The Affecting Factors and Overcoming Strategies of Reading Aloud Anxiety at the Eighth Grade of MTSN 2 Merangin

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ABSTRACT.

This study examines the factors contributing to reading aloud anxiety among eighth-grade students at MTSN 2 Merangin and proposes effective strategies to mitigate these anxieties. Key factors identified include fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of confidence, fear of ridicule, and a perceived lack of ability in vocabulary, motivation, preparation, and grammar. To address these issues, various strategies were implemented: providing additional practice and constructive feedback, fostering positive thinking, creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment, encouraging peer support through group activities, and incorporating games and interactive exercises. Data was collected through classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and pre- and post-intervention surveys. Analysis showed significant improvements in students' confidence and participation in reading aloud activities. By understanding and addressing the root causes of anxiety, educators can create a more conducive learning environment that encourages active participation and enhances students' reading skills. This research highlights the importance of targeted interventions and supportive teaching practices in reducing reading aloud anxiety and improving overall student performance.

Keywords: Reading Aloud Anxiety; Overcoming Strategies

ABSTRAK.

Studi ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kecemasan membaca dengan lantang di antara siswa kelas delapan di MTSN 2 Merangin dan mengusulkan strategi yang efektif untuk mengurangi kecemasan ini. Faktor-faktor kunci yang diidentifikasi termasuk takut membuat kesalahan, rasa malu, kurang percaya diri, takut diejek, dan kurangnya kemampuan dalam kosakata, motivasi, persiapan, dan tata bahasa. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, berbagai strategi diterapkan: memberikan latihan tambahan dan umpan balik yang konstruktif, menumbuhkan pemikiran positif, menciptakan lingkungan kelas yang mendukung dan tidak menghakimi, mendorong dukungan teman sebaya melalui kegiatan kelompok, dan menggabungkan permainan dan latihan interaktif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara siswa dan guru, dan survei sebelum dan sesudah intervensi. Analisis menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kepercayaan diri dan partisipasi siswa dalam kegiatan membaca dengan keras. Dengan memahami dan mengatasi akar penyebab kecemasan, pendidik dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih kondusif yang mendorong partisipasi aktif

dan meningkatkan keterampilan membaca siswa. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya intervensi yang ditargetkan dan praktik pengajaran yang mendukung dalam mengurangi kecemasan membaca dengan lantang dan meningkatkan kinerja siswa secara keseluruhan.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Membaca dengan Keras; Strategi Mengatasi

INTRODUCTION

English holds a pivotal role in education worldwide, being recognized as an international language essential for global communication. In today's era of advancement, proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, has become increasingly crucial. Hence, many students commence learning English from early education stages through high school and college. English education encompasses vital skills like speaking, writing, listening, and reading, all of which contribute to practical communication and application in various aspects of life.

However, recent global challenges, notably the pandemic, have disrupted education systems, including the learning of English in schools. With students transitioning to remote learning, the educational process and skill development have encountered significant obstacles. This shift has particularly impacted students' emotional well-being, leading to heightened anxiety in practicing English skills, such as reading aloud.

Reading aloud is an essential skill in language learning, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language. It helps students improve their pronunciation, intonation, and overall fluency. However, many students experience significant anxiety when asked to read aloud in front of their peers and teachers. This anxiety can hinder their ability to learn and progress in their language studies.

Reading is a fundamental skill in English that involves a cognitive process of interpreting and analyzing symbols, content, and societal implications within texts. It allows students to acquire significant information and knowledge while developing ideas and comprehending the meaning conveyed in written material.

Harmer (2009: 19) emphasizes that reading engages both the eyes and the brain, requiring the brain to interpret the messages received from visual information. Thus, reading goes beyond mere word recognition to encompass understanding the underlying meaning embedded in the text.

A valuable aspect of reading is the practice of reading aloud, which offers multiple benefits to students. This activity enhances word pronunciation, improves the quality of vocal delivery, and develops listening skills. It also aids in understanding intonation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. According to Guzzeti (2002: 487), reading aloud involves vocalizing text

with attention to voice modulation, pitch, expression, emphasis, and pauses, thereby effectively communicating the author's intended message.Therefore, reading aloud is not merely reciting text in front of an audience but also involves the ability to comprehend, articulate, and convey meaning through appropriate intonation and expression.

Upon observation, the researcher noted a prevalent issue among Eighth Grade students at MTSN 2 Merangin: a significant number of them exhibited fear, anxiety, and embarrassment when it came to practicing reading aloud in English. This reluctance was particularly pronounced among this specific grade level. Motivated by this observation, the researcher decided to delve deeper into identifying the underlying factors contributing to students' apprehension towards reading aloud.

The primary objective was to uncover the root causes behind why Eighth Grade students experience such anxiety during English reading activities. By conducting thorough research, the researcher aimed to pinpoint these factors accurately. Subsequently, armed with this understanding, the researcher intended to propose effective solutions and interventions. These solutions would be designed to alleviate students' anxieties and enhance their confidence in reading aloud.

The study's focus was not only on diagnosing the issue but also on devising practical strategies that could be implemented within the educational context of MTSN 2 Merangin. These strategies were envisioned to create a supportive environment conducive to overcoming reading anxiety. By addressing these challenges head-on, the researcher aimed to foster a more positive and empowering learning experience for Eighth Grade students in their English language acquisition journey.

This article aims to identify the factors contributing to reading aloud anxiety among eighth-grade students at MTSN 2 Merangin and to propose strategies to help overcome these challenges. By addressing these factors, educators can create a more supportive learning environment that encourages students to participate and improve their reading skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of the Anxiety

Anxiety is a mental health issue marked by intense feelings of worry, unease, or fear that can disrupt daily activities. In this study, anxiety refers to the nervousness students feel while learning English at school. Seligman, Walker, and Rosenhan (2001: 146) describe anxiety as an unpleasant feeling of fear and worry with physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. This means that students' anxiety disorders significantly impact their thinking and behavior, making them fearful of speaking or engaging in English learning, particularly in reading aloud.

Anxiety manifests as a sense of unease or impending danger accompanied by physical symptoms such as trembling, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and stomach tightness (Carslon and Buskist, 1997). It can influence a person's cognition, behavior, perception, and learning. Another critical aspect of anxiety is its impact on selective attention. Anxious individuals tend to prioritize certain stimuli and overestimate their significance as they attempt to rationalize their apprehension in response to perceived threats. Ultimately, although anxiety may seem significant to the individual experiencing it, it typically arises from situations or individuals that do not pose an immediate threat.

In educational research, various types of anxiety have been delineated by experts. Three commonly discussed types include trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2007: 87-92).

1. Trait Anxiety Trait anxiety refers to the predisposition to experience anxiety across different situations. Individuals with trait anxiety tend to experience anxiety more frequently or intensely than others, as it is a relatively stable aspect of their personality (Woodrow, 2006: 309).
2. State Anxiety In contrast to trait anxiety's enduring nature, state anxiety is temporary and context-specific. It represents a transient emotional state rather than a consistent personality trait (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2001: 90). State anxiety arises in response to specific stimuli, such as before an important test or during a challenging situation.
3. Situation-Specific Anxiety Situation-specific anxiety is a subtype of trait anxiety that manifests within particular contexts or settings, as noted by MacIntyre and Gardner (2001: 90). This form of anxiety is recurrent and distinctive to well-defined scenarios, such as public speaking, test-taking, problem-solving, or language learning challenges.

In summary, these classifications elucidate how anxiety varies in its duration, pervasiveness, and triggers across educational settings, offering insights into how individuals respond to and cope with anxiety-inducing situations.

In education, particularly in English language learning, many students encounter anxiety due to various factors. According to Ernawati and Fatma (2012), these factors can be categorized into internal and external influences.

Internal Factors

a. Fear of Mistakes

Motivation significantly impacts language learning, where low motivation often results in heightened apprehension about speaking a foreign language. This fear of making mistakes stems from issues like limited vocabulary, fear of judgment, and negative associations with errors (Robby, 2010). Students perceive mistakes as detrimental, fearing negative reactions

from peers. Teachers can address this by fostering preparation, relaxation techniques, positive reinforcement, and peer support in classrooms to alleviate student anxiety.

b. Shyness

Zimbardo (1982: 467–468) defines shyness as excessive self-focus and anxiety about social evaluation. Shy students tend to avoid speaking, give brief responses, and prefer solitude, which hampers their language learning progress. Their discomfort in social settings and fear of scrutiny contribute significantly to their anxiety.

c. Lack of Confidence

Self-confidence is crucial in learning and is intricately linked to various personality traits and emotions (Brown, 2000). Confidence plays a pivotal role in academic performance and overall personal development. Students lacking confidence may struggle to engage actively in language activities, affecting their learning outcomes.

d. Lack of Motivation

Motivation drives learning and makes the process more engaging and effective. It energizes, directs, and sustains behavior (Woolfolk, 2007; Santorock, 2011). Students with low motivation may exhibit poorer academic performance compared to their motivated peers, highlighting the importance of cultivating intrinsic motivation in educational settings.

External Factors

a. Embarrassment

Feeling embarrassed during English instruction can disrupt students' concentration and hinder effective communication. Overcoming embarrassment is crucial for students to express themselves confidently and participate actively in classroom activities.

b. Lack of Vocabulary

Limited vocabulary proficiency impedes effective communication and causes anxiety among students. Inadequate vocabulary skills restrict students' ability to express themselves fluently and comprehensively in English.

c. Grammatical Errors

Students often make grammatical errors when learning English as a second language, influenced by their native language. These errors can affect their communication clarity and confidence, contributing to language learning anxiety.

d. Peer Influence

Classmates' attitudes and behaviors significantly impact students' willingness to communicate and participate in discussions. Negative peer interactions such as teasing or ridicule can intimidate students, affecting their willingness to engage in language learning activities.

e. Lack of Preparation

Unpreparedness before classroom activities, such as presentations or discussions, heightens students' anxiety. When students are not adequately prepared with the necessary material, they may feel nervous and hesitant to speak in front of their peers and teachers.

Understanding these internal and external factors influencing student anxiety in language learning is crucial for educators to implement supportive strategies that promote confidence, engagement, and effective communication skills among students.

Concept of Reading

Reading holds significant importance in English language learning as it engages the thinking process and enables students to acquire essential information and knowledge. Through reading, students develop the ability to comprehend ideas and extract meaning from texts, thereby enhancing their understanding. Reading aloud is a particularly valuable skill in this process.

Reading primarily involves visual and cognitive processes, where the brain interprets information received through the eyes to derive meaning. According to Nunan (2003:68), reading is a fluent activity that integrates textual information with the reader's existing knowledge to construct understanding. Moreover, reading contributes to improving pronunciation and expanding vocabulary. Mastering reading skills empowers students to grasp the meanings conveyed through written words effectively.

Reading encompasses various types that are beneficial for English learning. According to Patel and Praveen (2008), these include Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading, Reading Aloud, and Silent Reading.

1. Intensive Reading Intensive reading focuses on thoroughly understanding the content of a text in detail, critically analyzing facts, concepts, opinions, and messages. Readers engage deeply with the material to enhance their critical reading skills, often employing techniques aimed at learning and comprehensive understanding. This type of reading fosters cognitive development through interactive and evaluative approaches.

2. Extensive Reading In contrast to intensive reading, extensive reading offers students more freedom and enjoyment. Here, students are encouraged to read widely without specific book requirements imposed by teachers. This approach allows students to choose books based on their preferences, promoting vocabulary enrichment, grammar understanding, and fluency development through extensive exposure to various texts.

3. Reading Aloud Reading aloud involves emphasizing clarity in pronunciation and volume. It requires readers to articulate words audibly and accurately, conveying the author's intended thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and experiences expressed in the text to both themselves and potential listeners.

4. Silent Reading Silent reading enables students to concentrate fully on comprehending the text without vocalizing the words. This method encourages focused attention, facilitating deeper engagement with the material and enhancing reading comprehension skills

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a collaborative technique employed by teachers, students, or readers to grasp and interpret an author's knowledge, thoughts, and emotions. This practice not only enhances students' enjoyment of reading but also aids in maintaining their concentration on the text.

According to Huang (2010: 148), reading aloud plays a crucial role in the holistic development of students and serves multiple purposes in English language teaching. It allows students to assess and ensure the accuracy of their pronunciation.

Ismail (2008) suggests that reading aloud is an effective method for engaging cognitive attention, prompting questions, and facilitating discussions. This approach fosters group cohesion and attentiveness to vocabulary, voice modulation, and intonation, thereby alleviating anxiety associated with learning.

According to Huang (2010: 149), reading aloud serves five primary functions:

1. Pronunciation Practice Engaging in reading aloud not only aids in correct pronunciation but also enhances comprehension and interpretation of words.
2. Oral Communication Skills Through pronunciation exercises, students learn correct pronunciation and receive feedback for improvement, thereby boosting their confidence in speaking English fluently and effectively.
3. Enhanced Understanding Reading aloud enables students to grasp the original ideas, attitudes, emotions, and stylistic nuances conveyed through the text. This practice encourages imaginative thinking and deeper comprehension.
4. Knowledge Enrichment Reading aloud contributes significantly to broadening students' knowledge and insights. It reinforces skills such as listening, reading, speaking, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, addressing any deficiencies in spoken English.
5. Classroom Dynamics Implementing reading aloud in class creates a dynamic atmosphere enriched by the sound of collective reading. It fosters enthusiasm and motivation among students, encouraging them to participate confidently in English reading practices within the classroom setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the factors contributing to reading aloud anxiety among eighth-grade students at MTSN 2 Merangin and to evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies to alleviate this anxiety. The mixed-methods

approach combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, while quantitative data were collected using pre- and post-intervention surveys. This design enables the triangulation of data to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

The participants of this study were eighth-grade students and their English teachers at MTSN 2 Merangin. A total of 60 students, aged 13-14 years, were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a representative sample of those experiencing reading aloud anxiety. Five English teachers participated in the study to provide insights into their observations and strategies for addressing student anxiety. The selection criteria included students' willingness to participate and teachers' experience in teaching English at the eighth-grade level.

A structured observation checklist was used to document students' behaviors and signs of anxiety during reading aloud activities. Observations focused on indicators such as body language, verbal responses, and participation levels. Interview guides were developed for both students and teachers. The student interviews aimed to uncover their feelings, fears, and experiences related to reading aloud. Teacher interviews focused on their perceptions of student anxiety and the effectiveness of various strategies they employed.

Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews. This involved coding the data to identify common themes and patterns related to students' anxiety and the impact of different strategies. The themes were then categorized to provide deeper insights into the underlying causes of reading aloud anxiety and the effectiveness of the interventions. Quantitative Data Analysis: The quantitative data from the pre- and post-intervention surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provided a summary of the data, including means and standard deviations. Inferential statistics, such as paired t-tests, were used to determine the significance of changes in students' anxiety levels and confidence before and after the intervention.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Affecting Factors

Based on the results of interviews and observations, it was found that several factors influence reading aloud anxiety, including:

1. Fear of Making Mistakes

The primary factor contributing to students' anxiety when reading aloud is the fear of making mistakes. This fear is rooted in the concern of being judged or criticized by their peers and teachers. Making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process, especially in language acquisition, but the fear of making errors can severely impact students' willingness to read aloud.

Students often worry about mispronouncing words, using incorrect grammar, or stumbling over sentences. This fear can be paralyzing, causing them to avoid reading aloud altogether. The pressure to perform perfectly can be overwhelming, leading to heightened anxiety and a reluctance to participate in reading activities.

2. Shyness and Lack of Confidence

Many students experience shyness and lack confidence in their ability to read aloud in English. This is often due to their perception of English as a challenging language and their own self-doubt in their language abilities. Shyness can be a significant barrier to participation in classroom activities, including reading aloud.

Lack of confidence in their reading skills can also stem from previous negative experiences. If a student has been corrected harshly or ridiculed for their mistakes in the past, they may develop a fear of reading aloud. This lack of confidence can be compounded by the fear of judgment from their peers and teachers, making it even more difficult for them to participate.

3. Fear of Being Laughed at or Mocked

Another significant factor contributing to reading aloud anxiety is the fear of being laughed at or mocked by classmates. This fear of ridicule can inhibit students' willingness to participate and read aloud in class. The social dynamics of the classroom can play a significant role in this fear.

Students are often highly sensitive to the reactions of their peers. The fear of embarrassment can be a powerful deterrent to reading aloud. If students believe that their classmates will laugh at their mistakes or mock their pronunciation, they are likely to avoid reading aloud to protect themselves from humiliation.

4. Lack of Ability (Vocabulary, Motivation, Preparation, and Grammatical Errors)

Students often feel they lack the necessary skills, including vocabulary knowledge, motivation, adequate preparation, and a strong grasp of grammar. This perceived deficiency can lead to heightened anxiety when asked to read aloud.

A limited vocabulary can make it difficult for students to understand and pronounce words correctly. Lack of motivation can result from a lack of interest in the material or a feeling of hopelessness about improving their reading skills. Inadequate preparation can leave

students feeling unprepared and anxious about reading aloud. Grammatical errors can also contribute to anxiety, as students may fear being corrected or criticized for their mistakes.

Implementation of Strategies

Based on our observations and interviews, we implemented several strategies to help reduce reading aloud anxiety among eighth-grade students at MTSN 2 Merangin. These strategies included providing additional preparation, promoting positive thinking, building a supportive classroom atmosphere, encouraging peer support, and incorporating games and interactive activities.

1. Preparation

Recognizing the importance of practice in building confidence, we integrated regular reading aloud sessions into the curriculum. Students were assigned short passages to practice at home before presenting them in class. This approach allowed students to familiarize themselves with the text and improve their pronunciation and delivery. Teachers provided constructive feedback aimed at encouraging improvement rather than focusing solely on mistakes.

Moreover, the inclusion of structured practice sessions helped demystify the process of reading aloud, making it a more manageable and less daunting task for students. By gradually increasing the difficulty of passages and varying the types of texts used, we aimed to progressively build students' proficiency and comfort levels in reading aloud.

2. Positive Thinking

To cultivate a more positive mindset towards reading aloud, we implemented activities aimed at promoting self-belief and optimism among students. Daily affirmations and self-reflection exercises were incorporated into classroom routines to help students recognize their strengths and abilities. Teachers consistently highlighted students' progress and successes, emphasizing that mistakes are natural and integral to the learning process.

By fostering a supportive atmosphere where students felt valued and capable, we aimed to shift their focus from fear of failure to a mindset of growth and improvement. This approach not only boosted students' confidence in their reading abilities but also encouraged them to approach challenges with resilience and positivity.

3. Building a Good Atmosphere

Creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment was crucial in mitigating reading aloud anxiety. Teachers collaborated to establish clear expectations for respectful behavior and mutual support among students. Instances of ridicule or mockery were promptly addressed to ensure a safe space where every student felt comfortable expressing themselves.

Through team-building activities and cooperative learning exercises, we promoted a sense of community within the classroom. Students were encouraged to work together, share their experiences, and offer constructive feedback to their peers. This collaborative approach not only enhanced students' interpersonal skills but also bolstered their confidence in speaking and reading aloud in front of others.

4. Peer Groups

Recognizing the positive impact of peer support, we integrated more collaborative learning opportunities into the curriculum. Small-group activities such as choral reading, reading in pairs, and peer feedback sessions were implemented to provide students with additional opportunities for practice and interaction. These activities allowed students to learn from each other's strengths, receive encouragement, and build trust among peers.

By engaging in cooperative learning experiences, students developed a sense of camaraderie and collective responsibility for their learning outcomes. This peer-supported approach helped diminish feelings of isolation and anxiety commonly associated with reading aloud in front of larger audiences.

5. Using Games Method

To make learning more enjoyable and engaging, we introduced various games and interactive activities centered around reading aloud. Word games, reading competitions, and role-playing exercises were integrated into lessons to add an element of fun while reinforcing reading skills. These activities not only captured students' interest but also provided opportunities for them to practice pronunciation, intonation, and comprehension in a supportive setting.

By incorporating interactive methods into the learning process, we aimed to reduce students' anxiety about reading aloud by promoting active participation and collaborative learning. These activities encouraged students to take risks, explore new techniques, and build confidence in their abilities to communicate effectively in English.

Discussion

After implementing these strategies, we observed a significant improvement in students' confidence and willingness to read aloud. Students were more engaged in reading activities and showed less anxiety when asked to read aloud in front of their peers and teachers.

In interviews, students reported feeling more confident and less fearful of making mistakes. They appreciated the additional preparation and practice opportunities, as well as the positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. Teachers also noted an improvement in students' reading skills and overall participation in class.

The use of peer groups and collaborative learning activities was particularly effective. Students felt more comfortable and supported when working with their peers, and the feedback and encouragement they received from their classmates helped build their confidence.

The incorporation of games and interactive activities also had a positive impact. Students enjoyed the activities and were more motivated to participate. The games provided a fun and engaging way to practice reading aloud, reducing anxiety and making the learning process more enjoyable.

CONCLUSION

Reading aloud anxiety is a common challenge among students learning English as a foreign language. Understanding the factors contributing to this anxiety and implementing effective strategies can significantly improve students' confidence and performance in reading aloud.

At MTSN 2 Merangin, we identified several key factors contributing to reading aloud anxiety, including fear of making mistakes, shyness and lack of confidence, fear of being laughed at or mocked, and a lack of ability. By addressing these factors and implementing strategies such as providing additional preparation, promoting positive thinking, building a supportive classroom atmosphere, encouraging peer support, and incorporating games and interactive activities, we were able to significantly reduce students' anxiety and improve their reading skills.

Creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment is crucial for helping students overcome their anxiety and develop their reading skills. By fostering a positive and encouraging atmosphere, teachers can help students build confidence and achieve success in their language learning journey.

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