, I wasn't so confident. With time, I got accustomed to expressing my ideas more clearly and naturally." These reflections show that confidence developed gradually through repeated exposure and positive interactions. Small successes also played an important role in sustaining motivation.

Finally, participants experienced a shift in their self-perception as English speakers. P2 reflected: "I realized that English is a global language. Everyone has their version of it, and that's okay." P4 added: "It made me more open and confident, less rigid about how English should sound." These reflections show that the exchange program helped participants develop a more inclusive and confident identity as English users. Viewing English as a global language reduced pressure to sound perfect and increased willingness to communicate, which ultimately supported sustained speaking development.

Table 4.1 Summary of Findings from Participant's Experiences on Speaking

No	Partisipant Code	Country of Exchange	Activities and Interactions	Key Language Experiences	Influencing Factors
1	P1	South Korea	Workshops, cultural activities, group discussions	Daily English use in multilingual environment	Immersion, social necessity, peer support
2	P2	Germany	Host family, cultural programs, school visits	English as lingua franca, multi-accents	Social support, cultural adaptation
3	P3	Australia	Workshops, social outings, peer discussions	Direct native speaker exposure, slang use	Immersion, peer encouragement
4	P4	Germany	Volunteering, community projects	Academic and casual English use	Peer scaffolding, emotional support
5	P5	Germany	Volunteering, organizing community events	Spontaneous speaking, code-switching	Practical tasks, motivation, peer help

This table provides a comprehensive and systematic summary of the main findings derived from the semi-structured interviews with five participants (P1–P5) who took part in student exchange programs in different countries, namely South

Korea, Germany, and Australia. The purpose of presenting the data in a table format is to clearly organize participants' experiences and to show patterns across cases in a structured and transparent way. By displaying the data visually, the table helps readers understand how different exchange contexts contributed to the development of students' English-speaking skills.

Each row in the table represents one participant and includes several key elements that reflect their learning experience. The first column identifies the country of exchange, which is important because the linguistic environment differs across locations. Although English is not the main national language in countries such as Germany and South Korea, the table shows that English still played a central role as a medium of communication. This highlights that speaking improvement does not only occur in English-speaking countries, but also in multilingual settings where English functions as a shared language.

The "Activities and Interactions" column describes the types of activities in which the participants were involved during their exchange programs. These activities include workshops, cultural events, volunteering, host family interactions, community projects, and informal social discussions. These activities are important because they represent real-life contexts where English was used naturally. Unlike classroom-based learning, these activities required participants to speak English spontaneously to communicate ideas, solve problems, and build social relationships. This confirms that speaking skills developed mainly through meaningful interaction rather than formal instruction.

The “Key Language Experiences” column explains how participants actually used and experienced English in these contexts. For example, participants in South Korea and Germany reported daily English use in multilingual environments, where English acted as a lingua franca among students from different countries. This forced them to rely on English as their main communication tool. In Australia, participants experienced direct exposure to native speakers, including local accents and slang, which helped them improve listening skills, pronunciation, and natural speaking patterns. In Germany, participants also reported spontaneous speaking and occasional code-switching during volunteering and community events, showing flexibility in language use and growing communicative confidence.

The “Influencing Factors” column highlights the sociolinguistic and psychological factors that supported speaking improvement. Across participants, several key factors repeatedly appeared, such as immersion, social necessity, peer support, emotional encouragement, and practical task engagement. Immersion refers to constant exposure to English in daily life, which reduced hesitation and increased fluency. Social necessity pushed participants to speak English even when they felt unsure, while peer support and emotional encouragement helped reduce anxiety and fear of making mistakes. These factors worked together to create a supportive learning environment that promoted active language use.

In addition, the “Additional Notes or Quotes” column (as mentioned in the explanation) strengthens the findings by including participants’ direct voices. These quotes provide concrete evidence of how participants perceived their own speaking development. The inclusion of direct quotations increases the credibility of the data

and allows readers to see how abstract themes such as immersion or confidence are experienced in real situations.

When examining the table as a whole, clear patterns emerge across participants. One important pattern is that immersion was effective in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. In Germany and South Korea, English was used as a common language among international participants, which created frequent opportunities for speaking practice. Participants in these contexts emphasized peer interaction, practical tasks, and emotional support as key contributors to their improvement. Meanwhile, in Australia, exposure to native speakers added another layer of learning, especially in terms of pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, and informal language use.

These patterns demonstrate that speaking improvement is not caused by a single factor, but by the combination of immersion, social interaction, and emotional support. The table clearly shows that participants became more fluent because they were repeatedly exposed to English, supported by peers, and encouraged to communicate without fear of making mistakes. This aligns closely with the main themes identified in Research Questions.

Furthermore, the findings presented in the table support broader sociolinguistic theories. For example, the constant exposure to meaningful language input reflects Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. At the same time, participants' ability to adjust their speaking style depending on their interlocutors relates to Giles's Accommodation

Theory, which explains how speakers modify their language to achieve effective communication. By connecting individual experiences to these theories, the table provides a strong foundation for the discussion section in Chapter IV.

Overall, this table demonstrates that student exchange programs provide rich linguistic environments that significantly support the development of English-speaking skills. By organizing participants' experiences clearly and systematically, the table shows that speaking improvement occurs through real communication, social engagement, and psychological growth. These findings also suggest that exchange program designers should intentionally create opportunities for immersion, interaction, and emotional support in order to maximize language learning outcomes.

B. Discussion

This discussion explains the findings of the study in a simple and clear way by connecting students' perceptions with theories and previous studies discussed in Chapter II. The main purpose of this discussion is to show how students experience student exchange programs and how these experiences help them improve their English-speaking skills. Rather than focusing only on test results or language rules, this study emphasizes real experiences, daily communication, and personal growth as important parts of speaking development.

Based on the findings of research question, students described that joining student exchange programs gave them many opportunities to speak English in real situations. At the beginning, most participants admitted that they felt nervous, afraid

of making mistakes, and not confident enough to speak. However, as they became more familiar with their new environment, they started to speak more naturally. This finding supports Brown's (2007) idea that speaking is not only about producing correct sentences, but also about interaction and meaning-making. Students learned to speak because they had to respond, ask questions, and express opinions in daily life.

This improvement also relates closely to the concept of immersion. When students live and study in an environment where English is used every day, they cannot avoid using the language. Participants explained that English was not only used in classrooms, but also in dormitories, group discussions, public places, and social activities. This situation helped them practice speaking continuously. Harmer (2007) explains that speaking skills grow faster when learners are exposed to meaningful communication. The findings of this study clearly show that frequent exposure made students speak more fluently and with less hesitation.

This finding shows that social interaction is one of the most influential aspects of student exchange programs. Students stated that interacting with local people, international friends, and classmates pushed them to adjust their language and communicate more clearly. Through these interactions, they learned new vocabulary, expressions, and ways of speaking that are rarely found in textbooks. This finding is in line with Zhang (2022), who found that informal conversations play a stronger role in speaking development than formal lessons. It also supports the idea that speaking skills improve through real communication rather than memorization.

Another important finding is the role of emotional experience in speaking development. Students explained that emotional challenges, such as feeling lonely, confused, or afraid, actually became part of their learning process. As time passed, they learned to manage their emotions and gained confidence. This finding supports Macintyre et al. (1998), who state that confidence and emotional comfort influence learners' willingness to communicate. When students feel safe and supported, they are more willing to speak, even if their English is not perfect.

The findings also support Ellis' (2008) view that speaking development requires a balance between fluency and accuracy. Students did not focus too much on grammar correctness when communicating. Instead, they focused on delivering messages and being understood. Over time, their accuracy improved naturally through repeated use. This shows that speaking development happens gradually and naturally. Students' voices in this study also confirm the importance of pragmatic competence. Participants learned how to speak politely, how to express opinions, and how to respond appropriately in different situations. This supports Kasper and Rose's (2002) explanation that successful communication depends on knowing how to use language appropriately in social contexts, not only on grammar knowledge. Students learned these skills through daily interaction, observation, and practice.

In terms of previous studies, the findings of this research are consistent with Susandi et al. (2023), Nugroho (2022), and Lee (2021). Similar to those studies, students in this research reported increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved speaking fluency after joining exchange programs. However, this study adds value by focusing deeply on students' voices and personal reflections, rather

than only measuring outcomes. This approach helps explain how and why speaking improvement happens.

One strength of this study is that it presents real experiences directly from students. Their stories show that speaking improvement is not only about language ability, but also about mindset, confidence, and adaptation. The consistency of students' responses indicates that the findings are reliable and meaningful. This supports Handayani's (2024) argument that students are able to reflect on their own learning progress accurately.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. The data are based on students' perceptions, which may be influenced by positive memories or personal feelings. The number of participants is also limited, so the findings cannot be generalized to all exchange programs. However, the purpose of this qualitative study is not generalization, but deep understanding. Therefore, the findings still provide valuable insights into the sociolinguistic impact of student exchange programs on speaking skills.

Overall, this discussion shows that student exchange programs help students improve their English-speaking skills through daily practice, social interaction, and emotional growth. Speaking improvement is not achieved instantly, but develops gradually as students interact with others and adapt to new environments. The findings strongly support the theories and previous studies discussed in Chapter II and confirm that speaking skills are shaped by linguistic, social, and psychological factors. By listening to students' voices, this study highlights that language learning

is a human process that grows through experience, interaction, and confidence. when learners are placed in real communication settings.

4. Immersion in an English-Use Environment

Immersion in an environment where English was used continuously emerged as the most dominant and influential aspect affecting participants' speaking fluency. All participants described how English became the main medium of communication throughout the exchange program, not only during structured academic activities but also in everyday social interactions. This constant exposure created a situation where English was no longer optional, but necessary for daily functioning.

Although several host countries, such as Germany and South Korea, are not English-speaking countries, English functioned as a shared language among international students from different linguistic backgrounds. This condition significantly reduced participants' opportunities to rely on their mother tongue, Bahasa Indonesia. As a result, participants were encouraged to think, respond, and express ideas in English more frequently and more naturally. Repeated use over time helped reduce hesitation, increase speaking speed, and strengthen overall fluency.

This experience is clearly described by P1, who joined an exchange program in South Korea: "In South Korea, there were workshops and cultural interactions with international students from Germany, Vietnam, and Turkey. I had to use English every day as it was a common language among everyone. I had to explain various ideas within group discussions, and it helped increase my speed and vocabulary."

This statement illustrates how immersion emerged from communicative necessity rather than instructional design. Because English was the only shared language, P1 was required to actively use it to express opinions and ideas. Speaking development, therefore, was driven by the need to be understood rather than by grammatical correctness. This condition encouraged a stronger focus on clarity, message delivery, and communicative effectiveness.

P1 further reflected on the effectiveness of study abroad programs compared to traditional classroom learning: "I remember that one of my lecturers said that he thought that a student exchange, which lasts for six months, is a better way to learn your English skills than learning English for four years in a class. To be honest with you, when he said that, I wasn't really sure whether he meant what he said, but now that I experienced it, I really agree with him."

This reflection highlights a significant change in perception. Before participating in the exchange program, P1 doubted that a shorter overseas experience could surpass years of classroom learning. However, after experiencing daily immersion and authentic communication, the participant recognized that meaningful language use had a stronger impact on speaking development. This finding suggests that intensive exposure within a shorter time frame can be more effective than long-term learning without sufficient real-life practice.

A similar pattern was reported by P3, who joined a program in Australia: "In workshops and discussion sessions, it was more so general activity sessions, but apart from that, it was like super-social coffee sessions, group hikes, or just hanging

out and talking about random things. And yeah, everyone spoke English because it was necessary for everyone. So yeah, a bit of both, but it was more so on a social level and greatly boosted me into getting more comfortable."

This experience demonstrates that immersion extended beyond formal learning environments. Informal social interactions played a crucial role in building comfort and fluency. Because these conversations occurred in relaxed and non-judgmental settings, participants felt freer to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. Over time, English became integrated into daily routines rather than treated as an academic task requiring constant self-monitoring.

Participants who joined programs in Germany also experienced immersion through practical and hands-on activities. P5 described this experience concisely: "Social bits within volunteering sessions, practical within daily errands, no academia, all hands-on."

This statement reflects how English was used during volunteering activities and daily tasks. Such situations required spontaneous speaking and immediate responses, which supported natural fluency development. Without academic pressure, participants could focus on communication and interaction, reinforcing English as a functional language rather than a theoretical subject.

Overall, immersion created a learning environment where English was acquired through use rather than instruction. This type of exposure helped participants reduce anxiety, increase speaking speed, and gain confidence. By using English daily in

meaningful contexts, speaking fluency gradually developed as part of participants' everyday behavior.

5. Interaction with Native Speakers and International Peers

Another influential aspect identified in the findings was interaction with native speakers and international peers. Participants emphasized that these interactions provided opportunities to use English in authentic communicative situations, exposing them to different accents, speaking styles, vocabulary choices, and communication strategies. This diversity helped participants become more flexible and adaptive in their language use.

Several participants highlighted the value of interacting with native speakers. P4 stated: "Interacting with people in this community center helped me learn European idioms and adjust my pronunciation."

This interaction allowed P4 to observe how English is naturally used in everyday communication. Exposure to idiomatic expressions and authentic pronunciation patterns helped refine speaking accuracy and naturalness. Similarly, P3 shared: "Interacting with the native speakers, such as the group from Sydney, really pushed me to listen more carefully to their idioms. One guy corrected my Aussie slang in a gentle way during our trips to the beach."

This experience shows that feedback from native speakers, when delivered supportively, can improve speaking without increasing anxiety. Gentle correction helped participants become more aware of their language use while maintaining confidence and motivation.

At the same time, interaction with international peers was described as equally important, particularly in contexts where English functioned as a lingua franca. P3 explained: "In Australia, with students from Japan, Brazil, and Germany, we shared tips on pronunciation during hikes."

Because all participants were non-native speakers, the learning environment felt safe and collaborative. Participants were more willing to make mistakes and learn from one another. P5 also emphasized the role of companionship: "Going together with my friend made me braver to practice. We often discussed the daily experience with each other, and that helped me more to express myself fluently."

These interactions reduced fear and encouraged continuous practice. Participants also developed sociolinguistic awareness, as they learned to adjust their speaking style depending on their interlocutors. P1 explained: "With native speakers, I tried to match their speed and vocabulary. With non-native speakers, I slowed down and chose simpler words." This adaptability reflects growth in sociolinguistic competence. Participants became more aware that effective communication involves adjusting language use according to context, audience, and relationship. This awareness increased confidence and control during conversations, contributing to improved fluency.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of the aspects of student exchange programs that are considered most influential in improving English speaking skills. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research captured the lived experiences of five students from the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry who had participated in student exchange programs in different countries. Through in-depth interviews, the study focused on students' voices to understand how their speaking skills developed within authentic sociolinguistic environments.

Based on the findings presented in Chapter IV, this study concludes that the improvement of students' English-speaking skills during student exchange programs is influenced by five interconnected aspects, rather than a single factor. These aspects include immersion in an English-use environment, daily language exposure through real-life activities, interaction with native speakers and international peers, participation in social and cultural activities, and psychological and emotional development. Together, these aspects formed a supportive learning environment that encouraged continuous speaking practice and gradual fluency development.

The first influential aspect is immersion in an English-use environment. Participants explained that during the exchange programs, English became the

primary language used for communication in academic settings, social interactions, and everyday situations. Because students came from different linguistic backgrounds, English functioned as the only shared language. This condition forced students to use English consistently, making speaking a necessity rather than a choice. As a result, students became more accustomed to using English naturally and experienced a noticeable reduction in hesitation when speaking.

The second aspect identified in the findings is daily language exposure through real-life communication. Participants emphasized that English was not only used in formal academic activities but also in informal situations such as shopping, volunteering, traveling, and casual conversations. These daily interactions required spontaneous responses and meaningful communication, which helped students develop fluency in a natural way. Through repeated exposure in authentic contexts, students gradually improved their speaking speed, vocabulary use, and overall communicative confidence.

The third influential aspect is interaction with native speakers and international peers. Interaction with native speakers allowed students to learn natural pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, and appropriate speaking styles. At the same time, interaction with fellow international students created a comfortable and non-threatening environment, as most of them were also non-native English speakers. This combination helped students become more flexible in adjusting their language use based on their interlocutors. Such interactions also enhanced students' sociolinguistic awareness, as they learned to modify their speaking style according to context, audience, and communication purpose.

The fourth aspect highlighted in the findings is participation in social and cultural activities. Activities such as group discussions, cultural events, volunteering programs, and shared experiences encouraged students to speak English in meaningful and emotionally engaging ways. Participants explained that cultural activities helped them connect language use with personal experiences, which made speaking more expressive and authentic. These activities allowed students to speak not only to complete tasks, but also to share ideas, feelings, and cultural understanding, which contributed to greater speaking fluency.

The fifth and final aspect influencing speaking development is psychological and emotional development. Many participants admitted that before joining the exchange programs, they experienced anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes when speaking English. However, supportive peers, friendly environments, and companionship especially from friends joining the program together helped reduce these negative feelings. Emotional support played a crucial role in increasing students' self-confidence and willingness to communicate. As students felt more comfortable and accepted, they became braver in expressing themselves and more consistent in practicing speaking.

In conclusion, this study confirms that student exchange programs provide effective learning environments for improving English speaking skills when these five aspects are present and interconnected. Speaking improvement occurred gradually through immersion, daily exposure, social interaction, cultural engagement, and emotional support. Even in non-native English-speaking countries, where English functioned as a lingua franca, students still experienced

meaningful speaking development. By emphasizing students' voices, this study highlights that English-speaking skills develop most effectively through real communication, social participation, and psychological readiness rather than through formal instruction alone.

B. Suggestions

Based on the conclusions of this study, several suggestions are proposed to improve the effectiveness of student exchange programs and to support English speaking development more optimally.

1. Suggestions for Students

Students who plan to join student exchange programs are encouraged to actively take advantage of opportunities to use English in daily activities. They should not be afraid of making mistakes, as speaking errors are a natural part of the learning process. Participating in social activities, group discussions, and informal conversations can help students improve fluency and confidence. In addition, students are advised to build positive relationships with peers and local communities, as emotional support and companionship play an important role in encouraging continuous speaking practice.

2. Suggestions for Educational Institutions and Program Organizers

Educational institutions and exchange program organizers are encouraged to design programs that emphasize immersion and interaction. Programs should include activities that require students to use English naturally, such as group projects, cultural events, volunteering, and daily communication tasks. Providing a supportive environment where students feel safe to express themselves is also

essential. Mentoring systems, peer support groups, or reflective discussion sessions can help students overcome anxiety and build confidence in speaking English.

3. Suggestions for Future Researchers

Future researchers are suggested to explore this topic using a larger number of participants or different research methods, such as mixed-methods or longitudinal studies, to examine long-term speaking development. Further research could also compare students' speaking development across different types of exchange programs or sociolinguistic contexts. In addition, future studies may focus more deeply on specific aspects such as emotional factors, identity development, or intercultural communication to enrich the understanding of how student exchange programs influence English speaking skills.

In conclusion, this thesis shows that student exchange programs are powerful tools for improving English speaking skills, as voiced by the participants. By focusing on immersion, interactions, and emotional support, programs can create lasting fluency. Students' experiences highlight the need for real-world practice over traditional lessons. Future efforts should use these insights to make language learning more effective and enjoyable. The study contributes to education by showing how global exchanges build not just skills, but also confidence and cultural understanding. This study also makes a significant contribution to the field of language education by highlighting students' voices and emphasizing the importance of real-world practice in language learning. These findings can be used to design more effective and enjoyable language programs. Thus, this thesis emphasizes that student exchange programs are transformative journeys that

empower learners to become confident and adaptive communicators in an interconnected world.

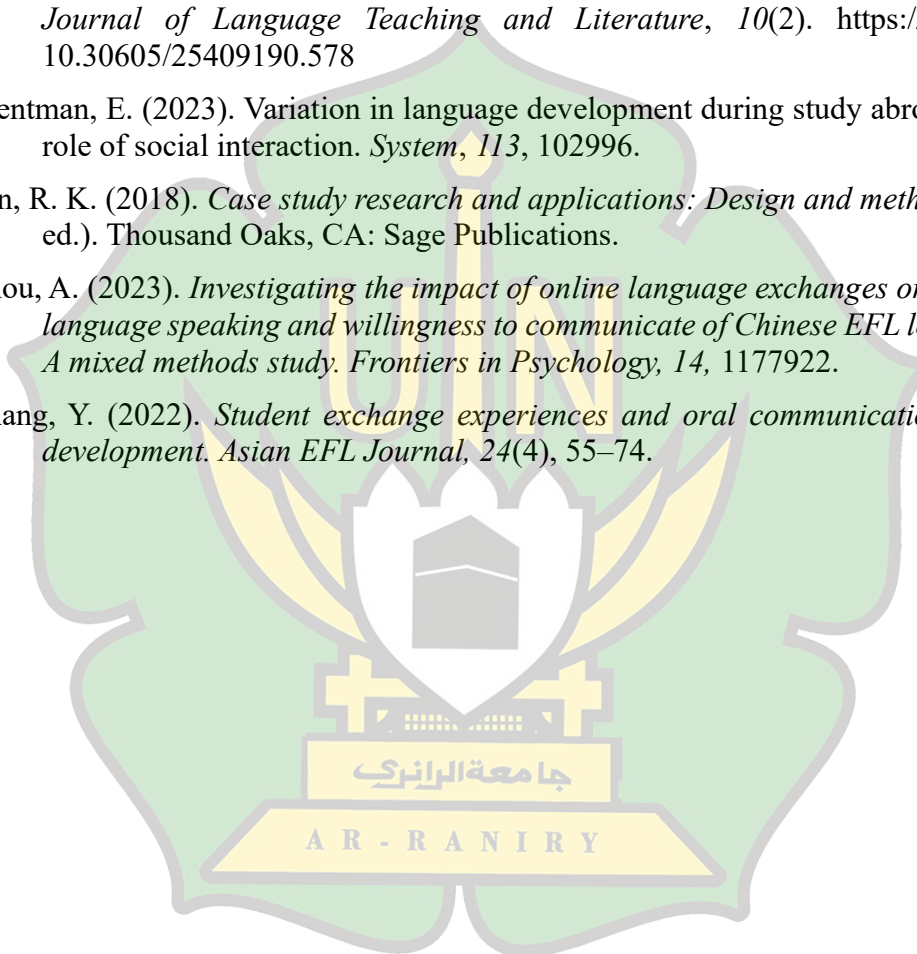


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Appointment Letter of Supervisor



KEPUTUSAN DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
NOMOR: 1433 TAHUN 2025

TENTANG:
PENGANGKATAN PEMBIMBING SKRIPSI MAHASISWA
DENGAN RAHMAT TUHAN YANG MAHA ESA

DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH

Menimbang : a. bahwa untuk kelancaran bimbingan skripsi mahasiswa pada Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh maka dipandang perlu menunjuk pembimbing skripsi;
b. bahwa yang namanya tersebut dalam Surat Keputusan ini dianggap cakap dan mampu untuk diangkat dalam jabatan sebagai pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa;
c. bahwa berdasarkan pertimbangan sebagaimana dimaksud dalam huruf a dan huruf b, perlu menetapkan Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

Mengingat : 1. Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional;
2. Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005, tentang Guru dan Dosen;
3. Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2012, tentang Pendidikan Tinggi;
4. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 74 Tahun 2012, tentang perubahan atas peraturan pemerintah RI Nomor 23 Tahun 2005 tentang pengelolaan keuangan Badan Layanan Umum;
5. Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 4 Tahun 2014, tentang penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Tinggi dan Pengelolaan Perguruan Tinggi;
6. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 64 Tahun 2013, tentang perubahan Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh menjadi Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
7. Peraturan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 44 Tahun 2022, tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
8. Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 14 Tahun 2022, tentang Statuta UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
9. Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 492 Tahun 2003, tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang Pengangkatan, Pemindahan dan Pemberhentian PNS di Lingkungan Depag RI;
10. Keputusan Menteri Keuangan Nomor 293/Kmk.05/2011, tentang penetapan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh pada Kementerian Agama sebagai Instansi Pemerintah yang menerapkan Pengelolaan Badan Layanan Umum;
11. Surat Keputusan Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor 01 Tahun 2015, Tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang kepada Dekan dan Direktur Pascasarjana di Lingkungan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

MEMUTUSKAN

Menetapkan : Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh tentang Pembimbing Skripsi Mahasiswa.

KESATU : Menunjuk Saudara :
Rahmi Fhonna, M.A

Untuk membimbing Skripsi

Nama : **Zahratul Ulya**
NIM : **220203090**
Program Studi : **Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris**
Judul Skripsi : **Students' Voices on Joining Student Exchange Programs to Improve English Speaking Skills**

KEDUA : Kepada pembimbing yang tercantum namanya diatas diberikan honorarium sesuai dengan peraturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku;

KETIGA : Pembiayaan akibat keputusan ini dibebankan pada DIPA UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor SP DIPA-025.04.2.423925/2025 Tanggal 02 Desember Tahun Anggaran 2025;

KEEMPAT : Keputusan ini berlaku selama enam bulan sejak tanggal ditetapkan;

KELIMA : Keputusan ini berlaku sejak tanggal ditetapkan dengan ketentuan bahwa segala sesuatu akan diubah dan diperbaiki kembali sebagaimana mestinya, apabila kemudian hari ternyata terdapat kekeliruan dalam Surat Keputusan ini.

Ditetapkan di : Banda Aceh
Pada tanggal : 16 Oktober 2025
Dekan,


Saiful Muluk

Tembusan

1. Sekjen Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
2. Dirjen Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
3. Direktur Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
4. Kantor Pelayanan Perbendaharaan Negara (KPPN), di Banda Aceh;
5. Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
6. Kepala Bagian Keuangan dan Akuntansi UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
7. Yang bersangkutan;
8. Arsip.



Appendix B: Data Participants of Observations

NO	Code Name	Batch
1	P1	2021
2	P2	2020
3	P3	2014
4	P4	2021
5	P5	2021

