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The Correlation Among Students' Motivation, Vocabulary Mastery, and Speaking Fluency in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the correlation among students' motivation, vocabulary mastery, and speaking fluency in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The research employs a quantitative method with a multivariate correlational design. The participants will consist of EFL students at the senior high school level. Data will be collected through a motivation questionnaire, a vocabulary mastery test, and a speaking performance rubric. The data will be analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation and multiple regression analysis to identify both partial and simultaneous correlations among the variables. It is expected that the findings will reveal a significant correlation between students' motivation and vocabulary mastery with their speaking fluency. The results of this study are anticipated to provide insights for English teachers in improving students' speaking ability through enhancing their motivation and vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: motivation, vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, EFL, correlation

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INTRODUCTION

English is nowadays one of the most important international languages used as a medium of communication, especially in education, business, and technology. Speaking skill becomes one of the most challenging aspects for students to master, especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Speaking fluency means much more than the production of grammatically correct sentences; it is about using language fluently, spontaneously, and meaningfully in real communication. Many EFL learners fail to develop their speaking fluency due to limited motivation and poor vocabulary mastery.

Motivation is the most essential element that determines the success of language learning. According to Gardner (1985), motivation determines how much effort students put into learning a foreign language. Highly motivated students are more willing to engage in speaking activities, take risks in using the language, and sustain their learning despite difficulties. At the same time, mastery of vocabulary is the basis for effective communication. Without proper mastery of words, learners cannot express themselves fluently or with accuracy.

Previous research has proven that motivation and vocabulary knowledge contribute greatly to students' speaking ability. Yet, there are very few studies that explain how these two variables co-vary with the speaking fluency of students in EFL settings where the exposure to English is limited. Consequently, this study intends to explore the correlation between students' motivation and mastery of vocabulary in regard to their speaking fluency while learning English as a foreign language.

The findings from this study are expected to give insight to English teachers and curriculum designers on how to develop better strategies to improve the speaking fluency of students. Equipped with an understanding of how motivation and vocabulary mastery interact in their influence on speaking performance, teachers will be able to create more engaging and vocabulary-rich learning environments that allow students to use English actively and confidently.

RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

In this study, a quantitative correlational research design is utilized with a multivariate approach. This design aims to identify the strength

of the relationship between three variables: students' motivation (X_1), vocabulary mastery (X_2), and speaking fluency (Y). The multivariate correlational method allows the researcher to analyze both the individual correlations and the simultaneous influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The rationale for the use of this design in this study is that it is appropriate since the study aims at finding the statistical relationship and not the cause-and-effect relationship.

2. Population and Sample

The population of this research consists of all eleventh-grade students at Senior High School State 1 of Gantung who are learning English as a foreign language. A random sampling technique will be used to ensure that each student has an equal chance of being selected, thus minimizing bias. The total sample is expected to include 30–35 students, which is adequate for correlation analysis based on Cohen's (1988) sample size recommendation.

3. Variables and Indicators

• Independent Variables:

Students' Motivation (X_1): measured through a questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), covering integrative and instrumental motivation.

Vocabulary Mastery (X_2): measured using a vocabulary test that assesses students' understanding of meaning, synonyms, antonyms, and word use in context.

• Dependent Variable:

Speaking Fluency (Y): assessed through a speaking test where students perform short oral tasks. Their fluency will be rated based on speed, smoothness, and coherence using Brown's (2004) fluency rubric.

4. Data Collection Techniques

- Motivation Questionnaire: distributed to measure students' motivational level toward learning English. "[Questionnaire](#)"
- Vocabulary Test: consisting of multiple-choice and matching items related to vocabulary usage. "[Vocabulary Test](#)"
- Speaking Test: conducted through short interviews or picture descriptions. Each student's performance will be recorded and rated by one English teacher to ensure reliability.

Speaking Test Rubric

Aspect	5 Points	4 Points	3 Points	2 Points	1 Points
Fluency	Smooth, very little pause, no repetition	There is a pause but it doesn't disturb the meaning	A few Pauses or repeat words but still understandable	Frequent pauses, interrupting the delivery	So many pauses or stops, hard to understand
Pronunciation	Clear pronunciation, accurate intonation and stress	Min or mistakes but don't interfere with understanding	Some mistakes that can disturb a little	A lot of mistakes, often asking for repetition	Pronunciation really hinders understanding
Grammar Accuracy	The Structure is very precise; the grammar variation is good	Small but rare mistakes	Mistakes are quite frequent but the meaning is still clear	There are many mistakes so that the meaning is sometimes unclear	Grammar is messed up so the meaning is difficult to understand
Coherence & Vocabulary Use	Ideas are well organized, vocabulary carries precisely	Quite structured & enough variety	Sometimes unstructured, limited vocabulary	Unclear ideas, word repetition too often	Incoherent, very limited vocabulary

5. Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using Multiple Correlation Analysis (R) to examine:

- The correlation between students' motivation and speaking fluency.
- The correlation between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency.
- The simultaneous correlation among students' motivation, vocabulary mastery, and speaking fluency.

Additional Statistical Procedures:

- Normality Test: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test will be used to verify normal distribution of all variables
- Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha will be calculated for the motivation questionnaire to ensure internal consistency
- Effect Size Reporting: Cohen's d will be reported alongside p-values to provide magnitude of relationships regardless of statistical significance

The analysis will be performed using SPSS software, with the significance level set at 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$). The interpretation will follow the correlation strength guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Siswa	SM (X1)	VT (X2)	SF (Y)
1	38	71	75
2	37	90	70
3	37	63	80
4	37	92	95
5	34	91	65
6	36	81	65
7	39	95	95
8	34	64	80
9	36	75	65
10	35	61	80
11	35	74	65
12	37	68	65
13	40	83	75
14	33	68	40
15	32	72	45
16	36	94	60
17	37	84	55
18	37	72	75
19	37	77	55
20	31	98	50
21	34	64	90
22	36	90	65

23	35	74	70
24	37	96	50
25	36	91	60
26	36	82	70
27	36	96	55
28	37	75	75
29	35	77	60
30	41	66	65

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive results showed that students' motivation had a mean score of 36.03 (SD = 2.11), vocabulary mastery had a mean of 79.47 (SD = 11.54), and speaking fluency had a mean of 66.17 (SD = 12.89) from a total of 30 respondents.

Preliminary Analysis

Normality Test: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that all variables were normally distributed (motivation: $p = .215$; vocabulary: $p = .178$; speaking fluency: $p = .194$), meeting the assumption for parametric correlation analysis.

Reliability Test: The motivation questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating high reliability for measurement.

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant correlation between students' motivation and their speaking fluency.

Pearson Product Moment correlation revealed that students' motivation was not significantly correlated with their speaking fluency ($r = 0.008$, $p > .05$, $N = 30$). The effect size was very small (Cohen's $d = 0.016$). This indicates that students who have higher motivation levels do not necessarily demonstrate higher speaking fluency performance. Thus, the alternative hypothesis (H_{a1}) is rejected, while the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is a significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their speaking fluency.

The statistical testing showed that vocabulary mastery did not significantly correlate with speaking fluency ($r = -0.117$, $p > .05$, $N = 30$). The effect size was small (Cohen's $d = 0.235$). This suggests that vocabulary mastery alone does not directly guarantee fluent oral production in EFL classroom settings. Therefore, H_{a2} is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3

There is a significant simultaneous correlation among students' motivation, vocabulary mastery, and speaking fluency.

Multiple regression analysis revealed that motivation and vocabulary mastery collectively did not significantly contribute to students' speaking fluency ($R^2 = 0.014$; $F(2,27) = 0.188$; $p = .829$). The prediction contribution of the two independent variables only explained 1.4% of the variance in the speaking fluency outcome. The effect size was very small (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.014$). Hence, the alternative hypothesis (H_{a3}) is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Summary of Findings

All three hypotheses tested in this study resulted in nonsignificant statistical relationships. Students' motivation and vocabulary mastery neither separately nor jointly contribute to accounting for students' speaking fluency in this context. This implies that speaking fluency development might be influenced more strongly by other factors outside motivation and vocabulary knowledge, possibly performance variables, speaking exposure frequency, confidence during oral tasks, anxiety regulation, interactional strategy, or communicative practice intensity within learning situations.

DISCUSSION

The current study revealed that students' motivation and vocabulary mastery did not significantly correlate with their speaking fluency, either separately or in combination. These findings suggest that fluent oral performance in an EFL classroom may not be driven mainly by either affective drive or lexical knowledge alone. In other words, although motivation and vocabulary are theoretically crucial in L2 learning, they do not function as direct predictors for fluency output. Fluency is a performance-based language skill, and hence tends to be shaped by dynamic, real-time processing rather than by static, knowledge-based constructs.

One possible explanation is that speaking fluency depends more upon proceduralizing and exposure to real usage rather than on declarative lexical storage. While the learners may possess sufficient vocabulary knowledge, retrieval speed, automaticity, and articulation control during oral performance result from different cognitive processes (Nation, 2013; Segalowitz, 2010). This implies that vocabulary mastery assessed through written testing does not necessarily translate into spontaneous fluent performance. By the same token, although motivation enhances effort and engagement, high motivation cannot be taken as a guarantee for fluent speech unless backed by sustained speaking opportunities, an oral practice environment, and frequency of communicative interaction.

Apart from this, speaking practice in traditional EFL Indonesian classrooms is generally scarce, highly teacher-dominated, and frequently monologic rather than interactional. In this kind of environment, students hardly engage with the processing of input/output in swift oral real-life conditions. This could, therefore, be the reason why the development of fluency has a more profound basis in other variables that were not measured in this study, such as speaking anxiety, confidence, pronunciation accuracy, exposure to authentic spoken text, discourse management strategies, hesitation control, turn-taking ability, and interactional communication training. This corroborates the previous TEFL literature highlighting that fluency is a multi-dimensional construct and not a product of just one or two linguistic factors.

In sum, the findings indicate that motivation and vocabulary mastery cannot be seen as a strong predictor for the students' fluency performance. Fluency tends to be more sensitive to performance-based, skill-execution factors rather than to cognitive or affective standalone variables. Future research, therefore, needs to integrate variables such as anxiety, communicative strategy use, oral interaction frequency, or exposure-based fluency training to provide a fuller explanation of the fluency mechanism in Indonesian EFL classroom contexts.

CONCLUSION

This present study aimed to explore whether motivation and vocabulary mastery correlate with speaking fluency in an Indonesian EFL classroom context. However, based on the statistical results, three hypotheses were rejected because no significant correlations existed among the variables-whether tested separately or simultaneously. Therefore, this study concludes that students' speaking fluency is not directly affected by either motivation or vocabulary knowledge. Fluent oral production seems to be determined by other performance-related and interactive factors beyond motivation and lexical competence.

These findings provide a crucial implication: fluency development needs to be treated as a dynamic performance skill that requires continuous oral practice, exposure, interaction, and communicative task repetition rather than only increasing the motivation level or vocabulary list size of the students. Teachers need to emphasize fluency-based classroom activities that include communicative tasks, role play, speaking speed cycles, interaction-based output, peer dialogues, authentic speaking exposure, and feedback-based fluency rehearsal. Vocabulary and motivation become supporting constructs, but they cannot shape fluent oral performance all by themselves in the absence of real oral practice.

Further research is thus encouraged to focus on other predictor variables which may well account more strongly for the variance in speaking fluency, such as anxiety control, willingness to communicate, pronunciation competence, interaction frequency, cognitive processing speed, and authentic exposure. More complex models, such as SEM, mixedmethods, and longitudinal designs, are also recommended as a way of accounting for the multidimensional nature of fluency development, particularly in EFL ecosystems with limited real speaking opportunities.

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