



Teachers' Strategies in Reducing Students' Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: A Multiple Case Study of Junior High School Teachers in Malang

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-09-04 Revised: 2026-09-10 Accepted: 2026-09-11 Keywords: <i>speaking anxiety;</i> <i>teachers' strategies;</i> <i>EFL classroom;</i> <i>speaking activities;</i> <i>multiple case study</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.12545 Corresponding Author: M. Farid Fuadi faridfuadi379@gmail.com English Language Education Study Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Islam Malang	<i>This study aims to investigate teachers' strategies in reducing students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms, the implementation of these strategies in classroom practices, and the challenges faced by teachers in managing students' speaking anxiety. A qualitative multiple case study method was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving two English teachers at SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari and MTsN 1 Malang. The analysis identified five main strategies used by the teachers: scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, motivational support, and classroom atmosphere management. The results show that these strategies were implemented through vocabulary and sentence preparation, guided speaking practice, pair and group activities, constructive feedback, encouragement, and the creation of a supportive classroom environment. The findings also revealed several challenges, including students' low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, uneven participation, differences in speaking ability, and limited classroom time. These findings indicate that reducing students' speaking anxiety requires a combination of instructional and emotional support that enables students to participate more confidently in English speaking activities. This study is expected to contribute to EFL teaching practices by providing a better understanding of how teachers manage speaking anxiety and create supportive classroom environments for students' speaking development.</i>

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it allows students to communicate ideas, opinions, feelings, and information through oral interaction. In the context of EFL classrooms, speaking activities provide students with opportunities to practice using English as a means of communication rather

than simply learning its grammatical structures and vocabulary. However, speaking is often perceived as one of the most difficult language skills for students because it requires them to produce language spontaneously and communicate directly with other people. Unlike written activities, speaking requires students to respond within a limited amount of time, which may create additional pressure, particularly for students who have limited confidence in using English.

One of the factors that can influence students' participation in speaking activities is speaking anxiety. Anxiety is an important affective factor in foreign language learning because students' emotional conditions can influence their ability and willingness to communicate. Horwitz et al. (1986) described foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with foreign language learning and classroom communication. In speaking situations, students may feel nervous because they are concerned about making mistakes, being negatively evaluated by teachers or classmates, or being unable to express their ideas appropriately. These concerns can make students hesitate to speak, remain silent, speak with a low voice, or avoid participating in classroom activities.

Speaking anxiety is particularly relevant because speaking activities often require students to perform publicly. Students may feel more anxious when they are asked to answer questions individually, participate in presentations, or speak in front of the whole class. The fear of making mistakes may become a barrier that prevents students from expressing their ideas even when they have sufficient knowledge of the topic. In addition, students with limited vocabulary may experience greater difficulty because they cannot easily find the words needed to communicate their ideas. Therefore, speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms cannot be understood only as an emotional problem but also needs to be considered in relation to students' linguistic abilities and classroom experiences.

The emotional dimension of language learning has been emphasized by several scholars. Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019) highlighted the relationship between learners' emotional experiences and their willingness to communicate in foreign language classrooms. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more likely to participate in classroom interaction. Conversely, an environment that makes students feel embarrassed or afraid of making mistakes may discourage them from using English. This suggests that teachers have an important responsibility to establish classroom conditions that allow students to practice speaking without experiencing excessive pressure.

Teachers play a central role in creating such supportive learning environments. Teachers do not only provide linguistic knowledge but also determine how speaking activities are organized and how students are encouraged to participate. Appropriate instructional strategies can help students prepare themselves before speaking, interact with peers, receive constructive feedback, and gradually develop confidence. Brown (2004) emphasized the importance of supportive instructional practices in helping language learners overcome communication barriers and participate more actively in language learning. Thus, reducing speaking anxiety requires teachers to consider both instructional and emotional aspects of classroom practice.

One strategy that can be used to support anxious learners is scaffolding. Scaffolding provides students with gradual assistance before they are expected to perform a task independently. In speaking instruction, teachers may introduce relevant vocabulary, provide sentence models, give examples of conversations, and conduct guided speaking practice before students perform individually. Such preparation can help students organize their ideas and become familiar with the language needed for the task. Quvanch et al. (2024) found that scaffolding and structured support can help learners develop confidence and reduce anxiety during speaking activities. Similarly, Botes et al. (2022) reported that

scaffolding activities can reduce students' speaking anxiety because students feel more prepared before they are required to produce language independently.

Another strategy that may support students is collaborative learning. Pair work and group discussions provide students with opportunities to practice English with their classmates before speaking in front of the entire class. For anxious students, communicating with a small group may feel less threatening than performing individually. Peer interaction can also provide social and emotional support because students can share ideas, help one another with vocabulary, and practice speaking together. Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019) emphasized the importance of positive interaction and emotional support in encouraging learners' willingness to communicate. Quvanch et al. (2024) similarly highlighted the role of pair and group speaking activities in developing students' speaking confidence through peer support.

In addition to instructional support and peer interaction, supportive feedback is also important in managing students' speaking anxiety. Teachers' responses to students' mistakes can influence how students perceive speaking activities. If mistakes are treated as a natural part of language learning, students may become more willing to take risks and participate. Teachers can therefore provide constructive feedback that focuses on improvement rather than making students feel embarrassed. Supportive feedback can also be combined with encouragement and positive reinforcement so that students recognize their progress and become more confident in using English.

Motivational support is another important aspect of teachers' efforts to reduce speaking anxiety. Students who lack confidence may need encouragement before and during speaking activities. Simple forms of motivation, such as praise, positive comments, and reassurance, can help students feel that their efforts are valued. Ashari et al. (2023) reported that teachers can reduce speaking anxiety by motivating students, preparing learning activities carefully, engaging learners through interactive classroom activities, and creating supportive learning environments. This indicates that teachers' emotional support can work together with instructional strategies to encourage students' participation.

Furthermore, classroom atmosphere management is important because students' emotional responses are influenced by the environment in which speaking activities take place. A classroom atmosphere that is relaxed, supportive, and tolerant of mistakes may encourage students to communicate more freely. Teachers can manage the classroom atmosphere by reducing unnecessary pressure, encouraging students to support one another, and treating mistakes as part of the learning process. Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019) noted that positive emotional experiences in language classrooms can contribute to students' willingness to communicate. Therefore, classroom atmosphere management can complement other strategies such as scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, and motivational support.

Previous studies have provided important insights into strategies for dealing with language anxiety. However, the implementation of these strategies may vary according to classroom conditions, student characteristics, teachers' experiences, and the educational context. A strategy that works effectively in one classroom may require adjustment in another classroom. Moreover, reducing speaking anxiety does not necessarily mean that all students will immediately become confident speakers. Teachers may continue to encounter students who hesitate to speak, fear making mistakes, have limited vocabulary, or participate unevenly in classroom activities. Consequently, it is important to investigate the strategies used by teachers together with the ways those strategies are implemented and the challenges that teachers encounter.

The present study addresses this issue by examining teachers' strategies in reducing students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms through a multiple case study. The study was conducted at SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari and MTsN 1 Malang, involving two English teachers. These two schools provide different classroom contexts for examining how teachers respond to students' speaking anxiety. The study uses classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' classroom practices. The use of multiple data sources also allows the researcher to compare information obtained from different sources and identify consistent patterns in the findings.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing literature on speaking anxiety by providing contextual and practice-based insights into how teachers address students' speaking anxiety in actual EFL classrooms. Unlike previous studies that have primarily examined individual strategies or the general relationship between anxiety and language learning, this study focuses on the combination of instructional and emotional strategies used by teachers and examines how these strategies are implemented in classroom practices. In addition, the multiple case study design enables a comparison of teachers' practices across two different junior high school contexts. The study also identifies the challenges teachers encounter when applying these strategies. Therefore, this study contributes not only by identifying strategies for reducing speaking anxiety, but also by explaining their classroom implementation and the contextual challenges that may influence their use.

Based on the background above, this study aims to investigate teachers' strategies in reducing students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. Specifically, this study seeks to answer three research questions: (1) What strategies do junior high school EFL teachers in Malang use to reduce students' speaking anxiety? (2) How are these strategies implemented in classroom practices? and (3) What challenges do teachers face in managing students' speaking anxiety? By addressing these questions, the study is expected to contribute to the understanding of speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms and provide practical insights for teachers who seek to create more supportive and comfortable environments for students' English speaking development.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate teachers' strategies in reducing students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding teachers' experiences, classroom practices, and strategies in dealing with students' speaking anxiety. The multiple case study design enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon in two different school contexts and identify similarities and differences in teachers' practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conducted at SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari and MTsN 1 Malang, involving two English teachers as participants.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the actual implementation of teachers' strategies during speaking activities, while semi-structured interviews explored the teachers' experiences, perceptions, strategies, and challenges in managing students' speaking anxiety. Relevant teaching documents, such as lesson plans and teaching materials, were also analyzed to support the observation and interview data. The participants were two English teachers from two junior high schools in Malang: one teacher from SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari and one teacher from MTsN 1 Malang. The two teachers were selected because they were directly involved in teaching English and managing students' speaking activities.

The analysis identified five main strategies used by the teachers: scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, motivational support, and classroom atmosphere management. The analysis also examined how these strategies were implemented in classroom practices and the challenges faced by teachers, including students' low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, uneven participation, differences in speaking ability, and limited classroom time. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the researcher used triangulation by comparing information obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documents. This process allowed the researcher to identify consistent patterns across different sources of data.

3. Results

This The findings were obtained from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis conducted at SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari and MTsN 1 Malang. The study identified five main strategies used by the two English teachers to reduce students' speaking anxiety: scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, motivational support, and classroom atmosphere management. Although both teachers used similar strategies, their implementation differed according to the classroom context. Miss Lila at SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari relied more on vocabulary preparation, sentence expressions, and pair practice, while Mr. Budi at MTsN 1 Malang emphasized group interaction, role-play, and creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere. This difference was related to the different language-learning contexts of the two schools.

Table 1. Comparison of Teachers' Strategies

No.	Strategy	Miss Lila – SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari	Mr. Budi – MTsN 1 Malang
1	Scaffolding	Vocabulary, sentence expressions, and pair practice	Guided preparation and examples before speaking
2	Collaborative Learning	Pair conversations and short dialogues	Group discussions and role-play
3	Supportive Feedback	Simple clues and supportive correction	Delayed correction and peer assistance
4	Motivational Support	Encouragement and reassurance	Encouragement and reducing performance pressure
5	Classroom Atmosphere Management	Patient and supportive interaction	Humor, informal interaction, and relaxed atmosphere

Scaffolding and Collaborative Learning

At SMP Islam Fatahillah Singosari, Miss Lila generally began speaking lessons by introducing vocabulary and simple sentence expressions related to the topic. During observation, she wrote useful expressions on the board and asked students to repeat them before practicing in pairs. Some students initially responded softly and appeared hesitant, but several became more active during pair practice. When students experienced difficulty, Miss Lila provided short clues or simple examples instead of immediately requiring them to answer independently.

At MTsN 1 Malang, Mr. Budi used a somewhat different approach. He frequently started speaking activities with group discussions before moving to individual performance. During one observed lesson, students discussed daily routines in small groups and then practiced short role-plays. Students appeared more relaxed and helped

each other find English vocabulary. Some students who were initially silent became more involved after listening to their classmates.

The interview data supported these observations. Miss Lila explained that students sometimes understood the material but were afraid to speak because they might make mistakes or be laughed at. She stated, "Sometimes they actually know the answer, but they don't want to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at by friends." She therefore allowed students to practice with friends before speaking in front of the class: "I usually let them practice first with their friends. If they directly speak in front of the class, many students become nervous."

Similarly, Mr. Budi reported that group work helped shy students participate more actively: "When students work in groups, usually they become braver. If they are alone, many feel shy." His statement corresponds with the observation that students were more active during group discussions and role-play activities.

Supportive Feedback, Motivation, and Classroom Atmosphere

Both teachers also used supportive feedback and encouragement, but their classroom practices showed slightly different emphases. Miss Lila used direct verbal encouragement when students appeared nervous or silent, including expressions such as "It's okay if you make mistakes," "Just try first," and "Don't be shy." These expressions were used to reassure students before or during speaking practice.

Mr. Budi placed greater emphasis on maintaining a relaxed atmosphere through humor and informal interaction. When students became nervous, he sometimes made jokes to reduce tension. He also avoided immediately correcting mistakes during speaking practice and encouraged students to communicate first. During observation, when a student paused while speaking, he responded, "Relax, just say what you know first." The student subsequently continued speaking with support from group members.

The interview data further demonstrated Mr. Budi's emphasis on classroom atmosphere. He explained, "If the class is too serious, students become tense. Sometimes I make jokes first or make the activity more relaxed." He also stated, "The important thing is students want to speak first. Mistakes can be corrected later." These responses indicate that he prioritized students' willingness to communicate before focusing on linguistic accuracy.

Document Evidence and Challenges

The document analysis supported the classroom observations and interviews. Both teachers' lesson plans and speaking materials showed that speaking activities were organized gradually. Students were generally introduced to vocabulary, sentence expressions, and examples before moving to pair or group speaking activities. However, Miss Lila's documents more frequently included short dialogues, pair conversations, sentence examples, and simple speaking prompts, whereas Mr. Budi's lesson plans included more group discussions and role-play activities. The materials also emphasized practice and participation rather than perfect grammatical accuracy.

Despite these strategies, both teachers continued to face several challenges. The most prominent were low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, uneven participation, differences in speaking ability, and limited classroom time. Some students remained hesitant during individual speaking activities, while others depended on their peers when they forgot vocabulary. These challenges were particularly visible when students were required to speak without sufficient preparation.

Overall, the results show that both teachers shared the same general goal of reducing speaking anxiety but emphasized different classroom practices. Miss Lila tended to emphasize preparation and pair practice, while Mr. Budi placed greater emphasis on group interaction and a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Nevertheless, both teachers combined

instructional and emotional support to help students become more confident and willing to participate in speaking activities. The observation, interview, and document data consistently supported the finding that gradual preparation, peer interaction, supportive feedback, encouragement, and a positive classroom environment were central to their efforts to reduce students' speaking anxiety.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that teachers used a combination of instructional and emotional strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. Five main strategies were identified: scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, motivational support, and classroom atmosphere management. These strategies were implemented according to students' needs and classroom situations rather than as isolated techniques. The findings suggest that teachers considered students' speaking anxiety as a condition influenced by both emotional and linguistic factors. Students' hesitation, low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary affected their willingness to participate in speaking activities. Therefore, teachers provided both academic assistance and emotional encouragement to help students become more confident.

An important point in interpreting these findings is that students' speaking anxiety in this study was not directly measured using a standardized anxiety scale or students' self-reported anxiety scores. Rather, anxiety was inferred primarily from the teachers' classroom observations of students' speaking-related behaviors, such as hesitation, low confidence, reluctance to speak, fear of making mistakes, and dependence on classmates. These observations were complemented by the teachers' interview responses and relevant classroom documents. Therefore, the findings should be understood as representing teachers' perceptions and observations of anxiety-related behaviors in speaking activities, rather than a direct measurement of students' psychological anxiety. This approach is consistent with the qualitative multiple case study design, which seeks to understand a phenomenon through participants' experiences and observations in its natural context.

The first important finding concerns the use of scaffolding. The teachers provided students with vocabulary, sentence models, examples, and guided speaking practice before asking them to speak more independently. This gradual support helped students prepare the language they needed and organize their ideas before speaking. The observation data showed that several students who were initially hesitant became more willing to participate after receiving sufficient preparation. This finding is consistent with Quvanch et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of scaffolding and structured support in helping learners develop confidence during speaking activities. Similarly, Botes et al. (2022) emphasized that appropriate support and preparation can help learners manage anxiety when performing speaking tasks. In this study, scaffolding therefore functioned not only as an instructional strategy but also as a means of reducing the pressure associated with speaking spontaneously in English.

The second finding relates to collaborative learning. Both teachers provided opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups before performing speaking tasks individually. The students appeared more relaxed when practicing with classmates than when speaking directly in front of the entire class. Collaborative activities allowed students to share ideas, help one another with vocabulary, and practice their pronunciation before being exposed to a larger audience. This finding supports Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019), who emphasized the importance of positive emotional experiences and social interaction in encouraging learners' willingness to communicate. It is also consistent with Botes et al. (2022) and Quvanch et al. (2024), who indicated that peer interaction and small-group communication can support speaking confidence and reduce anxiety. Thus, collaborative

learning in the present study provided students with a less threatening space in which they could gradually increase their participation.

The third strategy was supportive feedback. The findings indicate that the teachers attempted to correct students' errors without creating additional embarrassment or pressure. Instead of focusing immediately on mistakes, teachers encouraged students to continue communicating and provided correction in a supportive manner. This approach is important because fear of making mistakes was one of the challenges experienced by students during speaking activities. When students believe that every mistake will receive negative attention, they may become reluctant to speak. Supportive feedback can help students understand that mistakes are a natural part of language learning. This finding is in line with Luzón Rodríguez (2024), who emphasized the value of supportive and indirect correction during speaking activities. It also corresponds with Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019), who highlighted the role of positive emotional support in encouraging students' participation.

The fourth strategy, motivational support, was reflected in the teachers' use of praise, encouragement, reassurance, and positive reinforcement. The teachers encouraged students to attempt speaking even when they were uncertain about their answers or worried about making mistakes. Such encouragement was particularly important for students with low confidence. The findings showed that some students actually understood the learning material but were reluctant to speak because they lacked confidence in their English ability. Therefore, teachers' motivational support helped students overcome some of the emotional barriers that prevented them from participating. This finding supports Ashari et al. (2023), who found that teacher motivation, careful preparation, interactive activities, and supportive learning environments can contribute to reducing students' speaking anxiety. Motivational support therefore complemented the instructional strategies by addressing students' emotional readiness to communicate.

The fifth strategy was classroom atmosphere management. The teachers attempted to establish a classroom environment in which students felt comfortable making mistakes and expressing their ideas. Patience, encouragement, humor, and supportive teacher-student interaction were used to create a more relaxed atmosphere. The findings indicate that students were more willing to participate when they perceived the classroom as a safe environment rather than a place where their mistakes would be negatively judged. This finding is supported by Dzulfikri and Azami (2024), who emphasized the importance of supportive classroom environments in helping learners manage speaking anxiety. Ashari et al. (2023) also highlighted the importance of creating enjoyable and supportive classroom conditions. Therefore, classroom atmosphere management can be viewed as a foundation that supports the effectiveness of the other four strategies.

Regarding the implementation of the strategies, the findings demonstrate that teachers generally followed a gradual process of preparing students before requiring independent speaking performance. Activities commonly moved from preparation, such as vocabulary and sentence support, to guided practice, pair or group interaction, and finally more independent speaking. This pattern suggests that teachers attempted to reduce the level of pressure experienced by students by giving them opportunities to rehearse before performing individually. The document analysis also supported the observation findings, as lesson plans and speaking materials included guided speaking practice, pair work, and collaborative tasks before students were expected to perform more independently.

However, the findings also demonstrate that the implementation of anxiety-reducing strategies did not completely remove students' difficulties. The teachers continued to face several challenges, including low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, uneven participation, differences in speaking ability, and limited classroom time. At SMP

Islam Fatahillah Singosari, limited vocabulary sometimes caused students to stop speaking or switch to Bahasa Indonesia when they could not find appropriate English words. At MTsN 1 Malang, fear of making mistakes was particularly visible during individual speaking performance. Differences in speaking ability also caused some students to participate actively while others remained quiet or depended on more confident classmates.

The interview findings further support these observations. Both teachers identified students' lack of confidence as one of the most persistent challenges. Some students preferred to remain silent even when they understood the material because they were afraid that their English was not good enough. Limited vocabulary also made some students nervous when attempting to express their ideas. In addition, students' fear of being laughed at by their classmates created another barrier to speaking. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety may continue even when teachers have already provided appropriate instructional support. The teachers therefore need to continuously adapt their strategies according to individual students' confidence, language ability, and classroom participation.

The findings also have practical implications for EFL teaching. Teachers may consider organizing speaking activities progressively rather than immediately requiring students to perform individually. Providing vocabulary and language models, allowing students to practice with peers, giving constructive feedback, and providing continuous encouragement may help students participate more confidently. At the same time, teachers need to recognize that students have different levels of speaking ability and anxiety-related behaviors. Therefore, flexible classroom management and differentiated support are important in creating an environment where students feel sufficiently safe to use English.

Overall, the findings suggest that no single strategy is sufficient to address students' speaking anxiety. Scaffolding provides linguistic preparation, collaborative learning provides peer support, supportive feedback reduces fear of errors, motivational support strengthens confidence, and classroom atmosphere management creates a psychologically supportive environment. The combination of these strategies allows teachers to address different aspects of speaking anxiety simultaneously. Nevertheless, persistent challenges such as low confidence, limited vocabulary, fear of mistakes, and uneven participation show that reducing speaking anxiety is an ongoing process that requires consistent teacher support.

5. Conclusion

This study found that junior high school EFL teachers in Malang used several strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety, namely scaffolding, collaborative learning, supportive feedback, motivational support, and classroom atmosphere management. These strategies were applied together to address students' linguistic and emotional difficulties during speaking activities. Scaffolding helped students prepare vocabulary and language structures, while collaborative learning provided opportunities to practice speaking with peers. Supportive feedback and motivational support helped students overcome their fear of making mistakes and develop greater confidence. Meanwhile, classroom atmosphere management helped create a comfortable environment in which students felt more willing to participate in English speaking activities.

The findings also showed that the strategies were generally implemented through a gradual speaking process, beginning with preparation and guided practice, followed by pair or group activities and more independent speaking. However, teachers continued to face challenges, particularly students' low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, uneven participation, differences in speaking ability, and limited classroom time. These challenges indicate that reducing speaking anxiety is an ongoing process that requires continuous teacher support and adjustment to students' needs.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of combining instructional strategies and emotional support in creating a supportive EFL speaking classroom. The findings suggest that teachers should provide sufficient preparation, opportunities for peer interaction, constructive feedback, motivation, and a safe classroom atmosphere to encourage students to participate more confidently in speaking activities. Thus, the study contributes practical insights into how EFL teachers can manage speaking anxiety and support students' development of confidence in using English

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