



Exploring the Role of the Learning Environment in English Language Acquisition among EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the English-speaking proficiency of 36 undergraduate students in the Communication Studies Program at Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kosgoro 1957, Jakarta, and examines how environmental factors support language learning. Using class observations, speaking tasks, and interviews, the study found that 20% of students demonstrated high proficiency, 45% intermediate, and 35% low proficiency. High-proficiency students communicated confidently and clearly, intermediate students participated actively but sometimes hesitated, and low-proficiency students struggled with pronunciation, grammar, and sentence formation. Key environmental factors—English media exposure, peer interaction, and authentic communication experiences—were found to enhance learning outcomes. Media allowed self-paced practice, peer mentoring promoted indirect learning and confidence, and real communication reduced anxiety while encouraging experimentation. The findings suggest that a supportive and interactive learning environment benefits students across all proficiency levels. Educators are recommended to integrate diverse media, foster structured peer collaboration, and provide regular opportunities for practical communication to improve English-speaking skills effectively.

Keywords: learning environment, English language acquisition, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is one of the most remarkable achievements in human life. It is not only about memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary lists, but also about developing the ability to think, feel, and communicate through a new linguistic system. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the process of acquiring the language is often complex because it takes place in an environment where English is not the main medium of communication. The role of the environment, therefore, becomes one of the most influential external factors that determines how successfully a learner acquires a second or foreign language. This

study focuses on exploring how environmental factors affect the language acquisition process among EFL learners and what kinds of conditions best support their progress. In many EFL contexts, especially in non-English-speaking countries, learners' opportunities to use English outside the classroom are extremely limited. Most of the time, students learn English only within formal classroom settings.

Teachers often serve as the main source of knowledge, and instruction is typically focused on grammar accuracy and vocabulary mastery. While these aspects are important, the lack of real-life

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communication and exposure to authentic English often prevents students from developing fluency and confidence. In such conditions, English becomes merely a school subject rather than a living language that can be used naturally in everyday life (Yangambi, 2022). The situation outside the classroom tends to reinforce this problem. In many cases, students' families and social circles do not use English in daily interactions, and there are few opportunities to listen to or speak the language in authentic situations. This limited exposure makes it difficult for learners to internalize English structures and expressions naturally (Lase, 2024). Even when students have access to English media such as movies, songs, or online content, their engagement is often passive rather than interactive. Without an environment that encourages active use of the language, learning becomes mechanical, and students struggle to transfer what they learn in class into real communication. At the same time, the social and emotional environment plays a vital role in shaping learners' motivation and confidence.

Language acquisition is not merely a cognitive process; it also involves emotions, attitudes, and relationships. Learners who feel comfortable and supported are more likely to take risks, speak up, and practice the language (Rad et al., 2025). On the other hand, those who are afraid of making mistakes or receiving criticism tend to remain silent and disengaged. The presence of supportive teachers, peers, and family members can make a significant difference. A positive and encouraging environment reduces anxiety and fosters a sense of belonging, which in turn promotes more effective language acquisition (Maulana & Kaniadewi, 2025).

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach by reviewing related literature, theoretical models, and previous empirical findings. The goal is not only to describe the relationship between environmental factors and language acquisition but also to interpret how and why these factors influence learning outcomes. By

synthesizing insights from past studies, the research aims to identify the environmental conditions that best support EFL learners in acquiring English effectively. These include classroom environments that encourage communication, social settings that provide authentic exposure, and digital platforms that offer new spaces for interaction and input.

The digital environment, in particular, has become increasingly important in recent years. With the rise of online learning, social media, and global connectivity, EFL learners now have more opportunities to be exposed to authentic English content (Wang & Yasmin, 2023). They can watch videos, join discussion forums, play online games, or communicate with speakers from different parts of the world. These experiences can create a more immersive environment that compensates for the lack of exposure in traditional learning contexts. However, not all learners benefit equally from these opportunities. The effectiveness of digital environments depends on learners' motivation, access to technology, and ability to engage actively with English materials. In addition, psychological and affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are deeply connected to environmental conditions. A supportive classroom environment that values communication and minimizes fear of making mistakes can encourage students to participate more freely (Khafshoh et al., 2023). Conversely, a rigid and overly formal atmosphere can create stress and hinder learning. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping a positive environment by fostering trust, respect, and encouragement in the classroom. Their approach to feedback, correction, and interaction greatly influences how students perceive their ability to learn and use the language (Li, 2023).

A growing number of studies have highlighted the strong relationship between environmental factors and the process of language acquisition, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Researchers have long emphasized that language learning does not happen



in isolation; instead, it develops through social interaction, meaningful exposure, and active participation in communicative contexts. The surrounding environment provides the necessary input, feedback, and opportunities that enable learners to internalize new linguistic forms. Without such an environment, language acquisition tends to be slow, passive, and largely dependent on classroom instruction.

A relevant study that closely relates to the present research was conducted to explore how pedagogical strategies integrating extensive reading into speaking tasks could enhance EFL students' language acquisition (Sumardi, 2025). The study concluded that extensive reading, when integrated into speaking practice, provides rich language input, encourages deeper cognitive processing, and cultivates motivation and communicative competence among EFL learners. These findings strongly support the idea that environmental factors particularly those involving interactive and authentic language use play a vital role in promoting successful language acquisition. A more recent study examined the language acquisition of Moroccan tourism professionals working in cities such as Chefchaouen and Marrakech (Chibani & Hsoun, 2025). Despite limited access to formal language education, many of these individuals achieved remarkable fluency in English and Spanish through daily interactions with tourists and self-directed learning practices. The study demonstrated how environmental exposure, social interaction, and motivation collectively contribute to developing communicative competence in real-life contexts. It also highlighted the importance of informal learning environments as powerful spaces for language development, where authentic communication replaces formal instruction as the main driver of acquisition. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how different environmental factors influence language acquisition among EFL learners, focusing on how exposure, interaction, and motivation derived from one's surroundings contribute to the improvement of learners'

communicative competence. By understanding these dynamics, educators can design more effective learning strategies that bridge the gap between formal instruction and natural language acquisition.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive method to find out how the environment affects students' English language acquisition. Metode deskriptif kualitatif lazim digunakan dalam berbagai penelitian sosial termasuk penelitian kebahasaan (Gioia et al., 2013; Razak, 2017; Afifuddin & Saebani, 2002). The purpose of this method is to describe and understand students' real experiences in learning English in different environments, both inside and outside the classroom.

The study was conducted at Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kosgoro 1957 in Jakarta. The participants were 36 students from the Communication Studies Program. They were chosen because they often use English in their studies and daily communication, making them suitable for this topic.

Data were collected through interviews and observations. The interviews were done to understand how students learn English in their daily life, what kind of environment helps them learn faster, and what difficulties they face. The observations were carried out during English classes and group discussions to see how students used English naturally with their friends. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher read all interview transcripts carefully, grouped similar ideas, and identified common themes related to the role of the environment in learning English. The main themes that appeared included: learning English through media, practicing English with peers, and gaining confidence through exposure to real communication. This method helped the researcher describe clearly how environmental factors, such as classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, and daily exposure to English, influence students' language acquisition.

The results of this study are expected to help teachers create better learning strategies and en-

courage students to use English more actively in their environment.

RESULT

The findings of this study reveal varying levels of English-speaking proficiency among 36 undergraduate students from the Communication Studies Department at Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kosgoro 1957, Jakarta. Based on the assessment conducted through class observations, speaking tasks, and interviews, it was found that approximately 20% of the students demonstrated a high level of proficiency, being able to express their ideas clearly, use appropriate vocabulary, and maintain fluency during discussions. These students often showed confidence and initiative when communicating in English, both inside and outside classroom activities. Meanwhile, around 45% of the students were categorized as having a moderate level of speaking proficiency. They were able to convey basic ideas and participate in conversations, though they occasionally hesitated, made grammatical errors, and required more time to construct sentences. Their main difficulties were related to limited vocabulary and lack of exposure to authentic English-speaking situations. The remaining 35% of students fell into the low proficiency category, struggling with pronunciation, grammatical structure, and sentence formation. These students tended to avoid speaking opportunities and displayed low confidence when required to speak in English. The lack of consistent practice and limited interaction with English-speaking materials appeared to be major contributing factors. The summary of the results is illustrated in below:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| 1) High (Advanced) | 7 (20%) |
| 2) Midle (Intermediate) | 16 (45%) |
| 3) Low (Basic) | 13 (35%) |

The study investigated how environmental factors influence students' English learning, focusing on 36 participants from the Communication Studies Program, class of 2023. Their English proficiency levels varied, with 7

students (20%) at high proficiency, 16 students (45%) at intermediate proficiency, and 13 students (35%) at low proficiency (Table 1). These differences allowed for a nuanced analysis of how students at different skill levels engage with their learning environment.

The analysis of questionnaire responses, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews revealed that the learning environment plays a significant role in supporting English language acquisition among EFL learners. Four major themes emerged from the data: learning English through media, practicing English with peers, gaining confidence through authentic communication, and the relationship between these environmental factors and students' proficiency levels. These findings demonstrate that language acquisition extends beyond formal classroom instruction and is strongly influenced by learners' engagement with supportive, interactive, and authentic learning environments.

DISCUSSION

Learning English through Media

The use of English-language media was a dominant strategy among all participants. Students reported watching movies, YouTube videos, listening to podcasts, and following English content on social media platforms. For example, one student shared: *"I often watch English tutorials on YouTube and repeat the sentences to improve my pronunciation."* Observations confirmed that students frequently referenced content from these media during class discussions. A closer look at proficiency levels revealed differences in media use. High-proficiency students (20%) tended to choose advanced materials, such as TED Talks or news channels, to refine vocabulary and comprehension. Intermediate-level students (45%) preferred simpler videos or tutorials that matched their current level, while low-proficiency students (35%) used subtitles and visual aids to aid understanding. This indicates that media exposure not only supplements classroom learning but also



serves as a self-paced tool that adapts to individual skill levels.

Media exposure not only complements classroom learning but also provides a flexible and personalized learning environment, enabling learners to develop their skills efficiently according to their own pace and proficiency (Adeshina, 2024). Media exposure enhances classroom learning by providing supplementary materials that reinforce concepts taught in class. In addition, it functions as a self-paced learning tool, allowing students to progress according to their individual speed and preferences. Many media platforms can adapt to learners' skill levels, offering personalized exercises that match their proficiency. This dual function supplementing formal instruction and providing adaptive, independent practice supports more effective and individualized learning outcomes.

Practicing English with Peers

Peer interaction was another critical factor in language development. Students engaged in group discussions, collaborative projects, and informal conversations in English. For instance, during an observed group activity, intermediate-level students actively asked each other questions and corrected mistakes collaboratively, demonstrating that peer support fosters a safe and interactive environment for practice. The study found that students with high proficiency often acted as informal mentors, guiding their peers and introducing new expressions, idioms, or grammatical structures. This dynamic allowed lower-level students to learn indirectly through interaction, promoting not only language skills but also confidence. Observations also indicated that frequent peer communication reduced anxiety, as students felt less pressured to be perfect and more motivated to experiment with the language.

The study revealed that students with high English proficiency often acted as informal mentors, guiding their peers by introducing new expressions, idioms, and grammatical structures.

This peer mentoring created a dynamic in which lower-proficiency students were able to learn indirectly through interaction, enhancing both their language skills and confidence. Furthermore, observations indicated that frequent peer communication contributed to a reduction in language anxiety. Students felt less pressured to achieve perfection and were more motivated to experiment with the language. Overall, these findings highlight the significance of collaborative peer interactions, demonstrating that such an environment not only supports linguistic development but also fosters a positive and confidence-building learning experience.

Gaining Confidence through Real Communication

Exposure to authentic English situations was essential for building confidence. Activities such as presentations, debates, role-plays, and interacting with English content online gave students practical experience in using the language. One intermediate-level student noted: *"At first, I was afraid to speak in front of the class, but after presenting twice, I felt more comfortable and even tried using new words I learned from YouTube."* High-proficiency students leveraged these opportunities to refine articulation, expression, and fluency, while intermediate students showed significant improvement in participation and willingness to communicate. Low-proficiency students benefited by gradually overcoming fear and hesitation, illustrating that consistent exposure to meaningful communication can bridge gaps in skill levels.

Integration with Proficiency Levels

When linking these themes with the proficiency levels in Table 1, it becomes evident that environmental factors impact all students, but in different ways. High-proficiency students used the environment to enhance mastery, intermediate students used it to consolidate skills and gain confidence, and low-proficiency students relied

heavily on supportive media and peer interaction to engage with the language. This demonstrates that a supportive learning environment can accommodate varying skill levels, providing opportunities for incremental growth for all learners. The findings suggest that environmental factors—media exposure, peer interaction, and real communication—are crucial in shaping students' English learning experiences. They emphasize that language acquisition is not solely determined by innate proficiency but by active engagement with supportive and authentic contexts. This insight has practical implications for designing classroom activities, encouraging peer collaboration, and integrating media resources to optimize learning outcomes across diverse proficiency levels.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English language acquisition among EFL learners is a dynamic process that is significantly influenced by the quality of the learning environment. Rather than relying solely on formal classroom instruction, students developed their language skills through continuous exposure to English-language media, collaborative interactions with peers, and participation in authentic communication activities. These environmental factors complemented one another by providing meaningful opportunities for learners to practice, receive feedback, and gradually build confidence in using English. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of these environmental supports varies according to learners' proficiency levels. High-proficiency students tended to maximize available resources to refine their language competence, while intermediate- and low-proficiency students relied more heavily on media exposure, peer collaboration, and supportive classroom interactions to strengthen their fundamental language skills. These results reinforce the view that language acquisition is a socially and contextually situated process, in which meaningful interaction and authentic language use contribute substantially to learners' linguistic development. Therefore, creating a supportive

learning environment that integrates technology, collaborative learning, and real-life communication opportunities is essential for promoting sustainable English language acquisition among EFL learners. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that students' English-speaking proficiency is shaped not only by individual ability but also by the surrounding learning environment. Media exposure, peer interaction, and engagement in authentic communication activities collectively contribute to language development, confidence building, and reduced anxiety. High-proficiency students benefit from refining their skills, intermediate students consolidate and apply their knowledge, and low-proficiency students gradually gain confidence through guided practice and supportive interactions. These findings underscore the importance of creating a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that accommodates diverse proficiency levels, highlighting the role of active engagement, collaboration, and adaptive resources in fostering effective English language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the role of the learning environment in English language acquisition among EFL learners and found that environmental factors play a significant role in supporting students' language development. The findings revealed that learning through English-language media, practicing with peers, and engaging in authentic communication activities contributed positively to students' vocabulary acquisition, speaking confidence, and overall language proficiency. These factors created meaningful opportunities for learners to practice English beyond formal classroom instruction and encouraged continuous language exposure in real-life contexts. The study also demonstrated that the impact of the learning environment differed according to students' proficiency levels. High-proficiency learners tended to utilize available resources to refine their language skills, whereas intermediate- and low-proficiency learners



benefited more from supportive peer interactions, accessible learning media, and structured communication activities that gradually increased their confidence. These findings suggest that a supportive and interactive learning environment can accommodate learners with diverse proficiency levels and promote more effective English language acquisition.

Based on these findings, English lecturers are encouraged to integrate digital media, collaborative learning activities, and authentic communication tasks into classroom instruction to create a more engaging and supportive learning environment. Future research may involve larger samples from different institutions and employ longitudinal or experimental designs to further examine the long-term impact of environmental factors on English language acquisition among EFL learners.

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