# Exploring Student Learning Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif untuk menyelidiki strategi kecemasan berbicara siswa di SMA Negeri 34 Jakarta dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk mengatasi rasa takut berbicara. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi terstruktur. Sebanyak 12 siswa kelas XI berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini, yang terdiri dari 5 siswa laki-laki dan 7 siswa perempuan, dengan rentang usia antara 16-17 tahun. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis dengan menggunakan metode analisis tematik, yang meliputi pengkodean, klasifikasi, dan identifikasi tema dan sub tema. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa mengalami tingkat kecemasan sedang, dan metode pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang mendukung dapat membantu siswa mengatasi hambatan efektif seperti kecemasan berbicara.

Kata Kunci: *Berbicara, Kecemasan, Strategi*

Abstract

SThis study used a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate students speaking anxiety strategies at SMA Negeri 34 Jakarta in the context of English language learning to overcome their fear of speaking. The data collect through semi-structure in depth interviews. A total of 12 grade XI students participated in this study, consisting of 5 boys and 7 girls, with ages ranging from 16-17 years old. The data collected were to analyzed using thematic analysis method, which included coding, classification, and identification of themes and sub themes. The result show that most students experience moderate levels of anxiety. The results show that most students experience moderate levels and supportive English learning methods can help students overcome affective barriers such as speaking anxiety.

Keywords: *Speaking, Anxiety, Strategies*

# INTRODUCTION

Strategies are an important part of the learning process. Ideal learning strategies encourage students creativity and actively engage them (Nur Rahman, 2018). Muhammad et al. (2020) state that strategies can be defined as plans, methods, or a combination of activities carried out to achieve specific goals. Learning strategies in education are a series of actions or procedures used to help students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Additionally, these strategies serve as a guide for teachers in selecting appropriate methods of delivering material that align with students diverse needs and learning styles.

The ability to speak in multiple languages, especially English, is an important skill that often causes psychological problems. Rokhayani et al. (2021) state that speaking is an effective ability to communicate verbally in various contexts, including academic, professional, and social. However, many students experience anxiety when speaking, which affects their performance in class. Fear of speaking refers to feelings of fear or nervousness that arise when having to speak, especially in a foreign language. This term is often used in conjunction with Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA), which is the fear of speaking in public, whether in professional, academic, or informal settings. Meanwhile, performance anxiety, or performance anxiety, encompasses PSA and other types of anxiety that arise in performative situations such as exams or presentations. Understanding the types of anxiety experienced by students is crucial for understanding the differences between these terms. (Gerlach, V.S. & Ely, D.P. (1980).

Freud's psychoanalytic theory theoretically explains that anxiety is the result of internal conflict between the id, ego, and superego. Although this theory was first used in a clinical context, it is relevant for explaining the condition of students who experience internal conflicts such as fear of failure or negative judgment when speaking in public. This

framework can help us understand why students use certain coping mechanisms, such as over-preparing, avoiding eye contact, or using relaxation techniques to relieve emotional tension when speaking.

Fahranah et al. (2024) noted several main reasons for speaking anxiety, including lack of confidence, lack of preparation, and fear of negative judgment. Rokhayani et al. (2021) found that several factors exacerbate students anxiety when speaking, such as fear of making mistakes, pressure during exams, limited vocabulary, and fear of being punished by teachers. This shows that speaking anxiety is complex and encompasses psychological and situational aspects.

To overcome their anxiety, students usually try talking in front of a mirror, speaking positively about themselves, using notes during presentations, and seeking support from teachers or peers. For example, using breathing techniques such as the 4-7-8 method can help regulate physiological responses to anxiety (Vierra et al., 2022), and speaking English daily can help students feel more comfortable and confident (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

However, although these strategies have been widely discussed in the literature, few studies describe how they can be applied in the classroom. What do students do to prepare themselves before they speak? Students personal experiences in managing anxiety were used in this study to answer these questions. For example, some students said they could calm themselves by taking a deep breath before performing, while others said that note cards or encouragement from friends helped them.

Because of that, this study explores the methods used by 11th grade students at SMA Negeri 34 Jakarta to overcome anxiety in speaking English. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the level of anxiety students experience when speaking
2. To analyze the main causes of anxiety
3. To examine the methods used by students to overcome and control anxiety in speaking

Hamandia (2022) stated that Anxiety about speaking in public can affect anyone, from a student presenting in class to a manager addressing staff, and even to a child competing in a speech competition. These individuals are likely to become concerned about whatever they do, both before the activity starts and during the conversation. Often, Yuliska Putri et al. (2024) state that individuals often experience anxiety when speaking in front of large audiences, which can be influenced by lack of confidence and experience. Anxiety can be viewed from numerous perspectives, including psycho-dynamic, behavioral, and cognitive.

Numerous studies have found that anxiety disorders can hinder a person's capacity to properly communicate their thoughts and ideas in front of a forum. A person with public speaking anxiety disorder struggles to control their nervousness, which leads to negative reactions and ultimately lowers their public speaking skills. Julianto et al. (2017).

Many students feel ashamed or reluctant to express their ideas during class, which hinders learning effectiveness. Some avoid participation by pretending to read or write, while others feel they don't understand the material, which leads to insecurity and inhibits their ability to speak. Pour et al. (2018) emphasize the need for teachers to shift their mindset to help students develop communication skills, knowledge, and confidence as part of a quality education.

Speaking anxiety is a major barrier to effective communication and often manifests physically, such as through rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, or mental blocks. If left unaddressed, this anxiety can cause individuals to avoid public speaking altogether, limiting their confidence and progress in academic or professional environments. According to Hamama & Kusumaningratri (2023), overcoming this anxiety requires preparation, consistent practice, relaxation techniques like deep breathing, and a focus on the message rather than the fear.

Rajitha & Alamelu (2020) divide speaking anxiety into internal and external factors. Internal factors include fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confidence. Students often fear correction or ridicule from peers and teachers (Maher & Al Nakhalah, 2016), and those with low self-esteem tend to struggle more with language learning (Feryal Cubukcu, 2008; Hanton et al., 2004). These issues require attention from educators, who must equip themselves to support students psychologically as well as academically.

External factors include limited vocabulary, which Tanveer (2008) identifies as a major challenge in learning English. Students may also feel insecure if they believe others do not understand them, leading them to withdraw from speaking opportunities (Januariza & Hendriani, 2016). The fear of negative feedback and lack of practice (Sultana & Jamin, 2021; Kianinezhad, 2024) further contribute to anxiety. Appearance-related insecurities and fear of looking foolish can also prevent students from speaking up.

To manage anxiety, students often adopt preparation strategies such as reviewing material, expanding vocabulary, and practicing speaking. Exposure to English through reading, media, and conversation also helps (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Rafieyan, 2016). Relaxation techniques, like the 4-7-8 breathing method (Vierra et al., 2022), and positive thinking (Shokrpour et al., 2021) have been shown to reduce anxiety and improve focus.

Previous research confirms the effectiveness of these strategies. Martiningsih et al. (2024) found that 83.2% of university students used relaxation methods, and that well-prepared students were more confident and better able to manage anxiety. Similarly, Nugroho & Hapsari (2024) found high school students relied on preparation, relaxation, and peer support, proving that these strategies are useful across educational levels.

Despite these findings, many studies fail to consider how different anxiety levels affect strategy use or how context and background influence outcomes. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the strategies students use at different anxiety levels and how these strategies affect their confidence. Grounded in Freud's theory and supported by previous studies, this research highlights the importance of recognizing and developing targeted approaches to help students overcome speaking anxiety and participate more effectively in language learning.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore strategies students use to manage speaking anxiety in English class, and to identify which are most frequently used. Based on Mack et al. (2005), data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations, allowing a deeper understanding of students' personal experiences—something not easily achieved through quantitative methods.

Participants were 12 eleventh-grade students from SMA Negeri 34 Jakarta, aged 16–17, selected purposively due to their experiences with speaking anxiety. They gave informed consent, and ethical procedures—such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms—were strictly followed to ensure comfort and privacy.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in Indonesian, using open-ended questions that explored students' emotional responses, causes of anxiety, and coping strategies. The interview questions were based on established theories, including Horwitz et al. (1986) on foreign language anxiety and supported by Liu and Jackson (2008) and Tanveer (2007), who highlight psychological barriers like lack of confidence and fear of judgment. Coping strategies referenced studies by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), Woodrow (2006), and Young (1991), which emphasize techniques like rehearsal, using notes, and seeking social support.

Data were analyzed thematically by coding transcripts, grouping codes into themes, and refining them for clarity. These findings were then presented in narrative and tabular form. The study effectively captured students' anxiety levels, contributing factors, and

practical strategies for coping, supported by a strong theoretical foundation and expert-reviewed instruments.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview results, students anxiety levels related to speaking English were classified into three categories: high, medium, and low. These categories were determined based on indicators such as emotional expression, anxiety levels, physical reactions, and students experiences in conversation activities.

Students who have high anxiety levels usually show physical signs, like shaky hands, a faster heartbeat, and intense fear of performing. Also, they tend to avoid situations where they have to talk in front of others. On the other hand, students with moderate anxiety levels, although feeling tense and hesitant, have the ability to manage and complete tasks effectively. Students with low anxiety levels exhibit high self-confidence.

Table 1. Students Level Anxiety in Speaking (12 Students)

| Anxiety Level | Total Number of Students | General Description | Informant |
|---|---|---|---|
| High | 4 Students | Extreme anxiety, fear of making mistakes, body shaking, blank mind | Student 5, Student 10, Student 8, Student 7 |
| Medium | 5 Students | Anxiety in some situations, fear of making mistakes, but still able to perform | Student 1, Student 2, Student 4, Student 6, Student 9. |
| Low | 3 Students | Confident, enjoys performing, comfortable speaking in public | Student 3, Student 11, Student 12 |

From the classification results, it can be concluded that most students experience moderate levels of anxiety. They feel nervous, but are still able to speak well. Only a few students feel very confident, while the rest experience extreme anxiety that hinders their ability to speak English perfectly.

Through the process of coding data from interviews, some factors were found to play a role in the emergence of speaking anxiety. These factors were divided into five main themes with several sub-themes that describe the context of the causes of student anxiety

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

| Main Theme | Subtheme/Code | Informant Statement Excerpt |
|---|---|---|
| Fear of mistakes | Afraid of making grammar mistakes, mispronouncing words, lack of vocabulary | "Takut grammar-nya salah" – Student 2 |
| Social comparison | Feeling insecure when friends are more fluent | "Teman-teman lebih jago, jadi minder" – Student 2 |
| Feeling ashamed of being judged by others | Afraid of making mistakes in front of the class | "Kalau salah, takut diliatin banyak orang" – Student 5 |
| Lack of practice and preparation | Not familiar with the material, afraid of going blank | "Kadang nge-blank, jadi gugup" – Student 6 |
| Lack of experience | Not used to speaking English yet | "Masih kurang latihan, belum terbiasa" – Student 10 |

The most important factor that emerged in almost all interviews was the fear of making mistakes in the language, whether in terms of grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary. In addition, social pressure also played an important role, stemming from comparisons with friends who were more proficient in the language. This situation was exacerbated by feelings of embarrassment, lack of practice, and minimal experience in speaking directly in public.

Most students feel anxious when speaking, but they have mastered various strategies to overcome these emotions. These strategies stem from the students desire to recognize their weaknesses and improve their performance.

Table 3. Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety Based on Informants

| No | Name | Speaking Practice | Relaxation Techniques | Notes / Tools | Social Support | Self-talk / Motivation | English Language Habits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Student 1 | Yes (remember vocabulary, iprove) | Yes (take a breath) | No (prefer improvisation) | Yes (friend/teacher helps with vocabulary) | Yes | Not mentioned |
| 2. | Student 2 | Yes (self motivation during practice) | Yes (take a breath, stand up/sit down again) | Yes (notes are esier than memorization) | Yes (depends on the person) | Yes | Not mentioned |
| 3. | Student 3 | Yes (intonation and | Yes (take 2-3 breaths) | No (prefer improvisation) | Yes (supporting friends is important) | Yes | Yes (slip English into |

| No. | Student | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | pronounce practice) | | | | | conversation) |
| 4. | Student 4 | Yes (practice in front of mirror and with parents) | Yes (take a deep breath) | Yes (take brief notes during formal event) | Yes (teachers/parents very helpful) | Yes | Not mentioned |
| 5. | Student 5 | Yes (notes, pevious preparation) | Yes (take a breath, drink water) | Yes (notes before performing) | Yes | Not mentioned | Not mentioned |
| 6. | Student 6 | Yes (independent practice, review material | Yes (breathe when blank) | No (prefer remember on my own) | Not very important (more personal preference) | Yes | Not mentioned |
| 7. | Student 7 | Yes (practice with friends, then alone) | Yes (take deep breath) | Yes (keyword noted are very helpful) | Yes (friends/teachers are important) | Not mentioned | Not mentioned |
| 8. | Student 8 | Yes (practicing on my own) | Yes (breathing exercises, self calming) | Not often, but it helps | Not important (I trust myself more) | Yes (confidence is more important) | Not mentioned |
| 9. | Student 9 | Yes (practice in front of the morror, gesture) | Yes (shift attention, take a breath) | Yes (make notes) | Yes (ask friend to help with correction) | Not mentioned | Not mentioned |
| 10. | Student 10 | Yes (practice in front of a mirror) | Yes (breathe deeply when nervous) | Yes (take notes during the presentation) | Yes (friends understand the situation better) | Not mentioned | Not mentioned |
| 11. | Student 11 | Yes (reading practice and with friends) | Yes (repeated breathing) | Yes (formal notes) | Yes (friends and teacher very helpful) | Not mentioned | Yes (familiar with English from childhood) |
| 12 | Student 12 | Yes (practiced on my own and fluent) | Yes (not very successful) | No (more focused on the object being held) | Not very helpful (depends on the person) | Not mentioned | Yes (used to it, more nervous when using Bahasa) |

Description of Column Categories:

- Speaking Practice:

  Practicing speaking before performing, either alone or with others.

- Relaxation Techniques:

  Breathing exercises, pausing, or consciously calming oneself.

- Notes/Aids:

  Using notes, keywords, or text while speaking.

- Social Support:

  The role of friends, teachers, or parents in helping with preparation and emotional support.

- Self-talk/Motivation:

  Talking to oneself or using a positive mindset.

- English Language Habits:

- Using English naturally in everyday life.

Data collected from 12 grade XI students at SMA Negeri 34 in Jakarta showed that each student used a unique approach to overcome anxiety when speaking in English. Data analysis showed that different approaches were chosen by the students based on their respective experiences, comfort, and anxiety levels.

Self-speaking exercises, which every student did in their entirety (100%), include speaking in front of a mirror, memorizing texts, and participating in exercises with friends or family. These exercises not only improve speaking fluency but also teach you how to speak correctly, intonation, and tempo. Most students use relaxation techniques, especially deep breathing.

This strategy is physical and helps to reduce somatic reactions of anxiety such as rapid heartbeat, cold sweat or blankness.  This technique is very simple, but very effective in dealing with the pressure of public speaking.

Most students (9 out of 12) also used aids such as notes or keywords to stay focused and not lose their way while speaking. These aids proved very useful for students who were not used to speaking spontaneously in English.  One very important source of emotional reinforcement is social support from friends, teachers and parents. A total of ten out of twelve students said that they needed support when they saw the exercises, encouraged them, or gave corrections. However, some students choose to build their own confidence and believe that the support of others is not important.

Most students (about six students) considered cognitive strategies such as self-talk and internal motivation important. Motivating oneself, instilling the belief that mistakes are common, and setting goals to perform better are some examples of their forms. Although only a few students use English on a daily basis, it has been shown to help reduce unfamiliarity with the language and feel more comfortable speaking in formal situations.

The theory of Horwitz et al. (1986) says that speaking anxiety in a second language is influenced by pressure from the task situation, discomfort in communication, and fear of negative evaluation. The results of this study support this theory. Students experience anxiety due to many factors, including psychological and social factors.

Students showed that they realized the importance of managing emotions and improving performance. Their self-confidence was greatly influenced by regular practice, relaxation techniques, and social support. The findings enhance the understanding of how more empathic and supportive English learning methods can help students overcome affective barriers such as speaking anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

The results of a study conducted on 12 eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 34 Jakarta regarding the methods they use to overcome anxiety when speaking English show that there are significant differences in the levels of anxiety experienced by students when speaking English. Some students fall into the high or even low anxiety category, with physical symptoms such as trembling hands and excessive nervousness. On the other hand, some students fell into the moderate or even low anxiety category, with more stable self-confidence and more experience in public speaking.

The anxiety felt by students when they have to speak in front of the class is reinforced by various interrelated factors, such as lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, feelings of inferiority towards peers who are considered more skilled, and embarrassment at being judged by others.

However, students demonstrate various adaptive approaches to overcoming anxiety. Practicing speaking independently—for example, speaking in front of a mirror or practicing with friends and family—is the most commonly used approach. Before performing, many people use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing to calm themselves. The use of aids such as notes and keywords greatly helps students to stay on track with their speech.

It has also been proven that social support from friends, teachers, and family

provides a great emotional boost. In addition, some students build self-confidence by using cognitive strategies such as self-talk. Students who are accustomed to speaking English every day show lower levels of anxiety and more spontaneous communication skills. Therefore, it can be concluded that the approach used by students is contextual and combinative. Self-preparedness, a supportive social environment, and consistent practice habits are crucial for overcoming their speaking anxiety.

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