

STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN COPING WITH SPEAKING ANXIETY: AN INVESTIGATION OF INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Speaking Anxiety is one of the most significant challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where English is rarely used in daily communication. While numerous studies have examined the causes and the effects of speaking anxiety, limited research has focused on exploring learners' lived experiences and their coping strategies, especially in the Indonesian EFL Context. This study aims to review and synthesize previous studies on speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners, with a particular focus on their coping strategies. This study employs literature review using articles, relevant literature, and previous research on speaking anxiety and coping strategies. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is influenced by several factors, including fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and the classroom environment. To cope with this anxiety, learners tend to use five main strategies: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and avoidance or compensation strategies. Among these, affective and social strategies play a particularly important role in helping learners feel more confident and comfortable when speaking. This study highlights the importance of understanding learners' experiences and promoting effective coping strategies in language learning. It also emphasizes the need for supportive classroom environments that encourage students to practice speaking without fear, helping them gradually overcome anxiety and improve their communication skills.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, coping strategies, EFL learners, literature review, Indonesian context.

1) INTRODUCTION

Communication skills have become an essential requirement in the era of globalization, particularly in the context of English as an international language used across education, business, and technology (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Fang, 2021). Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most crucial because it enables direct and spontaneous interaction in real-life communication (Brown, 2004).

Paper presented at The 5th ICONELE on April 16th-17th, 2026 English
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Consequently, mastering English speaking skills is increasingly important for achieving academic and professional success (Galloway & Numajiri, 2020; Nguyen & Hamid, 2022).

However, many EFL learners still encounter difficulties in developing speaking proficiency, especially in contexts where English exposure is limited, such as in Indonesia. This lack of exposure often leads to low confidence and speaking anxiety, particularly in formal situations like presentations or classroom discussions. Learners frequently feel nervous and afraid of making mistakes, which can hinder their participation and overall speaking performance (Franceschini et al., 2020). Recent studies also indicate that many students feel nervous, shy, and afraid of making mistakes which negatively affects their participation and learning performance (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021)

Speaking anxiety is commonly associated with fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and limited linguistic competence. In addition, classroom environments that emphasize accuracy over fluency or lack supportive interaction may further intensify learners' anxiety (Kurniasari, 2023). As a result, anxious learners tend to avoid speaking opportunities and experience difficulties in oral communication.

Previous studies have consistently shown that speaking anxiety negatively affects learners' confidence, participation, and performance, as well as their willingness to communicate (Koçali & Aşık, 2025). However, most research has primarily focused on identifying the causes or measuring the level of anxiety, while limited attention has been given to how learners actively cope with it, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. In reality, learners employ various strategies, such as practicing speaking, regulating emotions, and seeking social support, to manage anxiety and sustain communication (Muhibbah & Amalia, 2025) Therefore, a deeper understanding of these coping strategies is necessary to support more effective and learner-centered teaching practices.

Based on this gap, this study aims to synthesize recent findings on speaking anxiety and to explore the coping strategies used by EFL learners in Indonesia. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions: (1) What are the main factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among EFL learners? (2) What strategies do learners use to cope with speaking anxiety?

and (3) How do these strategies affect learners' speaking performance? This study is expected to contribute to the development of theoretical perspectives on speaking anxiety and to provide practical implications for improving English language teaching.

Literature Review

Speaking Anxiety in EFL Context

Speaking anxiety is widely recognized as one of the most significant affective factors influencing language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It refers to feelings of nervousness, fear, and apprehension that arise when learners are required to communicate orally in a foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety consists of three main components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Among these, communication apprehension is especially relevant to speaking activities, as it directly affects learners' willingness and ability to engage in oral communication.

In EFL contexts, speaking anxiety is often intensified due to limited opportunities for authentic language use. Learners may possess adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; however, they frequently experience difficulty expressing their ideas orally because of psychological barriers (Tekin & Kaya, 2026). This condition indicates that speaking anxiety is not solely a linguistic issue, but also a complex psychological phenomenon that involves emotional and cognitive dimensions. Consequently, understanding speaking anxiety requires not only a focus on language proficiency but also attention to learners' emotional experiences in the learning process.

Factors Influencing Speaking Anxiety

A growing body of research has identified several interrelated factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among EFL learners. One of the most prominent factors is fear of negative evaluation, where learners are concerned about being judged by teachers or peers. This fear often leads to hesitation and avoidance of speaking tasks, as students try to minimize the risk of making mistakes (Kurniasari, 2023). Another important factor is lack of self-confidence.

Learners who perceive their language ability as inadequate tend to doubt their competence, even when they possess sufficient knowledge. This self-doubt reduces their willingness to participate in speaking activities and increases anxiety levels (Chong et al., 2025).

Limited vocabulary also plays a significant role in shaping speaking anxiety. When learners struggle to retrieve appropriate words during real-time communication, their cognitive load increases, resulting in disrupted fluency and heightened anxiety (Truong & Nguyen, 2023)

In addition, the classroom environment significantly influences learners' anxiety. A supportive and interactive learning atmosphere can reduce anxiety by fostering a sense of safety, while a rigid or overly evaluative classroom environment may intensify anxiety and discourage participation (Afidawati & Arrasyid, 2024)

These factors are interconnected and collectively contribute to the complexity of speaking anxiety, highlighting that it is shaped not only by linguistic limitations but also by psychological and contextual influences.

Coping Strategies in Language learning

Coping strategies in language learning refer to learners' conscious efforts to manage stress, regulate emotions, and overcome challenges encountered during the learning process. In the context of speaking anxiety, these strategies play a crucial role in helping learners maintain participation and sustain communication despite psychological pressure. Oxford (1990) classifies language learning strategies into four main categories: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Building on this framework, more recent studies have expanded the classification by including compensation strategies, particularly in situations where learners face linguistic limitations (Mardones et al., 2024)

Cognitive strategies are directly related to the processing and use of language. These include practicing speaking, repeating expressions, and organizing ideas before communication. Such strategies help learners improve fluency and reduce uncertainty during speaking tasks. Recent studies suggest that cognitive preparation can significantly lower anxiety by increasing learners' sense of control over the task (Diana et al., 2024).

In contrast, metacognitive strategies involve higher-order thinking processes such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning. Learners who use these strategies tend to prepare in advance, anticipate possible communication challenges, and reflect on their performance afterward. This self-regulation enhances learners' awareness and contributes to more effective anxiety management (Anwar et al., 2026).

Affective strategies focus on emotional regulation, which is particularly important in addressing speaking anxiety. Learners may use techniques such as relaxation, positive self-talk, and anxiety reduction strategies to manage their emotional responses. Recent research highlights that affective strategies are among the most influential in reducing speaking anxiety, as they directly target learners' psychological states (Koçali & Aşık, 2025)

Meanwhile, social strategies emphasize interaction and collaboration with others. These include asking for clarification, practicing with peers, and participating in group discussions. From a sociocultural perspective, interaction plays a central role in language development, and supportive peer relationships can significantly reduce anxiety and increase learners' confidence (Fitrianingsih et al., 2025)

Finally, compensation strategies are used when learners encounter linguistic difficulties. These strategies involve simplifying language, using synonyms, code-switching, or employing non-verbal cues such as gestures. Although sometimes associated with avoidance, compensation strategies allow learners to maintain communication flow and reduce breakdowns in interaction (Mardones et al., 2024).

These coping strategies demonstrate that learners are active agents in managing their anxiety. Rather than passively experiencing anxiety, they employ a range of cognitive, emotional, and social resources to navigate communication challenges. This highlights the importance of integrating strategy-based instruction and emotional support in EFL classrooms to foster more confident and resilient learners.

2) METHODS

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to examine speaking anxiety and coping strategies among Indonesian EFL learners. Data were collected from peer-

reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2026, while selected seminal works were included to establish the theoretical foundation.

The search was conducted using combinations of keywords such as *speaking anxiety*, *EFL learners*, *foreign language anxiety*, and *coping strategies*. The selection criteria included studies relevant to speaking anxiety, focusing on EFL learners, and addressing coping strategies. Articles were systematically screened based on their titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure relevance and quality.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and categorizing them into key themes, such as factors influencing speaking anxiety and types of coping strategies used by learners. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of recurring findings across studies.

3) RESULTS

The review identifies two major themes related to speaking anxiety among EFL learners: (1) factors contributing to speaking anxiety and (2) learners' coping strategies in managing anxiety during speaking activities. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety significantly influences learners' participation, willingness to communicate, and overall speaking performance.

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

The analysis reveals four dominant factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among EFL learners: fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and classroom environment.

Fear of negative evaluation emerges as the most prominent factor. Learners often feel anxious when speaking in front of teachers or peers due to concerns about making mistakes or being judged negatively. This condition frequently leads to hesitation and avoidance of speaking tasks, as learners prioritize accuracy over fluency (Haerani & Jatiraga, 2019).

Low self-confidence also plays a significant role. Many learners underestimate their speaking ability despite having sufficient linguistic knowledge. This lack of confidence reduces

their willingness to participate and increases anxiety during oral communication (Ajiza et al., 2024; Koçali & Aşık, 2025).

Limited vocabulary further contributes to anxiety by making it difficult for learners to express their ideas clearly. Difficulty in retrieving appropriate words during real-time communication often disrupts fluency and increases cognitive pressure (Daflizar, 2024)

In addition, the classroom environment significantly influences learners' anxiety levels. A highly corrective or teacher-centered environment tends to increase anxiety, while a supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere encourages participation and reduces fear of making mistakes (Lin et al., 2025.)

Coping Strategies

The findings show that learners employ a range of coping strategies to manage speaking anxiety, which can be categorized into cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social, and compensation strategies.

Cognitive strategies are commonly used to prepare for speaking tasks. These include practicing, organizing ideas, and rehearsing expressions before speaking. Such preparation helps learners feel more confident and reduces uncertainty during communication (Diana et al., 2024; Ajiza et al., 2024; Muhibbah & Amalia, 2025).

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating speaking performance. Through these strategies, learners become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, which supports gradual improvement and reduces anxiety (Han, 2024)

Affective strategies focus on managing emotions. Techniques such as relaxation, deep breathing, and positive self-talk help learners remain calm and reduce nervousness during speaking activities (Hidayatulloh & Tahir, 2025)

Social strategies emphasize interaction with others, including practicing with peers and participating in group discussions. Supportive peer interaction helps learners feel more comfortable and confident in speaking (Attia & Algazo, 2025).

Compensation strategies are used when learners face linguistic difficulties. These include simplifying language, using synonyms, or employing non-verbal cues. While these

strategies help maintain communication, excessive reliance on avoidance may limit speaking development (Sotomayor et al., 2024; Afidawati et al., 2024).

Impact of Coping Strategies on Speaking Performance

The findings indicate that coping strategies play a crucial role in shaping learners' speaking performance. Learners who use a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies tend to demonstrate greater confidence, improved fluency, and higher participation in speaking activities.

Among these, affective and social strategies appear to have the most direct impact on reducing anxiety, as they address emotional regulation and provide interpersonal support. In contrast, learners who rely heavily on avoidance strategies tend to show lower participation and slower development in speaking skills.

4) DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners is a multifaceted and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the interaction between psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors. Rather than functioning as an isolated internal condition, anxiety emerges through learners' engagement with classroom demands and social expectations. Recent studies further confirm that speaking anxiety is dynamic and influenced by both individual perceptions and instructional contexts (Chen, 2024). This reinforces the argument that anxiety should be understood as a situated experience rather than a fixed learner trait.

A central finding of this study is the persistent role of fear of negative evaluation, which continues to constrain learners' willingness to participate in speaking activities. This result aligns with recent research showing that learners experience heightened anxiety when they anticipate judgment from teachers or peers (Okyar, 2023). In classroom environments where accuracy is emphasized, learners tend to avoid taking risks, leading to reduced participation and limited speaking practice. Furthermore, Afidawati et al. (2024) highlight that post-pandemic classroom dynamics may intensify sensitivity to evaluation, making learners more

cautious in oral performance. This suggests that evaluative pressure is not only a psychological factor but also a product of instructional design.

Another important insight concerns the discrepancy between perceived competence and actual language ability. The findings show that many learners experience anxiety not because they lack knowledge, but because they lack confidence in using that knowledge in real-time communication. This supports Chen (2024), who found that expectancy beliefs significantly influence speaking performance and anxiety levels. Similarly, Hidayat et al. (2025) emphasize that low self-confidence remains one of the strongest predictors of speaking anxiety among university learners. These findings indicate that psychological factors, particularly self-efficacy, can override actual linguistic competence and limit learners' engagement.

In terms of linguistic factors, the study highlights that vocabulary limitations contribute to anxiety primarily through difficulties in lexical retrieval rather than insufficient knowledge alone. Speaking requires real-time processing, where learners must quickly access and use language resources. When this process is disrupted, anxiety increases and fluency decreases. This finding is consistent with Liu et al. (2024), who demonstrate that speaking performance is closely linked to cognitive processing efficiency and emotional response. It suggests that improving fluency requires not only vocabulary expansion but also practice that enhances automaticity and real-time language use.

The classroom environment also plays a crucial role in shaping learners' emotional experiences. A supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere appears to reduce anxiety and encourage participation, while teacher-centered approaches tend to increase pressure and fear of making mistakes. Ayiz & Tauchid (2024) show that peer-based learning approaches, such as peer teaching, can significantly reduce speaking anxiety by creating a more collaborative environment. Similarly, (Haoxing & System, n.d.) demonstrate that technology-supported learning environments can help lower anxiety by providing flexible and less threatening speaking opportunities. These findings suggest that anxiety is socially constructed and can be mitigated through appropriate pedagogical design.

Regarding coping strategies, the findings reveal that learners actively employ various strategies, with affective and social strategies emerging as the most effective. These strategies directly address emotional regulation and provide interpersonal support, helping learners manage anxiety during speaking tasks. (Al Younus et al., 2023) also found that students frequently rely on peer interaction and self-encouragement to reduce anxiety. In contrast, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as preparation and self-monitoring, play a supportive but indirect role in reducing anxiety (Gunawan, 2025). This indicates that while strategic preparation is important, it must be complemented by emotional and social support to be fully effective.

On the other hand, avoidance strategies are found to be largely counterproductive. Although they may provide temporary relief, they reduce opportunities for meaningful practice and hinder long-term development (Cahya & Churnia, 2026) emphasize that avoidance behavior is negatively associated with speaking performance and confidence development. Compensation strategies, such as simplifying language, may help maintain communication flow; however, excessive reliance on them may signal underlying gaps in proficiency. These findings highlight the importance of guiding learners toward more adaptive coping mechanisms that support both immediate communication and long-term improvement.

This study contributes to the growing body of research by offering an integrated perspective on speaking anxiety that connects cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The findings suggest that effective pedagogical practices should go beyond linguistic instruction and address learners' emotional needs and classroom interaction patterns. Creating a supportive learning environment, promoting collaborative activities, and integrating strategy-based instruction can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance learners' willingness to communicate. As recent research indicates, combining pedagogical innovation with emotional support is essential for fostering both confidence and communicative competence in EFL learners (Sak, 2022).

5) CONCLUSION

This study concludes that speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of psychological factors, linguistic limitations, and classroom environments. Fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and unsupportive learning conditions emerge as the most influential sources of anxiety, all of which contribute to reduced willingness to communicate and lower speaking performance.

The findings also demonstrate that learners actively employ a range of coping strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social, and compensation strategies. Among these, affective and social strategies are the most effective, as they directly address emotional regulation and provide interpersonal support, which are essential for building confidence in speaking. While cognitive and metacognitive strategies enhance preparation and self-regulation, their impact on anxiety reduction is less significant without emotional engagement. In contrast, avoidance strategies tend to hinder long-term speaking development despite offering temporary relief.

These findings underscore that learners are active agents in managing speaking anxiety and that successful language learning extends beyond linguistic competence. This study contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the importance of integrating emotional, social, and strategic dimensions in addressing speaking anxiety. Therefore, English language teaching should incorporate strategy-based instruction and foster supportive, interactive classroom environments that encourage learners to take risks and develop communicative competence more confidently.

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