

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: DOES IT REDUCE EFL STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN SPEAKING?

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety is one of the common affective barriers that may hinder students' performance in English communication. Although various strategies have been introduced to overcome speaking anxiety, limited studies have examined the effectiveness of relaxation techniques as an intervention to reduce English-speaking anxiety among university students, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing relaxation techniques in reducing English-speaking anxiety among students at IKIP Siliwangi. A quantitative approach was employed using a quasi-experimental research design with an experimental group and a control group through a pre-test and post-test procedure. The participants were IKIP Siliwangi students who experienced nervousness and anxiety during English-speaking activities. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including normality, homogeneity, hypothesis testing, and N-Gain analysis. The findings revealed a significant difference between the experimental group receiving relaxation technique intervention and the control group without intervention. The hypothesis testing indicated that H_a was accepted and H_o was rejected. Furthermore, the average N-Gain score of the experimental group was 59.33%, which was categorized as effective enough. These findings suggest that the implementation of relaxation techniques can be an effective alternative strategy to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English.

Keywords: Anxiety, English, Relaxation Techniques, Speaking

A. INTRODUCTION

In the midst of globalization, marked by the increasing openness of the free market, every individual is required to have competent human resources, particularly in the communication aspect. In this context, mastery of English is an integral requirement, both for understanding and utilizing developments in communication technology and for establishing direct interactions at the international level. As the language of global communication, English must be actively mastered, encompassing both spoken and written language skills, so that individuals can adapt and compete in an increasingly dynamic global environment (Handayani, 2016). English language skills are important things that

everyone must have, including students. There are many ways you can improve your English language skills (Farhansyah, et al., 2023). English has developed as a global language widely used in international communication, and is also the most widely studied foreign language in various parts of the world. Lolong (2019) emphasized that English proficiency is a crucial competency for every individual, including students. In addition to its function as a means of international communication, various findings also indicate that English is increasingly used in academic contexts, particularly at the higher education level. This situation demands that students continuously improve their English language skills to optimally keep up with academic and global developments. Based on theory and expert opinion, to have good language skills you need to pay attention to four components, specifically auditory skills, verbal skills, reading abilities, and writing abilities. A thorough examination of these four elements is necessary to assess and enhance an individual's language abilities (Djiwandono, 2011).

Higher education plays a strategic role in improving the quality of human resources, enabling them to drive national progress and compete globally. In the context of English language learning, universities play a crucial role in preparing students to face competition in the workplace. English language learning at this level is no longer limited to academic mastery (English for Academic Objectives) but is also tailored to the professional needs and specific fields of study of each student. Therefore, English instruction in higher education should be designed not only to support academic success but also to equip graduates with English language competencies relevant to the demands of the workplace or specific professions (English for Occupational Purposes) across various disciplines. (Putri, & Wijayanti, 2018).

Nevertheless, the skill to communicate in English is often regarded as difficult for learners to acquire, as this involves articulating a sequence of words verbally to express thoughts or messages. To communicate verbally effectively, one must master clear word choice and arrangement so that the message is accurately understood by the listener. Furthermore, understanding speaking strategies is crucial for minimizing misunderstandings and avoiding barriers in the communication process. Oxford (Irmawati, 2016) stated that communicating in English causes stress for learners. This is due to their fear of making grammatical errors and their limited English vocabulary, which hinders their speaking activities. Kurniawati (2015) explains that in reality, quite a few students are still unable to understand or even the phrases or statements expressed in English verbally by their conversation partners. This condition shows that English listening skills are still low, along with relatively limited vocabulary mastery. Then, according to Setyowati (2019) explained that the lack of students' ability to master English is because students are too focused on courses without realizing the special skills they must have, such as English. Initial research observations showed that students still felt awkward, embarrassed, afraid and tense in speaking English. They tend to be passive, apart from their weak English language skills, they also lack self-confidence and worry about making errors and feeling anxious.

One of the main factors hindering students' ability to speak English is anxiety. Anxiety is an unpleasant subjective experience, marked by sensations of concern, tension, and emotional distress. Annisa et al. (2017) explain that anxiety arises when individuals are faced with uncertain situations, particularly when there is doubt about their ability to meet the demands. In the context of learning, this condition is often associated with excessive self-attention, the emergence of negative emotions, and nervousness that accompany the

interaction process. For some students, learning English is not always perceived as an enjoyable activity. This is due to the demands of speaking or writing in a language they have not yet fully mastered. This situation becomes even more challenging in English classes, when students are required to express their opinions using vocabulary and language structures they rarely or never have used before (Hulaifah, 2019). Similarly, Horwitz et al. (1986) characterize foreign language anxiety as a set of perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and attitudes that develop in individuals in response to the complexity of the process of learning and teaching a foreign language. In studies on learning foreign languages, anxiety is typically categorized into three primary types: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of unfavorable assessment. Fadhilah's (2022) research revealed that students' inability to speak English in class is influenced by various anxiety elements, including timidity, diminished self-esteem, anxiety about errors, limited grammar mastery, and limited vocabulary. Similar findings were also demonstrated in Hulaifah's (2019) research on English language education students at a private university in Jakarta. The results of this study identified three main sources of English language anxiety: apprehension about errors in the foreign language acquisition process, poor evaluation of personal skills, and insufficient readiness when learners are prompted to converse in a foreign language during lessons. Overall, the results of this study provide empirical evidence that certain conditions and situations in learning can trigger foreign language anxiety.

The concept of anxiety in foreign language learning was first introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, as cited by Utami and Nurjati (2017). They suggested that anxiety about foreign languages comprises three key elements: anxiety over communication, anxiety related to tests, and fear of judgment or evaluation from others. Among these three components, fear of negative evaluation is seen as a major factor in generating unpleasant learning experiences and negative emotional reactions in individuals during the foreign language learning process. A method to alleviate anxiety while learning English for students is through relaxation techniques. Beech et al (cited in Khusumawati, 2017) argue that relaxation is a technique in behavioral therapy. Behavioral therapy is an intervention approach that utilizes a variety of techniques and procedures developed based on principles in learning theory. This therapy involves the systematic application of learning principles to change behavior towards more adaptive ways. Relaxation techniques, which are one of the techniques in behavioral therapy, can be used by individuals to develop internal systems within the person by cultivating a positive character, removing different types of disordered thoughts stemming from the person's inability to manage their ego, facilitating self-control, preserving lives, and promoting well-being for the individual's body. The benefits of relaxation are that it makes individuals better able to reduce tension, reduces stress-related problems such as hypertension, headaches and insomnia, reduces fatigue, delays mental activity and physical exercise, helps sleep soundly and increases understanding of certain knowledge. Relaxation techniques can be used as a strategy to reduce anxiety levels (Islami, 2022).

As for research by Francesco et al. (2010) stated that relaxation techniques can have an impact on reducing anxiety levels significantly. The use of these relaxation techniques is effective whether used independently or combined with other psychotherapy techniques. This is because relaxation techniques encourage a person to regulate breathing. Regular breathing will result in a regular heartbeat as well. So, the final impact is a reduction in muscle and nerve tension caused by anxiety. Thus, anxiety can decrease. Other research conducted by Javanmarda & Garegozlo (2013) also shows that relaxation techniques can

effectively reduce anxiety levels. Drawing from the explanation of the context surrounding the issue. Consequently, this study was performed to explore the application of relaxation strategies to reduce IKIP Siliwangi students' anxiety in speaking English.

B. METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental research design. A quasi-experimental design was selected because the study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing students' anxiety in speaking English by comparing the results between an experimental group and a control group. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a quasi-experimental design is commonly used in educational research when researchers cannot randomly assign participants but still intend to examine the effect of an intervention. This research applied a pre-test and post-test control group design, in which both groups were measured before and after the treatment to identify changes in students' anxiety levels. The experimental group received an intervention in the form of relaxation techniques, while the control group participated in regular learning activities without the implementation of relaxation techniques. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores was conducted to determine whether the intervention produced a significant effect on students' English-speaking anxiety. This design allows researchers to examine the effect of a treatment by comparing changes that occur between groups (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

The participants of this research were students of IKIP Siliwangi who experienced anxiety or nervousness during English-speaking activities. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. Each group consisted of 10 students. The participants were selected based on their experience of anxiety when speaking English, which was relevant to the focus of this research. The research was conducted through three main stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. In the pre-test stage, both groups were assessed to identify their initial levels of English-speaking anxiety before the intervention. The experimental group then received relaxation technique activities, while the control group continued with regular learning activities without the intervention. After the treatment period, both groups completed the post-test to examine changes in students' anxiety levels after the intervention.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite analyses were carried out, including normality and homogeneity tests, to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for statistical analysis. The Shapiro–Wilk test was applied to examine whether the data were normally distributed, while the Levene test was used to assess the homogeneity of variance between groups. Furthermore, a paired samples test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between students' pre-test and post-test scores. The effectiveness of the relaxation technique intervention was also measured using the N-Gain test to identify the level of improvement after treatment. The N-Gain analysis was used to determine the effectiveness of an instructional intervention by comparing the improvement scores before and after treatment.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research present the results of the analysis regarding the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing students' anxiety in speaking English. The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed to determine whether the intervention produced significant changes in students' anxiety levels. Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite analyses were performed to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for statistical analysis. These prerequisite tests included normality and homogeneity tests, followed by hypothesis testing and effectiveness analysis. The results of each analysis are presented in the following sections.

1. Data Analysis Requirement Testing

Before examining the effectiveness of relaxation techniques, the collected data were tested through prerequisite analyses to determine whether the data distribution met the requirements for parametric statistical procedures. Two assumption tests were conducted: the normality test and the homogeneity test. These analyses were necessary to ensure that the comparison between the experimental and control groups was statistically appropriate.

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the pre-test and post-test data from both groups followed a normal distribution. Since the number of participants in each group was fewer than 50, the Shapiro–Wilk test was applied to examine data normality. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 20, and the results of the pre-test normality test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Shows the results of the Pretest Normality Test.

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest_ Experiment	,935	10	,496
Pretest_ Control	,934	10	,487

Considering the findings of the Shapiro–Wilk normality assessment on the data from both groups presented in Table 1, it can be seen that the experimental group data meets the assumption of normality, with a significance value of $0.496 > 0.05$. Similar results were also shown by the control group, where the significance value obtained was $0.487 > 0.05$. These findings indicate that the measurement data in both groups are normally distributed. The details of the normality test results on the post-test data are presented as follows:

Table 2. the results of the Post-test Normality Test

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest_ Experiment	0,895	10	0,192
Pretest_ Control	0,901	10	0,223

The post-test normality results for the two groups using the Shapiro- Wilk method can be found in table 2 showing that the data from the experimental group is normally distributed because the significance is $0.192 > 0.05$. The control group post-test results were also normally distributed with a significance of $0.223 > 0.05$. Therefore, the pretest scores have a normal distribution based on the data collected. The normal distribution is essential because it ensures that the data meet the fundamental assumptions required for conducting parametric statistical tests. This supports the methodological perspective that testing for

normality is a crucial initial step to guarantee the validity of further analyses (Manzoni et al., 2008). Accordingly, the reduction in students' anxiety can be ascertained as resulting from the treatment provided, rather than from biased data distribution

Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity test is used to determine whether a sample included in study originates from a uniform group (has the same genetic variation) or not. To achieve Levene's statistical test and SPSS 20 application, this is achieved through a combination of two groups. The pretest the outcomes of the homogeneity test are as follows:

Table 3. The results of the Pretest Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
0,040	1	18	0,843

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the homogeneity test results show a significance value of 0.843. This value is greater than the significance limit of 0.05, thus concluding that the research sample comes from a population with homogeneous variance. The complete results of the homogeneity test on the post-test data are presented below:

Table 4. Shows the results of the Post-test Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2,753	1	18	0,114

Table 4 states that the homogeneity test gives a significance result of 0.114. Because the significance level is $0.114 > 0.05$, it can be concluded that the sample was taken from a population with the same variation. This means that the variation between groups can be considered equivalent, allowing for a fair comparison between the experimental and control groups. Such equality of variance is crucial in educational experiments, as homogeneity ensures that differences in outcomes are more likely attributable to the intervention rather than to sample characteristics (Hamdani et al., 2022).

2. The Effect of Relaxation Techniques on Students' English-Speaking Anxiety

After the data fulfilled the requirements of normality and homogeneity, hypothesis testing was conducted to examine whether the implementation of relaxation techniques significantly influenced students' English-speaking anxiety. The paired samples test was used to determine whether the post-test results of the experimental group students were different from those of the control group students. By using a paired samples test, H_0 is rejected, whereas H_a is accepted if the significance level (2-tailed) is greater than 0.05. The following table summarizes the results of hypothesis testing:

Table 5. The results of the Paired Samples Test

Class	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experiment	,001
Control	,004

Table 5 of the results of the T test (Paired Samples Test) shows that the control group has a significance level of $0.004 < 0.05$ and the experimental group has a significance level of $0.001 < 0.05$. Because there is a comparison of the average results of anxiety in English among students, it shows that the influence of the Relaxation Technique given to students can reduce anxiety in English in students during the pre-test and post-test. However, the reduction in anxiety was more significant in the experimental group that received relaxation techniques. This finding is consistent with Benson's relaxation response theory, which posits that relaxation decreases sympathetic nervous system activation while enhancing parasympathetic activity, thereby alleviating the physiological symptoms of anxiety (Toussaint et al., 2021).

3. The Effectiveness of Relaxation Techniques Based on N-Gain Analysis

To further examine the effectiveness of the intervention, the N-Gain analysis was conducted to measure the improvement in students' anxiety reduction from the pre-test to the post-test. The N-Gain score was calculated for both the experimental group, which received relaxation technique intervention, and the control group, which did not receive the intervention. The results of the N-Gain analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. the results of the N-Gain Test

Class	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Category
Experiment	59,3366	30,99	94,23	Effective enough
Control	20,4289	52,00	11,48	Ineffective

These results show that the N-Gain score of the experimental group (relaxation technique group) was 59.3366, or 59.33%, placing it in the quite effective category. Meanwhile, the control group which was not included in the N-Gain test relaxation technique group had an average of 20.4289 or 20.42%, which was in the ineffective category. So it can be concluded that relaxation techniques are quite effective in reducing anxiety in English in students. This is because the results of the N-Gain calculation show that H_a is accepted and H_0 is rejected. The results of this study are in line with the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) put forward by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who view anxiety in foreign language learning as a multidimensional construct that includes anxiety in communicating, anxiety when facing exams, and fear of negative assessment. Relaxation has been shown to assist students in reducing communication apprehension when speaking in English (Xiong et al., 2024).

In the era of globalization, it is very important for everyone to be able to communicate in various languages, one of which is English, which is known as an international language. English language skills are an essential competency that every individual, including students, needs to have. English language skills are not solely directed at academic interests or English for Academic Purposes, while also incorporating education that aligns with the specific interests and requirements of the professional world based on each person's area of study. According to research outcomes and quantitative analysis from the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, both the experimental and control groups were selected as samples from a population that follows a normal distribution. Thus, a difference was obtained between the two experimental and control groups which required a homogeneity test. The post-test significance score in this study was 0.114, which indicates that the data is homogeneous. After that, the researcher carried out a paired samples test with the aim of finding out the statistical differences between the two independent groups and the two unpaired groups.

This is done to confirm that the two groups of data belong to different individuals. The results of the paired samples test revealed that the significance level for the experimental group (2-tailed) was $0.001 < 0.05$, while the significance level for the control group (2-tailed) was $0.004 < 0.05$. These results show that the average post-test results of the experimental group with intervention are different from the control group without intervention. So in this research the hypothesis states that: H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

The N-Gain score is calculated from the difference between the pretest and post-test scores and then tested by the researcher. The average N-Gain of the experimental group (relaxation technique group) was 59.3366 or 59.33%, meaning the category was quite effective according to the results of the N-Gain SPSS version 20 score. So it tends to be assumed that the use of relaxation technique methods is very suitable for reducing anxiety in English to students. This statement is in line with the concept "As a warning signal, anxiety is accompanied by a series of interconnected somatic processes that act prior to emergency action." Spielberger (1966) namely in the action of dangerous situations in the sense that when danger strikes, the individual will go through a process of finding balance between conditions outside the environment. Furthermore, the reduction in anxiety observed in the post-test scores aligns with the concept of state anxiety in the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). State anxiety refers to temporary anxiety that arises from specific situations and is highly sensitive to psychological interventions (Knowles & Olatunji, 2020). Accordingly, the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in this study can be explained by the fact that relaxation specifically targets state anxiety that emerges when students are required to speak English in class (Jin et al., 2021).

This study is consistent with the meta-analyses of Hamdani et al., (2022) and Manzoni et al., (2008), which showed that relaxation methods effectively lower anxiety, stress, and depression in both teenagers and young adults. Moreover, the effectiveness of relaxation tends to increase when it is implemented in a structured and repeated manner (Ozgundondur & Gok Metin, 2019). In addition, an RCT conducted by (Luo et al., 2024) confirmed that progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) significantly reduces anxiety among healthcare professionals. In the context of language learning, these findings align with Toyama & Yamazaki, (2021) who emphasized that classroom interventions, including relaxation, can reduce foreign language anxiety. This is further supported by Jin et al., (2021), who found that positive psychology interventions lower speaking anxiety in university students. Evidence from local studies also reinforces the effectiveness of relaxation techniques. Ningrum and Andriani (2020) highlighted the significant role of social support in reducing students' exam anxiety, thereby strengthening the notion that relaxation interventions can be optimized when combined with external factors such as social support. Apart from that, the responses to the anxiety questionnaire in this study showed that students were also greatly helped by the relaxation technique sessions provided in reducing their anxiety when speaking English. This is in line with the recommendation of Toussaint et al., (2021), who emphasized that relaxation interventions are easy to implement, measurable, and effective in enhancing students' psychological readiness

D. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate that the implementation of relaxation techniques contributed to reducing students' anxiety in speaking English at IKIP Siliwangi. Based on the statistical analysis, the experimental group that received relaxation technique intervention showed a greater decrease in speaking anxiety compared to the control group. The hypothesis testing results confirmed that there was a significant difference between the groups, indicating that relaxation techniques had a positive effect on students' anxiety reduction. Furthermore, the N-Gain analysis revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher improvement score compared to the control group. The average N-Gain score of 59.33% placed the intervention in the effective enough category, while the control group showed a lower improvement score categorized as ineffective. These findings suggest that relaxation techniques can help students manage nervousness, reduce psychological barriers, and develop greater confidence during English-speaking activities. Therefore, relaxation techniques can be considered an alternative affective strategy in English language learning, particularly for students who experience speaking anxiety. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and explore different types of relaxation activities to obtain broader evidence regarding their effectiveness in reducing English-speaking anxiety.

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