



Implementing The Stop Technique (Stop, Take A Deep Breath, Observe, Proceed) As A Cognitive Pause Strategy In Senior High School English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: This study aims to examine the implementation of the STOP Technique (Stop, Take a Deep Breath, Observe, Proceed) as a form of brain break in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, while also exploring how students make sense of their experience with the technique. The study is grounded in the common difficulty teachers face in sustaining students' concentration and readiness to learn throughout extended lessons. A qualitative case study approach was employed in a tenth-grade class at a senior high school in Subang, involving 45 students, four of whom were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to capture varying levels of learning engagement. Data were gathered through classroom observation sheets, field notes, semi-structured interviews with students and an external observer, and a review of the lesson plan document, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The results indicate that, at the procedural level, the STOP Technique was carried out accurately and consistently across both meetings, supported by a high degree of agreement among all data sources. Nevertheless, its effects on participation, attention, classroom atmosphere, engagement, and teacher-student interaction were unevenly distributed, with students seated in the front and middle rows showing greater involvement than those seated at the back. A notable gap also emerged between direct observational data, which portrayed a more critical picture, and recall-based interview data, which tended to convey a more favorable impression. These findings suggest that the STOP Technique functions effectively as a calming pause at the procedural level, but its capacity to produce class-wide behavioral change depends heavily on students' initial engagement and physical proximity to the teacher, indicating a need to combine it with broader classroom management strategies for its benefits to reach all students equally.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become one of the essential skills required across many fields, from education and technology to global communication, prompting many countries to make it a compulsory school subject. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, most learning takes place through formal classroom instruction, given students' limited exposure to the target language in daily life (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Brown, 2002). This condition requires teachers to act not only as instructors but also as facilitators and classroom managers who can build a meaningful learning environment that keeps students actively engaged (Sundari, 2017).



One of the most persistent challenges in EFL teaching is sustaining students' focus and motivation, particularly during long lessons. Prolonged instructional time often leads to fatigue and reduced concentration, which in turn can lower participation and hinder the achievement of learning objectives (Rahmat, 2018). One approach gaining increasing attention as a response to this issue is the brain break, a short pause embedded within a lesson to refresh students' minds and restore their readiness to continue learning. Among the various forms of brain break, the STOP Technique (Stop, Take a Deep Breath, Observe, Proceed) has drawn particular interest for integrating mindfulness principles into a simple classroom practice. Liao et al. (2020) describe the STOP Technique as a mindfulness-based practice that encourages individuals to pause, take a deep breath, observe their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, and then resume their activity with greater awareness and self-control.

The researcher's interest in this topic originated from direct experience during an Independent Study (pre-internship) at a senior high school in Subang, conducted as part of the Merdeka Belajar program. During this activity, the researcher observed a teacher applying the STOP Technique in the middle of an English lesson when students began showing signs of fatigue and declining concentration. This simple intervention appeared to help students settle down, regain their attention, and participate more actively in the subsequent activities. This experience motivated the researcher to examine more closely how the STOP Technique functions as a brain break in English as a Foreign Language learning.

Based on this background, several problems can be identified: students often struggle to maintain focus during English lessons, some students remain insufficiently engaged in classroom activities, teachers need practical strategies to help students regain attention and concentration, and the application of the STOP Technique as a brain break specifically within EFL classrooms remains under-researched. This study is limited to examining the STOP Technique on its own, without comparing it to other teaching strategies, and was conducted in a single senior high school class in Subang, so the findings are not intended to be generalized across all learning contexts. Based on this scope, the study addresses two research questions: how is the STOP Technique implemented in the EFL classroom, and what are students' perceptions of using the STOP Technique as a form of brain break during English lessons? Accordingly, this study aims to describe the implementation of the STOP Technique in the EFL classroom and to explore students' perceptions of its use in helping them regain focus and learning motivation. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on mindfulness-based practices and brain-break strategies in English language teaching, while offering practical benefit to students, teachers, and future researchers interested in extending the application of the STOP Technique to broader educational contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning differs from Second Language (ESL) learning in that most exposure to English occurs within the formal classroom rather than in daily life (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). This requires teachers to design meaningful learning experiences that keep students motivated despite their limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom (Hasanuddin, 2014). Beyond delivering instruction, EFL teachers are expected to act as facilitators and classroom managers who build an interactive and supportive learning environment, helping students overcome challenges such as limited vocabulary, scarce learning resources, and declining motivation (Sundari, 2017).

One strategy that has gained attention in addressing declining student focus is the brain break: a short pause involving light movement, stretching, breathing exercises, or relaxation, intended to refresh students' minds and restore their readiness to continue learning (Waal, 2020; Donner, 2013). Brain breaks are generally classified into two types: energizing brain breaks, which emphasize physical activity to boost students' energy and alertness, and calming brain breaks, which emphasize relaxation, breathing, and mindfulness to help students reach a calmer state (NSW Department of Education, 2024). Given its characteristics, the STOP Technique is best categorized as a calming brain break, since it focuses on emotional regulation and self-awareness rather than physical activity.

The theoretical foundation of the STOP Technique lies in the concept of mindfulness, defined as the ability to intentionally direct attention to the present moment without judging what is being experienced (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Brown and Ryan (2003) add that mindfulness is not merely a relaxation technique but a psychological state that makes individuals more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In an educational context, mindfulness practice is considered to help students develop attention regulation, emotional regulation, resilience, and active engagement during learning (Saltzman, 2012).

The STOP Technique consists of four interrelated stages. In the Stop stage, students pause whatever activity they are engaged in and settle into a comfortable sitting position. In the Take a Deep Breath stage, students inhale and exhale slowly to ease tension. In the Observe stage, students are guided to notice the state of their body, thoughts, and feelings. In the Proceed stage, students resume their learning activity with greater awareness and self-control.



(Soetrisno, 2023; Arsa et al., 2024). Consistent application of these four stages has been reported to help students manage their emotions, build healthier social relationships, develop problem-solving skills, and reduce potential conflict in the classroom (Prasida, 2023).

Several prior studies have examined the application of the STOP Technique in educational settings. Maryani et al. (2024) found that the STOP Technique helped junior high school students better recognize and manage their emotions, although the study was limited by its small sample size and the absence of a comparison group. Similarly, Lubis et al. (2024) reported that repeated application of the STOP Technique gradually improved students' learning readiness, though this study, too, was confined to a single class without a control group. Both studies tend to focus on the effectiveness of the STOP Technique in terms of learning outcomes and behavioral change, while paying limited attention to how students themselves perceive and experience the technique—particularly within an EFL context. This gap motivates the present study, which not only examines the implementation of the STOP Technique but also explores students' perceptions through in-depth interviews, situating the inquiry within the relatively unexplored context of EFL classrooms.

Student perception itself is understood as the way students interpret and make sense of their classroom experiences, including their interactions with teachers, instructional practices, learning tasks, and classroom atmosphere (Meece, 1992). These perceptions, in turn, shape students' motivation, engagement, and self-regulation. Understanding student perception is therefore essential to complement direct observational data, offering a more comprehensive picture of how this strategy is experienced by the students themselves.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting (Sugiyono, 2023). The research was conducted in a tenth-grade class at a senior high school in Subang Regency, involving 45 students consisting of 18 male students (40%) and 27 female students (60%). Of these, four students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews, chosen to represent varying levels of attention and classroom engagement. The researcher assumed a dual role as teacher-researcher, delivering the lessons while simultaneously collecting data on the implementation of the STOP Technique.

Data were collected through five main techniques: classroom observation sheets, field notes, semi-structured interviews with students and an external observer, a review of the lesson plan document, and activity documentation. The observation sheet was designed to capture six aspects: the implementation process of the STOP Technique, student participation, student attention and learning readiness, classroom atmosphere, student learning engagement, and teacher–student interaction. The same instrument was used both by the teacher-researcher across both meetings and by the external observer, who was present only at the second meeting, enabling data triangulation. Separate interview guides were developed for students and the observer: the student guide explored their perceptions of the STOP Technique, while the observer guide sought the observer's overall evaluation of the implementation process. Field notes were divided into descriptive notes, which recorded events objectively, and reflective notes, which captured the researcher's interpretations and impressions—a distinction intended to preserve the objectivity of the data given the researcher's dual role as both teacher and observer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The study was initially planned to run across four class meetings; however, due to time constraints arising from co-curricular activities at the school, only two meetings were permitted for classroom implementation. Two additional sessions outside regular class hours were then used to interview the external observer and the selected student representatives, after all classroom activities had concluded. Because the interviews were conducted after both meetings using general, non-meeting-specific questions, the interview data in this study are presented as reflecting "Meetings 1 & 2" collectively rather than as data tied to a single session.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising three main stages. During data condensation, the researcher transcribed the interviews, reviewed the observation sheets and field notes, and coded relevant units of information before grouping them into categories and themes aligned with the six research aspects. During data display, findings were organized into triangulation tables and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation and cross-source comparison. During conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher repeatedly compared findings across the five data sources to ensure that the conclusions were supported by sufficient evidence. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility (through data triangulation and member checking), transferability (through a detailed description of the research context), dependability (through systematic documentation of the research procedure), and confirmability (through repeated cross-source verification of the findings).



4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted across two meetings in a tenth-grade class. The first meeting covered the topic of Announcement Text, during which the STOP Technique was applied twice: once in the middle of the lesson when several students began showing signs of declining attention, and again at the end of the lesson as a closing reflection. The second meeting continued the same topic through group presentations themed "Maintaining Classroom Cleanliness," with the STOP Technique again applied twice—once when the classroom grew less conducive as students waited for their turn to present, and once at the close of the lesson. The findings below are organized around the six aspects examined.

Implementation Process of the STOP Technique

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Very good	Very good
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good
Field notes	All stages were followed correctly with no technical difficulties	Same as Meeting 1
Student interviews	All students reported following every stage	Same as Meeting 1
Observer interview	—	The stages were presented sequentially and clearly

Across both meetings, the STOP Technique was applied consistently through its four stages. All data sources confirmed that the implementation itself proceeded smoothly without notable technical obstacles, as reflected in the field notes, which recorded that the STOP stages were carried out according to procedure without difficulty on the researcher's part. This was corroborated by the students interviewed, one of whom reported having followed all of the teacher's instructions closely, as well as by the external observer, who judged that the four stages were presented clearly and in the correct order. This indicator showed the strongest agreement among all data sources, consistent with the STOP Technique framework described by Soetrismo (2023) and Arsa et al. (2024), which treats the four stages as a coherent, interdependent sequence rather than as isolated activities.

Student Participation in Learning Activities

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Adequate	Adequate
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good
Field notes	Only a small number of students genuinely followed the STOP instructions	Same pattern; back-row students continued chatting with deskmates
Student interviews	All students self-reported following the stages	Same pattern
Observer interview	—	Participation described as "quite good," though engagement varied among students

The same pattern emerged at both meetings: only students seated in the front and middle rows consistently followed the STOP directions earnestly, while students in the back rows were repeatedly seen chatting and laughing with classmates instead. This pattern, however, was far less visible in the recall-based data; all four interviewed students reported following the directions well, and the external observer described overall participation as fairly good. This uneven engagement can be understood through the concept of mindfulness itself, which Kabat-Zinn (2003) and Brown and Ryan (2003) describe as requiring a deliberate, self-directed effort to attend to the present moment—an effort that, evidently, was not present uniformly across the class.

Student Attention and Learning Readiness

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Adequate	Adequate
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good
Field notes	Readiness was uneven; only actively engaged students showed change	Same pattern

Student interviews	All students reported feeling more focused/ready	Same pattern
Observer interview	—	Students appeared calmer, with less chatting

Students who engaged earnestly with the STOP Technique appeared calmer and more prepared to continue the lesson at both meetings. One student explained that the technique genuinely helped them feel more focused and calm, and more eager to continue the lesson. However, the teacher-researcher's field notes noted that most other students showed no marked change in attention. This partial improvement aligns in part with Lubis et al. (2024), who reported gradual gains in learning readiness after repeated application; in this study, however, the improvement remained concentrated among students who were already engaged, suggesting that a longer implementation period may be needed for the effect to be felt more broadly.

Classroom Learning Atmosphere

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Adequate	Adequate
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good
Field notes	The front of the class was calmer; the back rows remained noisy	Same pattern
Student interviews	All students reported significant, positive change	Same pattern
Observer interview	—	The atmosphere was described as calmer and more conducive

This indicator showed the widest gap between data sources. The teacher-researcher's field notes consistently noted that the front of the classroom grew relatively quiet after the STOP Technique, while the back rows remained filled with chatter and laughter, meaning a fully calm and conducive atmosphere was not achieved. By contrast, all four interviewed students described the change in classroom atmosphere as significant, and the external observer even called it the most noticeable change following the technique's implementation. This discrepancy suggests that while the classroom atmosphere did improve to some degree, the improvement was not felt equally by all students, in line with Weslake et al.'s (2015) recommendation that teachers vary their brain-break strategies according to classroom needs rather than relying on a single, uniform approach.

Student Learning Engagement

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Adequate	Adequate
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good
Field notes	No significant increase in engagement	Same pattern
Student interviews	All students reported becoming more active	Same pattern
Observer interview	—	Improvement noted, especially among previously passive students

Field notes from both meetings indicated that student engagement did not increase significantly following the STOP Technique, with already-active students remaining active and less-engaged students—particularly those seated at the back—remaining passive. This contrasted with the interview data, in which all four students reported increased confidence in answering questions and participating in discussions. This discrepancy can be explained through Meece's (1992) view that students respond to classroom conditions based on how they personally interpret their experience rather than on the conditions as they objectively occur; students who found the STOP Technique personally meaningful likely reported greater engagement regardless of whether this was consistently observable—a limitation also noted by Maryani et al. (2024) regarding the self-reported nature of such findings.

Teacher–Student Interaction During the Learning Process

Data Source	Meeting 1	Meeting 2
Observation sheet (teacher-researcher)	Adequate	Adequate
Observation sheet (observer)	—	Good



Field notes	Positive interactions, especially with cooperative students	Same pattern
Student interviews	All students reported positive, comfortable interactions	Same pattern
Observer interview	—	Interactions described as effective and well directed

Positive interactions between the teacher-researcher and students were most evident among students who were cooperative from the outset, such as those who answered reflection questions after each STOP session. One student noted that the interaction with the teacher went smoothly because instructions were explained clearly and were easy to understand. Interactions with less engaged students at the back of the room were comparatively limited, typically consisting of gentle prompts to refocus their attention. These findings reflect the broader classroom management challenges described by Sundari (2017), who argues that EFL teachers must act not only as instructors but also as facilitators and classroom managers to reach less engaged students.

Summary of Findings

A consistent pattern emerged across the six indicators examined. Indicator 1 showed strong agreement across all data sources, confirming that the STOP Technique was implemented correctly according to procedure. Indicators 2 through 6, however, revealed recurring discrepancies: direct observation data consistently showed an uneven effect concentrated among students in the front and middle rows, while students in the back rows remained relatively disengaged throughout both meetings. Data obtained through recall—student and observer interviews—consistently presented a more favorable picture.

These findings suggest that although the STOP Technique was implemented correctly at the procedural level, its effects on student participation, attention, classroom atmosphere, engagement, and teacher–student interaction remained uneven, particularly among students seated farther from the teacher's direct supervision. This is consistent with the technique's function as a calming pause for the brain grounded in the principle of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Barker, 2021). Translating this procedure into consistent, class-wide behavioral and emotional outcomes, however, proved more difficult within the constraints of an EFL classroom—supporting Sundari's (2017) view that sustaining student engagement requires broader classroom management efforts rather than a single strategy delivered uniformly from the front of the class. The discrepancy between observational data and students' self-report data further underscores the importance of examining students' perspectives (Meece, 1992) alongside direct observation, as the two sources capture different yet complementary dimensions of how the STOP Technique was experienced.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the STOP Technique (Stop, Take a Deep Breath, Observe, Proceed) in an English as a Foreign Language classroom, focusing on six aspects: the implementation process, student participation, student attention and learning readiness, classroom atmosphere, learning engagement, and teacher–student interaction. The findings show that the STOP Technique was implemented correctly and consistently across its four stages at both meetings, with no technical difficulties reported from any data source—this indicator marked the strongest point of agreement among all data sources. However, its effects on participation, attention, classroom atmosphere, engagement, and teacher–student interaction were uneven; only students in the front and middle rows were consistently and actively engaged, while students in the back rows remained relatively disengaged across both meetings. A notable discrepancy also emerged between direct observational data, which was more critical, and recall-based interview data, which conveyed a considerably more favorable impression—likely due to the general nature of the interview questions and the possibility that students willing to be interviewed were already more engaged from the start.

Overall, this study concludes that the STOP Technique can be applied effectively at the procedural level in the EFL classroom, but its benefits for students' behavior and emotions are not always evenly distributed. Its success appears closely tied to students' initial level of engagement and their physical proximity to the teacher, rather than functioning as a uniform intervention for all students. This conclusion should be read in light of several limitations: only two of the four originally planned meetings were carried out; the external observer was present only at the second meeting; and interview data were collected after all meetings had concluded using general rather than meeting-specific questions.

Based on these conclusions, English teachers intending to apply the STOP Technique are advised to pair it with more active classroom management practices—for instance, circulating around the room while giving instructions and offering brief prompts or eye contact to less engaged students during the Observe stage—and to apply it consistently over a longer period so that students become familiar with its purpose and benefits. Schools are encouraged to support



the regular integration of mindfulness-based strategies such as the STOP Technique into daily classroom practice, for example through brief teacher training on guiding mindfulness activities more inclusively. Future researchers are advised to apply the STOP Technique over a longer period, involve an external observer at every meeting, and design interview questions specific to each session, so that recall-based data can be compared more accurately with direct observational data.

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