

Teachers' Effective Strategies in Reducing Students' Anxiety in Speaking English

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Anxiety; Speaking; Strategy; Teachers Received: 19 Mar 2025 Revised: 28 Apr 2025 Accepted: 12 May 2025	<p>This study explores the strategies used by English teachers to reduce students' anxiety when speaking English in the classroom. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and students at a junior high school. The findings reveal that students' speaking anxiety often stems from limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. To address these challenges, teachers implemented various strategies, including role-play activities, the use of dictionaries and digital pronunciation tools, interactive games, and emotional support through motivational feedback. These approaches helped create a supportive and engaging learning environment, encouraging students to participate more actively and confidently in speaking tasks. By tailoring instructional strategies to students' needs and classroom conditions, teachers were able to foster a more positive attitude toward learning English. This study highlights the crucial role of effective teaching practices in mitigating language learning anxiety and offers practical insights for improving English-speaking skills among junior high school learners.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers act as educators who convey knowledge and guide students in learning. To achieve student learning success, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important. With this role, the teacher is tasked with organizing and assisting students in doing and completing their tasks as well as helping to find solutions to existing problems by discussing them and making suggestions (Isma et al., 2024; Webb, 2009). With the arrangements made by the teacher in the classroom and the support of the teacher through his interaction with the students to create a conducive learning atmosphere (Wulandari & Nurjaman, 2023). As a facilitator, teachers need to have a positive attitude, understand students through learning activities and have the competence to handle individual differences among students (Fauzi & Mustika, 2022).

With the various roles that teachers have, it becomes very important in shaping character and providing knowledge to students. Teachers must be able to create a conducive learning environment where students feel valued, motivated and eager to learn (Rusticus et al., 2023). Therefore, a teacher must have high standards to be a role model for all students. This also applies to English language learning, how students learn English in the classroom is greatly influenced by the teacher (Umam et al., 2023). In the context of English language learning, these roles become very relevant, especially when



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faced with challenges experienced by students, such as lack of participation in the classroom during English language learning even though English has been taught since elementary school.

English is taught in elementary school with a focus on vocabulary recognition, everyday expressions and basic skills such as listening and speaking. This is followed by more in-depth study of grammar, including the development of more complex speaking skills at the high school level. However, it is still a challenge for many students to develop English speaking skills in the classroom due to anxiety about speaking English (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). And this is a challenge for English teachers in the classroom, where they must know the causes of anxiety and how to overcome it. One of the main challenges is that there are very few opportunities for students to practice conversing in English (Butarbutar & Karnine, 2024; Hadiyanto et al., 2023). When they have to speak in English in class, many students feel nervous. They often worry about making mistakes in front of their teacher or their classmates. Both of these common causes of this feeling are pressure to do well.

According to Hulaifah (2019), anxiety is often considered a phenomenon associated with self-focus, negative feelings, and nervousness experienced during interactions. Learning English is not always a fun activity for some people, because they have to speak or write something they are not fully familiar with. Foreign language anxiety, according to Wolman and Stricker (1994), is defined as negative emotional distress or reactions that occur when learning or using English. They worry about saying or choosing the wrong words, especially when speaking, answering questions, or speaking in front of their peers (Humaera & Pramustiara, 2022; Suparlan, 2021). As a result, teachers have an important role in dealing with this issue. This issue shows up frequently in English classes. Consequently, educators face challenges in fostering a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere in the classroom where students feel free to express themselves without fear of repercussions. Effective speaking strategies are essential for improving students' English language proficiency. Teachers can tackle this problem in three ways: by adjusting their methods, emphasizing students' skill development, and fostering a positive learning atmosphere (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024).

Since each student in the class obviously has different interests. In addition, the physical and psychological conditions of the classroom and the characteristics of students in Indonesia are different, which makes it very important to know the strategies that are effectively used by teachers (Prihantoro, 2018). Students need the right strategy in acquiring material from the teacher. The strategies used by the teacher must be tailored to the students' abilities, needs and conditions. Speaking strategies help teachers to provide better speaking teaching activities (Noerjanah & Dhigayuka, 2022). However, there are several strategies that educators can use to reduce speaking anxiety by utilizing web-based technologies. Language anxiety can be reduced for students by using online platforms for foreign language teaching and learning (Dewaele et al., 2024). The sole study that addresses the use of web-based English language instruction to combat learners' speaking anxiety was carried out by (Bashori et al., 2020). The researchers want to know how the teachers determine the right strategy in overcoming this problem. In addition, the researchers also want to know whether the strategies used by teachers can actually reduce students' anxiety when speaking English in class.

Many studies have focused on various strategies used to overcome students' anxiety in speaking English. Research conducted by Handayani (2019) found that teachers used methods such as role-playing, practice, outdoor activities, and hands-on strategies to improve students' speaking skills. The strategies of games, questions, and writing exercises were effective in reducing students' anxiety when speaking (Irmayani et al., 2022). Another study also found that teachers' social strategies are effective in improving students' speaking skills, both inside and outside the classroom (Zakaria et al., 2019). However, researchers only focus on how teachers determine the best strategies to address students' speaking anxiety based on students' English proficiency in junior high school. This research offers a difference by focusing on junior high school students, a group that is underrepresented in previous



research on speaking anxiety. In addition, the researchers will explore how teachers determine the most effective strategies in overcoming students' anxiety in speaking English.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at exploring teachers' strategies for reducing students' speaking anxiety in English classrooms. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to gather rich, descriptive data. The research sought to capture the complexity of classroom interactions and the nuanced ways teachers respond to students' emotional needs in speaking activities.

2.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMP S DDI Maros, a junior high school located in Maros, Indonesia. The school was chosen based on accessibility and the researchers' established rapport with the teaching staff, which facilitated deeper engagement with participants. The school offers an English program with a strong emphasis on developing communication skills, making it an ideal site for investigating speaking anxiety and teaching strategies. Participants included five English teachers and ten students from Grades 7 and 8. Teachers were purposively selected based on their experience in teaching English and their willingness to share insights into their classroom practices. Students were chosen through a snowball sampling technique, beginning with recommendations from teachers and expanding based on referrals. Snowball sampling was used to reach students who were actively engaged in English speaking activities and had varying degrees of speaking anxiety (Etikan et al., 2016). Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants and, for students, from their parents or guardians as well.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with teachers and students. Interview guides were developed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into emerging topics. For teachers, interview questions focused on the identification of students' anxiety symptoms, the strategies implemented to address anxiety, and their reflections on the effectiveness of these strategies. For students, the interviews explored their experiences of anxiety, perceptions of classroom practices, and the impact of specific strategies on their confidence and participation. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' permission. Classroom observations were conducted to complement the interview data. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions during English speaking activities, paying attention to classroom atmosphere, students' visible anxiety behaviors, and teacher interventions. Field notes were taken systematically, and where permitted, short video recordings were used to capture key moments for later analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze the collected data. This method was chosen for its flexibility and its suitability for identifying patterns within qualitative data. The analysis followed six phases:

1. Familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts and observation notes.



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2. Initial coding, where meaningful segments of text were labeled based on emerging ideas related to anxiety and teaching strategies.
3. Searching for themes by grouping similar codes together.
4. Reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence and distinction among them.
5. Defining and naming the final themes to capture their essence clearly.
6. Producing the final report by weaving together the themes with direct quotations and observational data to illustrate findings.

An inductive approach was primarily adopted, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predefined categories. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was applied by cross-validating findings from interviews and observations. Member checking was also conducted by sharing summaries of interview findings with participants for validation.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were rigorously maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their data. All recorded data were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in reporting findings to protect participants' identities. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board prior to data collection.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English

The following section presents the results of the research that has been conducted on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching speaking skills in the classroom. These findings were obtained through interviews and observations conducted during the research process. This presentation aims to provide a factual picture of the obstacles experienced by teachers in the practice of teaching speaking. The following are some of the challenges found in this study:

3.1.1 The Students' Lack of Vocabulary

As conveyed by the 7th grade teacher, who said *"kenapa bisa terjadi seperti ini, karna kurangnya pemahaman dan kosakata yang mereka punya karena tidak terbiasa dengan bahasa inggris"* (why it can happen like this, because of the lack of understanding and vocabulary they have because they are not used to English). The lack of vocabulary possessed by students is one of the factors that cause their anxiety when asked to speak in English. Students often seem hesitant to speak because they feel they don't have enough words to express their ideas or opinions correctly. In addition, they need to look up words using a dictionary to ensure the correctness of what they want to say, this also takes quite a long time for students.

One of the 8th grade teachers said that *"kalau membahas tentang kendala atau tantangannya dalam mengajarkan bahasa inggris apalagi ketika mulai mengajarkan siswa tentang berdialog atau berbicara dalam bahasa inggris itu kendalanya ada banyak yang pertama itu kendalanya bagi siswa karena siswa tidak terbiasa dengan kosa kata bahasa inggris"* (when discussing the obstacles or challenges in teaching English, especially when starting to teach students about dialogue or speaking in English, there are many obstacles, the first is the obstacle for students because students are not familiar with English vocabulary).

3.1.2 Students Experience Fear of Making Mistakes

From the observations made by researchers in the classroom, when the teacher asked students to answer questions using English or speaking English, many students seemed hesitant and afraid to answer. Many are afraid when directly appointed and when told to answer without being appointed.

When his friends focus on the student who is speaking, he will look down and feel even more embarrassed even though he has written the answer correctly. As said by the 8th grade teacher *“ada perasaan ragu dan takut mengucapkan kata dalam bahasa inggris karena takut melakukan kesalahan”* (there are feelings of doubt and fear of pronouncing words in English because being afraid of making mistakes).

3.1.3 The lack of Students' Self-confidence

Lack of self confidence is one of challenges in teaching English, like what said by the grade 7 teacher said *“sebenarnya mereka tau jawabannya, tapi mereka tidak berani mengangkat tangan duluan sebelum ditunjuk”* (actually they know the answer, but they don't dare to raise their hands first before being appointed). On the other hand, it was also found that fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by friends also caused students to be less active and anxious, they felt embarrassed if their friends started laughing and looking at them.

3.2 Effective Strategies Used in Reducing Students' Anxiety in Speaking English

The following section describes effective strategies used by teachers in reducing students' anxiety when speaking in class. This description is the result of research that has been conducted through interviews and observations. Here are the strategies :

3.2.1 Role Play

This was explained directly by the grade 7 English teacher, who said *“saya membagi siswa menjadi beberapa kelompok kemudian mulai memainkan Role-play sembari itu saya juga mendampingi siswa tentang bagaimana cara mengucapkan kosa kata bahasa inggris dengan benar. Kemudian saya juga seringkali memberikan mereka tugas hafalan agar siswa bisa menambah vocabularynya dan memperbaiki penyebutannya dalam melafalkan kosa kata dalam bahasa inggris. Karena ketika siswa terlatih untuk melafalkan atau berbicara dalam bahasa inggris. Saya yakin bahwa pada kelas berikutnya pada pembelajaran berikutnya mereka mampu untuk memperbaiki kesalahan mereka sendiri jika sudah terbiasa melafalkan kosa kata dalam bahasa inggris Role play yang saya terapkan di kelas itu biasanya saya menyediakan satu tema . Contoh temanya itu tentang drama-drama keluarga seperti kakak dan adik atau pertengkaran antara teman kelas hal-hal sederhana itu yang kadang saya berikan kepada siswa . Kemudian selain menyediakan tema, terkadang juga saya menyediakan ceritanya. Jadi, siswa hanya memainkan perannya saja dikelas mereka hanya berdialog dengan teman kelompoknya satu sama lain”* (I divide the students into groups and then start playing the role-play while I also guide the students on how to pronounce English vocabulary correctly. Then I also often give them memorization tasks so that students can increase their vocabulary and improve their pronunciation in pronouncing vocabulary in English. Because when students are trained to pronounce or speak in English. I am sure that in the next class in the next lesson they are able to correct their own mistakes if they are used to pronouncing vocabulary in English Role play that I apply in class I usually provide one theme. For example, the theme is about family dramas such as brothers and sisters or quarrels between classmates, simple things that I sometimes give to students. Then besides providing the theme, sometimes I also provide the story. So, students only play their roles in class, they only dialogue with their group friends with each other).

In this case, the teacher gives a general explanation about the use of the role-playing method and the material to be acted out. The next stage is to select the actors to play the role, then select the observer (observer) responsible for overseeing the performance of the role play and providing an assessment. The next stage is the implementation (play), discussion, and assessment conducted by the observer-group role-playing game.

The same thing was also conveyed by the 7th grade English teacher, *“biasanya juga saya memberikan role play atau dialog berpasangan, berkelompok dan mereka juga biasanya mempraktekkannya lewat video atau misalnya langsung tapi kalau saya biasa lebih senang kalau Biasanya role play itu mereka lewat video kemudian kirim ke saya”* (usually I also give role play or dialog in pairs,



groups and they also usually practice it through videos or for example directly but if I usually prefer it if they usually role play through videos and then send them to me).

3.2.2 Using a Dictionary

Another teacher also used a strategy of inviting students to continue carrying dictionaries and compiling words before answering questions as preparation. As conveyed by the 7th grade English teacher, said: *"sebelumnya saya memang sudah membuat kesepakatan kelas yaitu mereka wajib untuk membawa kamus agar mereka bisa menjalani proses memahami pembelajaran bahasa inggris ini proses memahami makna setiap kalimat setiap teks, bagaimana merangkai kata menjadi kalimat, ini bagaimana mencari kata di kamus menyatukan kata-kata"* (Previously I had made a class agreement that they were obliged to bring a dictionary so that they could go through the process of understanding English learning, this is the process of understanding the meaning of each sentence of each text, how to string words into sentences, this is how to look for words in the dictionary to put words together).

This is supported by the opinions of students who feel more comfortable when using a dictionary because they can prepare in advance what they will say by striking words with the help of a dictionary. As one of the 8th grade students said: *"saya lebih suka kalau menggunakan kamus, karena saya bisa menerjemahkan jawaban saya dulu sebelum berbicara dengan guru"* (I prefer to use a dictionary, because I can translate my answers first before talking to the teacher). In addition, teachers also utilize google audio as an aid to train students' pronunciation.

3.2.3 Pronunciation Practice Together Using Google Audio

This was done by the 7th grade English teacher, who said *"ada juga hal lain yang biasa saya lakukan, hal yang kedua yang saya lakukan di kelas itu adalah belajar pelafalan jadi belajar pelafalan kita buka google kemudian kita lihat kata-katanya kemudian lafalkan saya tampilkan di papan kemudian kita lafalkan bersama-sama mereka dengar lewat speaker"* (there are also other things that I usually do, the second thing I do in class is learning pronunciation so learning pronunciation we open google then we see the words then pronounce I display on the board then we pronounce together they hear through the speakers).

3.2.4 Giving an Ice Breaking Activity

The 7th grade English teacher also said that it is important to give icebreaking to students so that they are not bored while learning. This is proven by the fact that students remain enthusiastic if learning is interspersed with icebreaking. The 7th grade teacher said, *"saya juga memberikan ice breaking kemudian game dalam bahasa inggris tebak kata, tebak gambar kemudian lewat permainan quiz online menggunakan aplikasi yang seperti sekarang ada quizis word wall dari aplikasi-aplikasi game"* (I also give ice breaking then games in English guess the word, guess the picture then through online quiz games using applications such as now there are quizis word wall from game applications).

3.2.5 Giving a Motivational Talk to the Students

The 8th grade English teacher said that providing motivation to struggling students is very important to keep them comfortable, this way students will not feel different from their other friends. *"Jadi cara yang saya lakukan kepada siswa yang merasa cemas dalam berbicara bahasa inggris yaitu dengan cara memberikan kalimat-kalimat motivasi kepada siswa tersebut agar lebih giat lagi untuk belajar bahasa inggris. Kemudian saya memberikan pendekatan belajar yang lebih intens kepada siswa tersebut"* (So the way I do to students who feel anxious in speaking English is by giving motivational sentences to these students so that they are more active in learning English. Then I provide a more intense learning approach to these students).

Overall, the challenges that teachers face when teaching speaking in class come from the students themselves. Some students do not have enough vocabulary, so they are reluctant to speak in class. This



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reflects similar research which said that lack of vocabulary mastery hinders students' speaking ability (Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022). With the lack of vocabulary owned by students, they will feel afraid to speak in class. This fear causes anxiety because they are afraid of being wrong, ridiculed, or getting negative judgment from friends and teachers (Hussain et al., 2021). This also reduces students' confidence in the classroom, making it more challenging for teachers to improve students' speaking. Students' lack of confidence is still a challenge for teachers in developing students' speaking (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Chand, 2021; Musdayanti et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, teachers still use many strategies to overcome these challenges. Role play is the strategy that teachers use most often, and students are more enthusiastic about learning with this. Grade 7 students said that learning while role playing is very fun because it is done in groups. This is supported by research from Subekti and Goram (2022), which says that roleplay in groups reduces student anxiety. In addition to roleplay being fun for students, providing icebreaking during learning is also considered effective in reducing student anxiety during the learning process (Madden & Robinson, 2025). Icebreaking also has a positive impact on the learning atmosphere because it makes the learning process more fun and less stressful for students.

Moreover, the use of dictionaries as a medium to enrich vocabulary is also considered very effective. This is evidenced by previous research, which shows that the use of learner dictionaries as learning media is very effective in enriching students' vocabulary (Sarmila et al., 2023). This can motivate students and improve their ability to communicate in English because they are more confident in using the vocabulary they have learned. In addition, in addition to enriching English vocabulary using dictionaries, grade 7 teachers also use audio on google translate as a medium to help students improve pronunciation. Pronunciation exercises with tongue twister method and speaking simulation effectively improve students' pronunciation clarity and fluency in speaking. Furthermore, of all the strategies used, it is also necessary to motivate students. The English teachers at the school provide motivation to all students, especially those who are considered lacking in English language skills. According to Noerjanah and Dhigayuka (2022), motivation through games and teacher support reduces anxiety and increases students' learning motivation.

This study provides evidence that strategies such as role play, icebreaking, using dictionaries, and Google Translate audio are effective in reducing anxiety and improving students' speaking skills. These findings can serve as a reference for teachers in choosing appropriate methods to increase student participation in the classroom. However, this study has some limitations, such as the limited number of participants as it only involved some English teachers. In addition, the study was only conducted in one school and used interviews without direct observation, so the results cannot be widely generalized. Therefore, further research is needed with a wider scope and more diverse approaches.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the strategies employed by English teachers to reduce students' speaking anxiety in junior high school classrooms. The findings revealed that students' anxiety stemmed primarily from limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. In response, teachers implemented a range of pedagogical strategies, including role-play, dictionary use, digital pronunciation tools, interactive language games, and emotional encouragement, to foster a more supportive and engaging classroom environment. These strategies were found to be effective in helping students gradually overcome their fear of speaking English. Notably, the study highlights that addressing language anxiety requires more than just linguistic instruction; it also demands careful attention to students' emotional experiences, classroom atmosphere, and teacher-student interactions. The success of these strategies also underlines the importance of culturally and developmentally appropriate interventions, particularly for adolescent learners in EFL contexts. By offering empirical evidence grounded in classroom practice, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on



affective factors in language learning and provides practical guidance for educators seeking to support anxious learners. Future research may expand upon these findings by including a broader sample, incorporating quantitative measures of anxiety, and exploring students' own self-regulation strategies.

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