



The Role of Indonesian in Reducing English Speaking Anxiety in Junior High School Students

Eka Salma Inayah¹, M Hanafi², Mohammad Luqman³

¹²Program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

³MTs Negeri 4 Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

*E-mail: salmaaainayahhh2004@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role of Indonesian in reducing English-speaking anxiety in junior high school students. This study was conducted at MTs Negeri 4 Sidoarjo in the 2024/2025 academic year, with a population of all eighth-grade students. The sample was determined purposively by nine students from class 8D representing three participation categories: active, shy, and passive. The instruments used were classroom observation and semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences regarding the use of Indonesian during English learning. Data were analysed thematically through the stages of transcription, coding, categorisation, and interpretation. The results showed that Indonesian has different functions for each student group. Active students use it as a supporting tool to maintain fluency in speaking and increase confidence when experiencing difficulty remembering English vocabulary. Shy students use it as a bridge when forgetting words or as an element in constructing sentences, so they can stay engaged without withdrawing. Passive students rely heavily on Indonesian as a shield to reduce their fear of mistakes or ridicule, allowing them to participate, even with limited proficiency. These findings confirm that Indonesian is not a barrier, but rather a strategic resource that can help reduce anxiety, maintain engagement, and support the gradual improvement of speaking skills. Therefore, teachers are advised to implement a flexible and strategic bilingual approach to create a supportive classroom atmosphere, prioritise participation over perfection, and build students' confidence in communicating in English.

Keywords: role of Indonesian, English, speaking anxiety

Peran Bahasa Indonesia dalam Mengurangi Kecemasan Berbicara Bahasa Inggris pada Siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki peran bahasa Indonesia dalam mengurangi kecemasan berbicara bahasa Inggris pada siswa sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini dilakukan di MTs Negeri 4 Sidoarjo pada tahun ajaran 2024/2025, dengan populasi seluruh siswa kelas delapan. Sampel ditentukan secara purposif oleh sembilan siswa dari kelas 8D yang mewakili tiga kategori partisipasi: aktif, pemalu, dan pasif. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah observasi kelas dan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman siswa mengenai penggunaan bahasa Indonesia selama pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui tahapan transkripsi, pengkodean, kategorisasi, dan interpretasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa Indonesia memiliki fungsi yang berbeda untuk setiap kelompok siswa. Siswa yang aktif menggunakannya sebagai alat pendukung untuk mempertahankan kelancaran berbicara dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri ketika mengalami kesulitan mengingat kosakata bahasa Inggris. Siswa yang pemalu menggunakannya sebagai jembatan ketika lupa kata-kata atau menjadi elemen tentang membangun kalimat, sehingga mereka dapat tetap terlibat tanpa menarik diri. Siswa pasif sangat bergantung pada bahasa Indonesia sebagai tameng untuk mengurangi rasa takut mereka akan kesalahan atau ejekan, sehingga mereka dapat berpartisipasi, meskipun dengan kemampuan terbatas. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa bahasa Indonesia bukanlah penghalang, melainkan sumber daya strategis yang dapat membantu mengurangi kecemasan, mempertahankan keterlibatan, dan mendukung peningkatan keterampilan berbicara secara bertahap. Oleh karena itu, guru disarankan untuk menerapkan pendekatan bilingual yang fleksibel dan strategis guna menciptakan suasana kelas yang suportif, mengutamakan partisipasi daripada kesempurnaan, dan membangun kepercayaan diri siswa dalam berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: peran bahasa Indonesia, kecemasan berbicara, bahasa Inggris

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INTRODUCTION

English speaking skills are considered one of the most crucial skills in learning a foreign language. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires not only linguistic mastery but also psychological readiness, such as self-confidence, a sense of security, and emotional stability (Wang et al., 2022). According to (Munif, 2015), speaking skill in English is one of the important skills in the English learning curriculum at school level, especially at junior secondary level. In practice, there are still many students who have difficulty speaking in English due to anxiety, which is often referred to as speaking anxiety. This anxiety appears in various forms, such as fear of making mistakes when speaking, fear of being ridiculed by friends, or fear of getting negative judgment from the teacher. This phenomenon is a challenge for English teachers, as anxious students tend to be passive and reluctant to participate in speaking activities. So this speaking anxiety is not a small and trivial problem, as it can directly hinder students' participation in the learning process. When students feel pressured to use a language they have not yet fully mastered, they tend to choose silence over taking the risk of speaking or use Indonesian as a supporting language.

A similar phenomenon also occurred at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo, where most students felt more comfortable using Indonesian than English during learning. Indonesian was chosen because it was considered emotionally safer and easier to understand. According to (Zulfikar, 2019) in the context of foreign language learning, this tendency is often viewed negatively because it is considered to hinder the practice of the target language. However, upon closer examination, the use of Indonesian may actually be seen as a natural strategy for students to overcome anxiety while remaining engaged in the learning process.

The problem becomes more complex because anxiety does not only affect students' willingness to speak but also their overall performance.

Students who experience high anxiety tend to struggle with fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary recall. Their mental focus is often divided between trying to remember the correct forms and worrying about possible mistakes, which reduces the quality of their speech. This indicates that reducing speaking anxiety should be one of the priorities in English teaching, particularly at the junior secondary level, where students are still building their confidence.

Cook (2001) argues that L1 can serve as a scaffolding tool that helps learners understand complex instructions, lower their affective filter, and build confidence before moving into the target language. In the Indonesian context, where exposure to English outside the classroom is very limited, using Bahasa Indonesia strategically may prevent students from shutting down due to fear of failure. When students feel supported, they are more willing to try speaking English even if their skills are not yet perfect.

Teachers also find that mixing Bahasa Indonesia with English, especially in the early stages of learning, can help maintain classroom engagement. For instance, giving instructions, clarifying difficult vocabulary, or providing feedback in Indonesian can minimize misunderstanding and reduce students' fear of negative evaluation. Gradually, teachers can increase the proportion of English while still allowing Indonesian as a backup language. This bilingual approach creates a safer environment where students do not feel forced but are guided step by step to use English.

Therefore, the use of Bahasa Indonesia should not always be seen as a barrier in English learning. Instead, it can function as a pedagogical strategy to reduce speaking anxiety and encourage active participation. Investigating how Bahasa Indonesia helps students overcome their anxiety at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo is crucial for developing effective bilingual teaching practices. This study aims to provide deeper understanding on how the



integration of Indonesian in English classes can contribute to creating a supportive learning environment and improving students' speaking performance.

Several previous studies have also been conducted on the same topic, namely research by (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021), which examined the practice of using L1 (mother tongue) by English teachers in high schools in Jakarta. The second study, conducted by (Puspitasari, 2022), examined students' perceptions of the use of Indonesian in intensive English classes at universities. The third study, conducted by (Anindya, Inayati, 2022) examined positive perceptions of L1 use in general. The fourth study, also conducted by (Nuralika, Fadia, Kustiwan Syarief, 2022), identified that most students experience speaking anxiety, classified into facilitative and debilitating anxiety. However, previous research has focused solely on mother tongue use at the university level and among teachers. This study will examine participants at the junior high school level to complement the findings of previous studies.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on MTsN 4 Sidoarjo, with particular attention to students in grade 8D. The aim is to investigate why these students feel more comfortable using Indonesian in English classes and the role of Indonesian in helping them overcome speaking anxiety. Unlike previous studies, this study emphasizes the affective dimension of L1 use, considering how Indonesian supports students emotionally and psychologically during English speaking activities. These findings are expected to not only contribute to the theoretical debate on L1 use in foreign language classes but also provide practical insights for teachers and curriculum developers. By understanding students' perspectives, educators can design learning strategies that are more responsive to their affective needs rather than implementing a rigid English-only policy.

In addition to its contributions, the study also faces several limitations that warrant further

discussion. The small number of participants, with only nine students, makes the results contextual and specific to class 8D of MTs Negeri 4 Sidoarjo, thus limiting generalizability beyond that context. Furthermore, the study was conducted in only one class at a specific school level, necessitating further studies in other classes or schools to test cross-contextual validity. The study also lacked in-depth quantitative data, as it used a qualitative approach. Therefore, students' anxiety levels were not measured using a reliable quantitative instrument. Furthermore, the study did not compare with other interventions, such as classes that reduce the use of their first language or alternative learning strategies, so the long-term effectiveness of anxiety management remains uncertain. Finally, the study did not explicitly examine other variables such as initial English proficiency, gender, learning motivation, or teacher role, even though these factors could potentially provide a more comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety and student participation in English learning.

Based on the situation that occurred, it is necessary to have research that explains the situation. The research being conducted has 2 main problem formulations that must be resolved, namely:

- 1) Why are MTsN 4 Sidoarjo students more comfortable using Indonesian than English in English classes?
- 2) What is the role of Indonesian in helping students overcome English speaking anxiety?

In line with the formulation of the problem, the objectives of this research in the short term and long term, namely:

A. Short Term

- 1) Identifying the reasons why 8D students at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo are more comfortable using Indonesian than English in English classes.
- 2) Analyzing the role of Indonesian in helping reduce students' speaking anxiety.

- 3) Creating a more supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe to practice, especially when speaking.
- 4) Lower levels of stress and fear in speaking encourage students to engage more actively in class.

B. Long Term

- 1) Contributes to the development of English language learning strategies that are more responsive to students' affective aspects, particularly in addressing speaking anxiety.
- 2) Offers practical insights for English teachers on how to strategically utilize Indonesian as an emotional and cognitive support in learning.
- 3) Formulation of systematic bilingual approaches in teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Indonesian context.
- 4) Reducing language anxiety enables students to strengthen their English skills and gain better career opportunities.

This research is expected to provide practical benefits for teachers in utilizing Indonesian strategically to reduce students' speaking anxiety, so that English learning becomes more effective and comfortable.

This study can help them realize that using Indonesian in the classroom is not a weakness but a temporary support to build self-confidence and gradually improve their English speaking ability. In addition, the results of this study are also useful for curriculum developers and researchers as a reference in designing English learning models that are more responsive to students' affective needs, especially in overcoming speaking anxiety.

The theoretical review in this research will be divided into several main sections, namely:

1) Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety describes the worry, uneasiness, or anxiety that people feel when speaking a foreign language, especially when speaking orally. It is a

common occurrence among language learners and can hinder their progress in honing their speaking skills" by Chang and Tsai (2022).

2) Role of L1 (First Language) in Second Language Learning

"Using First Language in the Classroom, explains that L1 can function as a cognitive tool in second language learning." by (Cook, 2001).

3) Affective Filter Hypothesis Theory

"High anxiety will hinder the language learning process." by (Krashen, 1982). - 438. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2024.17224a>

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach because the primary aim of the study was to explore students' subjective experiences, perceptions, and feelings about the use of Indonesian in English speaking activities. A case study design was employed to explore how students in class 8D at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo experienced speaking anxiety and how Indonesian contributed to reducing it. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it enables a detailed exploration of a particular group in a specific context, while also allowing the use of multiple data sources such as observation and interviews to provide a comprehensive picture of students' behaviors and perspectives.

The participants consisted of nine students from class 8D at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo. They were selected through purposive sampling, a technique often used in qualitative studies to choose participants who can provide rich and relevant information regarding the research focus (Palinkas et al., 1968). The nine students were divided into three categories based on their participation in English speaking activities: (1) active students, who frequently attempted to speak using a mixture of English and Indonesian; (2) shy students, who



occasionally used English but often returned to Indonesian when they felt insecure; and (3) passive students, who rarely used English and preferred either Indonesian or silence. This grouping allowed the researcher to investigate different perspectives on how Indonesian functions as a coping strategy in reducing speaking anxiety.

Data collection was conducted through two main techniques namely, classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Observation was carried out directly during English lessons, using an observation sheet designed to record important aspects such as expressions of nervousness, willingness to speak, the frequency of Indonesian versus English use. This method enabled the researcher to identify visible signs of anxiety and language choice in real time. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same nine participants to explore their personal experiences in greater depth. The interview guide included open-ended questions about their feelings when speaking English, their reasons for using Indonesian, and their perceptions of whether Indonesian helped them feel more comfortable in class.

The data obtained from observations and interviews were examined by categorizing students according to their participation patterns and their tendency to use Indonesian in English lessons. Rather than applying coding techniques, the analysis concentrated on comparing the two sources of data namely observation sheets and interview notes and organizing them into specific categories.

The observation findings were analyzed to identify noticeable behaviors, including how often students spoke, whether they preferred English or Indonesian, and the degree of anxiety displayed during classroom interactions. Based on these aspects, students were grouped into three categories namely, active, shy, and passive. This grouping was then validated and further elaborated through the students' own accounts during the interviews.

Next, the contribution of Indonesian in alleviating speaking anxiety was examined by connecting the observed classroom behaviors such as alternating between Indonesian and English, relying more on Indonesian, or choosing silence with students' explanations of their comfort levels and underlying reasons. This comparison revealed clear parallels between their observable participation and their personal reflections.

Finally, the outcomes of the analysis were presented in both tabular form and narrative descriptions, illustrating how each student group (active, shy, passive) used Indonesian differently and how this shaped their levels of speaking anxiety.

RESULT

1. Students' Participation Categories

Based on observations and interviews, the nine students were divided into three groups. The first group consisted of three students who were quite active in speaking in class. They were brave enough to try using English, although they often mixed it with Indonesian. The second group consisted of three shy students. They occasionally tried speaking English, but often reverted to Indonesian when unsure. The third group consisted of three passive students. They rarely spoke English and preferred to remain silent or use only Indonesian.

Table 1
Student Participation Categories

Categories	Characteristics	Number of Students
Active	Speaking a mix of English and Indonesian	3
Shy	Sometimes speak English, often return to Indonesian	3
Passive	Avoiding English, choosing Indonesian/silence	3

Students who belonged to the active category showed a willingness to take risks in speaking English. One of the students even stated in the interview that it was not a problem if their English was imperfect, as long as they could express what they wanted to say. During classroom activities, they were often the first to raise their hands or volunteer to answer, showing their eagerness to participate. When they forgot certain vocabulary, they immediately filled the gap with Indonesian so that the communication could continue smoothly. In practice, these students often switched between English and Indonesian, especially when specific words were difficult to recall. Although their speaking was not fully in English, the use of their first language played an important role in maintaining their confidence and keeping them actively engaged in classroom interactions.

The shy students showed a different pattern compared to the active ones. They usually waited for others to speak before daring to try, and when they did respond, their sentences were short and often mixed, beginning in English but ending in Indonesian. Many of them admitted that they actually wanted to use English, but they felt nervous about making mistakes. Indonesian became a lifeline that helped them continue speaking rather than stopping completely. This sense of hesitation was also clear when students in the shy category were asked to speak English in class. One student even mentioned, "Sometimes I want to answer the question in English but my friend will laugh at me," showing that fear of negative reactions from peers added to their anxiety and limited their willingness to participate.

Meanwhile, the passive students tended to avoid English almost entirely and rarely engaged in communication using the target language. When asked questions, they often

chose to remain silent or responded briefly in Indonesian. Some of them reported that they were unwilling to speak because they lacked sufficient vocabulary, while others mentioned that even when they understood the questions, they could not respond since they did not know the meaning of certain words. For these students, Indonesian became the safest option to avoid difficulties in expressing themselves, but this reliance on their first language also limited their opportunities to practice and reduced their overall participation in English learning.

2. Reasons for the More Dominant Use of Indonesian

The reasons for the dominant use of Indonesian are listed in the table below.

Table 2
 Reasons for the More Dominant Use of Indonesian

Categories	Reasons for Using Indonesian	Impact on Anxiety
Active	Using Indonesian as a support when forgetting vocabulary or having difficulty constructing sentences.	This increases confidence because communication remains fluent even when not entirely in English sentences.
Shy	Using Indonesian as a bridge when unsure or afraid of making mistakes.	This helps them continue to participate even when they are afraid to speak fully in English.
Passive	Relying heavily on Indonesian due to a lack of vocabulary and fear of ridicule.	This reduces fear and anxiety, although their participation remains limited.



The results of the study showed that students at MTs N egeri 4 Sidoarjo were more comfortable using Indonesian because of its role in reducing speaking anxiety. For active students, Indonesian served as a tool to maintain smooth communication when they forgot vocabulary or had difficulty constructing sentences. Shy students used Indonesian as a bridge, allowing them to remain engaged despite feeling hesitant or afraid of making mistakes when using full English. Meanwhile, passive students used Indonesian as a shield to protect themselves from the fear of being ridiculed or mispronounced, even though their participation remained low. Thus, using Indonesian is not merely a barrier, but a strategy that helps students reduce anxiety, maintain engagement, and gradually increase their confidence in speaking English.

3. The Role of Indonesian in Reducing Speaking Anxiety

From the results of observations and interviews, it is clear that Indonesian plays an important role in reducing students' anxiety when learning to speak English.

Table 3
The Role of Indonesian for Three Categories of Students

Categories	The Rule of Indonesian	Impact on Anxiety
Active	Used mixed with English when speaking.	Makes students more confident because they can convey ideas without being too afraid of making mistakes.
Shy	Used as a bridge when you forget vocabulary or are confused about how to construct sentences.	Help students continue to participate in discussions even if they are hesitant to speak full English.
Passive	Rely heavily on Indonesian to speak in class.	Reduces anxiety, fear of being wrong, and fear of being laughed at, even though participation remains limited.

The results of this study indicate that Indonesian plays a significant role in reducing students' speaking anxiety in English classes. This finding aligns with Chang and Tsai's (2022) opinion, which states that speaking anxiety is a feeling of worry, anxiety, and discomfort when speaking in a foreign language, which can hinder the development of students' speaking skills. This is evident in shy and passive students, who exhibit anxiety symptoms when asked to speak fully in English. For these students, the challenge is not only the linguistic aspect but also the emotional

aspect, as they must manage feelings of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and the possibility of negative evaluation from their peers and teachers.

DISCUSSION

The use of Indonesian in the classroom supports Cook's (2001) theory, which explains that a first language (L1) can function as a cognitive tool in second language learning. For active students, for example, Indonesian is used as a support when they have difficulty fully expressing

their ideas in English. For shy students, L1 serves as a bridge so they can still participate without being silent. This perspective illustrates why students in this study continued to participate in classroom interaction despite limited English proficiency. They depended on their first language to sustain communication and active engagement. This finding also supports Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that high anxiety can hinder the language acquisition process. With the use of Indonesian, students' anxiety levels decrease, making them more comfortable engaging in the learning process. This is evident in passive students who, despite being reluctant to speak English, are still able to participate by using Indonesian as a "helper." Instead of completely avoiding interaction, they found a safer way to take part in classroom activities through their first language.

When connected with classroom realities, these theoretical perspectives become even clearer. The active students in this study showed how Indonesian could be a flexible support system. Instead of letting communication break down when they lacked vocabulary, they inserted Indonesian words naturally, which allowed them to keep speaking and stay confident. This strategy shows how Indonesian reduced their anxiety by allowing them to prioritize communication over accuracy. On the other hand, shy students use Indonesian as a bridge. They typically start sentences in English but switch to Indonesian when unsure about grammar or pronunciation. For these students, Indonesian provides a sense of security. Without it, they admit they might choose to remain silent for fear of being corrected or laughed at by their classmates. In this way, Indonesian not only helps them maintain communication but also reduces the emotional stress associated with speaking a foreign language.

Meanwhile, passive students mostly depend on Indonesian. For them, using English feels difficult and stressful, so their first language becomes the safest choice. Although this strong dependence reduces their chance to practice

English, it still plays a useful role, it helps them stay involved in classroom activities instead of avoiding participation. For teachers, this suggests that letting students use Indonesian is more effective than letting them stay silent. Even small participation through L1 keeps them connected and slowly increases their confidence in English.

The comparison among the three groups shows that Indonesian reduces anxiety in different ways. Active students rely on it as a backup when they forget certain words, shy students use it as a bridge to continue their ideas, and passive students depend on it as a shield to avoid mistakes. In all cases, Indonesian helps lower the emotional barriers that often stop students from speaking. With less pressure, students feel more comfortable taking risks and trying to communicate, even if their English is not perfect. Over time, this repeated exposure to speaking situations can gradually build both confidence and competence.

These findings have clear implications for English teaching. First, teachers should avoid seeing Indonesian only as a negative influence or a block to learning English. Instead, it should be viewed as a natural and useful support that helps students both emotionally and cognitively. Allowing students to rely on Indonesian when necessary can create a safer and more supportive classroom environment, where the focus is on participation rather than perfection. Second, teachers can design activities that help students increase their use of English step by step. For instance, group work can begin with mixed language use and then move toward prompts that require more English in later stages. This gradual method respects students' psychological needs while still encouraging progress.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the use of Indonesian is not an absolute barrier in English classes, but rather a strategy that helps reduce anxiety, maintain student engagement, and ultimately supports the development of their speaking skills.



CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the use of Indonesian plays an important role in reducing students' speaking anxiety in English classrooms. The findings revealed three different patterns: active students used Indonesian as a backup strategy to maintain fluency, shy students relied on it as a bridge to continue their ideas when uncertain, and passive students treated it as a shield to avoid mistakes and embarrassment. Despite the differences, all groups demonstrated that Indonesian lowered emotional barriers and encouraged them to stay engaged in classroom interaction rather than withdrawing completely.

These results highlight that the use of Indonesian should not be seen merely as an obstacle to English learning. Instead, it functions as a practical and supportive tool that helps students manage anxiety and gain confidence in speaking. By allowing Indonesian to be used strategically, teachers can create a more supportive classroom environment where participation is prioritized over perfection. In the long term, this gradual and step-by-step use of English supported by Indonesian can help students develop both confidence and competence.

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