



## TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN REDUCING ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT SMPN 4 BANJARMASIN

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### ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety significantly hinders students' participation in English-speaking activities. To address this, English teachers in the seventh grade at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin employ various strategies aimed at reducing students' anxiety and fostering active engagement. These strategies encompass planning and classroom interactions designed to create supportive learning conditions. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study collected data through interviews and classroom observations, analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Findings from interviews and three classroom observations revealed that teachers implemented multiple techniques to ease students' anxiety, including providing constructive feedback, introducing speaking tasks gradually, promoting team-based learning, encouraging self-expression, and fostering a relaxed and comfortable classroom atmosphere. Additionally, teachers offered ample speaking opportunities, structured group activities, and motivation-building practices to boost students' confidence and willingness to speak.

*Keywords: Teachers' strategies, Speaking anxiety*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential language skills because it enables effective communication, especially in today's era of globalization (Rao, 2019: 6; Suryani, 2017). Through speaking, individuals convey ideas, share information, and express thoughts with people worldwide. It is often regarded as the foundation of successful communication, both in one's native language and in foreign languages such as English (Abrar, 2017: 97; Jenks & Lee, 2020). Beyond language mastery, speaking proficiency also contributes to building interpersonal relationships, shaping personality, and influencing character development (Jaya et al., 2022: 105; Jin, 2023; Jaya et al., 2025).

Despite its importance, many students struggle to speak English confidently.

Previous studies revealed that this difficulty often stems from limited language proficiency and feelings of anxiety. Mulyani (2018: 45) found that anxiety frequently arises from a lack of self-confidence and fear of making mistakes, while Suparlan (2021: 167) reported that insufficient opportunities to practice further intensify this problem. For students living in environments where English is rarely used, speaking anxiety thus becomes a major barrier to learning (Akramy, 2020; Padmadewi, 2018; Day, 2023).

This anxiety often appears as nervousness, fear, or discomfort when students are asked to speak English, especially in front of a large audience (Umisara et al., 2021; Lesiana et al., 2023; Jaya et al., 2025a). In such situations, the role of the teacher becomes crucial. Thornbury (2023) explained

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that teacher interaction, feedback, and classroom atmosphere strongly influence students' anxiety levels. Similarly, Haug and Mork (2021) emphasized that a supportive learning environment and the acceptance of mistakes as part of the learning process help reduce students' fear of negative evaluation. More recently, Zheng and Cheng (2018) highlighted that a trusting relationship between teachers and students can significantly increase learners' confidence and willingness to speak.

In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary school to higher education. However, when students transition from elementary to junior high school, many experience increased anxiety in speaking English. This is often due to adapting to a new learning environment with higher academic demands and limited speaking experience in elementary school. At SMPN 4 Banjarmasin, for example, seventh-grade students often hesitate to participate in speaking activities, which negatively affects their achievement and interest in learning English. Therefore, teachers must not only teach language content but also create a supportive atmosphere that reduces speaking anxiety and encourages active participation.

Several studies, such as Wahyuni et al. (2022), who employed a mixed-method approach with eighth-grade students, and Azizah (2021), who examined teacher strategies in general EFL contexts, have explored approaches to addressing speaking anxiety. Building on this literature, the present study specifically focuses on seventh-grade students at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin. Its aim is to identify and explain the strategies teachers use to reduce speaking anxiety, offering more targeted insights into teaching speaking skills at the early stages of secondary education.

**2. METHODS**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in

reducing English-speaking anxiety among seventh-grade students at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to explore complex issues from participants' perspectives, providing rich insights that quantitative methods often cannot offer (Sugiyono, 2021; Patton, 2020; Tisdell et al., 2025). The research subject was an English teacher at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin, selected based on a preliminary study indicating the need for specific strategies to address students' speaking anxiety. The study was conducted at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin, Jl. Teluk Tiram Darat No. 01, Banjarmasin Barat, Kalimantan Selatan, with official permission obtained from the school. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observations. Interviews explored the teacher's perspectives on strategies used, while three classroom observations captured the practical implementation of these strategies to ensure data accuracy and completeness (Mauliddiyah, 2021; Susanto et al., 2023; Anufia, 2019). Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman (2019) model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Relevant information from interviews and observations was selected, organized systematically in tables, and then interpreted to verify the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Van Maanen, 2025; Kvale, 2021; Gill & Baillie, 2018).

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings from the interviews and observations. The researcher used one teacher for an interview, and in the observation section used a checklist table, which was carried out to find teachers' strategies in reducing speaking anxiety among seventh-grade students.

The interview was conducted once on May 21st, 2025. Detailed data were collected and systematically recorded during this observation. From the interview results, it can

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be concluded that teachers use various strategies to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English. Teachers use nine strategies, namely (1) provide positive feedback, (2) step-by-step introduction, (3) team-based learning, (4) encouraging self-expression, (5) creating a relaxed speaking environment, (6) a comfortable classroom environment, (7) providing students with speaking opportunities, (8) using structured group work activities, (9) increasing student confidence and motivation. All of these strategies are used by teachers to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English.

The researcher also conducted three classroom observations to gather data regarding the teaching and learning process. The first observation was conducted by the researcher on May 21st, 2025. Detailed data were collected and systematically recorded during this observation. The observation conducted in class seven F. Based on first observations, it can be concluded that teachers use various strategies to reduce speaking anxiety in seventh-grade students in English learning. These strategies include (1) provide positive feedback, (2) step-by-step introduction, (3) team-based learning, (4) creating a relaxed speaking environment, (5) a comfortable classroom environment, (6) providing students with speaking opportunities, (7) using structured group work activities, (8) increasing student confidence and motivation.

The second observation was conducted by the researcher on May 21st, 2025. Detailed data were collected and systematically recorded during this observation. The observation conducted in class seven A. Based on second observations, it can be concluded that teachers use various strategies to reduce speaking anxiety in seventh-grade students in English learning. These strategies include (1) provide positive feedback, (2) step-by-step introduction, (3) team-based learning, (4) creating a relaxed speaking environment, (5) a comfortable classroom environment, (6) providing students with speaking opportunities, (7)

using structured group work activities, (8) increasing student confidence and motivation.

The third observation was conducted by the researcher on May 22nd, 2025. Detailed data were collected and systematically recorded during this observation. The observation was conducted in class seven B. In the third observation, it was seen that the teacher implemented the strategies (1) provide positive feedback, (2) step-by-step introduction, (3) team-based learning, (4) encouraging self-expression, (5) creating a relaxed speaking environment, (6) a comfortable classroom environment, (7) providing students with speaking opportunities, (8) using structured group work activities, (9) increasing student confidence and motivation. The positive reinforcement strategy is emphasized more by giving praise after students try to speak. This helps create a supportive atmosphere and builds students' courage to try again even though they still make mistakes.

The findings of this study reveal that English teachers at SMPN 4 Banjarmasin applied a range of strategies to reduce speaking anxiety among seventh-grade students. One of the most prominent strategies was providing positive feedback. Teachers frequently encouraged students through praise and supportive comments, especially when students made mistakes. This approach helped increase students' confidence and motivation, making them more willing to participate in speaking activities. The importance of motivation was also highlighted during interviews, where teachers explained that many students felt afraid and lacked self-confidence when speaking English.

Another strategy used by the teachers was the step-by-step introduction of speaking activities. Students were first guided through simple vocabulary and sentence structures before progressing to more complex speaking tasks. Classroom observations showed that this gradual method reduced students' fear of speaking by helping them feel more prepared and less pressured. This approach is consistent with findings from previous studies

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that emphasized the value of scaffolding in foreign language learning.

Team-based learning also played a significant role in lowering students' anxiety. Teachers encouraged group work and peer interaction through activities such as dialogues, games, and discussions. These collaborative environments allowed students to feel more supported and less isolated, which in turn made them more comfortable speaking English. Encouraging self-expression was another effective strategy observed in the classroom. Students were given the freedom to choose their speaking topics, which increased their engagement and made them more confident when expressing personal opinions.

In addition to these instructional methods, teachers also worked to create a relaxed and emotionally safe classroom atmosphere. This included using soft tones, friendly body language, and emphasizing participation over perfection. Such an environment helped reduce the fear of being judged, allowing students to take risks and speak more freely. Teachers also provided frequent speaking opportunities through pair activities, presentations, and discussions, ensuring students became accustomed to using English in various contexts.

Structured group work activities were also observed to be effective in reducing anxiety. These tasks allowed students of mixed abilities to work together, providing peer support and fostering cooperation. Finally, increasing student confidence and motivation through praise and recognition was found to be a crucial element. Teachers noted that acknowledging students' efforts, even when errors occurred, encouraged them to continue practicing without fear of embarrassment.

Based on the findings and discussions in this chapter, it can be concluded that teachers use various strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety. This finding is supported by several previous studies, such as Kilag et al. (2023), Herdiani et al. (2023),

Wahyuni et al. (2022), Azizah (2022), Inada (2021), Damayanti et al. (2020), and others, which show that these strategies complement each other in supporting English learning and are effective in helping students reduce speaking anxiety in students and build self-confidence gradually.

In conclusion, from the discussion above, the various strategies used by teachers to reduce students' speaking anxiety in English learning are very diverse and complementary. These strategies are not only aimed at improving speaking skills but also at helping to build self-confidence, comfort, and motivation in students. All of these findings are in line with previous studies and strengthen the understanding that teaching speaking requires effective strategies to reduce students' anxiety when speaking (Kaforina et al., 2023; Fadilah et al., 2023). Based on these results, the research conclusions and several practical suggestions will be presented, such as the importance of teachers creating a comfortable and supportive learning environment, using effective group work, and giving speaking assignments in stages so that students can adapt slowly.

This study certainly has several limitations that require consideration. The researcher acknowledges that the analysis and interpretation process presented in this chapter does not fully cover all aspects, in depth or breadth. Data collection was done from limited sources, and observations were also limited by time and context, focusing on speaking activities. Although the researcher attempted to present the results and discussion objectively and in accordance with the available data, the possibility of bias, lack of understanding of certain meanings, or the emergence of alternative interpretations remains inevitable. Therefore, constructive feedback and further research are essential to deepen the understanding of the issues investigated in this study.

**4. CONCLUSION**

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Strategies in reducing seventh-grade Based on the analysis of classroom observations and interviews, nine key strategies were identified, aligning with the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. These strategies included: (1) providing constructive feedback, (2) introducing speaking tasks gradually, (3) implementing team-based learning, (4) fostering self-expression, (5) creating a relaxed speaking environment, (6) ensuring a comfortable classroom atmosphere, (7) offering ample speaking opportunities, (8) organizing structured group activities, and (9) enhancing students' confidence and motivation. Classroom observations further revealed an additional strategy—assigning grades to encourage students' willingness to speak—highlighting teachers' adaptive approaches to reducing anxiety. Collectively, these strategies not only improve speaking proficiency but also strengthen students' confidence, comfort, and motivation in English learning.

The findings carry important implications for English language teaching, particularly in EFL contexts where speaking anxiety remains a significant barrier. Future research should examine the long-term impact of these strategies across diverse educational settings and integrate technological tools or peer-assisted learning methods to further support anxious learners. Additionally, professional development programs for teachers should incorporate training on anxiety-reduction techniques, ensuring that educators are equipped with practical, evidence-based approaches to foster more supportive and confidence-building classroom environments.

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