



## Reducing Students' Anxiety in Speaking English: Teacher's Strategies

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### Abstrak

Kecemasan dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dapat menghambat siswa dalam mempelajari bahasa tersebut. Menyadari masalah ini, guru bahasa Inggris harus memiliki strategi untuk membantu siswa mengatasi kecemasan berbicara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi guru dalam mengurangi kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris serta kelebihan dan kekurangan strategi yang diterapkan. Informan penelitian ini adalah seorang guru bahasa Inggris di sebuah SMP Islam di Surakarta, Jawa Tengah yang mengajar di kelas VIII. Desain penelitian ini adalah studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi dan wawancara. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi guru untuk mengurangi kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris adalah relaksasi, persiapan, berpikir positif, mencari teman sebaya, dan kelompok sebaya. Penerapan strategi tersebut memiliki dampak, baik kelebihan maupun kekurangan. Kelebihan dari strategi tersebut adalah: (1) menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang santai dan positif, (2) mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi dan pembelajaran kolaboratif. Sementara itu, kelemahan dari strategi yang digunakan oleh guru adalah siswa sering menghabiskan waktu untuk membuat kelompok dan berisik. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa memilih strategi yang tepat untuk membantu siswa mengatasi kecemasan mereka dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris memerlukan beberapa pertimbangan, seperti kemampuan siswa, kebutuhan, serta keadaan kelas.

**Kata kunci:** kecemasan berbicara, belajar bahasa Inggris, keterampilan berbicara

### Abstract

*Anxiety in speaking English can hinder students' performance in learning the language. Recognizing this problem, English teachers should have strategies to help students cope with speaking anxiety. This current study focused on investigating teacher's strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies applied by the English teacher of an Islamic junior high school in Surakarta, Central Java. Case study design was implemented in this research. The subject of this research is an English teacher who taught at the eight grades. The techniques in collecting the data included observation and interview. The research findings show that the teacher's strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English are relaxation, preparation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and peer group. Implementing those strategies has impacts, either advantages or disadvantages. The advantages of those strategies are: (1) creating a relaxed and positive learning environment, (2) developing communication skill and collaborative learning. Meanwhile, the disadvantage of the strategies used by the teacher is students often take time in making groups and noisy. These findings imply that choosing the suitable strategies to help students cope with their anxiety in speaking English need some considerations, such as students' abilities, needs, as well as classroom circumstances.*

**Keywords:** *reducing anxiety, English learning, speaking skill*

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## Introduction

In learning English, there are four skills that students must know and master, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is the most important skill of the four skills. Speaking consists of making systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. Spoken language is one of the simplest and most common forms of human communication (Bailey and Nunan, 2005). Gaining these skills makes it easier for them to share their ideas with others and they can go abroad to continue their studies. Communicating in the target language is not easy, especially for students who lack vocabulary and self-confidence, so they are afraid to use the target language. It results in their anxiety in speaking English. Horwitz (2010) explains that anxiety is a subjective feeling of tension, fear, irritability, and worry related to stimulation of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety is caused by a number of factors. According to Marwan (2007), lack of preparation is the main problem affecting English students. In this case, they are afraid that their speaking performance will not go well. In this case, the teacher's role is to help students achieve the intended language learning goals as well as to help the students cope with their anxiety. The strategies used by teachers should be adjusted to the students' abilities, needs, and circumstances.

Considering this situation, firstly, teachers need to know whether their teaching strategies are appropriate to the needs, abilities, and conditions of their students since appropriate speaking teaching strategies will produce effective results regarding students' speaking skills. Also, it is important for teachers to pay attention and provide positive reinforcement to students, motivate students, and create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom (Keramid, 2009). It can reduce students' anxiety, increase self-confidence, improve communication skills, as well as encourage them to communicate (Noon-ura, 2008). Moreover, responding to students' learning anxiety, Nunan (1999) explained that teachers must be open to various responses to overcome student resistance. This allows students to confidently answer teacher questions and participate in class activities.

Several studies which focused on teacher's strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English have been conducted. The first study was conducted by Wantassen (2022) which revealed several conclusions regarding the strategies used by the teacher to overcome students' anxiety in speaking English, namely by

making it easier for students to learn to speak English. It also investigated the impact felt by students after the teacher implemented the strategies. Furthermore, Arodijah (2020) wrote another research and found several findings that emerged in the strategies of English teachers in teaching speaking. English teachers must implement different plans, methods, approaches or series of activities designed to achieve education or teaching goals. However, they also faced several problems in its implementation. The third study was written by Zed and Kassida (2017). The researchers found several difficulties faced by students when learning a second or foreign language and they were afraid of speaking English in public. This study attempts to understand the nature of anxiety from a different perspective. The results show that language learners themselves can help reduce their speaking anxiety and teachers can also help students to limit learners' English speaking anxiety.

While previous studies mostly investigated the students' anxiety and their strategies to reduce it, this current study focuses on the teacher's roles in helping the students cope with their anxiety. Therefore, this study was conducted under two research questions: (1) what are the strategies used by the teacher to reduce the students' anxiety in speaking English? and (2) how are the impacts of implementing those strategies?

## Method

This research used a case study design. According to Gay, Millis, and Airasian (2006), qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. In this research, the data were collected through classroom observation, interview, and documentation to investigate and find the teacher's strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English. The data collection was conducted on 14-20<sup>th</sup> of November 2023.

The researcher observed the teaching and learning process and interaction between the teacher and students then identified the teacher's strategies in reducing students' anxiety in speaking English, the way the teacher interacted with the students in the process of teaching and learning and the expressions when the teacher used the strategies. Furthermore, an interview was carried out to get additional information about the way the teacher used the strategies in

reducing students' anxiety, as well as the advantages and disadvantages from those strategies. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstanding, and then it was translated into English. The translations have been checked and confirmed.

Then, the data were analyzed using a qualitative data analysis technique. To analyze the data, the writer followed the steps proposed by Huberman in Presley (2012). The data analysis in this study will be broken down into three stages; they are data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. Finally, to convey the trustworthiness of the study, methodological triangulation was performed.

## Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings concerning the problem statements, equipped with supporting data, and discusses the findings related to previous studies and existing theories. There were two objectives in this research. The first was to describe the strategies used by the English teacher to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English and the second was to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies applied by the teacher.

### The strategies used by the teacher to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English

There are several strategies implemented by the teacher in order to help the students reduce their anxiety in speaking English as described in the following findings.

#### Relaxation

Based on the observation, the teacher usually asked the students to calm themselves in order to reduce stress and anxiety hormones and increase circulation to the brain. Furthermore, the teacher also provides easy materials to the students to make them feel secure about understanding the learning materials and provided them with key vocabularies to assist them in speaking English. Then, the teacher gave examples of the pronunciation so that the students do not feel inferior. The teacher also helped them to combine the ideas before they have speaking performance. By this way, the teacher gave the students the opportunity to

express every idea they conveyed in English. Regarding the relaxation strategies, the teacher explained as follows.

*"First, we provide easy materials, which they encounter every day. Then we give examples of pronunciation so that they don't feel inferior, at least by practicing together it will make them confident in each other, not making fun of each other. Then we also provide ways to remember the content that we convey, for example, with the story material that we provide, we help them to remember the key words, and to combine ideas with the content. It will make them more relaxed in practicing speaking." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

Making the students relaxed was also done through providing fun learning activities using songs or films, as the teacher expressed in interview.

*"We ourselves try to look attractive. Then the next thing is how we present a method that is easy, fun using drillings, songs, films that make them happy. Later on, the children themselves find it easy to speak, find it easy to express, that's how it is." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

The teacher invites students to be relaxed in communicating. He positions himself as equal to the students, so that mentally the students feel comfortable with the teacher and helps them in many ways. Moreover, providing easy materials which the students encounter every day makes them feel secure and relaxed when learning English speaking. In addition, the use of songs and films in teaching helped the students to be relaxed during the learning process.

This finding is in line with Zed and Kassida (2017) whose study reported that supportive classroom environment results in students with a greater degree of self-confidence and relaxation so they are not restricted by fear of failure. The teacher should tolerate when students make mistakes and provides a relaxed atmosphere so they have opportunity to continue speaking. Moreover, according to Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004), relaxation can reduce stress and can help benefit our mind, body, and spirit. Relaxation strategy was implemented by the teacher in several ways, such as by providing a secure learning situation by giving easy material, providing keywords, giving guidance for pronunciation and constructing ideas.

### **Preparation**

The teacher motivated the students to have preparation before starting the learning process, so that they can take the opportunity. In everyday practice, the teacher used to motivate the students to speak English with friends and initiate talking in English. He also made the students read the materials before coming to the class. In addition, the results of interview with the teacher explained that he focused on the theme, to help the students prepare the vocabularies they needed. The teacher gave sample sentences from which the students were stimulated to create their own sentences with the vocabularies they had learned and prepared.

*"We helped them prepare their vocabulary around the topic. Initially we have to focus on an easy topic with familiar vocabulary that they can express. It will help them in creating sentences." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

From these findings it can be figured out that the teacher made the students get prepared mainly by enriching the vocabulary and by practicing spoken English more on a daily basis. Through these strategies the students would be familiar with the vocabulary as well as sentence construction and it helped them to create their own spoken language.

This finding confirms the result of a previous study by Ariska (2019) which reported that preparation strategy can improve students' speaking performance and make the students be prepared before speaking English. According to Kondo & Ying Ling (2004), preparation is the process of getting ready for some opportunity, in this case the speaking practice. It reduces the uncertainty the speaker may feel about the upcoming performance, thereby reducing speaking anxiety.

### **Positive thinking**

The teacher motivated students to always think positively and think about the best things that will happen. The teacher makes the students practice on a daily basis so that they feel confident, happy, and calm in the learning process. In addition, the teacher also ensures that students can continue to try to speak without having to be afraid of the consequences or mistakes, so they do not worry and can enjoy learning English. He ensured the students that making mistakes is something normal in the learning process. Thinking about funny and enjoyable things and appreciate each

student's performance are also the ways to boost the students' positive thinking regarding speaking English.

Furthermore, the results of interview with the teacher explained that the teacher gives the students attention for getting them to divert their minds from negative thought, especially in their speaking performance. They will be motivated to continue the efforts that have been conveyed.

*"Yes... they need our attention and appreciation. It makes them feel better and positive in the learning process. They will be motivated to do better effort. We also help them when they have some problem, like when they run out of vocabulary or other difficulties during their speaking we should help them by giving a clue or other stimulus. Therefore, they don't feel worry." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

Making students feel positive and thinking about good things in the learning process are one of the keys to reduce their anxiety in speaking English. Knowing that they do not need to worry about making mistakes encouraged them to feel secure in their learning process. It is also complemented with the teacher role who gives assistance.

Another strategy to reduce speaking anxiety is by developing students' positive thinking about the learning process. It is stated by Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004) stated that thinking

positively means thinking about the best to happen, not the worst. Furthermore, Dumarni (2018) stated that thinking positively about learning as a place to develop the knowledge in reaching the achievement could lead to inner motivation in reducing anxiety. The teacher's role is very essential in making students think positively about their performance and not feeling worry about their learning process.

### **Peer group and peer seeking**

During the observation, the teacher invited the students to discuss and create a text about the school and then asked them to make a vlog about the school situation. Working together in groups made them not shy. From this activity, students can learn to work together and they can see each other's speaking abilities. Moreover, they could help each other to remember the vocabulary and expressions used. They can learn from their peers as well as correct them as they made mistakes. Working with peers encouraged them to practice without being worried about speaking in front of the class. In addition, asking to friends when they were unsure or not knowing something is easier than asking to the teacher directly.

Furthermore, the results of interview with

the teacher explained that students can control their anxiety by working in group. When students work with a team of the same age, they are not feeling shy or embarrassed when they made mistakes. The teacher provided guidelines and procedure in doing the group work. They can express and practice their idea first in group before having their speaking performance.

*“Yes, sometimes we work in groups...when children work with a team of their age, they are not awkward...like yesterday, we invited the children to discuss the descriptive text about the school and the condition of each room, whether the room was big, small, then the color, comfort, comfortable, uncomfortable.” (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

Peer group and peer seeking are interconnected. Peer seeking is distinguished from students' willingness to seek out other students who have appear to have difficulty understanding the class and/or controlling their anxiety (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004). Moreover, working in group also provides a better place to practice (Ariska, 2019). It can be seen during the observation, the teachers used to ask the students to work in pairs or in groups to practice their speaking skill. The more they practiced with their friend, they would not feel worried or afraid when speaking English. It is also reflected from the following interview result.

*“In class, if the topic is dialogues, I often let them practice in pairs, such as checking understanding, or admiring, or greeting.... The topics that can be practiced every day. The more often we create opportunities to practice in groups, especially small groups consisting of two students, they will not feel worried when speaking English.” (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

The teacher helped the students through actively monitoring the group work, to check whether the students have difficulties. According to Mapesa (2013), peer group has the important role in influencing students' behavior in taking decision. While they practiced in group, they could reflect from it, and decided the language use dealing the the vocabulary they chose, the sentence construction, etc. As they found it difficult and not sure, then they could use another form of language use of discussed with their friends about it. As a result, these practices and discussion helped them in making decisions about their performances. They also can give suggestions about their friends' performance and language use to help them doing better.

In line with these facts, Zed and Kassida

(2017) stated that peer group can motivate students, encourage active learning, communication, decision-making skills, and develop critical thinking. When students work together they will motivate each other, assists, encourage, and support the participation of their members of the group work. Furthermore, peer group can encourage students in expressing their opinions, train students to become good partners, allows the teacher to give students more speaking time, and lets students to interact with everyone in the group (Wahyuni, Maneba, & Syafitri, 2022).

### **3.2 The impacts of implementing the strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English**

The teacher's strategies to reduce the students' anxiety in speaking English brings

positive impacts in the teaching and learning process. Here are some findings that were figured out from the interview with the teacher.

#### ***Creating a relaxed and positive learning environment***

The teacher tried to be close mentally and psychologically to the students to make fun and easy learning, putting students in a positive environment and mood, and stimulating students to talk. Then the teacher often provides assistance to solve students' problem during the learning process. It is implemented through the strategies of relaxation, preparation, positive thinking and peer group and peer seeking. All these strategies could create positive learning environment in which the students felt secure and not worried when they are practicing. As English is a foreign language which is not familiar with the students, creating positive learning environment can lead to better learning experience and results. It is also implemented through continuous motivation and affirmation that English is easy and brings many benefits for their lives. Therefore, the students would have stronger motivation in learning the language.

*“Yes, the first thing I tried to do was to be close with my students. Then secondly, often them positive affirmation about how English is easy and gives a lot of benefits...because everywhere people need English. I can see that the students more enjoyed the class and the most important thing is they have positive attitude toward the learning process.” (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

This finding confirmed the results of a previous study conducted by Suhri, Atmowardoyo, & Salija (2019) which mentioned that by reducing anxiety, students can improve their learning experience and increase their self-confidence and motivation to learn. Based on the data findings, It is found that the teacher's strategies

could lead to positive learning environment which eventually reduce the students' speaking anxiety. It was implemented through providing fun learning activities, preparing the students with vocabulary and pronunciation, guiding the students to construct sentences, and doing a lot of practices either individually or in group. The students were positively responding to the implementation of those strategies seen from their willingness to participate in the learning activity without getting worry about making mistakes of being embarrassed because they thought positively about their learning process.

Moreover, the teacher's positive affirmation and appreciation also support the students to perform better.

*"Yes, make a joke, giving appreciation, praise often. We praise whatever progress the students make. By doing this I hope they must also be willing to praise other people so they will tend to support each other." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

As stated by Suhri, Atmowardoyo, & Salija (2019), every student sometimes needs a relaxed atmosphere that it can make them happy while studying in class and they do not feel stressed when studying. The ways implemented by the teacher to make the students feel happy and relaxed are by making jokes, giving praise and appreciation so that students can enjoy and be happy. The teacher praise whatever progress the students make. It also to make the students appreciate their friends in the class. Therefore, supportive class environment can be established.

#### ***Developing communication skill and collaborative learning***

One of the strategies implemented by the teacher is by making the students prepared. It was done through practicing vocabulary and sentences in English. Moreover, the teacher also often initiated to speak in English. This daily-based practice led the students to develop their communication skill. The more exposure to English sentences and expression makes the students familiar with the language. It is completed with the strategy of peer group and peer seeking which enabled the students to practice their skill with friends. They can not only share their ideas and practice their skills, but also get correction and suggestion from their peers. Moreover, the teacher also helped the students to generate their ideas before speaking, connecting their ideas into longer sentences and paragraph for their speaking performance.

*"...because I greet them in English every day, not*

*just in class... or the way I appreciate them. It also from the daily learning practice in class and group activity, so they are more confident to speak English." (Mr. CSP, Interview, 16 November 2023)*

Based on the findings, the teacher encourages students so that they dare to convey their ideas. It started by the teacher's initiation through asking questions. It makes the students deliver their ideas. Then, the teacher always respects and appreciate their opinion and invites them to listen to other people's opinions. It makes the students feel positive that their opinions are accepted and also they can compare their opinion with others'. Moreover, group activities also played an important role. By having peer group activities, the students develop their communicative skills. According to Suhri, Atmowardoyo, & Salija (2019), students can express their opinion and desires together with other members of group and the teacher use group discussion so that students communicate their desires and opinions to others. Moreover, it makes the students do collaborative learning while they are working in groups. Suhri, Atmowardoyo, & Salija (2019) state that cooperative learning can be a good way when students can learn together and help each other. Peers can create collaborative learning that helps students deal with difficult situations, such as anxiety. Moreover, Kadir & Salija (2018) stated that the teacher's strategy to focus on language use rather than language form can be facilitated through group work which enabled students to practice with their partners. Language must be communicative and understandable. For junior high school students, the use of English focus on the importance that students can understand first, then after a while they will do self-correction that it turns out they will notice their mistakes. The important thing is to have the courage to speak first then over time, the students want to learn more about grammar and finally become perfect.

#### ***Group works sometimes takes time and noisy***

Apart from the good benefits of the strategies implemented by the teacher, it also has some challenges while he wants to develop relaxed and positive atmosphere through group works and other fun activities. Even though group work brings good impact for the students, sometimes it takes a lot of time to make group since some students are reluctant or shy if they join a new group. Therefore, the groups are usually chosen by the teacher based on his consideration. The groups consist of high achievers, middle achievers and lower achiever so they can learn and help each other. He also designed the learning activities which made the group members to not dependent on one or two members. Everyone should contribute to the group. It can be seen from the

following statement.

*"In making group, sometimes they feel not confident with their ability. Then secondly, they are reluctant or embarrassed if they are considered smarter than others. Then the next one is still relying on other people in the group. We should have win-win solution for this." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

As in other typical of group works, some students did not pay attention to lessons because they are too noisy and chat more with their friends in the group. If it is not treated well, the teacher would lose much time in the class. For this case, the teacher believed that as a teacher, he should have authority and trust in the classroom so that the teacher has the power to provide solutions and has integrity. To handle everything, the important thing is that the teacher has to be able to force the child internally, not physically. The students are given continued awareness and the teacher also provides enthusiasm and understanding of the benefits of learning for students.

*"That was, I built the students' trust to me. Second, we must be authoritative, have the power to provide solutions." (Mr. CSP, interview, 16 November 2023)*

Noise cannot be avoided in group work. As long as the noise still convey with the learning activities, it still can be tolerated. However, if the noise is disturbing the group work, teachers must be able to control it.

## Conclusion

According to data findings and discussion, the researchers made the conclusion. The English teacher's strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English was carried out in several ways, namely relaxation, preparation, positive thinking, and peer group and peer seeking. Relaxation strategy tries to make the students feel relaxed and happy in joining the class. They less worry because the teacher and the class are supportive. In addition, preparation is also important to reduce the students' anxiety. Teachers can help the students prepare the vocabulary and sentence construction they need for speaking practice. Furthermore, teachers also can promote daily use of English. Positive thinking, on the other hand, also beneficial to help students cope with their anxiety. They don't feel afraid of making mistakes so that they are more courage to

perform their skill. The last strategy is peer seeking and peer group. The implementation of those strategies has positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts are creating a relaxed and positive learning environment and developing communication skill and collaborative learning. Meanwhile, group works sometimes take time and noisy so that teachers and consider it and prepare some anticipation.

This study has some limitations. First, it involves one informant and one school. Different context many results in different findings. Therefore, further researchers could involve more informant and different context, such as in elementary school, high school or university level.

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