

## **PEER GROUP ACTIVITIES: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO REDUCE SPEAKING ANXIETY IN EFL CLASSROOMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined how practical peer group activities helped Indonesian first-grade high school students improve their English speaking skills and reduce their speaking anxiety. Through an explanatory mixed-method research design, the study methodically investigated the linguistic and psychological effects of collaborative learning strategies in EFL situations at SMAN 13 Pangkep throughout the 2024–2025 academic year. After being randomly selected, forty-four students were split equally into two groups: the experimental group received set-up peer group interventions. In contrast, the control group proceeded to use conventional solo learning strategies. The multi-instrument methodology used validated anxiety questionnaires derived from the Psychological and Sociocultural Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), semi-structured interviews, structured classroom observations, and standardized speaking assessments to collect thorough quantitative and qualitative data. According to statistical analysis, the experimental group's mean anxiety levels decreased from 64.95 to 56.09, significantly improving compared to the control group's more modest fall from 64.86 to 60.54 ( $p=0.029$ ). At the same time, the experimental group's mean performance scores increased from 49.36 to 65.90, which was a substantial improvement above the control group's from 46.33 to 56.18 ( $p=0.009$ ). Qualitative data supported these statistical findings, as participants described peer group activities as helpful, engaging, and life-changing for their language learning process. The collaborative task division, mutual feedback, and knowledge sharing created a supportive environment that students especially enjoyed. These factors combined to lower anxiety and boost confidence in oral communication. Significant empirical evidence is presented in the study to support the incorporation of organized collaborative learning practices as a successful educational intervention for addressing the complex relations between social, emotional, and psychological aspects that affect language acquisition. These results provide essential information for developing curricula and instructional strategies that build communicative competence and reduce language anxiety in teenage EFL learners in Indonesian classrooms.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Speaking Skills, EFL Learning, Peer Group Activities, Speaking Anxiety

## INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is a complex cognitive and social process that significantly poses many difficulties for students when improving their speaking abilities (P. Li & Jeong, 2020). According to Teimouri et al. (2019), oral communication in a second or foreign language involves intricate psychological, emotional, and social processes in addition to linguistic proficiency. The most prevalent of these difficulties is Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), which prevents students from communicating effectively and impedes their language development and general academic performance (Resnik & Dewaele, 2020). FLSA influences learners' confidence, engagement, and motivation in addition to the fluency and accuracy of their spoken output, which ultimately shapes their long-term success in language acquisition (L. Li & Heydarnejad, 2024).

Numerous individual, environmental, and social factors impact the psychological concept of speaking anxiety. According to Gkonou et al. (2020), new research has shed more light on the intricate connections between speaking anxiety, learner identity, motivation, and cognitive processes, building on the groundbreaking work of Horwitz et al. (1986). The symptoms of FLSA might range from minor anxiety to severe anxiety that keeps students from engaging in speaking exercises. Usually, learners who experience high levels of anxiety speak more slowly, halt more frequently, and hesitate more, which makes it harder for them to speak confidently and coherently (Szyszka et al., 2024). This state impacts performance, lowers confidence, and decreases involvement in educational activities.

According to neurolinguistic research, language learning activates several cognitive systems, such as memory, perception, and social cognition, demonstrating that language acquisition is a social phenomenon intricately woven into interactive human experiences (P. Li & Jeong, 2020). In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory highlights language acquisition as a socially mediated process in which language is a sophisticated psychological tool that influences social interaction and personal cognition and is a tool for communication. This concept has been broadened by contemporary scholars such as Teimouri et al. (2019), who emphasize that language acquisition happens due to dynamic interactions between personal psychological processes and larger social contexts.

The educational system in Indonesia offers a fascinating setting for researching speaking anxiety and focused treatments. Despite continuous initiatives to advance communicative language teaching (CLT), culturally embedded communication norms, teacher-centred instructional methods, and a lack of exposure to language use in everyday situations are some obstacles that Indonesian students commonly face when trying to improve their speaking abilities (Mbato, 2020). These elements contribute to ongoing speaking anxiety and emphasize the necessity for innovative teaching strategies adapted to Indonesian students' cultural and educational reality (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020).

Even though anxiety related to foreign languages has been thoroughly researched in a variety of settings, there are still a lot of unanswered questions regarding the creation of culturally sensitive and successful interventions to lessen speaking anxiety, especially in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Research on workable solutions tailored to Indonesian high school students is scarce despite various proposed tactics to

reduce FLSA. Studies that have looked at FLSA in college students, like Mulyono et al. (2021), have found that high anxiety can lower motivation, confidence, and speaking ability. Most FLSA research also concentrates on general theories or approaches from other contexts, frequently ignoring the distinctive cultural elements found in Indonesian classrooms. Wijaya (2023) emphasizes the need for solutions that fit the Indonesian educational setting, arguing that students can lessen their speaking anxiety by encouraging classroom environments and introducing innovative activities.

Peer group activities have gained attention recently as a potentially helpful tactic to reduce speaking anxiety because they create cooperative learning settings that offer emotional support, lessen performance pressure, and encourage genuine conversation (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). Social constructivist learning theories, which highlight the significance of social interaction in cognitive development, theoretically support these approaches. Peer group activities can alleviate individual anxiety, offer scaffolded learning experiences, and promote authentic communication by establishing controlled, encouraging environments. Because collaborative learning settings use distinct neural pathways than standard instructional models, neuropsychological research indicates that they may reduce anxiety reactions related to language performance.

Despite these encouraging findings, little is known about the precise ways in which peer group activities in Indonesian high schools may decrease speaking anxiety. According to Anandari (2015), speaking anxiety is common among Indonesian EFL students because of feelings of discomfort, shyness, and worry. Although self-reflection has been used as a technique to deal with anxiety, further research is required to find out how group activities might help students deal with their speaking anxiety (Anandari, 2015).

In order to fill this research gap, the current study thoroughly and empirically examines peer group activities to lower speaking anxiety in Indonesian EFL high school students. This study examines the relationship between collaborative learning structures, psychological health, and language proficiency to offer helpful, context-sensitive techniques to improve the efficacy of speaking instruction in Indonesian classrooms. The study specifically looks into how well peer group activities reduce speaking anxiety and improve English language speaking skills among first-grade high school students at SMAN 13 Pangkep in Indonesia.

This study's significance goes beyond simple classroom procedures. The research adds to more extensive scholarly discussions about language education, applied linguistics, and educational psychology by tackling FLSA through culturally sensitive, empirically supported treatments. Especially in EFL situations like Indonesia's academic environment, the results can guide curriculum development, teacher professional development, and the establishment of encouraging learning environments that place equal emphasis on linguistic proficiency and learner well-being.

This study aims to figure out whether peer group activities can successfully lower speaking anxiety levels and improve speaking skills among EFL students in Indonesian high schools. Additionally, the study intends to investigate how students view these collaborative learning strategies. The findings of this study will give EFL teachers important information

for developing more encouraging and productive learning settings that consider the psychological and linguistic aspects of language acquisition.

## **METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

The study employed a mixed-method research design following the QUAN-qual model, primarily emphasizing quantitative research methods as suggested by Mills and Gay (2018). This methodological strategy used qualitative data to offer more profound contextual insights while prioritizing quantitative analysis. Beyond conventional single-method approaches, the research aimed to develop a holistic knowledge of speaking anxiety by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The influence of peer group activities on language learning anxiety was systematically investigated using a quasi-experimental methodology, with descriptive qualitative methodologies providing a nuanced examination of participants' experiences.

### ***Research Setting and Participants***

The study was conducted at the South Sulawesi, Indonesia, public high school SMAN 13 Pangkep. X MIA Al-Khawarizmi was chosen as the experimental group, and X MIA Al Faraby was selected as the control group for the study. There were 22 students in each class, for a total sample size of 44. Because these classes were carefully chosen, a controlled setting for comparing individual and peer group learning strategies was guaranteed. The participants represented a representative sample of Indonesian high school students, making them ideal for examining speaking anxiety in EFL settings.

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

A multi-instrument method was used in the study to guarantee thorough data collection. Adapted from Yaikhong and Usaha (2012), the Psychological and Sociocultural Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) questionnaire was the primary quantitative tool. The questionnaire, which consisted of 17 thoughtfully crafted statements, assessed students' speaking anxiety levels both before and after the test. Three distinct topics—Fort Rotterdam, Ideal Teacher, and My Lovely Hometown—were included in the speaking exam to elicit a range of linguistic responses and measure several aspects of speaking ability.

Researchers documented the learning process during the pre-test, treatment, and post-test phases, using systematic observation as a key data collection component. Rich contextual information was obtained from these observations, which included complex relationships and signs of anxiousness. Students' opinions of peer group activities were investigated through semi-structured interviews, which were used to supplement the quantitative and observational data. A thorough qualitative investigation of the experiences and viewpoints of the participants was made possible by the interview questions, which were modified from Jurmasari et al. (2021).

### ***Research Procedure***

The research followed a meticulously designed procedural framework that systematically addressed the complexities of investigating speaking anxiety in an EFL context. The initial pre-test phase served as a critical foundation for the entire study, implementing standardized assessments to establish baseline measurements of speaking anxiety and linguistic performance. Researchers carefully administered the Psychological and Sociocultural Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) questionnaire and conducted speaking tests across experimental and control groups, ensuring a comprehensive initial evaluation.

The pre-test assessment involved a comprehensive evaluation process beyond simple score collection. Students in the experimental and control groups completed a 17-item anxiety questionnaire and participated in speaking tasks covering three carefully selected topics: Fort Rotterdam, Ideal Teacher, and My Lovely Hometown. These topics were strategically chosen to elicit diverse linguistic responses and capture multifaceted aspects of speaking performance. Trained researchers documented not only quantitative scores but also qualitative observations of students' verbal and non-verbal anxiety indicators, creating a rich, multi-dimensional dataset.

The intervention phase represented a critical component of the research design. The experimental group underwent a structured program of peer group activities specifically designed to mitigate speaking anxiety. These activities were meticulously crafted to create supportive learning environments that encourage communication, reduce performance pressure, and promote collaborative interaction. Researchers carefully monitored and documented the implementation of these activities, paying close attention to student engagement, interaction patterns, and observable changes in communication dynamics.

In contrast, the control group continued with traditional individual learning approaches, maintaining standard classroom instructional methods. This approach allowed for a precise comparative analysis, enabling researchers to isolate the potential impact of peer group activities on speaking anxiety. Throughout the intervention period, systematic documentation of classroom interactions provided additional contextual insights.

### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS 23 statistical software to study the research findings thoroughly. Researchers computed frequency distributions, mean scores, and standard deviations to comprehend students' anxiety levels and speaking abilities. Hypothesis testing was carried out using t-tests with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  to guarantee statistical rigour.

The interactive paradigm of Miles and Huberman, which entails methodical data reduction, display, and interpretation, was adhered to in qualitative data analysis. Researchers found recurrent thematic patterns after coding observational notes and transcribing interview recordings. Beyond only looking at numbers, this method made it possible to comprehend the experiences of the pupils fully.

Data triangulation was used in the study, comparing quantitative measures, qualitative observations, and interview insights. This approach offered a more comprehensive

perspective on how peer group activities might influence speaking anxiety in the context of language learning. By integrating many data sources, the study sought to reveal the intricate social and psychological processes that underlie language learning experiences.

The thorough technique captured both statistical patterns and students' individual experiences in the Indonesian EFL classroom, guaranteeing a nuanced investigation of speaking fear.

## RESULTS

### *The Students' Speaking Anxiety Level*

Speaking anxiety is a common challenge for students learning a foreign language. This research aimed to understand how students experience anxiety when speaking English by carefully examining their anxiety levels before and after the intervention. By measuring and comparing these levels, we can understand how different teaching approaches might help students feel more confident when communicating in English.

#### *The Distribution of Frequency and Percentage of the Students' Speaking Anxiety Level in the Pre-test and Post-test of both experimental and control classes*

The study tracked students' speaking anxiety levels using detailed measurements before and after the peer group activities. By calculating the frequency and percentage of anxiety levels in the experimental and control classes, researchers could see how the intervention affected students' feelings about speaking English. This approach allows for a clear, numerical understanding of changes in students' language learning experience.

*Table 1.* The Distribution of Frequency and Percentage of Experimental Class in Pre-test

No	Speaking Skill Classification	Range	Speaking Anxiety Level					
			Low		Moderate		High	
			17 - 50		51 - 68		69 - 85	
			F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Excellent	86 - 100	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Very Good	71 - 85	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Good	56 - 70	0	0	6	27.27	0	0
4	Average	41 - 55	0	0	9	40.91	4	18.18
5	Poor	26 - 40	0	0	1	4.55	2	9.09
6	Very Poor	< 26	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total		0	0	16	72.73	6	27.27

As shown in Table 1, there are 6 (27.27%) students had moderate speaking anxiety levels with good speaking skills, 9 (40.91%) students had moderate speaking anxiety levels with average speaking skills, 1 (4.55%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with poor speaking skill, 4 (18.18%) students had high speaking anxiety level with average speaking skill, and 2 (9.09%) students had high anxiety level with poor speaking skill. There is no student had a low speaking anxiety level.

The comparison between the frequency score and the percentage of the students' speaking anxiety level and speaking skill in the pre-test of the control class is presented in the following table:

Table 2. The Distribution of Frequency and Percentage of Control Class in Pre-Test.

No	Speaking Skill Classification	Range	Speaking Anxiety Level					
			Low		Moderate		High	
			17 - 50		51 - 68		69 - 85	
			F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Excellent	86 - 100	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Very Good	71 - 85	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Good	56 - 70	0	0	3	13.63	0	0
4	Average	41 - 55	0	0	12	54.55	2	9.09
5	Poor	26 - 40	0	0	3	13.63	1	4.55
6	Very Poor	< 26	0	0	0	0	1	4.55
Total			0	0	18	81.81	4	18.19

As shown in Table 2, there are 3 (13.63%) students had moderate speaking anxiety levels with good speaking skills, 12 (54.55%) students had moderate speaking anxiety levels with average speaking skills, 3 (13.63%) students had moderate speaking anxiety levels with poor speaking skill, 2 (9.09%) students had high speaking anxiety level with average speaking skill, 1 (4.55%) student had high speaking anxiety level with poor speaking skill, 1 (4.55%) student had high speaking anxiety level with very poor speaking skill. There is no student had a low speaking anxiety level.

Based on the aggregate frequency and percentage of the two classes indicated that they were equal in the limited description scale of speaking anxiety and speaking skill. Therefore, these findings confirm that both classes are still needed to reduce their speaking anxiety and enhance their speaking skill.

Table 3. The Distribution of Frequency and Percentage of Experimental Class in Post-Test

No	Speaking Skill Classification	Range	Speaking Anxiety Level					
			Low		Moderate		High	
			17 - 50		51 - 68		69 - 85	
			F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Excellent	86 - 100	2	9.09	0	0	0	0
2	Very Good	71 - 85	4	18.18	1	4.55	0	0
3	Good	56 - 70	0	0	12	54.54	0	0
4	Average	41 - 55	0	0	2	9.09	0	0
5	Poor	26 - 40	0	0	1	4.55	0	0
6	Very Poor	< 26	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total			6	27.27	16	72.73	0	0

As shown in Table 3, there are 2 (9.09%) students had low speaking anxiety levels with excellent speaking skills, 4 (18.18%) students had low speaking anxiety levels with very good speaking skills, 1 (4.55%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with very good speaking skill, 12 (54.54%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with good speaking skill, 2 (9.09%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with average speaking skill, and 1 (4.55%) student had moderate speaking anxiety level with poor speaking skill. As stated in Table 1, in the pre-test, the students' speaking anxiety level in the experimental class was higher. Still, in the post-test, the students' speaking anxiety level was lower than in the pre-test.

Furthermore, the comparison between the frequency score and the percentage of the students' speaking anxiety level and speaking skill in the post-test of the control class is presented in the following table:

Table 4. The Distribution of Frequency and Percentage of Control Class in Post-Test

No	Speaking Skill Classification	Range	Speaking Anxiety Level					
			Low		Moderate		High	
			17 - 50		51 - 68		69 - 85	
			F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Excellent	86 - 100	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Very Good	71 - 85	2	9.09	1	4.55	0	0
3	Good	56 - 70	0	0	9	40.90	0	0
4	Average	41 - 55	0	0	9	40.90	0	0
5	Poor	26 - 40	0	0	1	4.55	0	0
6	Very Poor	< 26	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total			2	9.09	20	90.90	0	0

As shown in Table 4, there are 2 (9.09%) students in the control class had low speaking anxiety levels with very good speaking skill, 1 (4.55%) student had moderate speaking anxiety level with very good speaking skill, 9 (40.90%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with good speaking skill, 9 (40.90%) students had moderate speaking anxiety level with average speaking skill, 1 (4.55%) student had moderate speaking anxiety level with poor speaking skill, and there is no student had high speaking anxiety level. As stated in Table 4.2, in the pre-test, the students' speaking anxiety level in the control class was higher, but in the post-test, the students' speaking anxiety level was lower than in the pre-test.

*Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Students' Speaking Anxiety*

The mean score and standard deviation of the students' speaking anxiety are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Mean Score and Standard Deviation of the Students' Speaking Anxiety Level in the Pre-Test and Post-Test

Group Statistics					
	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Experimental	22	64.95	6.343	1.352
	Control	22	64.86	5.073	1.081
Post-test	Experimental	22	56.09	7.223	1.540
	Control	22	60.54	5.721	1.219

Based on Table 5, we can see that the mean score of the students' speaking anxiety level in the pre-test of the experimental class was higher than the control class, but the difference is not significant. The mean score of the experimental class on the pre-test was 64.95, while the mean score of the control class was 64.86. It indicated that students' speaking anxiety levels in the experimental class were higher than in the control class. The mean score of the experimental class was lower than the control class in the post-test. Previously, on the pre-test, the mean score for the experimental class was 64.95, which was reduced on the post-test to 56.09. Then, the mean score for the control class was 64.86, which was also reduced on the post-test to 60.54. Both of the activities used in this research affected the students' speaking anxiety, but the rate of the effect was different.

*Hypothesis Testing Using T-test of Students' Speaking Anxiety*

The t-test statistical analysis was employed to prove the research hypothesis and determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. The result of the t-test calculation can be seen in the following table:

Table 6. Independent Samples T-test

	P-Value (Sig. 2 Tailed)	Level of Significance ( $\alpha$ )	Remarks
Pre-test of the Experimental Class and Control Class	0.958	0.05	There are no significant differences.
Post-test of the Experimental Class and Control Class	0.029	0.05	There are significant differences.

Table 4.6 shows the t-test value of the experimental and control class. The t-test value of pre-test > ( $\alpha$ ) where the t-test value was 0.958 and ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.05. It indicated no significant difference between the students' scores in the pre-test of both classes. Then, the post-test shows that the t-test value < ( $\alpha$ ), (0.029 < 0.05). It indicated a significant difference between the students' scores in the post-test of both classes. So, based on the t-test result and supported by all the findings, the researcher can conclude that  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is

accepted. It means that the use of peer group activities reduces the students' speaking anxiety level.

***The Students' Speaking Skills***

*Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Students' Speaking Skill*

The mean score and standard deviation of the student's speaking skills are presented in the table below:

Table 7. Mean Score and standard deviation of the students' speaking skills in the pre-test.

Group Statistics					
	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Experimental	22	49.36	7.322	1.561
	Control	22	46.33	8.502	1.812
Post-test	Experimental	22	65.90	12.978	2.766
	Control	22	56.18	10.284	2.192

Based on Table 7, we can see that the mean score of the students in the experimental class was higher than in the control class, but the difference was insignificant. The mean score of the experimental class on the pre-test was 49.36, and the mean score of the control class was 46.33. It indicated that students' speaking skills in the experimental class were higher than in the control class. The standard deviation of the experimental class was 7.322, and that of the control class was 8.502.

The mean score of the experimental class was higher than the control class in the post-test. Previously, on the pre-test, the mean score for the experimental class was 49.36, and it enhanced on the post-test to 65.90. Then, the mean score for the control class was 46.33, and it was also enhanced on the post-test to 56.18. The researcher can conclude that although both activities used in this research affected the students' speaking skills, peer group activities for the experimental class enhanced more than the individual learning activities used for the control class.

*Hypothesis testing using T-test of Students' Speaking Skill*

The t-test statistical analysis was employed to prove the research hypothesis and determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. The result of the t-test calculation can be seen in the following table:

Table 8. Independent Samples T-test

	P-Value (Sig. 2 Tailed)	Level of Significance (a)	Remarks
Pre-test of the Experimental Class and Control Class	0.212	0.05	There are no significant differences.
Post-test of the Experimental Class and Control Class	0.009	0.05	There are significant differences.

Table 8. shows the t-test value of the experimental and control classes. The t-test value of the pre-test  $> (\alpha)$  where the t-test value was 0.212 and  $(\alpha)$  was 0.05. It indicated no significant difference between the students' scores in the pre-test of both classes. Then, the post-test shows that the t-test value of the post-test  $< (\alpha)$ ,  $(0.009 < 0.05)$ . It indicated a significant difference between students' scores in the post-test of both classes. Thus, based on the t-test result and supported by all the findings, the researcher can conclude that  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted. This result means peer group and individual learning activities enhance students' speaking skills.

*The Students' Perception Toward Peer Group Activities.*

There are some opinions of the students toward peer group activities in reducing students' speaking anxiety. Those are helpful, good, interesting, and new activities in learning English.

Table 9. The Students' Perception toward Peer Group Activities

Students' Perception	The Items	Statements
a. Very helpful	1) Task division	Peer group activities are very helpful because there is a division for each group task, so other friends can correct our mistakes.
	2) Help each other	It is very helpful and very interesting because, in a group, we can help and give suggestions to our friends; those are all the way around. Besides, I can have self-confidence and maybe can correct some mistakes.
b. Very good	1) Help each Other	Eee it is good because, for example, if we do not know something, then one of our friends knows the meaning, so she/he can help us. Helping each other.
	2) Get close to peers	In my opinion, it is very interesting because it is fun. We can play and get close to friends, and our self-confidence increases because friends give suggestions and correct them. Thus, we know our mistakes.
c. Very interesting	1) Fun teaching & Interesting material	It is very fun because of the way it is taught and because the material used is very interesting.
	2) Get close to peers	In my opinion, it is very interesting because it is fun. We can play and get close to friends, and our self-confidence increases because friends give suggestions and correct them. Thus, we know our mistakes.
d. New Activity in learning English	1) Different activities	In my opinion, peer group activities are a new thing for me because the learning process uses group work with different activities from daily activities and as a place to share. Sharing knowledge.

According to the results of the interviews, peer group activities considerably raised students' enthusiasm for learning the language. The ability of these collaborative activities to lower speaking fear and improve speaking proficiency was a significant factor in this involvement. These exercises fostered encouraging learning environments by forming small discussion groups centred around particular subjects. Most students thought peer group activities were a good way to help English language learners who were nervous about speaking. Their experiences uncovered four main themes demonstrating these advantages of cooperative language learning methods. These activities' social and structured elements revolutionized the learning process by reducing the fear associated with language practice and increasing its effectiveness for learners of all skill levels.

Students overwhelmingly regarded peer group activities as very beneficial to their language-learning process. Peers could recognize and fix each other's errors in a safe setting because of the organized task distribution among groups. Thanks to this collaborative correction mechanism, students could get fast feedback without the intimidation frequently connected to teacher-centred correction. Additionally, by fostering a mutual support system among these groups, students could support one another by offering advice and suggestions, resulting in a reciprocal learning environment where knowledge flowed in various directions. This encouraging environment significantly boosted students' self-confidence because they felt empowered to criticize their peers and accept assistance, strengthening their comprehension of language ideas.

Peer group activities were considered "very good" mainly because of the dynamics of knowledge exchange that developed organically inside the groups. Students appreciated how these exercises facilitated group problem-solving, especially when dealing with language barriers. Students could rely on more experienced peers to fill their knowledge gaps when presented with new terms or ideas. Because support was easily accessible inside the group, this instant access to peer assistance established a safety net that decreased worry over not understanding anything. With students switching between the roles of helper and helped, the emphasis on "helping each other" emphasizes the reciprocal nature of these interactions and fosters balanced learning relationships.

Because these peer group activities were entertaining and engaging, students found them especially interesting. The instructional strategies used in these exercises were delightful and unique, drawing in and holding the pupils' interest. Due to their relevance and stimulation, the well-chosen materials further increased student involvement. Students appreciated how these activities promoted social connections among peers, enabling them to play together and form tighter friendships, in addition to the academic advantages. Since students felt more at ease around their peers, this social component significantly reduced anxiety. Students gradually realized their errors and enhanced their language proficiency in a stress-free setting due to the positive feedback loop formed by the increased self-confidence brought about by encouraging peer comments and corrections.

Many students saw peer group activities as an inventive way to learn English that was very different from conventional approaches. These activities' unique framework, which included various group projects that deviated from standard classroom exercises, offered a novel educational opportunity. Pupils valued these exercises as specialized forums for

information sharing where they could openly discuss ideas and gain knowledge from one another. This innovative method of instruction fostered a supportive peer network and shared responsibility for language production, which decreased speaking anxiety.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined how practical peer group activities worked to improve speaking abilities and lessen speaking anxiety in first-grade high school students in an Indonesian EFL setting. The results showed that students participating in peer group activities significantly improved their speaking performance and reduced their anxiety compared to those in conventional solitary learning environments. The findings are consistent with and go beyond earlier theoretical models and empirical research on language anxiety and cooperative learning strategies.

### *Speaking Anxiety Reduction through Peer Group Dynamics*

According to the quantitative statistics, students in the experimental group significantly decreased speaking fear. Peer group activities caused the mean anxiety score for students to drop from 64.95 on the pre-test to 56.09 on the post-test, whereas the control group had a more moderate drop from 64.86 to 60.54. It is confirmed by this statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.029$ ) that speaking anxiety was lessened by peer group activities than by individual learning strategies.

This result validates Toyama and Yamazaki's (2021) claim that collaborative learning environments can dramatically reduce language anxiety by fostering supportive circumstances for genuine communication. Students' decreased fear reactions during peer-facilitated language performance can be explained by their neuropsychological viewpoint, which suggests that collaborative settings may activate distinct neural pathways compared to traditional instructional methods. The evidence further supports the idea put forth by Gkonou et al. (2020) that speaking anxiety is a complex psychological condition that results from interactions between emotional experiences, environmental circumstances, and personal traits.

Several processes that are part of peer group activities are responsible for the change in anxiety levels. According to their interview statements, students felt more at ease making small-group mistakes since peer repair was perceived as less intimidating than teacher-centred correction. Second, the interview data demonstrated how students valued the recommendations and assistance they received from their peers in return, resulting in what Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory refers to as scaffolded learning experiences in the zone of proximal development. Third, as students no longer felt entirely in charge of language production, the division of performance pressure among group members probably helped to lower individual anxiety.

These results fill a significant gap that Wijaya (2023) pointed out, highlighting the necessity of solutions customized for Indonesian educational settings. The study's peer group approach is an example of a culturally sensitive intervention that circumvented the traditional educational frameworks and collectivist cultural norms that Mbato (2020) identifies as possible obstacles to communicative language instruction in Indonesia.

### ***Enhancement of Speaking Skills through Collaborative Learning***

When students participated in peer group activities, the study found that their speaking performance significantly improved in addition to their anxiety levels. The control group improved more modestly, from 46.33 to 56.18, whereas the experimental group's mean speaking score rose from 49.36 to 65.90. This difference between both groups is statistically significant ( $p = 0.009$ ), indicating that peer group activities offer better context for speaking proficiency development.

The concept proposed by Li and Jeong (2020), which views language as a social phenomenon firmly embedded in interacting human experiences, helps explain this performance improvement. A more integrated approach to language learning resulted from the peer group activities' creation of real-world communication situations that engaged memory, perception, and social cognition. This transformation is further demonstrated by the frequency distribution data, which shows that no students in the experimental group had excellent or very good speaking skills before the intervention. However, following peer group activities, two students (9.09%) and five students (22.73%) developed excellent speaking skills and very good speaking skills, respectively.

The qualitative data provides information about how this change took place. Students valued how "there is a division for each group task, so other friends can correct our mistakes," which created continuous opportunities for feedback and growth. They also indicated that peer group activities made it easier to divide tasks and correct each other collaboratively. Additionally, they valued knowledge sharing, pointing out that "if we do not know something, then one of our friends knows the meaning, so she/he can help us," demonstrating the advantages of dispersed knowledge within peer groups. Student comments such as "our self-confidence increases because friends give suggestions and correct them" further highlighted the psychological advantages that ultimately improved speaking skills, with increased self-confidence emerging as a significant benefit.

These results support Anandari's (2015) study on anxiety in Indonesian EFL students, which found that the main obstacles to speaking were shyness, discomfort, and fear. The peer group intervention directly addressed these psychological obstacles, which produced welcoming and encouraging learning environments that students characterized as "very fun" and "interesting."

### ***Theoretical Implications: Beyond Anxiety Reduction***

The study's findings contribute significantly to our theoretical understanding of the connection between anxiety and language acquisition. First, they refute oversimplified notions of anxiety as only a barrier to learning, demonstrating how well-structured social circumstances can turn worry into a controllable—even beneficial—aspect of language development. This finding supports the claim made by Teimouri et al. (2019) that language acquisition entails dynamic interactions between broader social circumstances and personal psychological processes.

Second, the results are consistent with Szyszka et al.'s (2024) description of a multifaceted understanding of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). The student's transition from high anxiety levels and mediocre or subpar speaking abilities to moderate or low anxiety levels and outstanding speaking abilities illustrates the intricate connection between language proficiency and psychological state. This change demonstrates how halting the "self-reinforcing cycle of worry and communication problems" might accelerate language development.

Third, the study offers factual backing for a social constructivist approach to language instruction. Vygotsky's ideas of socially mediated learning, in which cognitive progress happens via interaction with more experienced peers, are immediately reflected in the student testimonials regarding information sharing, mutual correction, and collaborative learning.

### ***Cultural and Contextual Dimensions***

The study's conclusions are significant in Indonesian education, as Mbato (2020) explained, where speaking proficiency has historically been hampered by teacher-centred teaching methods and little exposure to real-world language use. The peer group intervention effectively circumvented cultural communication norms that occasionally value harmony above straightforward speech by establishing more intimate, smaller language practice environments.

According to the qualitative data, peer group activities were "a new thing" for pupils used to more conventional methods. In addition to the events' perceived fun and interest, this novelty aspect generated an intrinsic drive, which aided in overcoming cultural barriers to unplanned communication. As "different from daily activities" and "a place to share," students rated these activities highly, indicating that peer group techniques can successfully reconcile more communicative language learning objectives with traditional educational principles.

Hasibuan and Irzawati (2020) expressed concern about the necessity for pedagogical innovations adapted to Indonesian learners' cultural and educational realities, and this cultural dimension meets that concern. The peer group intervention successfully modified

the ideas of communicative language teaching to function inside Indonesian educational traditions rather than against them.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

Even if the study showed a lot of beneficial results, there are a few things that should be noted. The brief intervention time and the small sample size (n=44) constrain the findings' generalizability. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to investigate the sustainability of anxiety reduction and speaking improvements over lengthy periods. Furthermore, studies examining how peer group activities fluctuate in their impact across different age groups, cultural contexts, and competence levels will enhance knowledge of this intervention's adaptability.

The precise processes by which peer connection lowers anxiety could also receive more focus. More targeted studies on the neuropsychological and socioemotional aspects of peer-mediated language learning would reinforce theoretical underpinnings, even though qualitative data provide initial insights into these processes.

### ***Pedagogical Implications***

The results have some beneficial ramifications for EFL teaching in Indonesian and comparable educational settings. Peer group activities that are well-planned and have distinct work divisions should be used by teachers so that students can assist one another's learning while staying accountable. As demonstrated by students' positive experiences with peer correction, peer feedback should be designed to provide psychological safety while offering essential corrective advice. Given that good emotional experiences aid in language acquisition, peer activities' "fun" and "interesting" components should be purposefully designed alongside educational objectives. Since students value the self-confidence they acquire from peer support, teachers should see confidence growth as a valid educational goal. Finally, peer group approaches should be adapted to work within, rather than against, existing cultural norms and academic traditions.

These suggestions align with the findings of Mulyono et al. (2021) about the elements that contribute to speaking anxiety in EFL students and Wijaya's (2023) demand for encouraging classroom settings and innovative teaching methods to assist Indonesian students in overcoming speaking anxiety.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study proves that peer group activities help Indonesian high school EFL students improve their speaking skills and lessen their speaking fear. The statistically substantial gains in psychological comfort and linguistic achievement demonstrate collaborative learning environments' ability to revolutionize language instruction. Peer group activities address the complex interplay of social, psychological, and cognitive elements that affect language learning by establishing supportive environments for genuine communication.

The results enrich theoretical knowledge of language anxiety and valuable methods for teaching EFL, especially in cultural circumstances where conventional teaching methods may impede the development of communicative language. These cooperative methods foster

positive support cycles, confidence building, and language development. One student's testimonial shows that peer activities helped them "play and get close to friends" while boosting "self-confidence because friends give suggestions and correct them."

Given the significant influence that well-structured social interactions can have on the cognitive and affective aspects of language acquisition, future research and pedagogical initiatives should build on these insights to create collaborative language learning strategies that are more sophisticated and culturally sensitive.

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