# 'HIGH ACHIEVERS' USE OF SELF-TALK AS A STRATEGY IN SPEAKING

**Angela Nova Clarissa**

Universitas Negeri Surabaya
angelaclarissa@mhs.unesa.ac.id

## Abstrak

Berbicara di depan umum secara akademik adalah salah satu hal yang paling ditakuti oleh mahasiswa S1, terutama yang hendak menjadi guru bahasa Inggris. Untuk itu, peneliti telah menemukan beberapa strategi termasuk berdialog dengan diri sendiri yang dapat membantu siswa menjadi pembicara yang lebih baik. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami cara siswa berprestasi melakukan perbincangan pribadi saat mereka tampil di depan umum dan frekuensi perbincangan mereka. Menggunakan analisis data kualitatif dasar, penelitian ini menyelidiki jenis perbincangan pribadi yang digunakan siswa berprestasi dan reaksi mereka selama tampil di muka umum. Perbedaan penelitian ini dengan penelitian yang sudah ada terletak pada peserta, peneliti hanya berfokus kepada murid yang memiliki prestasi atau nilai di atas rata-rata. Peneliti dalam jurnal ini menggunakan skala dialog pribadi milik Brinthaupt sebagai dasar acuan teori dan menerapkannya untuk menentukan dialog pribadi yang digunakan oleh partisipan. Jumlah peserta dalam penelitian ini adalah empat mahasiswa yang memiliki nilai tinggi. Hasil dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa tidak ada dialog pribadi berupa kritik yang dipakai oleh para partisipan, sebaliknya, mereka menggunakan dialog pribadi berupa pengelolaan internal, dan seberapa sering dialog pribadi yang diungkapkan oleh para partisipan memberikan efek terhadap tingkat kegelisahan mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** siswa berprestasi, dialog pribadi, strategi, Academic Speaking.

## Abstract

Speaking in public for academic purposes is one of the most fear that undergraduate students suffer from, especially student teachers. For that case, researchers have proposed several strategies for public speaking including self-talk that could help students to be better speakers. The purpose of this study is to understand the way high-achiever students do self-talk for their speech performances and the frequency of their self-talk. Using basic qualitative data analysis, this study investigated which type of self-talk high-achiever students' use and their way to do their self-talk during speech performances. The research gap from existing studies is that this research elaborate focused participants, which only aimed to understand high achievers students. The researcher used the self-talk concept from Brinthaupt as the primary theory and utilized it to determine the participants' type of self-talk. The participants for this study were four high achiever undergraduate students. The result of this study was that all of the participants used self-management, there was no self-criticism found, and the frequency of the participants' self-talk affected their communication apprehensive.

**Keywords:** high achiever, self-talk, strategy, Academic Speaking.

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking in English for academic purposes is common, but the language structure and organization are different from English for daily needs. Since no one has the language for academic speaking as their first language, people need to be trained to master public speaking for academic purposes (Franks, 2018). He explains the requirements such as specialized vocabulary, precise grammar, and deemed pronunciation that makes academic speaking become a complex matter.

Because of those requirements, people usually face difficulties in the process of mastering academic speaking, especially for English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduate student who learn it formally as a learning subject in university. Academic speaking in

undergraduate courses has higher requirements (Franks, 2018), which would make the students have to work harder on their progress. It is not only the requirements that make academic speaking students face some difficulties but also other causes like the students' insufficiency of speaking practices, unclear instruction on the speaking matter, and/or negative self-image (Ferreira Marinho, 2015).

Academic speaking is directly linked to public speaking because of the similar performances, in which the speakers have to talk in front of the audience. Both have anxiety and nervousness problem along with the practices. Shi (2015) shows that there is a significant relation between self-talk and public speaking performances for undergraduate students. She finds out the relation between ones' self-talk frequencies and communication apprehension. She states that specific self-talk could help students to be focused and reduce their fear of public speaking significantly. Osorio also had done another study on self-talk and one's performances in 2013. They did experimental research on how self-talk (they call it self-statement) has an impact on one's public speaking test. He found that self-assessment of performance varied as a function of the different states of anxiety elicited by the experimental model, supporting the hypothesis that cognitive mechanisms, and especially negative cognitions, are associated with the etiology of both the fear of public speaking and social anxiety disorder (Osório, 2013).

There are several studies about self-talk as a strategy for students' performances including public speaking. The results from those studies confirm that there is a connection between self-talk and students' performances in the field including public speaking for academic purposes.

Hatzigeorgiadis in his article found that motivational self-talk strengthens one's self-confidence and reduces cognitive anxiety that resulting in better performances in physical education (Hatzigeorgiadis & Nikos Zourbanos, 2009). He even made further literature research about the effectiveness of self-talk and the attention on it worldwide and drew a conclusion that by understanding the mechanism of self-talk one can be more focused in the middle of distraction and fatigue (Galanis, 2017). Self-talk is denned as what people say to themselves, with particular emphasis on the words used to express thoughts and beliefs about oneself and the world to oneself (Burnett, 1996).

Some researchers in previous studies state that self-reinforcement and self-management are essential self-talk that provides someone with better speech performance outcomes (Brinthaupt, 2009). He states that self-talk is the condition when one is talking to him/herself in a specific event. That self-talks are social-assessment, self-reinforcement, self-management, and self-criticism. Students who use social-assessment tend to be imagining how others would think about them and replaying others' comments about them. Students who use self-reinforcement have a tendency to be proud of their accomplishments and be pleased with their effort. Students who implement self-management tend to give themselves plans for their stage show and figure out the things they should say and do. Students who bring about self-criticism lead to the act of discouraging and criticizing oneself behavior.

Students who frequently use self-criticism and social-assessment tend to have higher anxiety than the ones who do self-reinforcement and self-management. It proves that self-talk is significantly related to ones' performance (Shi, 2015). On the other hand, using self-reinforcement and self-management is expected to get a better academic speaking performance.

Using the theory, the researcher for this current study observed the type of self-talk that participants do and sought the way they implement it. In addition, she only focused on high-achiever students and looked for the words that the participants do to themselves without any interference from anyone. The researcher feels the urge to run this study because she aimed to get a deeper meaning from the self-talk that high-achievers do in order to help undergraduate students to choose the appropriate words to talk to themselves while facing public speaking anxiety.

Before Brinthaupt developed his self-talk scale, other researchers developed several self-talk scales. For example, Siegrist designed self-talk to reflect specific situations in which people talk to themselves about themselves like 'I talk over with myself personal problems' (Siegrist, 1995). Siegrist's self-talk scale only focused on how one did dysfunctional self-talk. Another example of the self-talk scale comes from Duncan and Cheyne; they created a 27-item measure of overt self-verbalizations that includes situations such as trying to remember a phone number or finding a misplaced item (Duncan, 1999). However, Duncan and Cheyne's self-talk is the type of aloud self-talk, covert self-talk that one possibly done does not count. It means that they only used

self-talk that has been done noticeably and ignore the silent ones.

Recent researchers, use positive and negative self-talk as their measurements. They differentiate positive from negative self-talk using Manning's measurements (Steeg, 2014). According to Manning, positive self-talks indicate optimism, encouragement, praise, or hope. While in the other hand, negative self-talks indicate pessimism, discouragement, insults, lack of hope, or despair (Manning, 1990).

A major emphasis of prior research has been directed to the important relationship between people's cognitive resources and speaking difficulties. Difficulties in public speaking are always in line with fear and anxiety during the speech. For example, researchers have investigated how speakers' public speaking anxiety experiences during the speech preparation and delivery stages are related to positive and negative thought content (Edwards, 2003). Past research suggests that excessive anxiety negatively affects people's normal ability to manage their experiences through cognitive processing. As Bishop explained, threat-related cognitions can overwhelm a person's ability to process experiences in non-threatening ways (Bishop, 2007). For example, A researcher found that fear of an audience's negative evaluations and predictions of poor performance are the two underlying cognitive factors that give rise to communication anxiety (Cho, 2004). In the current research, we propose that there are other research questions related to the cognitive aspects of public speaking anxiety that deserve attention.

This study aims to understand the types of self-talk which had been used by the students consciously. The researcher examined which type of self-talk and the way participants do their self-talk that could possibly affect the way they delivered their speech during Academic Speaking Class.

The objectives of this study were only focused on these aspects: (1) To identify the type of self-talk high achiever students use as their strategy; (2) To explain the way high achiever students with different dimensions of self-talk implement their self-talk inside the classroom.

The participants for this current study are high achiever English education undergraduate students because the purpose of this study was to understand the way high achiever students could manage their 'stage fright' or nervousness during academic speaking class. By understanding high achiever students' strategy, the result from this study could help students with speaking anxiety to use the same strategy as high achiever students and become better speakers.

## METHOD

This study aimed to investigate the types of self-talk applied by high achiever students in their Academic Speaking Class. Along with that, this research intended to get a deeper exploration of the way the participants implemented self-talk within their performances. For that reason, descriptive explanation using qualitative research is suitable to analyze and interpret the findings in a detailed study.

According to (Stake, Robert E., 2010), qualitative research involves the process of interpreting the collected data of qualitative research; the researcher intended to use basic qualitative/interpretive research as the research design. (Ary, 2006) Explains basic qualitative research focuses on describing phenomena or processes. Which identifies recurrent patterns or themes that can be based on a variety of disciplinary lenses using various data collection techniques.

This study was held at an academic speaking class in one of the state universities in Surabaya as the research participants. The participants were students with high achievement that met the researcher's requirements to define the term. Those students are the ones who got a minimum A- in their previous speaking class, which is public speaking, and 3.75 in their GPA. The participants had to be students who currently learn academic speaking because they were having the matter that the researcher is longing to know.

All participants also enrolled in the same lecturer in academic speaking classes that made them experience the same classroom activities. There were two classes of academic speaking with the same lecturer. Each class had two people who met the participant's criteria needed for this study. In addition, there were proximally four people who met the criteria.

The researcher used two techniques, those were observation and interview to collect data needed for this study. Those data contained information about the type of self-talk, which was implemented by the participants within their academic speaking performances. The major instrument in qualitative research is the researcher herself. It means that the researcher herself was the one who had the role to collect, observe, analyze, and interpret the data.

In order to answer both research questions, there were two techniques those are interviews and observations. The first technique, which was an interview, was held after the class of the last day of observation had conducted which was on March 23, 2019. The interview was done after their performances in order to help the participants remember their self-talk. The researcher used interview guidelines to get the information, explanation, ideas, opinion, and so forth.

The other technique, which was an observation, was conducted in academic speaking class during participants' performances. Observing means that the researcher gathers some information through direct seeing, hearing, and feeling (Stake, Robert E., 2010). The researcher observed the process of participants' performances with a non-participatory observation which means that the researcher do nothing to interference with the participants' activities. This observation was conducted three times for each participant following their academic speaking class schedule. The observation was only held three times due to limited opportunity for the subject to perform their speech in public, as a result of the strict class schedule, each participant only had three chances to do the performances. During the observation, the researcher observed the participants' body language, performances, and overall overview to confirm the participants' performances result while using their self-talk.

There were four instruments equipped those techniques, such as:

1. Interview Guidelines

There remained four categories in the self-talk scale by Brintaupt, those are social-assessment, self-reinforcement, self-management, and self-criticism. The guidelines that were used to collect data from participants' explanations were open-ended questions concerning their self-talk routine.

2. Field Note

During the classroom observation, the researcher wrote down all the important things that contribute to the participants' performances. The important things meant by the researcher are the description of the situation during academic speaking performances, participants' body language (including body movement, posture, and gestures), and overall performance overview. This field note was applied to confirm the participants' interview results for both research questions.

3. Video Recording

In order to help the researcher understand and managed to see the whole point of the participants' speech deliveries, the researcher record the participants' performances during academic speaking class. The video could be re-watched so that it helped the researcher to see the performances in detail and lessen the number of missing information during class observation.

4. Audio Recording

During the interview, the researcher was focused on the participants' answers and the proper questions to seek deeper explanations only. Due to the situation, the researcher decided to record the audio so that she could listen to the interview as much as needed to gather the overall information for the study.

Ary in his book explains three steps of data analysis technique for qualitative, those are familiarizing and organizing, coding and reduction, interpreting, and representing (Ary, 2006). Familiarizing and organizing aimed to help the researcher to recall and be immersed in the data. The researcher wrote the transcriptions directly without changing any information to avoid bias during the analysis. The researcher also gave notes that provide the participant's body language details (e.g., posture and hesitations). The researcher read and reread the notes and transcripts that she got from observation and interview. She also watched and re-watch videotapes, and listen to the audiotapes repeatedly. After being immersed in the data, those data must be set into the form ready for analysis.

Coding and reduction is the second step of analyzing data. The researcher made codes based on themes or categories that appeared in the data transcription (e.g., afraid of comments and avoiding critics from the audience are included in 'self-criticism'). Coding helped the researcher to distinguish or find similarities in the results. The codes were classified into a table containing several columns, which contained identifications and matched data from the result. The names that were used for coding were appropriate and taken from the results' keywords. Along with that, the researcher also did some reductions to minimize the codes by reducing repeated or irrelevant words.

The last step was interpreting and representing the findings. The researcher described the categories by giving explanations and illustrations. The interpretation was used to explain the answer to the first and second research questions. All data gathered were used to get a deeper understanding of the issues. It was written in

accordance with the researcher's knowledge, perspective, and theoretical orientation, which are associated with the research findings. Furthermore, the researcher represented the interpretations of the types and ways high achiever students using their self-talk during academic speaking were written and supported by the data in the form of words.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study is an interpretation of the participants' interview answers. The findings from observation were also important to examine the participants' stage delivery and establish further description on the connection between students' type of self-talk and their stage performances.

### Type of High Achiever Self-Talk

The answer to the first research question is that each participant has a different type of self-talk from one another. Student 1 was more into self-management and social assessment. It is shown in her interview.

| Turn 8 | Student 1: | *...meyakinkan diri sendiri gitu, ga apa-apa, kalem-kalem...* |
|---|---|---|

She said that she ensure herself to be calm that everything will be okay, this is in accordance with the self-talk scale. Brinthaupt (2009) explains that the action of reminding oneself to do the thing they need to do is one factor from self-management. In this case, Student 1 kept reminding herself to be calm and make sure that she could handle the situation.

Another self-talk from student 1 is social assessment. During the interview with Student 1, the researcher found two answers that elaborate her social assessment in turn 10 and turn 28.

| Turn 10. | Student 1: | *Takut ada positif response dari orang-orang gitu. Negative maksudnya* |
|---|---|---|
| Turn 28. | Student 1: | *Ya kayak 'kamu itu seharusnya lebih prepared sebelumnya', saya takut kalau digituin sama dosen.* |

One kind of factor that shows social assessment is imagining the way other people would respond to things one said or done (Brinthaupt, 2009). Student 1 showed her fear towards others negative responses, her classmates and lecturer, on her speech performances.

As the effect of her social assessment, Student 1 was suffering from nervousness or stage fright. It was confirmed from these interview results.

| Turn 2. | Student 1: | *Enjoy speak in public? Hmm, I don't think so. I feel like,when I want to speaking in public, I feel like unconfident.* |
|---|---|---|
| Turn 4. | Student 1: | *Kurang percaya diri, terus kadang grogi gitu kalau speak in public. Harus ada dorongan yang kuat.* |

In her statements, Student 1 said several times about her feeling towards speaking in public. She was not enjoying the time she had during the academic speaking class and was feeling low about her performance. Those facts were confirmed by her academic speaking class performances. During Student 1's performances, she kept moving her hands and legs. She also stutter when some audience asked something to her right after her speech in front of the class, sometimes even forgetting the words she was just about to say. The thing that helped her to become a high achiever was probably because of her effort in it, she was well prepared. She took notes of everything that she should say and her PowerPoint was so simple and understandable for something that is considered as complex like academic journals. She also practices a lot to make her capable of explaining things to the audience without looking at her notes and slides repeatedly.

Another participant, called Student 2, used social-assessment, self-management, and self-reinforcement.

| Turn 4 | Student 2: | I'm picturing myself as another person and I usually really.. Hmm *kalau ngomong itu aku bener-bener menganggap diriku itu orang lain jadi kayak 'Iya nggak sih, ini bener gitu gak sih?', 'oh iya ini bener gitu' jadi bener-bener ada percakapan antara diriku sama pikiran, gitu.* |
|---|---|---|

A different self-management factor from the self-talk scale is mentally exploring a possible development of action. From the answer above, Student 2 explained that she imagined herself as somebody else and explored every possibility she could think of. In her answer below, she talks about another self-talk.

| Turn 22 | Student 2: | *... Kalau setelah performance gitu ya, aku* |
|---|---|---|

*puas dengan performanceku barusan, self-esteem ku lagi tinggi, terus ada yang bilang gini gini gini, ya maklumlah ada kesalahan kecil…*

One of the self-reinforcement factors from the self-talk scale is feeling proud of something one has done. Student 2 felt good about her performance and was proud of it, she was capable of not thinking about the small mistakes that happened during her speech.

Student 2 also did a social assessment of herself about her speech performances. She said …*aku takut dapat penilaian buruk*…(Student 2, turn 48), in that case, she explained the way she became anxious about how somebody else negative judgments towards her performances.

Turn 48.    Student 2    *Mereka melihat kan pasti menilai kan men-judge gitu, aku takut dapat penilaian buruk gitu, aku takut hasil yang ku berikan itu kurang maksimal, gitu.*

Another factor from Student 2 for having stage fright was because she had her thoughts regarding academic speaking. In her statement, she told the researcher that she did not like academic speaking because of the lecturer. She said that she does not fully understand the idea was given by her lecturer. Marinho (2015) stated that one factor that could be affecting one's academic speaking is unclear instruction. The point that the lecturer's instruction made Student 2 have difficulties in the class affecting her careless preparation. She kept reading her notes and avoid explaining the charts that she put on her slides.

From the interview below, she also stated that academic speaking was not her favorite class and she suffered from stage fright in most classroom presentations besides academic speaking.

Turn 6.    Student 2:    *Hmm kurang suka*

Turn 14.    Student 2:    *hmm yaa.. hampir di semua presentasi itu kan pasti gugup, pasti ada kayak badan keringetan dan sebagainya. Aku biasanya nenangin diri aja, minum, yaa self talk ke diriku sendiri kayak 'tenang tenang tenang, bisa kok, lancer kok, gak usah tegang, gak usah*

*buru-buru ngomongnya, kamu sudah latihan kok, kamu bisa' gitu aja.*

On the other hand, Student 3 and Student 4 did not show any stage fright. Student 3 even felt motivated by the fact that she was at the highest ESC level in her class.

Turn 46    Student 3:    …in my class I'm in the highest level of ESC, so I have to more talkative than others, not like passive student

According to the self-talk scale, people who implement self-reinforcement would feel happy for themselves. In this case, Student 3 was feeling happy for herself and proud of it. She used her achievement to motivate herself to be a better Student.

Even though they were not severely suffering from stage fright, Student 3 still gets some nervousness when she had to talk about something she does not fully understand in public like impromptu public speaking. She stated, '*Kalau aku punya bakat disitu, misalnya media pembelajaran, aku punya ability disitu, nah aku performancenya meskipun di public itu gak nervous. Nah seumpama tentang politic, kan aku gak ngerti, nah itu baru nervous.*' (Student 3, turn 4)

From the researcher's field notes data, the way Student 3 prepared her material for academic speaking was proper. She wrote some important points of her materials and understood the explanation. She even delivered her speech with slides full of pictures to support her materials. Student 3 was not trembling or showing any sign of nervousness, she was playing with her neither pen nor hands. When the audience and lecturer ask some questions, she could answer in a thorough explanation.

Different results were found from the interview with Student 4. He only used one type of self-talk, which is self-management. Along with that, he mentioned that he enjoy speaking in public and liked to be the first one who performed to avoid stage fright.

Turn 4    Student 4:    Yes of course, I love public speaking.

Turn 30    Student 4:    …I tell myself 'the sooner the better' and I always ask to my lecturer to perform first.

There was not much information about his self-talk besides self-management because he insisted that all he did was pray and call his mom to support him. This situation requires further research to get a deeper

understanding of the way other's supportive utterances affect one's performances.

The data from field notes also supported Student 4's statements. He did not show any signal of nervousness and made well-designed slides, he even got dressed for his speech performance. Even in some parts of speech, he still looked at his notes and read rather than memorizing, he could answer all questions given by the audience in a brief explanation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, high achiever students in this study used self-reinforcement, self-management, and social assessment. According to Shi (2015), high achiever students have a tendency to use self-management self-talk and is shown in all four participants' interview results (Speaker 1 with self-management and social assessment, speaker 2 with self-management, self-reinforcement, and social assessment, speaker 3 with self-reinforcement and self-management, and speaker 4 with only self-management). They implemented self-management as their strategy to overcome stage fright and cope with academic speaking anxiety. On the other hand, high achiever students used no self-criticism. As the previous studies discovered, students with self-criticism lead to one's anxiety and nervousness, and no high achiever students in this study ever mention it. Further research is needed to understand the reason why high achiever students do not use self-criticism.

In addition, the result from the second research question was one's specific self-talk implementation could affect one's communication apprehension. The closer the implementation of self-talk to the upcoming speaking performances, the better it would affect one's academic speaking performances. Most high achiever students in this current study tend to try to finish the academic presentation as fast as they could or do it as the first speaker so they do not experience intense stage fright.

### Suggestion

This current study was only focusing on the literal aspect of self-talk from high achiever students without investigating deeper on the cognitive aspect. In addition, further study is needed to interpret the reason why high achievers do not use self-criticism in their self-talk. There was also no distinctive explanation on high and low achievers' self-talk that could give a better understanding to motivate students to use the suitable self-talk during

academic speaking. These result gaps could be an idea for future researchers to seek and get a deeper explanation about ones' self-talk for students in different levels and competence. More studies in the future had better explore more about the use of self-talk by using a different concept of self-talk.

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