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Exploring the Relationship Between Cultural Capital and University EFL Students' Speaking Performance

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ABSTRACT

Cultural capital has been widely discussed in Bourdieu's theory as a factor that influences students' academic experiences, including language learning. In the EFL context, the diversity of cultural capital types owned by students may affect their speaking performance in different ways. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the types of cultural capital possessed by EFL university students, examine the relationship between cultural capital diversity and students' speaking performance, and find out which aspects of cultural capital have the strongest influence on speaking performance at the university level. This study used a quantitative correlational design and involved 44 English Education students from a public university in Surabaya. Data on cultural capital were collected through a questionnaire consisting of seven cultural capital factors, while students' speaking performance was taken from the final scores of Public Speaking and Academic Speaking courses. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson product–moment correlation. The results showed that most students had medium to high levels of cultural capital diversity, with art appreciation, cultural visits, and cultured family as the dominant factors. The students' speaking performance was also mostly in the medium to high category. In addition, the analysis showed a significant medium positive correlation between cultural capital diversity and speaking performance (r = .411; p < .01), which means that students with higher cultural capital diversity tended to have better speaking performance. These findings suggest that cultural capital plays a role in supporting students' speaking development in the EFL university context.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill plays a central role in EFL learning since it reflects learners' ability to express ideas, interact, and participate in academic communication. However, students' speaking performance is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by broader sociocultural resources that support their learning experiences. Within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, cultural capital is considered one of the key factors influencing students' academic behaviors, preferences, and capacities to succeed in educational settings (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital—expressed through knowledge, exposure, habits, and family resources—creates differences in how students' access, interpret, and participate in learning activities, including oral communication.

Several scholars (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Sullivan, 2001) argue that cultural capital contributes to academic achievement because students who possess richer cultural resources tend to have stronger confidence, broader background knowledge, and greater engagement. In language learning, cultural capital may help students enrich topics for communication, expand vocabulary

through cultural exposure, and develop speaking readiness through participation in culturally valued activities.

Furthermore, previous studies tend to categorize cultural capital merely by its levels (high–medium–low), whereas Bourdieu's framework actually implies the importance of understanding the diversity of cultural capital types, such as art appreciation, cultural visits, family literacy, and access to cultural goods. These variations may influence students differently, yet empirical evidence regarding which specific types of cultural capital most strongly affect EFL speaking performance remains limited. This limitation creates a gap: while the role of cultural capital in education is acknowledged, its specific contribution to speaking performance and the dominant cultural capital types that shape this skill are still underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on EFL university students in an English Education program to map the diversity of cultural capital types they possess and to investigate how these cultural resources contribute to their speaking performance. The scientific novelty of this research lies in its focus on identifying the cultural capital types that are most commonly possessed by students with high speaking performance, rather than only measuring overall cultural capital levels. This perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of Bourdieu's theory in the EFL higher education context.

The present study aims to examine the role of cultural capital in shaping EFL university students' speaking performance. Specifically, it seeks to identify the diversity of cultural capital types possessed by students, to determine the level of their speaking performance and examine its relationship with cultural capital, and to identify which types of cultural capital are most prevalent among students who demonstrate high speaking proficiency. Through this focus, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how different forms of cultural capital contribute to students' oral language development in an EFL context.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Cultural Capital and Educational Achievement
Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes cultural capital as a set of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and cultural resources that individuals acquire through socialization and education, shaping their academic trajectories and social positioning. Cultural capital is transmitted through family background, social class, and educational experiences, influencing how learners access, interpret, and benefit from educational opportunities. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that students who possess higher levels of cultural capital—such as exposure to cultural activities, parental support, and familiarity with academic norms—tend to achieve better educational outcomes (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Jaeger, 2011; Jaeger & Mollegaard, 2017). These findings suggest that cultural capital does not merely accompany academic success but actively facilitates it by shaping students' dispositions, expectations, and learning strategies.

Cultural Capital, Family Background, and Educational Socialization
The role of family and social environment has been widely acknowledged as a key factor in the development of cultural capital. Lareau (1987) and Carlisle and Murray (2015) argue that family–school relationships and socioeconomic status significantly influence children's access to cultural resources, thereby shaping their academic behaviors and literacy development. Through everyday interactions, families transmit values, habits, and linguistic practices that contribute to students' readiness for academic engagement. From a sociological perspective, the concept of habitus explains how these repeated social experiences become internalized dispositions that guide learners' attitudes and actions in educational settings (Stam, 2009; Gaddis, 2013).

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), cultural capital also operates as a marker of social distinction. In many Asian contexts, including Thailand and Indonesia, English proficiency is often associated with social prestige and educational advantage (Hayes, 2016). Students

from less privileged backgrounds may experience anxiety, fear of judgment, or limited opportunities to practice English, which constrains their speaking development (Khamkhien, 2010). Consequently, unequal access to cultural and linguistic resources contributes to disparities in speaking performance among learners.

Cultural Capital and Language Learning Practices

Research has identified various dimensions through which cultural capital influences language learning, particularly speaking ability. These dimensions include participation in cultural visits, engagement with literature and the arts, and involvement in family-based literacy practices (DiMaggio, 1982; Ho et al., 2020; Scherger & Savage, 2010). Such experiences expose learners to diverse linguistic inputs, broaden their perspectives, and support the development of communicative competence.

Family literacy practices, such as shared reading and intellectual discussions, play a crucial role in fostering vocabulary growth and expressive ability (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Reese et al., 2012). Learners who grow up in environments rich in textual and cultural resources tend to develop stronger linguistic repertoires, enabling them to articulate ideas more confidently and fluently (Jeon & Day, 2016). These findings highlight the close relationship between everyday cultural practices and language development.

Cultural Capital and Speaking Performance in EFL Contexts

In the context of speaking instruction, engagement in artistic and cultural activities has been shown to enhance learners' oral proficiency. Activities such as drama, music, and performance-based tasks encourage active language use, creativity, and emotional expression, all of which contribute to improved fluency and confidence (Galante & Thomson, 2017). Through such experiences, learners gain opportunities to practice language in meaningful, low-anxiety contexts that support oral communication development.

Despite the growing body of research linking cultural capital to educational outcomes, several gaps remain. Much of the existing literature focuses on general academic achievement rather than speaking performance, which is particularly sensitive to factors such as confidence, exposure, and cultural familiarity. Moreover, previous studies often conceptualize cultural capital as a single construct, overlooking the diversity of its components and their potentially distinct contributions to language learning. Few studies have explicitly examined which specific forms of cultural capital most strongly influence EFL speaking performance.

Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the diversity of cultural capital types among university EFL students and examines how these dimensions relate to speaking performance. By identifying the most influential forms of cultural capital, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how sociocultural resources shape oral language development in EFL contexts.

METHODS
Design
This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between the diversity of cultural capital types and students' speaking performance. This design was chosen because the study aimed to determine whether variations in cultural capital were associated with differences in speaking scores. The categorization of cultural capital and speaking performance levels into low, medium, and high was used only for descriptive purposes and was developed based on the possible score range of the questionnaire. These cut-off points were proportionally determined and reviewed during the thesis supervision process to ensure their appropriateness.

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between the diversity of cultural capital types and students' speaking performance. In this study,

diversity of cultural capital types means how many different types of cultural capital students have across the seven factors measured, not diversity in a statistical sense.

The correlational design was chosen because the study aimed to determine the statistical association between cultural capital and speaking outcomes without manipulating variables. The framework follows Bourdieu's theory of capital, which serves as the conceptual basis for analyzing how cultural resources influence educational performance. This design aligns with the research objectives, which focus on identifying cultural capital diversity, measuring speaking performance, and analyzing the correlation between the two.

Participants

The participants were 44 students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at a public university in Surabaya. A total sampling technique was used, as all individuals in the cohort met the inclusion criteria and were available for participation. The sample size was considered appropriate because it represented the entire population of students who had completed both speaking courses required for measuring performance. All participants were undergraduate EFL learners who had completed Public Speaking and Academic Speaking courses. Students' speaking performance was measured by calculating the average of their final scores in the two courses, ensuring that the scores represented their overall speaking ability. The participants varied in cultural backgrounds but shared similar academic environments, allowing for consistent evaluation of cultural capital types.

Data Collection

Data were collected within a single academic semester to maintain consistency. The cultural capital questionnaire was distributed via an online form, allowing students to respond independently and confidentially. Speaking performance data were obtained directly from official course records with lecturer approval. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the study and its purpose. Data collection procedures were standardized to reduce potential bias and ensure uniformity in responses.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a Cultural Capital Questionnaire designed to measure seven dimensions of cultural capital, namely cultural visits, literary and art-related activities, literate family background, social–political discussions, cultured family, cultural commitment, and art appreciation. The items were adapted from established and validated instruments in previous studies (DiMaggio, 1982; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Sullivan, 2001; Ho et al., 2020; Lareau, 1987; Khodadady & Natanzy, 2012) and were measured using a Likert-scale format to allow for quantitative analysis of each cultural capital dimension. Content validity was ensured through expert judgment, in which two lecturers in English Education evaluated the clarity, relevance, and theoretical alignment of the questionnaire items. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated that all components of the instrument met acceptable reliability standards, confirming the internal consistency of the measurement.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and the Pearson product–moment correlation. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the diversity of cultural capital types and the level of speaking performance. Pearson correlation was applied to examine the relationship between cultural capital and speaking performance. These analytical methods were chosen because they align with the quantitative nature of the data and directly address the research questions. Statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study. Participation among the students was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all students. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed; individual data were not disclosed and were used solely for research purposes. Permission was obtained from the English Education Department to access students' speaking scores. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives. It begins by describing the distribution of students' cultural capital and speaking performance, followed by an analysis of the relationship between these variables. The discussion then interprets the results in light of existing literature, highlighting how different forms of cultural capital contribute to students' speaking performance in the EFL context. Through this integrated presentation, the section aims to connect empirical findings with theoretical perspectives on cultural capital and language learning.

Diversity of Cultural Capital types Among EFL University Students

This section presents the findings related to the diversity of cultural capital types among EFL university students. The analysis focuses on describing students' levels of cultural capital across the seven measured factors to provide an overview of how cultural capital is distributed among the participants. Understanding this distribution is important to illustrate the variety of cultural resources owned by students before examining their relationship with speaking performance.

Table 1. *Statistic of Cultural Capital Factors*

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultured Family	44	3.46	.698
Cultural Commitment	44	2.73	.769
Cultural Investment	44	2.81	1.121
Cultural Visit	44	3.65	.696
Literary and Art Studies	44	3.34	.676
Art Appreciation	44	4.03	.491
Literate Family	44	2.61	.942
Valid N (listwise)	44		

The table above showed the analysis of students who possessed varying levels of the seven types of cultural capital measured in this study. The seven cultural capital components analyzed in this research were adopted from the cultural capital scale designed and validated by Khodadady and Natanzi (2012). Art appreciation emerged as the highest cultural capital aspect, indicating that students most frequently engaged in activities such as listening to music, participating in arts-related events, or performing creative activities. Cultural visit activities and cultured family background also appeared at relatively high levels, reflecting students' involvement in visiting cultural or historical places, reading practices, family conversations, and culturally oriented interactions. Literary and art studies showed a moderate level, while literate family background appeared as the lowest cultural capital factor, followed by cultural commitment and cultural investment. This suggests that not all students experienced similar levels of exposure to literacy-related family practices or long-term cultural investments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' cultural capital is diverse, with different cultural resources available across different types. This confirms the importance of examining cultural capital as multidimensional rather than singular. The result reinforces Bourdieu's assertion that cultural capital manifests through different forms and cannot be examined as a single construct (Bourdieu, 1986). The relatively lower score in literate family background reflects arguments raised by Lareau et al. (2004), who suggested that literacy-related practices are often unevenly distributed due to

socioeconomic differences. This supports the theoretical claim that students' exposure to certain forms of cultural capital is shaped by family background and available resources (Sullivan, 2001). These findings justify the importance of examining each type of cultural capital independently, which is the novelty highlighted in this research.

Level of Students' Speaking Performance and Its Correlation with Cultural Capital

The analysis of students' speaking performance—taken from their Public Speaking and Academic Speaking final scores—showed that the majority of students achieved a high level of speaking ability, with only a small portion falling into moderate categories. This analysis provides an overview of students' speaking performance levels before examining their relationship with cultural capital. By presenting the distribution of speaking scores, this section helps explain how students' speaking ability varies across the sample. These results serve as the basis for further correlation analysis between cultural capital diversity and speaking performance.

Table 2. *Statistic of Speaking Performance*

Score	Category	Frequency	
		Public Speaking	**Academic Speaking**
0-2.50	Low Score	0	0
2.60-3.50	Medium Score	16	9
3.60-4.00	High Score	28	35
	Total	44	44

To examine the relationship between cultural capital and speaking ability, a Pearson product moment correlation test was conducted. The result showed a positive and significant correlation between the diversity of cultural capital types and speaking performance. This indicates that students with higher cultural capital tend to demonstrate stronger speaking performance.

Table 3. *Correlation between Cultural Capital and Speaking Performance*

		CC Score	**Speaking score**
CC Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.411[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	44	44
Speaking Performance	Pearson Correlation	.411[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	44	44

From Table 3., the coefficient significant value (p) was .006 that implies that there was a positive significant correlation between two variables (Cultural capital and Speaking performance). In addition, the Pearson product moment correlation (r) was .411. As stated by Cohen (1988), if the pearson correlation value was between r=.30-.49, it was indicated as medium correlation between X and Y. This finding supports the basic idea that cultural capital can help students in their academic performance, including speaking ability. However, it does not mean that cultural capital is the only factor influencing speaking performance. Other factors such as teaching methods, personal motivation, and the learning environment may also contribute. The results indicate that cultural capital is one important element that can support students in improving their speaking performance in an EFL context.

The positive and moderate correlation identified in this study suggests that cultural capital plays a meaningful role in shaping students' speaking performance, although it does not operate in isolation. Consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital as a resource that enhances academic engagement, the findings indicate that students who possess richer cultural experiences tend to

demonstrate stronger oral communication skills. This relationship aligns with previous studies showing that exposure to cultural practices, such as art appreciation, reading habits, and family-based intellectual engagement, supports language development and communicative confidence (DiMaggio, 1982; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Ho et al., 2020). The moderate strength of the correlation also suggests that while cultural capital contributes meaningfully to speaking performance, it interacts with other influential factors, including instructional quality, learning motivation, and classroom environment. Similar to findings reported by Khamkhien (2010) and Hayes (2016), students' opportunities to use English in supportive and culturally enriched contexts appear to enhance their speaking competence. Therefore, cultural capital should be viewed as a significant, yet complementary, factor within the broader ecosystem of EFL learning.

The most dominant cultural capital with high the higher speaking performance

Among the seven cultural capital components, art appreciation appeared as the most dominant type of cultural capital among students who achieved high speaking performance. Students who were more frequently engaged in artistic or creative activities showed higher mean scores in this category. Their involvement in these activities helps them expand their vocabulary, strengthen their cultural awareness, and enrich their ideas when performing speaking tasks.

This finding shows that exposure to artistic activities can support students' speaking development. Students who are involved in art-related activities tend to feel more confident and expressive when speaking in English. Art appreciation helps students become more comfortable sharing ideas, which can improve their speaking performance in classroom activities. In addition, cultural support from the family also plays an important role in students' speaking development. When students receive encouragement and opportunities to engage in creative or cultural activities, they are more likely to develop confidence and readiness to use English in speaking tasks. This suggests that cultural capital works through both individual experiences and the support provided by the students' surrounding environment.

Table 4. *Cultural Visit of Cultural Capital*

Items	Questions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
CV1	I visit museum and historical places	44	1.00	5.00	4.00
CV2	I visit handy-craft galeries	44	1.00	5.00	3.31
Valid N (listwise)		44			
				Total score	7.31
				Mean	3.65

The second most dominant cultural capital type among students with high speaking performance was cultural visit activities. Students who often visited cultural places such as museums, historical sites, exhibitions, or cultural events showed relatively higher mean scores in this category as presented in Table 4. These visits may provide them with new insights, real-world knowledge, and meaningful experiences that enrich the topics and ideas they bring into speaking activities. Such exposure helps students feel more confident when sharing stories, giving descriptions, or expressing opinions. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from these cultural visits acts as important cultural understanding. This cultural understanding is shown to be a key factor for good speaking performance and confidence, allowing learners to communicate more effectively and feel less nervous during interaction (Khodadady & Ghassemifard, 2012).

Table 5. *Art Appreciation of Cultural Capital*

Item	Questions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
AA1	I like to listen music and English song	44	3.00	5.00	4.81
AA2	I like to play an instrument	44	1.00	5.00	3.00
AA3	I enjoy watching theatres	44	2.00	5.00	4.27
Valid N (list wise)		44			
Total score					12.08
Mean					4.02

The third dominant factor was cultured family, which refers to students' family habits related to reading, cultural discussions, or general support for cultural activities at home. These activities are categorized as art appreciation as part of cultural capital as presented in Table 5. Students who came from families with stronger cultural habits tended to have higher mean scores in this component. Being surrounded by a supportive cultural environment helps students develop curiosity, motivation, and readiness to engage in academic conversations, which may contribute to their speaking tasks in class.

This finding reinforces the view that family-based cultural environments play a crucial role in shaping students' communicative confidence and linguistic readiness. When students grow up in households where reading, discussion, and intellectual engagement are encouraged, they are more likely to develop the cognitive and linguistic resources necessary for effective oral communication. Such environments foster not only vocabulary development but also critical thinking and self-expression, which are essential for speaking performance. Consistent with previous studies, family cultural practices function as an early form of cultural capital that supports students' academic engagement and verbal interaction (Lareau, 1987; Cheung & Andersen, 2003). In this sense, cultured family environments do not merely provide exposure to knowledge but also cultivate dispositions that enable students to participate more confidently and actively in classroom discourse, particularly in EFL contexts where speaking requires both linguistic competence and self-assurance.

For the next components, literary–art studies and cultural investment appeared at a medium level among students with higher speaking performance. Students who read books, engage with literature, or have access to reading materials are exposed to richer vocabulary and broader knowledge, which can help their speaking tasks. However, not all students enjoy literature or have personal libraries at home, so the overall level of these two factors remained moderate. This mechanism, linking reading exposure to enhanced vocabulary for speaking, is consistent with EFL research in Thai universities, which confirms that engagement with extensive reading materials significantly improves students' word knowledge and overall linguistic competence (Puangchompoo, 2014).

Table 6. *Cultured Family of Cultural Capital*

Items	Questions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
CF1	I am a cultured person	44	2.00	5.00	3.68
CF2	I have grown up in cultured family	44	1.00	5.00	3.27
CF3	I have fluency in my speech	44	2.00	5.00	3.45
Valid N (list wise)		44			
Total score					10.40
Mean					3.47

Meanwhile, cultural commitment and literate family showed lower mean levels. Cultural commitment reflects students' involvement in cultural or social activities that may build confidence, but participation varied widely among the group. Literate family also appeared low because many students did not come from families with strong reading habits or academic support. As a result, these two factors were less dominant among students with higher speaking performance.

This finding suggests that limited engagement in sustained cultural activities and weaker literacy environments at home may constrain students' opportunities to develop the linguistic confidence necessary for effective speaking. When cultural commitment is low, students may have fewer chances to practice expressive skills or to internalize communicative norms that support oral proficiency. Similarly, a lack of family literacy support can reduce exposure to rich language input, which is essential for developing vocabulary and discourse competence. These results align with previous studies indicating that limited cultural and literacy resources restrict learners' opportunities to build communicative confidence and fluency (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Lareau, 1987). Consequently, students with weaker cultural and literacy backgrounds may face greater challenges in developing strong speaking performance despite formal classroom instruction.

Overall, the seven cultural capital components showed different levels among students with high speaking performance. These variations illustrate that students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and each type contributes differently to the cultural experiences they bring into the learning process. Together, these patterns help explain how students' everyday cultural habits and environments support their participation and performance in EFL speaking activities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the diversity of cultural capital types among EFL university students and examined how these cultural resources relate to their speaking performance. The findings showed that students possess different levels of cultural capital across the seven components, with some types appearing more dominant among students who achieved higher speaking scores. Art appreciation, cultural visit activities, and cultured family emerged as the most prominent cultural experiences, while other components such as literary–art studies, cultural investment, cultural commitment, and literate family appeared at moderate or lower levels.

The results also indicated that students with higher speaking performance tended to be those who were more actively engaged in various cultural activities, whether through arts, reading, family interactions, or cultural exposure. These cultural experiences helped support their confidence, vocabulary range, and readiness to express ideas in speaking tasks. Although cultural capital is not the only factor influencing speaking performance, it remains an important element that shapes how students participate and perform in EFL learning.

Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications can be identified. EFL teachers can include more art-based activities in speaking classes, such as drama performances, music-based discussions, visual storytelling, or simple creative presentations. These activities can help students use their existing cultural experiences, express their ideas more easily, and feel less anxious when speaking in class. At the institutional level, universities can also support students by providing more opportunities to experience cultural activities, especially for those from lower cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, universities can organize guided cultural visits, hold art-related events on campus, or offer affordable cultural workshops. These programs can help students gain more exposure to cultural experiences and build confidence in using English for speaking activities.

Overall, this study shows that cultural capital provides meaningful insights into students' speaking development by highlighting the role of everyday cultural habits and family environments. Future research may expand these findings by involving larger samples, examining each cultural capital type in more depth, or using additional analytical methods. Studies that explore classroom practices, learning motivation, or teacher support may also offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to students' speaking performance. This research hopes to encourage further discussions on how cultural experiences can be actively integrated and supported in EFL education.

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