

APPLICATION OF EMOTIONAL FREEDOM TECHNIQUE (EFT)- BASED RELAXATION TO REDUCE PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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Article Information

Received : October 30, 2024

Revised : November 15, 2024

Accepted : November 16, 2024

Abstract

This study examines the description, implementation, and impact of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)-based relaxation in reducing students' public speaking anxiety at MAN 1 Makassar City. The study's population consists of 71 students with high and very high public speaking anxiety. The sample includes 7 students in the control group and 7 students in the experimental groups from class XII IPA 6. This research is a quasi-experiment using a pretest-posttest control group design. The research instruments included a public speaking anxiety questionnaire adapted from the theory by Muslimin & Maswan (2021), the Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) scale, observation, and process and outcome evaluation instruments. The data analysis techniques used were descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The results showed that public speaking anxiety levels in both the control and experimental groups were categorised as high and very high. The treatment implementation included preparation and problem identification, setup, tuning in, tapping sequence, repetition, and role-playing. The Mann-Whitney U test results showed that EFT-based relaxation has a significant effect in reducing public speaking anxiety, with an Asymp. Sig. value of $0.029 \leq 0.05$. The decision is that H1 is accepted, and H0 is rejected, meaning that EFT-based relaxation can reduce public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar City.

Keywords: emotional freedom technique, public speaking anxiety, relaxation technique, group counselling.

Introduction

Anxiety is a physical and psychological reaction, often marked by continuous fear and worry, that can make individuals feel threatened (Fadli et al., 2020; Suharnadi et al., 2022). It also causes discomfort when expressing opinions, especially in social settings like public speaking. Public speaking, unlike everyday conversation, is formal, planned, and aims to inform, influence, or entertain an audience (Muslimin & Maswan, 2021; Susilo, 2020).

According to Muslimin & Maswan's theory (2021), anxiety in public speaking is caused by three main aspects: degree of evaluation (feeling evaluated), subordinate status (lower status), and lack of communication skills and experience. When someone feels tense, restless, and nervous, their emotions become unstable, and negative thoughts tend to arise. They may view themselves as inferior, leading to feelings of anxiety.

Anxiety is rooted in negative and irrational thoughts. When anxiety impacts emotions, thoughts, and the body, individual behaviour is also affected (Ellis & Maclaren, 2005). Negative and irrational thoughts in public speaking anxiety include statements like "I will fail, everyone will laugh at me", "I am bound to make a big mistake, the audience will mock me", and "I am not good enough, I am not worth listening to" (Craig, 2008).

Research by Yin et al. (2022) found that 36% of 149 high school students in Westchester County, New York, experienced high anxiety during public speaking. Similarly, Liyanage et al. (2022) reported that 56% of university students in the U.S. felt anxious about public speaking. In Indonesia, a study by Dwiyanti (2024) at Wahid Hasyim Junior High School in Malang showed that out of 30 eighth-grade students, 22 felt worried about public speaking, with fear of negative evaluation being the main cause (49.5%). Ebrahimi et al. (2019) also noted that public speaking anxiety often arises from fear of negative judgment, concern about audience reactions, and a lack of confidence in sharing ideas.

The phenomenon of public speaking anxiety also occurs at the school where this study was conducted, namely Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Makassar City (MAN 1 Makassar City). The researcher conducted an initial observation on January 17, 2024, by distributing a public speaking anxiety scale questionnaire adapted from the theory by Muslimin & Maswan (2021), covering three areas: degree of evaluation, subordinate status, and lack of communication skills. The questionnaire was distributed to 156 students in the 11th-grade IPA, IPS, and AGAMA classes, selected randomly on May 28, 2024 via Google Forms. The results showed that 6% of students had very high anxiety, 39% high, 51% low, and 4% very low levels.

These findings were also supported by the researcher's interview with the school's Guidance and Counselling (BK) teacher, she noted that students often struggle even to express personal opinions in front of their classmates due to a lack of confidence in their abilities and fear of being ridiculed or making mistakes. Environmental pressure and negative thoughts also cause students' behaviour to become uncontrolled, leading to a loss of concentration and feelings of low self-esteem.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis in the 1960s, posits that individuals' emotions and behaviours are shaped by how they interpret their thoughts, especially when influenced by negative, irrational beliefs. Misinterpretations can lead to problematic emotions and actions, but increasing mental awareness helps individuals better manage their responses (Ellis & Maclaren, 2005). This approach is particularly effective for transforming negative thoughts that fuel anxiety in situations like public speaking. For example, replacing irrational beliefs such as "*I will fail*" with rational affirmations like "*I can do this*" can reduce anxiety, making individuals feel more open and confident in public settings.

Research by Maritza & Siregar (2024) and Erisma & Jannati (2023) supports REBT's focus on transforming negative thought patterns that lead to anxiety. By helping individuals replace irrational beliefs with flexible, rational ones, REBT enables them to understand that anxiety isn't solely driven by external situations but also by their own thought processes, increasing confidence in social situations like public speaking.

Beck (2020) emphasizes that relaxation techniques—like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and mindfulness—help manage physical responses to stress by calming both mind and body, reducing symptoms such as tension and anxiety. Similarly, Jacobson (1976) highlights that these techniques improve awareness of physical signs of anxiety (e.g., elevated heart rate, sweating), leading to more controlled behaviour over time. Craig (2008) adds that Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) combines acupuncture with positive affirmations, using tapping to release negative emotions and relax the mind by sending calming signals to the amygdala, as noted by (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

Research shows that both relaxation techniques and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) are effective for reducing public speaking anxiety. For instance, a study by Dincer et al. (2022) found that EFT reduced anxiety among 76 nursing students more significantly than breathing techniques, with effectiveness scores of 3.18 and 1.46, respectively. While breathing relaxation primarily promotes physical calmness, EFT

combines physical and psychological methods, yielding faster and longer-lasting results. These findings align with Wati et al. (2022), who also noted EFT's effectiveness in reducing anxiety swiftly and with lasting benefits.

Although the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) has proven effective in reducing anxiety, its application in group counselling remains underexplored. Most EFT studies focus on individual use, missing the potential benefits of social support in group settings. Additionally, few studies combine EFT with psychological theories like Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). In Indonesia, the use of EFT at the high school level, especially in Islamic schools, is still rarely explored.

The researcher selected the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)-based relaxation within group Counselling using the REBT approach due to its ability to help students visualise situations with rational, positive thoughts. EFT combines meridian tapping with a focus on negative emotions, calming both mind and body to release blocked emotions and reduce anxiety (Rukmala et al., 2022). With regular practice, EFT is expected to build confidence, create a sense of security, and enable more relaxed self-expression during public speaking. This study aims to describe public speaking anxiety and examine how EFT-based relaxation can reduce this anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar.

Method

This study utilises a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. The design used is a two-group pretest-posttest control group design. The variables in this study are EFT-based relaxation as the independent variable (X) and public speaking anxiety levels as the dependent variable (Y).

The population of this study consists of 11th-grade students at MAN 1 Makassar City in the 2023/2024 academic year, experiencing high or very high levels of public speaking anxiety, totalling 71 students. The research sample focuses on class XII IPA 6, consisting of 14 students divided into 7 students as the control group and 7 students as the experimental group. Sampling was conducted using a simple random sampling technique, allowing each student an equal chance of being selected (Pandang & Anas, 2019). The student selection process was done randomly through a lottery.

The data collection techniques used include:

1. Public Speaking Anxiety Scale: Adapted from Muslimin & Maswan's theory (2021), this scale includes three aspects: degree of evaluation, subordinate status, and lack of communication skills and experience. The validity test criteria applied were "H₀ is accepted if the r-value obtained is > 0.3 (two-way test with a significance level of 0.05)", resulting in 30 valid statement items. The reliability test results, using Cronbach's Alpha, showed a value of 0.940, falling between $0.80 < r_{11}(\alpha) \leq 1.00$, indicating a very high data reliability level.
2. Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) Scale: Adapted from Walmsley's theory (2023), this scale measures the subjective intensity of pressure or anxiety experienced by individuals, ranging from 0 (very comfortable) to 10 (very anxious) before and after EFT-based relaxation.

The data analysis techniques used include descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The descriptive approach applied is percentage analysis using a Likert assessment model, where the highest score is given a value of 4 and the lowest score a value of 1.

Table 1. Public Speaking Anxiety Level Categories

Number	Class Interval	Category
4	98-120	Very High
3	75-97	High
2	52-74	Low
1	29-51	Very Low

Inferential statistical analysis uses the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. The testing criteria reject H_0 if the asymptotic significance (Asymp. Sig.) value is less than or equal to $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. All data analysis processes utilize *SPSS 22 for Windows*.

Result and Discussion

Table 2. Public Speaking Anxiety Levels of the Experimental Group Pretest & Posttest

Interval	Category	Experimental Group			
		Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
98-120	Very High	1	14.3	-	-
75-97	High	6	85.7	3	42.85
52-74	Low	-	-	3	42.85
29-51	Very Low	-	-	1	14.3

Table 2. shows the public speaking anxiety levels of students at MAN 1 Makassar City for the experimental group during the pretest. There was 1 (14.3%) student in the very high category, and 6 (85.7%) students in the high category. After undergoing treatment through Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation for five sessions, the posttest was conducted.

The posttest results indicated that there were no students in the very high category, 3 (42.85%) students in the high category, 3 (42.85%) students in the low category, and 1 (14.3%) student in the very low category. The results of the pretest and posttest for the experimental group can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Tendency in Public Speaking Anxiety Levels of the Experimental Group

Data Type	Group	Mean	Interval	Class	Gain Score
Pretest	Experimental	83.57	75-97	High	-18.71
Posttest	Experimental	64.86	52-74	Low	

Table 3. shows the mean score of the variable, where the pretest result for the experimental group was 83.57, categorized as high. The posttest result for the experimental group was 64.86, categorized as low. Based on Table 3, there was a decline in category from high to low, or from the interval 75-97 to 52-74 in the experimental group.

Table 4. Level of Public Speaking Anxiety in the Control Group Pretest and Posttest

Interval	Category	Control Group			
		Pretest		Posttest	
		F	%	F	%
98-120	Very High	-	-	1	14.3
75-97	High	7	100	6	85.7
52-74	Low	-	-	-	-
29-51	Very Low	-	-	-	-

Table 4. shows the level of public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar City for the control group during the pretest, where all students (7 respondents) were in the high category (100%). After receiving treatment with deep breathing techniques once, a follow-up calculation was made.

The posttest results showed that there was 1 (14.3%) student in the very high category, and 6 (85.7%) other students remained in the high category. There were no students in the low or very low categories. The results of the pretest and posttest for the control group can be seen in the following table.

Table 5. Tendency of Public Speaking Anxiety Levels in the Control Group

Data Type	Group	Mean	Interval	Class	Gain Score
Pretest	Control	81.71	75-97	High	0.57
Posttest	Control	82.28	75-97	High	

Table 5. shows the average (mean) score for the variable, with the pretest result for the control group being 81.71, which falls in the high category. The posttest result for the control group was 82.28, also in the high category. Based on Table 5, it can be seen that there was no significant change, and the level of public speaking anxiety among students remained in the same interval, namely 75-97, which is categorized as high.

The counsellor used the Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) technique and conducted a discussion session by asking each counselee to share and imagine their experiences during public speaking. They then identified the negative and irrational thoughts that triggered their anxiety. This process helped counselees realize how influential their spoken and thought expressions were on their feelings and behaviours, encouraging them to adopt more positive suggestions.

When providing positive suggestions to oneself, it is important to avoid using words like “no” and “don’t”, as the human brain tends to disregard negative words and focus on the remaining message. For example, saying “*I must not worry*” leads the brain to focus on the word “worry”, thus reinforcing that feeling. In contrast, using positive suggestions that focus on desired outcomes, such as “*I will be calm*” or “*I can focus on speaking*”, is more effective in influencing an individual’s thoughts and behaviours.

a. Set up, tune in, tapping sequence, and repeat activities

The counsellor asked counselees to fill out the Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) scale to measure their anxiety levels on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means very relaxed and 10 means very anxious. This scale would be used before and after each session of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), starting from the set up stage, tuning in, tapping sequence, and repeating.

The relaxation began with the Forceful Coping Statements technique. Counselees prepared a set up statement (positive affirmation) that would be repeated during the tapping stage. The sentence structure was:

*“Although I am currently anxious about (the problem),
I accept, I acknowledge, I surrender (acknowledging the problem),
I believe I can speak with confidence (the goal I want to achieve).”*

Next, during the tune-in phase, counselees aimed to feel and align themselves with the emotions or problems they wanted to address, using the Unconditional Self Acceptance technique. This technique helped counselees accept themselves as they are, without being influenced by others' judgments or expected outcomes.

During the tapping sequence stage, counselees tapped on 9 meridian points on their bodies (energy pathways) using 2-3 fingers while reciting the set up statement (positive affirmation) and focusing on the problem. The tapping order was as follows:

- 1) Side of the hand (karate chop/KC).
- 2) Top of the head (crown/Cr).
- 3) Middle of the eyebrows (eyebrow/EB).
- 4) Side of the outer eye (side of the eye/SE).
- 5) Under the eye (under the eye/UE).
- 6) Under the nose (under the nose/UN).
- 7) Between the chin and the lower lip (chin/Ch).
- 8) At the junction of the collarbone, clavicle, and the first rib (collar bone/CB).
- 9) About 4 fingers below the armpit (under the armpit/UA)

b. Set up, tune in, tapping sequence, and repeat again, then role-playing activities

This activity was similar to the previous meeting, applying the set up, tune in, tapping sequence, and repeat techniques together again. However, before that, the counsellor asked counselees to engage in role-playing to test their public speaking skills. Simulating public speaking situations allowed counselees to confront situations they had previously avoided but in a safe and supportive environment. The counsellor randomly selected counselees to speak for one minute on an easy topic that had been prepared.

c. Reinforcement of set up, tune in, tapping sequence, repeat, and role-playing again

Similar to the previous meeting, the activities involved executing the set up, tune in, tapping sequence, and repeating again, but this time in a more open location to train the counselees' courage and confidence during public speaking. In this session, the counsellor allowed counselees to choose random topics, which their group members would present during the role-playing.

In each meeting, the researcher asked all students to fill out the Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) scale before and after conducting the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation to measure their anxiety levels while public speaking. The SUD scale was repeatedly filled out, both during group counselling and when students practised independently, to help the researcher assess the effectiveness of EFT in reducing anxiety.

Table 6. SUD Scale Results for Each Student Before and After EFT

Respondent	Mean Pretest Result	Mean Posttest Result	Gain Score
1	6.5	2.5	-4
2	4.8	1.2	-4.6
3	7.8	1.6	-6.2
4	7.6	3.4	-4.2
5	7.5	1.33	-6.17
6	5.16	0.83	-4.33
7	5.83	2.16	-3.67

Table 6. shows that *Respondent 3* experienced the most significant reduction in anxiety, with a gain score of 6.2, followed by *Respondent 5* with a gain score of 6.17. The other respondents also showed a significant decrease in anxiety, such as *Respondent 4* with a gain score of 4.2, *Respondent 6* with a gain score of 4.33, and *Respondent 1* with a gain score of 4. In contrast, *Respondent 7* and *Respondent 2* recorded lower gain scores of 3.67 and 3.6, respectively. Overall, all students exhibited a positive impact from the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation in reducing public speaking anxiety.

The researcher conducted hypothesis testing using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test to examine the impact of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

relaxation on reducing public speaking anxiety. The hypothesis in this study was whether EFT relaxation could influence the reduction of public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar City. Before determining the effect, the hypothesis was formulated as a null hypothesis (H_0): “There is no effect of public speaking anxiety levels among students at MAN 1 Makassar City before and after receiving Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation”. The testing criteria is to reject H_0 if the Asymp. Sig. ≤ 0.05 . The results of the Mann-Whitney U test regarding public speaking anxiety levels among students are presented below.

Table 10. Results of Mann-Whitney U Statistical Test

Group	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	7	5.07	7.500	-2.177	.029
Control	7	9.93			

Based on the data analysis using *SPSS 22 for Windows*, the experimental group has a lower mean rank (5.07) compared to the control group (9.93). This indicates that the anxiety levels in the experimental group, which received treatment with EFT relaxation, tended to be lower than those in the control group. The Mann-Whitney U value is 7.500 with a Z value of -2.177.

The significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.029, which is less than 0.05. This indicates a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in public speaking anxiety levels, thus the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Consequently, H_0 , which states “There is no effect of public speaking anxiety levels among students at MAN 1 Makassar City before and after receiving Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation,” is declared rejected, while H_1 , which states “Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation can influence the reduction of public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar City,” is declared accepted.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the more frequently students practice Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation, the lower their anxiety levels become during public speaking. This change is significantly evident between the experimental and control groups. These findings provide a consistent positive impact on students’ public speaking experiences.

This study demonstrates that the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), combined with relaxation and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), significantly reduces public speaking anxiety among students at MAN 1 Makassar City. Anxiety levels measured through the Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) scale dropped from high (average 8 and 7) to low (average 2 and 1) following the intervention. The hypothesis testing using the Mann-Whitney U test also confirmed a significant decrease in anxiety levels between the pretest and posttest. Behavioural observations revealed positive changes, including increased confidence, emotional control, and improved public speaking performance.

These findings underscore the effectiveness of EFT-based relaxation techniques in addressing public speaking anxiety in an educational context. By targeting both emotional and physical symptoms, EFT helps students shift from irrational beliefs to positive affirmations, ultimately boosting their self-confidence. This is particularly important in Islamic school settings, where public speaking skills are often necessary for various academic and religious activities. Furthermore, the integration of REBT principles reinforces the cognitive restructuring process, enabling students to view their anxiety more constructively.

The results align with previous studies by Oktaviani et al. (2021) and Susilo (2020), which reported EFT’s effectiveness in reducing anxiety. Additionally, the

findings support Craig's (2008) assertion that addressing negative self-perceptions through affirmations can alleviate communication apprehension. The rapid and lasting effects of EFT observed in this study mirror the findings of Dincer et al. (2022), who noted similar outcomes in anxiety management. Furthermore, the role-playing and simulations used in the intervention resonate with Carnegie's (2023) emphasis on consistent practice to enhance public speaking skills.

The findings are consistent with research by Maritza & Siregar (2024) and Erisma & Jannati (2023), which highlight the importance of combining cognitive-behavioural approaches like REBT with relaxation techniques to manage anxiety. The study expands on their work by demonstrating how EFT, when applied in group settings, provides additional social support, which fosters a safe environment for students to confront and manage their fears. This aligns with DeVito's (2019) theory that relaxation techniques are critical for improving emotional control during high-stress activities like public speaking.

While the positive outcomes suggest the effectiveness of EFT, other factors may have contributed to the results. The group counselling sessions themselves may have provided a sense of community and encouragement, reducing anxiety regardless of the specific technique used. Additionally, repeated exposure to public speaking through simulations might have desensitized students to their fears, independent of the EFT intervention.

This study provides a practical framework for addressing public speaking anxiety in high school students, particularly in Islamic school contexts. The findings highlight the importance of integrating evidence-based techniques like EFT with cognitive approaches to foster both emotional and behavioural improvements. Educators and counsellors can adopt similar interventions to help students develop confidence and communication skills, which are essential for academic and personal growth.

Despite its promising findings, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Second, the intervention was conducted over a short period, making it difficult to assess the long-term effects of EFT on public speaking anxiety. Third, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to bias. Lastly, cultural factors specific to Islamic school settings might have influenced the results, limiting their applicability to other contexts.

Future studies should explore the long-term effectiveness of EFT by conducting follow-up assessments several months after the intervention. Expanding the sample size and including participants from diverse educational settings would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, research could compare the effectiveness of EFT with other anxiety-reducing techniques, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) or mindfulness-based interventions, to identify the most effective approach for managing public speaking anxiety. Finally, investigating the role of cultural and environmental factors in shaping the effectiveness of EFT would provide valuable insights for tailoring interventions to specific populations.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study on the application of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) relaxation to reduce public speaking anxiety at MAN 1 Makassar, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the pretest showed high levels of anxiety in both the experimental and control groups. After five sessions of EFT in the experimental group and one deep breathing session in the control group, the posttest revealed a significant decrease in anxiety in the experimental group, while the control group's anxiety remained high or even increased. Second, the EFT relaxation process consists of six steps: preparation and problem identification, setup, tuning in, tapping sequence, repetition, and

role-playing. Finally, the application of EFT in group counselling at MAN 1 Makassar effectively reduced students' public speaking anxiety.

Based on the study's findings, further research should explore the long-term effects of EFT by conducting follow-ups months after the intervention. Expanding the sample size and including students from different schools would help generalize the results. Comparing EFT with other techniques, like CBT or mindfulness, could identify the most effective method for reducing public speaking anxiety. Lastly, studying how cultural and environmental factors, especially in Islamic schools, affect EFT's effectiveness would provide insights into tailoring interventions for different settings.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the faculty and staff of MAN 1 Kota Makassar for their support, as well as the students whose participation was essential to the study's success. Heartfelt thanks are extended to academic advisors at Universitas Negeri Makassar for their invaluable insights.

Author Contributions Statement

AW collected and analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript, incorporating relevant literature. NF provided guidance on the instruments used, and FA contributed to the findings and discussions to present a cohesive analysis.

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