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The Influence of Desk-Mate Interaction Activities on Students' Behavioral Engagement in English Speaking Activities at MTs YMPI Rappang

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ABSTRACT

Active participation is essential in English speaking instruction because students need repeated opportunities to use the target language, respond to others, and persist in communicative tasks. This study investigated the influence of structured desk-mate interaction activities on the behavioral engagement of eighth-grade students at MTs YMPI Rappang. A quantitative pre-experimental approach with a one-group pre-test and post-test design was employed. The participants were 20 eighth-grade students selected through total sampling. Behavioral engagement was measured using a 10-item five-point Likert questionnaire covering active participation, cooperation, attention, responsiveness, and persistence. The treatment was conducted in one classroom meeting through dialogue practice, pair discussion, question-and-answer activities, and a cooperative speaking task on daily activities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test. The mean score increased from 41.10 in the pre-test to 42.05 in the post-test, a descriptive gain of 0.95 points, while the standard deviation decreased from 6.223 to 3.734. Nevertheless, the paired-samples t-test yielded $t = -0.959$, $df = 19$, and $p = 0.350$, which was higher than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was retained. The findings indicate a positive descriptive tendency, but the short desk-mate interaction treatment did not produce a statistically significant improvement in students' behavioral engagement. Longer and repeated implementation, potentially combined with other collaborative speaking strategies, is recommended for further investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a central component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because learners are expected to use language for real-time communication rather than only recognize vocabulary and grammatical forms. In junior high school classrooms, however, the availability of a speaking task does not automatically guarantee that students will participate actively. Some students may avoid responding, wait for stronger classmates, lose attention, or stop trying when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties. For this reason, speaking instruction requires classroom arrangements that increase the amount of meaningful student talk while also sustaining students' visible participation in the learning process.

One classroom resource that is available without additional technology or special facilities is the student's desk mate. The classmate sitting next to a learner can serve as an immediate interaction partner for short dialogues, questions and answers, information exchange, and cooperative task completion. Compared with whole-class speaking, interaction with a familiar partner can provide a smaller communication space in which students have more frequent turns and can receive immediate assistance. Harmer (2007) notes that pair work can increase student talking time and reduce teacher domination, while Richards (2015) emphasizes that meaningful communication is fundamental to communicative language teaching. These principles make desk-mate interaction potentially useful for organizing speaking practice in classrooms with limited time.

The present study focuses on behavioral engagement rather than speaking achievement alone. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) describe student engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement concerns students' observable involvement in learning, such as participation, attention, effort, cooperation, and persistence. Reeve (2012) similarly associates behavioral engagement with active involvement, sustained attention, and effort in academic tasks. In an English speaking classroom, these behaviors are important because communication practice depends on whether students actually respond, cooperate, remain focused, and continue speaking when tasks become difficult.

Structured peer interaction provides a theoretical basis for expecting improvement in such behaviors. Johnson and Johnson (2018) explain that cooperative learning is supported by positive interdependence and individual accountability: learners work toward shared goals while remaining responsible for their own contribution. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective also positions interaction as a mechanism through which learners can receive support from more capable peers. In a desk-mate setting, this support may appear when a student suggests a word, models pronunciation, clarifies an expression, or encourages a partner to continue a speaking task. These forms of assistance can lower immediate barriers to participation without removing individual responsibility.

Empirical research generally supports the value of peer interaction for EFL speaking and engagement. Rahman, Yusri, and Putri (2023) reported that cooperative peer relationships were associated with stronger behavioral engagement in speaking classrooms. Saeid (2024) found that collaborative peer interaction in a secondary EFL context supported speaking performance, confidence, and classroom participation. More recently, Ding and Zhu (2025) showed that structured peer feedback in EFL speaking could strengthen motivation and behavioral engagement, although their intervention was technology-supported. These studies indicate that

interaction with peers can contribute to participation, yet the form, duration, and context of interaction vary considerably across studies.

A more specific question concerns whether interaction with the student who already sits beside the learner can function as a structured instructional treatment. General peer collaboration may involve changing groups, digital feedback, or teacher-selected partners, whereas desk-mate interaction uses a stable, immediately accessible partner. This distinction matters in classrooms where teachers need a practical strategy that can be implemented quickly and repeatedly. At the same time, evidence about a desk-mate-specific treatment with behavioral engagement as the primary outcome remains limited. Previous studies often examine speaking proficiency, willingness to communicate, peer support, or general collaboration rather than a focused pre-test and post-test evaluation of desk-mate interaction.

The research was therefore conducted among eighth-grade students at MTs YMPI Rappang and implemented structured desk-mate interaction through dialogue practice, pair discussion, question-and-answer activities, and cooperative speaking tasks. Behavioral engagement was operationalized through five indicators: active participation, cooperation, attention, responsiveness, and persistence. The study examined students' engagement before and after the intervention and tested whether the change was statistically significant. This focus makes it possible to distinguish a descriptive improvement in classroom engagement from evidence of a statistically reliable treatment effect.

Accordingly, the study addressed two questions: how students' behavioral engagement was characterized before and after the implementation of desk-mate interaction activities, and whether the activities produced a significant effect on behavioral engagement in English speaking. The study was expected to provide practical evidence about a simple pair-based strategy while also clarifying the conditions under which a short intervention may or may not be sufficient to change students' classroom behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Desk-Mate Interaction Activities

Desk-mate interaction activities are structured learning tasks in which students communicate and cooperate with the classmate sitting next to them. The activities differ from spontaneous conversation because the teacher specifies the purpose, task, language focus, and expected contribution of each partner. In speaking lessons, desk mates may practice a model dialogue, ask and answer questions, exchange information, plan a short conversation, or complete a task jointly. This format creates repeated opportunities for learners to use English in a manageable social setting while receiving immediate support from a peer.

The cooperative character of desk-mate interaction is consistent with the principles described by Johnson and Johnson (2018). Positive interdependence encourages learners to recognize that task success depends on both partners contributing, while individual accountability prevents one partner from completing the task alone. Face-to-face promotive interaction also requires partners to explain, respond, encourage, and assist one another. In English speaking activities, these principles can be translated into alternating turns, listening to a partner's answer, helping with vocabulary, and jointly preparing a short performance.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning develops through social interaction and mediated assistance. Lantolf (2006) further explains the relevance of

sociocultural theory to second-language learning, where learners use interaction to construct and regulate language performance. A desk mate can therefore provide temporary scaffolding when a learner has difficulty producing an utterance. The support may be as simple as recalling a word, repeating a model, correcting pronunciation, or prompting the next line of a dialogue. Such assistance allows the task to continue and can keep students behaviorally involved.

Peer interaction also creates opportunities for immediate feedback. Topping (2018) explains that peer assessment and feedback can support learning by making students attend to performance criteria and respond to one another's work. In speaking contexts, peer feedback does not need to be formal. A partner may signal that an expression is unclear, repeat the correct form, or request clarification. Triassanti, Panggabean, and Mansur (2023) likewise discuss peer feedback in speaking instruction and students' responses to it. These interactional moves can turn a speaking activity from individual rehearsal into reciprocal communication.

Behavioral Engagement in English Speaking

Student engagement describes the quality of learners' involvement in academic activity. Fredricks et al. (2004) distinguish behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The behavioral dimension is particularly appropriate when a study seeks to measure observable classroom involvement because it concerns actions such as participation, compliance with learning procedures, attention, effort, and persistence. Wong and Liem (2022) also emphasize the importance of conceptual clarity in engagement research, noting that observable participation should be distinguished from emotional reactions and deeper cognitive investment.

In the present research, behavioral engagement was represented by five indicators. Active participation refers to students' willingness to take part in English speaking tasks rather than remain passive. Cooperation concerns working constructively with a desk mate. Attention refers to remaining focused during the activity. Responsiveness concerns answering questions and communicating during interaction. Persistence refers to continuing participation and completing speaking tasks even when difficulties occur. These indicators are observable manifestations of engagement and directly match the behavioral demands of pair-based speaking activities.

Reeve (2012) explains that engagement can be strengthened when classroom conditions support students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Although the present study did not measure these psychological needs directly, desk-mate interaction may provide a context in which students make small communicative choices, experience task completion with support, and interact with a familiar peer. Such conditions are relevant to sustained behavioral involvement because students are more likely to remain on task when participation feels manageable and socially supported.

Behavioral engagement is also closely related to opportunities for language practice. A student who pays attention but never responds receives less productive speaking practice than a learner who asks questions, attempts answers, and persists through communication problems. Richards (2015) therefore emphasizes tasks that require learners to exchange meaning, while Harmer (2007) highlights pair work as a way to increase the proportion of class time in which students are actively using English. Behavioral engagement is thus not merely a classroom-management outcome; it is part of the mechanism through which students gain communicative experience.

Speaking Activities and Peer Interaction in EFL

Speaking activities require learners to process language quickly, listen to an interlocutor, select vocabulary, organize expressions, and respond within a social interaction. These demands can make speaking more challenging than receptive activities, particularly for learners with limited confidence or linguistic resources. Pair-based communication can reduce the number of listeners and provide more turns per student, allowing learners to practice before performing in front of the whole class. This makes peer interaction a practical bridge between teacher modeling and more public speaking performance.

Research on peer-supported speaking provides several relevant indications. Nhan (2024) examined students' perceptions of peer interaction in developing English speaking skills, while Saeid (2024) investigated peer interaction in a secondary EFL context. The growing attention to peer interaction reflects a broader shift from teacher-fronted recitation toward learning environments where students use language with one another. Weng, Noordin, Ahmad, and Chen (2025), in a review of mobile-assisted peer feedback for EFL speaking, likewise show that peer processes have become an important component of speaking development across both face-to-face and technology-mediated settings.

Peer interaction can influence engagement as well as language performance. Song (2024) links social support from teachers and peers with the sustainable development of learner engagement and well-being, while Ding and Zhu (2025) specifically include behavioral engagement in their study of peer feedback in EFL speaking. These findings support the view that peer-based activities should be evaluated not only by final speaking scores but also by the extent to which students participate during the learning process.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

Rahman et al. (2023) investigated cooperative peer relationships and behavioral engagement in EFL speaking classrooms. Their work is directly relevant because it connects peer relationships with participation, cooperation, attentiveness, and willingness to communicate. However, the study primarily examined the relationship between peer interaction and engagement rather than testing a desk-mate-specific classroom treatment. This leaves open the question of whether deliberately structured interaction between adjacent partners can cause measurable changes in behavioral engagement.

Saeid (2024) used a quasi-experimental approach to examine peer interaction in a secondary EFL setting and reported advantages for collaborative speaking activities compared with conventional instruction. The study supports the pedagogical value of peer communication, but its treatment involved broader collaborative learning rather than the stable desk-mate format used in the present research. Similarly, Suwarni and Natsir (2024) examined project-based collaborative learning for speaking, illustrating that collaboration can be embedded in more extensive instructional designs. These approaches are valuable, yet they differ in intensity and duration from a short desk-mate intervention.

Ding and Zhu (2025) investigated mobile-based peer feedback and found that structured peer activity could support motivation, engagement in feedback provision, and speaking achievement. Gorham, Majumdar, and Ogata (2025) also examined peer-feedback training in an EFL speaking task. These technology-supported studies show the potential of carefully organized peer processes, but they rely on additional platforms or training structures. The

present research instead examines an immediately available face-to-face partner, making the intervention easier to implement but also potentially less intensive.

Taken together, previous studies suggest that peer interaction can support speaking participation, confidence, feedback, and engagement. The remaining gap is methodological and contextual: relatively few studies isolate structured desk-mate interaction as the independent variable while measuring behavioral engagement before and after treatment in a junior high school classroom. The present study addresses that gap through a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design at MTs YMPI Rappang.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative pre-experimental design, specifically a one-group pre-test and post-test design. The design can be represented as O1 - X - O2, where O1 is the behavioral engagement pre-test, X is the desk-mate interaction treatment, and O2 is the post-test. A pre-experimental design was selected because the study aimed to identify change in the same group before and after an instructional intervention without a separate control group. Creswell (2012) describes experimental research as a means of examining the influence of an intervention on an outcome, while Sugiyono (2019) discusses the one-group pre-test and post-test design for comparing measurements taken before and after treatment.

The independent variable was structured desk-mate interaction activities. These activities required students to work with the classmate sitting next to them during English speaking tasks. The dependent variable was students' behavioral engagement, defined as their observable participation, cooperation, attention, responsiveness, and persistence during English speaking activities.

Participants and Research Context

The study was conducted with eighth-grade students at MTs YMPI Rappang in the 2026/2027 academic year. The eighth grade consisted of one class with 20 students. Because the population was small and all members of the class were accessible, total sampling was used, and all 20 students participated in both the pre-test and post-test. The findings are therefore interpreted within this specific class and learning context rather than generalized to all junior high school students.

The instructional context was English speaking with the topic Daily Activities. The treatment was designed to make students use familiar vocabulary and simple expressions in direct interaction with their desk mates. The classroom activities were therefore aligned with the students' immediate communicative needs while allowing the researcher to observe changes in behavior connected to participation and task completion.

Research Instrument

Students' behavioral engagement was measured using a questionnaire administered before and after the treatment. The instrument contained 10 statements derived from five behavioral-engagement indicators: active participation, cooperation, attention, responsiveness, and persistence. Each indicator was represented by two items. The same questionnaire was used at

pre-test and post-test so that the students' total scores could be compared across the two measurement points.

Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), giving a possible total score from 10 to 50. For descriptive interpretation, scores of 10-17 were categorized as Very Low, 18-25 as Low, 26-33 as Moderate, 34-41 as High, and 42-50 as Very High. Before data collection, the questionnaire underwent content validation by two expert validators. The thesis methodology also specified construct-validity testing using Pearson Product Moment correlation and reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, with 0.70 as the stated reliability criterion. Because the source did not report the resulting coefficients in the findings, no additional validity or reliability values are inferred in this article.

Treatment and Data Collection

Data collection took place in one classroom meeting. First, students completed the behavioral engagement questionnaire as a pre-test. The researcher then introduced the lesson objectives and vocabulary related to daily activities, modeled pronunciation, and demonstrated a short dialogue. Students practiced with their desk mates and took turns asking and answering questions about their own routines. The pair format required both students to speak and respond rather than depend on teacher-fronted interaction.

The treatment continued with a cooperative speaking task in which each pair developed a short conversation about daily activities. The researcher monitored the pairs, provided guidance, corrected pronunciation when necessary, and encouraged active participation. Several pairs performed their dialogues in front of the class, after which feedback and a lesson summary were provided. At the end of the meeting, students completed the same behavioral engagement questionnaire as the post-test.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire scores were analyzed quantitatively using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores. The Shapiro-Wilk procedure was specified in the thesis as the normality test before inferential analysis. A paired-samples t-test was then used to determine whether the mean post-test score differed significantly from the pre-test score for the same students. The significance level was set at 0.05: a p-value below 0.05 would lead to rejection of the null hypothesis, whereas a value above 0.05 would indicate insufficient evidence of a statistically significant difference.

In addition to the paired-samples t-test, the paired-samples correlation was considered to describe the association between students' pre-test and post-test scores. The primary inference, however, was based on the paired-samples t-test because the research question concerned change after the treatment rather than merely the correlation between the two measurements.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Twenty students completed both measurements. The pre-test mean was 41.10, which fell in the High category according to the study's score classification. The individual pre-test scores ranged from 29 to 49, showing that students began the study with different levels of observable

engagement. The relatively high mean is important for interpreting the intervention because many students were already participating at a substantial level before the structured desk-mate activities were introduced.

After the treatment, the mean score increased to 42.05, which fell in the Very High category. The mean gain was therefore 0.95 points. The standard deviation decreased from 6.223 at pre-test to 3.734 at post-test, indicating that the students' scores were less dispersed after the activity. Descriptively, the class moved from the upper end of the High category to the beginning of the Very High category, but the magnitude of the average change remained small.

The individual data also show that the treatment was not followed by uniform improvement. Some students increased their scores, some remained similar, and some decreased. The largest increase reported in the thesis occurred for one student whose score rose from 29 to 39. This variation suggests that students did not respond identically to the same pair-based activity and that the class mean alone cannot represent the full pattern of engagement change.

Changes in Behavioral Engagement

The descriptive increase can be interpreted through the behavioral-engagement framework of Fredricks et al. (2004). The treatment required students to participate in pair talk, respond to a partner, maintain attention to the conversation, cooperate in constructing a dialogue, and continue until the speaking task was completed. In other words, the instructional procedures directly elicited the behaviors represented in the questionnaire. A modest post-test increase is therefore theoretically plausible because students were given explicit opportunities to display those forms of engagement.

The result is also compatible with social interdependence theory. Johnson and Johnson (2018) argue that cooperation is strengthened when students recognize that successful task completion depends on reciprocal contribution. In the treatment, a dialogue could not proceed unless one student listened and the other responded, and the cooperative conversation required both partners to contribute. These task demands may have encouraged participation among students who otherwise might remain passive in whole-class interaction.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective offers another explanation for the descriptive improvement. During pair work, desk mates could assist one another with vocabulary, pronunciation, or expressions. Such immediate scaffolding can keep a speaking task moving when one learner experiences difficulty. From the communicative perspective of Richards (2015) and Harmer (2007), the pair format also increases opportunities to use English directly rather than waiting for a turn in teacher-led interaction. These theoretical mechanisms help explain why a positive tendency appeared even though the statistical test did not confirm a significant treatment effect.

Paired-Samples Correlation and Hypothesis Testing

The paired-samples correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores was 0.711 with a significance value of 0.000. This indicates a strong positive association between the two sets of scores: students who were relatively more engaged at pre-test also tended to have relatively higher scores at post-test. The correlation does not, however, establish that the treatment changed engagement; it only describes the consistency of students' relative positions across the two measurements.

The paired-samples t-test provided the main test of the hypothesis. The analysis produced t = -0.959 with 19 degrees of freedom and a two-tailed significance value of 0.350. Because 0.350 was greater than the 0.05 criterion, the null hypothesis was retained and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the observed difference between 41.10 and 42.05 was not statistically significant under the conditions of this study.

The statistical result requires a careful distinction between descriptive and inferential conclusions. It is accurate to state that the mean score increased and the distribution became less variable. It is not accurate to conclude that the treatment was proven effective, because the probability value did not meet the predetermined significance threshold. The study therefore provides evidence of a positive descriptive tendency rather than evidence of a statistically reliable effect.

Interpretation of the Main Findings

The absence of a significant effect does not necessarily mean that peer interaction is pedagogically unhelpful. Instead, it indicates that the particular intervention tested here - one meeting with 20 students and no control group - did not generate a change large enough to be distinguished statistically from normal score variation. The short duration is especially relevant because behavioral engagement can reflect classroom habits that develop through repeated routines. One exposure to a structured pair task may provide an engaging experience without being sufficient to alter students' broader participation patterns.

The high initial mean may also have constrained the amount of observable improvement. With a pre-test mean of 41.10 on a scale whose maximum was 50, the class already entered the study near the boundary between High and Very High engagement. This interpretation should be treated as a contextual inference rather than a separate statistical finding, but it helps explain why a small gain could occur even when the activity was positively received by some students. Greater change may be easier to detect in groups with lower initial engagement or after a longer intervention.

The findings therefore qualify, rather than simply contradict, earlier positive studies of peer learning. Rahman et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between cooperative peer relationships and behavioral engagement, but correlational evidence addresses association rather than short-term treatment change. Saeid (2024) used a broader collaborative intervention, while Ding and Zhu (2025) examined structured peer feedback over a technology-supported context. Differences in treatment intensity, research design, sample characteristics, and learning tasks can reasonably produce different statistical outcomes.

For classroom practice, desk-mate interaction remains useful as a low-cost organizational technique because it provides immediate opportunities for students to speak, listen, cooperate, and respond. The present findings suggest, however, that teachers should not assume that a single pair-work meeting will substantially change behavioral engagement. More promising implementation may involve repeated desk-mate routines across several lessons, rotating task types, explicit speaking goals, continuous feedback, and integration with role play, small-group discussion, or collaborative problem-solving.

DISCUSSION

The central finding of this study is the coexistence of a small descriptive improvement and a non-significant inferential result. This combination is important because it prevents an overly

simple conclusion. The post-test mean was higher than the pre-test mean, and the class-level category shifted from High to Very High, yet the paired-samples t-test showed that the difference was not statistically significant. In educational research, a visible numerical increase should not be interpreted as effectiveness unless the design and statistical evidence support that claim. The present study therefore provides a useful example of why descriptive and inferential results must be reported together.

The descriptive pattern remains educationally meaningful because the treatment was aligned with the behaviors it sought to encourage. Dialogue practice required students to take speaking turns; question-and-answer work required responsiveness; cooperative conversation required collaboration; and completing the task required attention and persistence. These activity structures correspond closely to the five engagement indicators. Fredricks et al. (2004) and Reeve (2012) provide a conceptual basis for understanding why direct opportunities for participation can be associated with higher behavioral involvement, even when the measured change is modest.

The social structure of the treatment also matters. Johnson and Johnson's (2018) cooperative-learning principles suggest that interaction becomes productive when partners depend on one another while remaining individually responsible. The desk-mate format naturally creates proximity, but proximity alone does not guarantee positive interdependence. Teachers still need to design tasks that require reciprocal contributions, such as information gaps, alternating questions, joint planning, and paired performances. Future implementations could strengthen the treatment by making each student's contribution explicit and by repeating the cooperative structure until it becomes a classroom routine.

Sociocultural theory further supports the role of the partner as a source of immediate assistance. Vygotsky (1978) and Lantolf (2006) view learning as mediated through social interaction. In speaking activities, the practical value of this perspective is visible when a partner helps recall vocabulary, models a phrase, or prompts a response. Such scaffolding can preserve participation when a learner would otherwise withdraw from the task. The present study did not separately measure the quantity or quality of peer assistance, so this mechanism remains a theoretical explanation rather than a directly tested mediator. Future research could combine engagement questionnaires with observation or interaction analysis to examine how specific partner behaviors relate to changes in engagement.

The result should also be understood in relation to the study's duration and baseline condition. The treatment occurred in one classroom meeting, whereas engagement is often shaped by repeated experiences, expectations, and classroom norms. A student who is accustomed to limited participation may need several cycles of supported speaking before new behavior becomes stable. Conversely, students who already have high engagement scores have less room for measurable improvement. The pre-test mean of 41.10 indicates that the group was not starting from a low level of behavioral engagement, which may have reduced the size of the possible average gain during a single session.

Comparisons with previous research also show why context matters. Rahman et al. (2023) examined cooperative peer relationships and found positive links with behavioral engagement; Saeid (2024) reported benefits from broader peer interaction; and Ding and Zhu (2025) found positive outcomes from structured peer feedback. These studies support the general importance of peer processes, but they do not imply that every form of peer activity will produce a significant effect after the same amount of time. The current result suggests that the design of

interaction - including duration, task variety, feedback, and partner accountability - should be considered as carefully as the presence of peer work itself.

The study also has methodological limitations that constrain causal interpretation. A one-group pre-test and post-test design does not include a control group, so changes across measurement points cannot be attributed exclusively to the intervention. The sample was limited to 20 students from one eighth-grade class, reducing statistical power and external generalizability. In addition, behavioral engagement was measured through a self-report questionnaire rather than through multiple sources such as systematic observation, teacher ratings, or interaction transcripts. These limitations do not invalidate the data, but they define the level of confidence that can be placed in the conclusions.

Pedagogically, the most appropriate implication is to treat desk-mate interaction as a complementary strategy rather than a stand-alone solution. The format is practical, creates more speaking turns, and can make peer support immediately available. Teachers can strengthen its potential by using it consistently across lessons and combining it with role play, group discussion, problem-based tasks, peer feedback, and opportunities to perform for the class. Such combinations may provide both the frequency and variety of participation needed for behavioral engagement to change more substantially over time.

Future studies should therefore extend the treatment over several meetings and include a larger sample or comparison group. Quasi-experimental designs could compare structured desk-mate interaction with conventional teacher-fronted speaking or with alternative collaborative arrangements. Mixed-methods research could add classroom observations and student interviews to explain why some learners improve while others remain stable or decline. These extensions would make it possible to identify not only whether desk-mate interaction works, but also for whom, under what conditions, and through which interactional processes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of structured desk-mate interaction activities on the behavioral engagement of 20 eighth-grade students at MTs YMPI Rappang. Students' mean engagement score increased from 41.10 before treatment to 42.05 after treatment, a gain of 0.95 points, and the standard deviation decreased from 6.223 to 3.734. Descriptively, the average engagement level moved from High to Very High. Nevertheless, the paired-samples t-test produced $t = -0.959$, $df = 19$, and $p = 0.350$. Because the p-value exceeded 0.05, the study found no statistically significant effect of the desk-mate interaction treatment on behavioral engagement.

The findings indicate that desk-mate interaction can create useful opportunities for participation, cooperation, attention, responsiveness, and persistence, but a single meeting was not sufficient to demonstrate a reliable statistical improvement in this group. English teachers may therefore use desk-mate interaction as part of a broader interactive speaking approach rather than rely on it as a short stand-alone intervention. Repeated practice, varied pair tasks, explicit partner accountability, and continuous feedback may strengthen its contribution to engagement.

Future research should involve longer treatment periods, larger samples, and a control or comparison group. The use of observation, teacher ratings, interviews, or interaction records alongside questionnaires would also provide a more comprehensive picture of behavioral engagement. Such studies could determine whether sustained desk-mate interaction produces

stronger effects and clarify the classroom conditions that make pair-based speaking most beneficial.

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