

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the findings and analysis, it is important to describe the data collection process, which was conducted through classroom observation and a focus group discussion (FGD). These techniques were selected to explore the social challenges students face in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and how these challenges are managed by the teacher, using the framework of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

A. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study based on classroom observations and a focus group discussion (FGD) conducted in Class X MPLB at SMKN 1 Kertak Hanyar. The purpose of these findings is to identify the social challenges students face in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as to understand how the teacher addresses these challenges in the classroom.

Data were collected using two qualitative techniques. First, classroom observations were conducted over five sessions between April 30 and May 8, 2025. Second, a focus group discussion was conducted on May 8, 2025, involving six students with varied levels of English proficiency. These participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a range of perspectives. The initials of the participants are: A, D, Nl, Nd, Nv, and S.

The findings are thematically organized based on the two research questions that guide this study.

1. Social Aspect Challenges Faced by EFL Learners

The data reveal that students experienced a variety of social barriers that hindered their learning engagement and language development:

a. Fear of Making Mistakes and Being Judged

Many students reported feeling hesitant to speak or ask questions in class due to fear of making errors and being judged by more proficient peers. This fear often resulted in reduced classroom participation and reluctance to engage in English conversation.

b. Limited Peer Interaction and Social Cliques

Peer collaboration was found to be selective. Students were generally willing to help close friends but were reluctant to assist others outside their social circle. This exclusivity often led to unequal group participation during collaborative tasks, with some students being excluded or left out.

c. Passive Attitudes Toward Learning

Several students described their learning experience as neutral or unremarkable. They showed low initiative and were dependent on tools such as Google Translate instead of seeking help from peers or teachers. This passivity limited the potential benefits of collaborative and interactive learning.

In addition, the FGD revealed a more nuanced reality: while some students willingly assisted close friends, they were hesitant to help peers outside their social circle due to fear of being misjudged or seen as "showing off". Students also described "cliques" that limited collaboration, especially during group tasks, indicating that some social barriers still hinder equitable participation.

Furthermore, the findings identified several external social factors that contributed to these challenges, including lack of parental support, which affected students' motivation and confidence in using English; cultural norms that discouraged active speaking or expressing opinions in front of others; unequal access to learning resources, making some students feel disadvantaged compared to their peers; classroom seating arrangements that limited opportunities for diverse interaction and often reinforced existing cliques; and previous negative experiences, such as being corrected harshly or mocked, which created lasting fear and reluctance to participate. These external factors, combined with internal challenges, shaped a learning environment where social barriers continued to impact students' engagement and language development.

2. Teacher's Role in Managing Social Challenges

The teacher consistently encouraged students to ask questions, re-explained unclear material, and provided emotional support. This helped reduce students' anxiety and created a more open environment for participation.

a. Use of Scaffolding Techniques

The teacher consistently applied scaffolding to assist students in overcoming learning obstacles. Scaffolding was particularly important for those who lacked confidence or were hesitant to participate. When students appeared confused or passive, the teacher responded by simplifying instructions, using repetition, and translating key points into Bahasa Indonesia. For example, during a lesson on daily routines, many students seemed unsure how to form sentences. To assist them, the teacher provided a model sentence on the whiteboard (“I wake up at 6 o’clock”), and then invited students to adapt it by changing the subject or verb.

Scaffolding in this classroom context was applied through several concrete techniques. First, the teacher often used simplified explanations, breaking down complex instructions into short, manageable chunks. She would rephrase her statements using familiar vocabulary and avoid long or abstract sentences. Second, she brought real-life objects into the classroom—such as markers, bags, and rulers—to help students associate vocabulary with tangible items they could see and touch. When introducing new terms, she would hold up the object, say the word, and ask students to repeat it, making the lesson more interactive and concrete.

The teacher also made effective use of humor to lighten the classroom mood. She occasionally made small jokes or mimicked

exaggerated pronunciation to catch students' attention. This helped reduce tension, especially among students who were anxious about speaking. Students were observed laughing and relaxing more during these moments, which created a friendlier and less judgmental atmosphere.

In addition, physical demonstration was often used to explain verbs or classroom instructions. For example, when teaching action verbs like "run," "sleep," or "write," the teacher physically acted them out in front of the class. This was particularly useful for visual and kinesthetic learners, as they could associate movement with meaning. It also helped students who struggled to understand verbal explanations alone. These scaffolding efforts worked together to make the learning environment more accessible, especially for students with low confidence or language difficulties. The teacher's attentiveness and adaptability encouraged students to try using the language without fear of failure, and supported their growth within their Zone of Proximal Development.

b. Interactive and Inclusive Group Work

The teacher assigned group activities that encouraged cooperation among students with different levels of proficiency. Group work served as an important method for encouraging interaction and reducing social isolation in the classroom. Initially, it was observed that students tended to form fixed groups based on their

friendships, which led to the exclusion of quieter or less confident individuals. To manage this, the teacher intentionally assigned group members and frequently rotated them to break up exclusive circles and promote inclusivity. One particular example occurred during an activity in which students were asked to create dialogues about shopping at a traditional market. The teacher divided the class into small groups and assigned specific roles, ensuring a mix of language abilities in each team. A student who was usually overlooked was assigned the role of presenter, and though visibly nervous, he completed the task successfully and received positive feedback. This act of recognition boosted his confidence and encouraged him to participate more actively in the following sessions.

Although social cliques sometimes limited the inclusivity of these tasks, the teacher made clear efforts to facilitate balanced participation and effective teamwork. She actively walked around the classroom during group activities, approaching individual students personally to check on their understanding and comfort level. Rather than waiting for students to raise their hands, she asked quiet students directly “Do you understand?” or “Do you need help?” in a soft tone, making it easier for them to express confusion without fear of judgment. In some cases, the teacher would kneel beside a group to be at eye level with the students, helping to reduce the psychological

distance and making the interaction feel more like a conversation than an evaluation.

This type of teacher presence and proactive checking-in encouraged students who were hesitant to speak up in front of the class to at least engage within their group. Some students, who otherwise would have remained silent, were seen nodding, responding in short phrases, or asking for repetition when approached individually by the teacher. These moments showed how her active facilitation and interpersonal approach helped balance the group dynamic and gradually nurtured more inclusive participation.

c. Integration of Technology and Gamification

Tools such as Quizizz and other interactive games were employed or suggested by students as effective in enhancing motivation and reducing social pressure. These methods promoted healthy competition and created a fun, engaging learning atmosphere.

To create a more engaging and low-anxiety learning environment, the teacher integrated technology into classroom activities, particularly through the use of gamification. Gamification refers to the application of game-like elements such as points, timers, rankings, or rewards into non-game contexts like classroom instruction. The purpose of gamification is to increase student

motivation, enhance focus, and make the learning process more enjoyable.

In this study, the teacher was observed using Quizizz, an online learning platform that allows teachers to create and conduct interactive quizzes in a game-based format. Students can join the quiz using their smartphones by entering a game code, and then answer multiple-choice questions while competing with their classmates in real time. Each question is timed, and players receive instant feedback along with a score leaderboard, which adds excitement and encourages participation. Because the students' names and results appear on the leaderboard with fun avatars and animations, the activity felt more like a game than a test.

During the observed session where Quizizz was used, students who were usually passive or anxious appeared noticeably more engaged. Some smiled or laughed when they saw their avatars, and others excitedly shouted their scores as they moved up the leaderboard. The teacher used this opportunity to review vocabulary and sentence structure in a way that lowered students' fear of making mistakes, since the format allowed them to answer anonymously without speaking aloud.

In addition to Quizizz, the teacher also introduced simple vocabulary guessing games using PowerPoint slides. For example, in one activity, an image would appear on the screen and students had

to guess the English word within a time limit. This added an element of fun and urgency, encouraging faster thinking and cooperative guessing in small groups. Though less interactive than Quizizz, this approach still used game-based elements like time pressure and group competition to increase student involvement.

By incorporating technology in this way, the teacher successfully reduced the emotional tension often associated with language learning and provided alternative methods for students to demonstrate their understanding. These tools not only helped reinforce the lesson content but also created a more inclusive and exciting learning atmosphere that supported students' willingness to participate.

3. Summary of Findings

The illustration of relationship between the social challenges experienced by students in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the impacts of these challenges on the learning process, and the strategies implemented by the teacher in response, as interpreted through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework. The diagram categorizes key barriers such as fear of judgment, low confidence, and peer exclusion, followed by their negative influence on student engagement and participation. It then highlights the teacher's supportive interventions, including scaffolding, group work facilitation, and the use of interactive tools to foster a more inclusive and

collaborative learning environment. This model serves to visually summarize the main findings of the study and emphasize the importance of social dynamics in shaping EFL learning outcomes.

In the first stage of the scheme, students were found to encounter several social difficulties in the classroom. These included fear of being judged, low confidence, peer exclusion, and unequal group participation. These challenges were not limited to students with lower English proficiency but were also prevalent among students with stronger language skills who experienced Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). These social obstacles significantly influenced students' behavior, often leading to passiveness, hesitation to speak, and reluctance to engage in group work.

The second stage of the scheme reflects the impact of these social challenges on learning. When students lack a safe and supportive environment, they are less likely to take risks, interact with peers, or participate actively in classroom activities. This directly affects their ability to engage within their Zone of Proximal Development, where learning ideally takes place through social collaboration and guided support.

In response to these challenges, the third stage of the scheme highlights the teacher's role in managing and reducing these barriers. The teacher employed several targeted strategies, including the use of scaffolding techniques (e.g., simplified instructions, real-life objects, and

humor), interactive and inclusive group work (e.g., rotating group members and directly approaching passive students), and integration of technology and gamification (e.g., using Quizizz and vocabulary games to boost engagement and lower anxiety). These efforts created a more emotionally safe and socially inclusive environment, enabling students to engage more confidently and collaboratively in EFL learning.

Overall, this model demonstrates that the success of EFL instruction depends not only on linguistic input but also on how social challenges are addressed through thoughtful and adaptive teaching practices. The teacher's interventions helped bridge the gap between students' current competence and their potential development, affirming the core principles of ZPD in real classroom practice. The important findings of each variable are presented here. It should be presented concisely and meaningfully. It can be presented in the form of statistical numbers, tables or graphs accompanied with sufficient explanation to make more communicative. The explanation is limited to the fact without researcher's interpretation.

B. Discussion

This study investigated the social aspect challenges students face in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and explored how teachers manage these challenges through strategies aligned with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory. It specifically aimed to answer two key questions: what social aspect issues do students experience in an EFL

classroom, and how do teachers manage these issues? The findings showed that students encountered a variety of social challenges, including fear of being judged, low confidence, peer exclusion, and unequal participation. These obstacles directly impacted their learning engagement, collaboration, and emotional comfort in the classroom.

1. The social aspect of students experience as EFL Classroom

In line with the theoretical review presented in Chapter II, learning EFL in the Indonesian context is not only about mastering grammar and vocabulary but also about navigating the social dynamics involved in classroom interactions. As Daar (2020) and Suardipa (2020) emphasized, EFL learners must engage in structured social practices to use language meaningfully. However, this study revealed that many students remain passive or hesitant in class due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by more proficient peers. This was not only apparent during classroom observations—where some students consistently avoided eye contact or lowered their heads when questions were posed—but also clearly supported by FGD responses. One student, referred to as A, stated that they felt uncomfortable participating because “takut salah dan di-judge karena ada yang lebih hebat dan jago dari saya.” This anxiety caused the student to stay quiet even when they understood the material. The researcher also observed similar hesitation in several classroom sessions, where students avoided speaking English unless they were directly called upon by the teacher,

and even then, responded with minimal words or in Bahasa Indonesia. These behaviors reflect the internal barriers students face due to peer-related performance anxiety, which is a common component of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). This behavior reflects what Vygotsky defined as a learner's actual development level students know certain things but hesitate to act without support.

To identify these participants, the research commences with the observation of various students during their learning processes. Following this initial observation, few participants has been selected some who exhibits the capability to work independently and another who requires external assistance. This selection based on observed behaviors and characteristics aligning with the study's focus. The next step involves engaging in interviews with the chosen participants. These interviews delve into their learning experiences and social interactions. Open-ended questions used to gather qualitative insights. The obtained data from the interviews will then be validated, ensuring its reliability. This may involve cross-referencing interview responses with observed behaviors or using other validation techniques. Following the interviews and data validation, a concluding observation conducted to consolidate findings. This final observation aims to observe any changes or patterns that may have emerged. The study will be summarized, highlighting key insights gained from both observations and interviews.

The researcher aims to explore how various types of students navigate social interactions and learning experiences, while assessing the impact of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory on their learning and educational journey. Participant selection will prioritize willingness to participate, and privacy rights will be upheld throughout the study.

The data collected from the focus group discussion (FGD) further enriched the understanding of students' social experiences in learning English. Several students expressed feelings of discomfort when speaking English, not necessarily due to a lack of knowledge, but because of social pressure from their peers. One student, referred to as A, admitted that they often felt afraid of making mistakes and being judged by classmates who were perceived as more proficient. This form of anxiety, though sometimes experienced by lower-proficiency learners, also appeared in students with stronger English skills confirming the presence of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among more capable learners.

The presence of anxiety and hesitation observed among students in this study aligns with the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as described by Elaine K Horwitz, Michael B Horwitz (1986). They define FLA as a specific form of anxiety that arises from the unique demands of language learning, involving self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that interfere with classroom performance.

This anxiety is particularly associated with three dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

In the context of this study, the most prominent form of anxiety displayed by students was the fear of negative evaluation, where students refrained from participating out of concern for being judged by more proficient peers. For example, a student identified as A mentioned feeling hesitant to speak because others in the class were “more skilled and better.” Similarly, the classroom observations revealed that even students with relatively good English proficiency sometimes remained silent unless directly called upon, reflecting a reluctance rooted not in capability but in emotional discomfort. This hesitation is consistent with what Horwitz et al. noted as students’ fear of speaking in the foreign language classroom due to possible embarrassment or negative peer judgment. Such findings underscore the idea that language anxiety is not confined to low-performing students; it also affects those who are competent but socially constrained. Therefore, addressing this form of anxiety through scaffolding, inclusive peer interaction, and gamified learning environments is not just supportive it is essential for helping all students engage within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Another student, Nd, pointed out the tendency of some classmates to form tight social circles, or “sirkel,” that excluded others during group activities. This behavior created barriers to equal participation

and discouraged interaction across different student groups. The student noted that classmates often preferred to work only within their familiar groups, resisting collaboration with those outside their circle. This reinforces the earlier classroom observations and highlights how peer dynamics can restrict opportunities for inclusive learning, especially for quieter or less connected students.

On a more encouraging note, students expressed appreciation for game-based learning. Two participants, NI and A, positively described the use of platforms such as Quizizz in the classroom, referring to the experience as “interactive” and “motivating.” The students felt that gamified tools provided a healthy competitive environment and helped them participate more confidently. This aligns with the observed increase in engagement during gamified lessons, suggesting that technology integration helped reduce social anxiety and offered a less threatening space for students to practice English.

These student insights validate and deepen the earlier findings. They highlight that while social challenges persist, they can be mitigated through thoughtful instructional strategies. Teachers play a crucial role not only in providing linguistic support, but also in cultivating a socially supportive atmosphere where students of all levels feel valued and safe to participate.

Vygotsky’s concept of ZPD (Shabani et al., 2010) explains that learners need guidance from more capable individuals to reach their

potential development level. However, when peer interaction is limited or exclusive as seen in the presence of “cliques” in group work opportunities for scaffolding are diminished. These findings align with Fitriani & Maemonah (2022), who argued that ZPD is most effective when learners are embedded in socially supportive environments. In this study, participants like Nd and Nv expressed frustration and disengagement caused by being excluded or not helped by classmates, which confirms how weak peer dynamics hinder learning in social contexts.

The concept of the social aspect in EFL learning also emerged as a critical factor. As highlighted by Cui & Yang (2022), fostering social and emotional skills in language classrooms is essential for building confidence. This is supported by findings from the current study, where students felt more motivated and safer in interactions with supportive peers and teachers. Unfortunately, as shown in cases of peer exclusion, social challenges may even act as barriers to emotional well-being, leading to withdrawal or anxiety. Moreover, these findings are echoed in more recent research. A study on peer emotion transmission in EFL classrooms (Jin et al., 2023) found that emotions like anxiety and fear are easily spread among learners, reinforcing hesitation and silence in group settings. This helps explain the reluctance observed in some of the participants who feared being judged by more skilled classmates. Additionally, studies have suggested that EFL classrooms can

sometimes act as catalysts for bullying or exclusion when social dynamics are not carefully managed (e.g., Ningsih et al., 2022). One participant, Nv, shared an emotional experience of being isolated by classmates, which confirms how these dynamics can impact not only EFL learning but also self-esteem.

2. The teachers manage the issues that affect students

Despite these challenges, the role of the teacher in this study was central to managing and reducing social barriers. As seen in the observations, the teacher employed scaffolding strategies including simplified explanations, group activities, the use of humor, and direct encouragement that align with Vygotsky's instructional approach. These strategies mirror those used in Martiana's (2021) study, which emphasized scaffolding as a solution to social challenges and a tool for enhancing creative thinking. In this case, the teacher helped students activate their ZPD by creating an environment where they felt safe to ask questions and participate.

Furthermore, some students highlighted the positive influence of interactive digital tools such as Quizizz, which created low-pressure, enjoyable opportunities for learning. This supports findings from the study "Peer Support in Language Learning" (Mirsad & Wang, 2023), which concluded that peer support, combined with digital collaboration, reduces anxiety and builds student resilience. These tools also fostered inclusivity by giving all students regardless of their proficiency level a

chance to contribute. In addition to student perspectives, insights from the English teacher, referred to here as Ms. E, provided further depth to the understanding of broader challenges that influence students' engagement and performance in learning English. Based on her observations over time, she expressed concern that students' comprehension and learning outcomes in English had been in steady decline. She attributed this trend to several overlapping factors that extend beyond the classroom itself.

One of the most prominent issues, according to Ms. E, was the lack of intrinsic motivation among students. Many learners showed minimal enthusiasm toward learning English, treating it as a mandatory subject rather than a skill to be developed with purpose. Compounding this issue was the limited support and guidance from parents at home, which left students without a strong foundation or reinforcement outside of school hours. Another challenge she identified was students' growing tendency to underestimate the value of classroom assignments. Many believed that answers to any given task could be easily found through the internet, which discouraged them from engaging in deeper thinking or truly processing the material on their own. This reliance on quick digital access has, in many cases, hindered the development of critical thinking skills necessary for language acquisition.

She also noted the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had disrupted students' study habits over an extended period.

While classes continued online during that time, she observed that many students had not engaged meaningfully with the lessons, and the lack of direct supervision during home learning made it difficult to ensure their commitment. As a result, she remarked that many of the current Grade X students are effectively starting over from the basics, even though they have formally studied English for several years. Concepts as fundamental as parts of speech remain unfamiliar to many, and skills such as speaking and listening comprehension pose significant difficulties due to these accumulated gaps.

These insights from Ms. E support the findings of this study and highlight the critical role of external social and educational influences, including students' home environments, learning histories, and mindset toward schooling. They further emphasize the importance of not only managing classroom social dynamics but also creating a learning atmosphere that helps rebuild foundational skills while fostering collaborative engagement and emotional safety.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of social dynamics in EFL learning and underscores the relevance of Vygotsky's ZPD in addressing these challenges. Although issues like exclusion, fear of judgment, and low confidence persist, strategic scaffolding and peer support can effectively reduce their impact. Ensuring emotional safety and responsive teaching remains essential for fostering equitable, collaborative learning within the ZPD.