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Exploring EFL learners' coping strategies during speaking development

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EXPLORING EFL LEARNERS' COPING STRATEGIES DURING SPEAKING DEVELOPMENT

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Modern Languages in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

Department of English and Modern Languages
Independent University, Bangladesh
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Declaration

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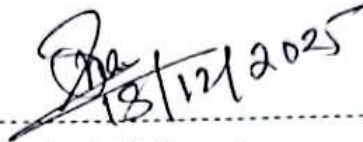
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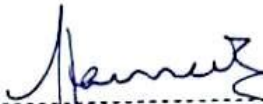
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Abstract

This research examines how EFL students at the tertiary level experience anxiety while speaking and how various affective factors contribute to students' oral performance. This research indicates that the majority of students experience fear of making mistakes, negative judgments from peers, and small vocabulary sizes, and that these affect students' confidence during spontaneous speaking experiences. However, the study showed that providing structured speaking activities, giving students positive feedback from their teachers, and using familiar listening material may lessen anxiety and allow more students to actively participate in speaking. The present study is consistent with other prior research that indicates that the presence of an unnecessarily high level of difficulty may have a significant impact on the communicative performance of EFL learners in an increasingly global world. It appears that an anxiety-sensitive approach to the teaching of speaking in the EFL classroom could be an effective way to create a stimulating classroom atmosphere while also providing students with less stressful chances to develop their speaking ability.

Keywords: speaking anxiety; EFL learners; oral performance; affective factors; vocabulary limitations; instructional practices

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List of Abbreviation

EDSA – English Department Students’ Association

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

PSA – Public Speaking Anxiety

LLS – Language Learning Strategies

ICALA – Intelligent Computer-Assisted Language Assessment

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Problem

Public speaking in English is a major challenge for the EFL learners, especially in peer-led settings such as the EDSA English Study Club. Many learners have strong public speaking anxiety, which constrains their performance, reduces confidence, and further hampers overall speaking development (Muhibbah & Amalia, 2025). If this is not duly addressed, PSA will turn into a long-term barrier to communicative competence. Even though some students try to cope by themselves, structured interventions within such clubs are still lacking. Research also shows that EFL learners often cannot identify the causes of anxiety and lack effective coping strategies (Diana et al., 2024). The main factors leading to speaking anxiety include a lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, low proficiency levels, academic expectations, and a general fear of judgment. Learners commonly use mindset adjustment, relaxation techniques, confidence-building, and practice to cope, but all these strategies put together are inadequate. Thus, more systematic guidance and support are needed to help learners cope effectively with PSA.

Despite the efforts to create supportive environments for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the context of peer-led English as a second language (ESL) club activities, the anxiety experienced by EFL learners associated with public speaking in their second (3rd) language will continue to be a hindrance to their holistic development without the establishment of systematic support mechanisms. Although EFL learners use strategies such as thinking about the positive outcomes and practicing speaking in English, such attempts at increasing confidence are not usually effective because of the lack of systematic support. Therefore, it will be necessary to create systematic support mechanisms within ESL clubs in order to facilitate learners' journey towards becoming confident speakers of English through comprehensive systematic processes and systematic peer support.

Speaking anxiety among EFL learners increased due to online learning during COVID-19 (Maharani & Roslaini, 2021). This online class made real-time communication difficult, hence limiting the participation of students and slowing down their language development. Since speaking anxiety disrupts processes and outcomes of learning, how far students cope in online environments is essential to understand for helping them improve their proficiency and engagement.

Many EFL learners find speaking more problematic compared with other language skills because psychological factors such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and low confidence make the communication process more anxiety arousing. Linguistic issues like a restricted vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties along with limited opportunities to practice also impede the development of speaking. Successful learners use coping strategies, such as practicing pronunciation, engaging in various English-speaking activities, and communicating more effectively with body language (Shen & Chiu, 2019).

Excessive levels of stress and anxiety have therefore had adverse impacts on learners' performances in speaking; it makes them hesitant, nervous, and less fluent. Linguistic gaps, grammatical errors, and unclear ideas add to anxiety. Speaking anxiety is not only a problem

of language but also a psychological issue due to the fear of evaluation and lack of confidence. It thus means educators have to create supportive environments and adopt strategies that reduce stress but build the speaking competence of learners (Athawadi et al., 2023)

A number of interconnected variables can create a barrier to EFL students when speaking in front of others, this has been exacerbated by the online learning environment during the worldwide pandemic, most learners have had little opportunity to practise and thus are often under greater pressure than usual to complete e-Speaking Tasks. Psychological factors such as the fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence combined with linguistic issues such as limited vocabulary or pronunciation difficulties make speaking even more challenging. For this reason, I think that anxiety during speaking is both a language issue as well as an emotional one resulting from fear of being assessed and having insufficient self-belief. Therefore, I think teachers and educational institutions need to increase the level of support they provide, keep creating safer learning environments, and provide resources that help learners develop strategies for coping with stress and developing speaking confidence over time.

1.2 Problem Statement

Most EFL learners worry about speaking because of linguistic, psychological, and environmental obstacles. Pronunciation, grammatical, lexical, and fluency problems hinder their communications; similarly, anxiety, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes weaken their performances. These are often exacerbated by a lack of interaction and teaching approaches that emphasize the accuracy rather than fluency aspect of speech production (Mahripah, 2014).

Anxiety related to speaking impedes learners' participation in their classes. It is often motivated by fear of negative assessment, a limited vocabulary, an incorrect pronunciation, and a lack of confidence in his/her speaking skills. While learners are aware that speaking is an important skill to become proficient at, they still have issues communicating well. Therefore, it will be beneficial to investigate how learners cope with their anxieties and how teachers can provide supportive classrooms that help foster confidence for learners.

These two points reveal that difficulties experienced during speaking practice in EFL classrooms are derived from more than just the lack of English vocabulary or the inability to pronounce words correctly; they are also influenced by emotions and how speaking instruction is provided during English classrooms. While many learners desire to be able to communicate properly, a combination of vocabulary problems, pronunciation issues, and fluency issues, mixed with anxiety about what others will think, can make speaking a very difficult situation. In addition, I have come to realize that the traditional way in which speaking is taught in a classroom is often not conducive to developing true interaction between learners and teachers and, subsequently, does not lend itself to building learners' confidence in using their speaking abilities. Understanding how learners cope with their speaking anxieties will help teachers create more supportive classrooms that utilize communication-based lessons. With a supportive atmosphere and encouragement from their teachers, learners will be able to gradually face and overcome their fears and speak more effectively. Many EFL learners experience high levels of public speaking anxiety, which reduces their fluency, confidence, and overall communication ability. This anxiety is often triggered by fear of mistakes, negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, and insufficient

speaking practice. Since public speaking is an important aspect of both academic and professional life, understanding its causes and effects is vital for developing strategies that would enable learners to speak more confidently. Similarly, despite years of instruction, many EFL learners fail to communicate effectively due to speaking anxiety that adversely affects their performance. Other varieties of difficulties which the learners at Biskra University face include fear of evaluation, low confidence, and limited speaking opportunities. Among these social and affective strategies, peer interaction, emotional regulation, and building confidence can help learners reduce anxiety, though these remain underexplored. Therefore, this study has explored how these strategies could help learners to overcome speaking anxiety and improve their oral performance. Hamrit (2023)

These points, in my opinion, clearly show that public speaking anxiety is a major barrier for many EFL learners that affects their confidence and performance. Despite years of learning, many students continue to struggle due to the emotional factors not being adequately dealt with in traditional classrooms. It is, therefore, important to explore social and affective strategies, given that peer support and activities on building confidence can make learners feel more comfortable and better prepared to speak in English.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives	Research Questions
1. To investigate the coping techniques utilized by EFL learners during their speaking growth.	1. What coping strategies do EFL learners currently use to develop their speaking skills?
2. To find out how students feel about the efficiency of coping mechanisms	2. How effective do learners perceive these coping strategies to be?
3. To investigate the contextual elements that influence strategy choice and success.	3. How do classroom environment, teacher feedback, peer interaction, and learner psychology (e.g., anxiety, self-efficacy) influence learners' choice and effectiveness of coping strategies?

Table 11.3 Research Objectives and Questions

1.4 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it helps explain how coping strategies can reduce speaking anxiety and improve learners' confidence and oral performance in English. By identifying which strategies work best and what factors influence their use, the study provides valuable guidance for teachers to create more supportive, low-anxiety learning environments. It also

contributes to helping learners manage their emotions more effectively, participate more actively, and develop stronger communication skills.

1.4.1 Practical Significance

This study has practical implications for teachers and students because it identifies the most effective coping mechanisms for reducing anxiety when speaking English at schools after the pandemic. Specifically, the research emphasizes preparation and practice, utilising relaxation techniques, positive self-talk and previous experience of speaking in public and obtaining assistance from other students so that they can develop good habits that they may regularly implement in their class lessons to reduce anxiety and enhance the number of students participating when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, through the results presented in this study, educators can create an environment that is nurturing towards students as it provides students with constructive ways to manage stress and to restore self-confidence when communicating in English (Afidawati et al., 2024).

1.4.2. Learner development contribution

By providing an understanding of how students are utilizing coping strategies such as preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking to cope with both trait and situational speaking anxiety, this study is a contribution to the development of learners. By identifying what strategies students rely on most, it will assist in viewing how they create self-confidence, manage their feelings, and improve their oral performance (Lestari et al., 2023). In addition, by interpreting how learners understand the various forms of anxiety, it enables them to select coping strategies that are most appropriate to their needs, thereby enhancing the potential for successful self-management and improving speaking proficiency.

1.4.3. Instructional improvement

According to the study, there are many ways to enhance EFL instruction in order for learners to successfully handle their speaking anxiety. Specifically, three instructional improvements are suggested: 1) Provide structured opportunities where learners can prepare for speaking tasks prior to the task's execution, 2) Incorporate activities designed to assist students in managing their anxiety, and 3) Encourage strategies that promote positive thinking and self-confidence. Furthermore, it emphasises the necessity for teachers to establish collaborative learning as well as peer interaction as a mechanism for students to practice their speaking skill and feel supported by others. Collectively, these improvements will create an instructional atmosphere that is conducive to effective anxiety management and growth of oral communication proficiency among students (Lestari, Syahid, & Widiastuty, 2023).

1.4.4. Innovation in language learning

Technology-based innovations in how we learn languages can decrease stress and enhance engagement through improved access to autonomous and low-pressure opportunities for oral practice (Elov et al., 2025). By utilizing the ICALA system, teachers can create nonthreatening environments for learners to conduct oral assessments while supporting learners' confidence and promoting independence. The "vibe coding" design also provides learners with opportunities to develop more interactive experiences with their target language, creating the conditions necessary for learners to engage in creative, authentic, and meaningful uses of language (Woo, Guo, & Yu, 2025). Technology can foster learner

independence and emotional resiliency while supporting learners' development of skills related to the study of languages through communication and creative expression.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on exploring the coping strategies used by EFL learners to manage speaking anxiety. The research is limited to a small group of participants from a specific educational institution, where data were collected through a Google survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The study examines the types of coping strategies learners employ, the factors influencing their choices, and how these strategies support their speaking development. The scope does not extend to other language skills such as reading, writing, or listening, nor does it aim to measure the effectiveness of coping strategies over time. Instead, it provides an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences and perspectives within a defined context.

Research is constrained by a number of limitations. One limitation is that the sample size of the research is small and that both interviews and surveys were conducted with a small representative group; thus making it less generalizable. Another major limitation of this research is that the research was conducted at a single institution and may not represent other EFL learner populations. A third limitation is that the majority of the data was collected from self-reported responses, and the potential for response bias could exist. In addition, the length of time for collecting this data limits the researcher's ability to identify any progression of the learner's coping strategies. The methodology for this study using Google Surveys and semi-structured interviews were not able to provide full insight into the complexity of the emotional or behavioral coping processes. The data analyzed from document analysis also has limitations based on the available quality of documents from the institutions or generated by learners. Finally, this research only focuses on coping strategies related to language anxiety while not accounting for other types of language anxiety and the associated coping strategies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical literature on EFL learners' speaking anxiety and the coping strategies they use to manage it. The aim is to clarify how affective, cognitive, and linguistic factors influence learners' speaking performance and how established theories explain variations in anxiety and coping behaviour. The chapter begins with key theoretical perspectives, followed by empirical studies on speaking anxiety and coping in EFL contexts, and concludes by outlining gaps that justify the present study.

The review draws on major frameworks relevant to affective factors in language learning, including Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which links anxiety to reduced language intake (Krashen, 1982); Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, which explains how learners use problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies in stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); and language learning strategies theory (Oxford, 2018), which highlights effective language learners consciously use a variety of direct and indirect strategies—such as cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies to enhance autonomy, proficiency, and communicative competence. By examining these theoretical foundations alongside empirical findings, this chapter establishes the conceptual basis for understanding the relationship between speaking anxiety, coping strategies, and learner outcomes, thereby underscoring the need for further investigation in this area.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by four pivotal theoretical frameworks: Affective Filter Hypothesis - Krashen 1982, Anxiety as a Barrier to Speaking Performance , Language learning strategies theory - Oxford,2018, with self-regulated learning and Stress and Coping Theory - Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, Coping Strategies as Responses to Speaking Anxiety. According to Krashen's Affective Filter, anxiety hinders the process of language processing, and therefore, the reduction of emotional filters is necessary. Communication Apprehension Theory explains learners' fear in speaking situations and thus clarifies the origins of anxiety when speaking in public. Stress and Coping Theory explains how individuals deal with anxiety through different coping strategies. Language Learning Strategies Theory by Oxford, 2018, closely relates to self-regulated learning; it explains how learners consciously plan for, monitor, and control their language learning through strategic and self-directed behaviors. These theoretical frameworks together provide a clear basis that can be used in the investigation of EFL speaking anxiety and the adoption of coping behaviors.

2.2.1 Affective Filter Hypothesis

According to Krashen (1981,1982), the Affective Filter Hypothesis is the theory that emotional factors, such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety, affect the amount of target language input processed by the Language Acquisition Device. Specifically, high levels of

motivation, high levels of confidence, and low levels of anxiety correlate with a lower Affective Filter, thereby allowing more of the target language input to be effectively processed by the learner. Conversely, learners with either high levels of anxiety or low levels of motivation will develop a higher Affective Filter, which inhibits the input, thus causing the learner not to be able to acquire the material even though the material has been comprehended (Krashen, 1982). This theory can explain why learners become “fossilized” or fail to progress despite continued exposure to input, and the importance of developing low anxiety and a supportive learning environment to enhance the learner’s ability to acquire a new language. (Krashen, 1982).

2.2.2 Stress and Coping Theory

Stress and Coping Theory's central point is the idea that stress is not due to the individual on their own or the environment on its own, but that it results from the interaction between the individual and the environment (the interaction between the two) with respect to the individual's perception and actions concerning that interaction. According to the authors, coping is determined by the way people evaluate a given event (as dangerous, as a threat, or as a challenge), and this evaluation in turn determines how the person copes with that event. Effective interventions must, therefore, consider both the characteristics of individual vulnerabilities as well as the demands that are placed on individuals by the external or environmental factors that cause them stress, rather than simply looking at the individual as an individual (i.e. the internal weaknesses of each individual) or the environment that created the stress. In addition, stress and coping are both dynamic processes that not only vary between situations but also change over time. As a result, the understanding of how people cope with stress is contextual, based upon the environment and the situation. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.2.3 Language Learning Strategies Theory

According to Oxford (2018), Language Learning Strategies (LLS) refer to the purposeful and goal-directed behaviours through which learners assist themselves to achieve their potential in learning a language. Language Learning Strategy (LLS) incorporate cognitive, metacognitive, and social processes to enhance the ability of learners to learn, understand, practise and fulfil their learning way of learning to improve themselves as independent and successful learners. The effectiveness of the learning strategies deployed by an individual is guided by the ability to become an effective learner. A learner who is able to self-regulate is capable of planning for their learning, monitoring their progress, evaluating how well they have done, controlling their emotions, and effectively socialising to encourage communication. Effective language learning strategies will promote the autonomy of learners and motivate learners to achieve their goal of being proficient in English. They will assist in creating better language learning outcomes for learners.

2.2.4 Anxiety as a Barrier to Speaking Performance

The study of Kiruthiga and Christopher (2022), provides a model that suggests that affective factors, such as anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and attitudes, will directly influence the way an individual learns to communicate in English, and consequently, an individual's ability to speak in English. As with the findings of the study, when learners are experiencing low levels of anxiety and have high levels of motivation and self-confidence, it is often considered optimal emotional conditions for perfect speaking ability. In contrast, negative

emotion states may be barriers to the fluency, accuracy, and willingness to communicate. Evidence will support the development of a model that shows affective variables predict speaking ability aligned closely with Krashen's Affective Filter.

2.2.5 Responses to Speaking Anxiety

The study shows that university students use a range of self-coping strategies to manage public speaking anxiety, including cognitive strategies (positive self-talk, reframing thoughts), behavioral strategies (practice, preparation, relaxation exercises), and emotional regulation strategies (breathing, mindfulness). Their systematic review highlights that effective coping often involves self-regulation, where learners actively monitor and adjust their thoughts and behaviors to reduce anxiety and improve speaking performance (Tee et al., 2020).

2.2.6 Self-regulated Learning

The study indicates that cognitive self-regulated learning is significantly related to language learning strategy use by learners because successful learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes consciously. Their findings further indicate that strategy use is not random but guided by learners' ability for self-regulation, meaning that students with stronger self-regulation skills tend to employ more effective cognitive, metacognitive, and resource-management strategies. This connection underlines the fact that self-regulation acts as an underlying mechanism that shapes how language learning strategies are selected and used in pursuit of better performance (Zarei & Gilanian, 2014).

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

2.3.1 EFL Students Speaking Anxiety in Tertiary Level

The research explored the causes and types of speaking anxiety that exist among EFL tertiary-level students and revealed that many EFL learners experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when engaging in oral performance tasks. Specifically, results indicate that fear of making mistakes, fear of negative feedback from peers and/or instructors, and a lack of adequate linguistic resources, especially vocabulary, are major contributing factors for students developing anxiety towards speaking tasks. The researchers confirm that in-class speaking tasks such as informal discussions and presentations create higher instances of anxiety than speaking tasks for which students have prepared. Both types of speaking tasks were associated with less participation by anxious learners due to this anxiety having a substantial negative impact on their ability to perform orally. The findings of this study provide empirical evidence both of how speaking anxiety restricts university-based EFL learners' ability to communicate successfully with others as well as how important it is for instructors to create emotionally supportive environments in the classroom to lessen the affective barrier of anxiety (Tercan & Dikilitaş, 2015).

2.3.2 EFL Learners Utilize Coping Strategies to Manage their English Language Anxiety

This research provided an examination of the various ways in which EFL learners cope with anxiety related to learning and using the English language (i.e., the learning process) by utilizing a variety of different strategies to cope with this anxiety. Based upon their data

collection, it can be concluded that EFL learners employ a combination of various types of coping techniques for their anxiety-driven behaviors (i.e., using both problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping strategy), as well as that these types of coping strategies directly influence learners' levels of engagement and anxiety-driven behaviors in the classroom context. In addition, this empirical study demonstrates that individuals who demonstrate utilizing adaptive coping strategies (i.e., preparing more thoroughly for upcoming tests, positive self-statements, and seeking out assistance from an academic or peer support network) tend to have lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of engagement than do those who utilise maladaptive coping strategies (i.e., all forms of avoidance), thereby having a more restrictive impact on learners' ability to engage with the classroom and develop their language ability(s). Thus, the results of this empirical research support and provide evidence of the important impact that coping strategies have not only upon learners' emotional experience but also upon their academic outcomes within the EFL setting. (Adelian et al., 2024)

2.3.3 EFL Learners' Self-efficacy Beliefs and English Performance

Chen (2007) examined the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their English performance, finding that students with stronger self-efficacy demonstrated higher levels of achievement across language skills. The study shows that learners who believe in their ability to succeed are more persistent, more willing to take risks in communication, and more effective in applying learning strategies, whereas low self-efficacy is associated with avoidance, reduced effort, and weaker performance. This empirical evidence underscores self-efficacy as a key psychological factor influencing learners' motivation, strategy use, and overall English proficiency.

2.3.4 Learner Motivation in the EFL Classrooms in Bangladeshi University

Chowdhury, Roy, and Kabilan (2021) investigated learner motivation in EFL classrooms at a Bangladeshi university, focusing on how students perceive and experience motivation. Using semi-structured interviews, the study found that motivation is influenced by both internal factors, such as the desire to improve communicative competence and career prospects, and external factors, including teacher support, classroom environment, and instructional practices. Supportive, interactive teaching and constructive feedback enhanced engagement, while monotonous, exam-focused methods reduced motivation. The findings underscore the importance of student-centered, anxiety-free classrooms that foster autonomy, engagement, and sustained language learning.

2.3.5 Strategy Use in Overcoming Oral Communication Anxiety

EFL learners face several persistent challenges in managing classroom speaking anxiety, including fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and pressure to speak accurately in front of peers (Theriana, 2023). These difficulties often lead to avoidance, hesitations, and reduced participation during oral tasks. To overcome these barriers, learners commonly employ strategies such as mental preparation, positive self-talk, practicing with peers, and seeking emotional support (Theriana, 2023). Many also rely on repetition, rehearsal, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks to build fluency and confidence. Additionally, teacher encouragement and a supportive classroom atmosphere play a crucial role in lowering anxiety levels. Together, these coping strategies help learners regulate emotions, manage stress, and become more active and confident speakers (Theriana, 2023).

2.3.6 Coping Strategies as Predictors of Improved Speaking Development

When it comes to public speaking anxiety the university students face a variety of challenges such as low self-confidence, physiological stress reactions, and fear of being judged (Tee et al., 2020). According to the review, students frequently employ self-coping strategies to deal with these difficulties, including cognitive restructuring, positive self-talk, relaxation techniques, and preparation-based practices (Tee et al., 2020). Anxiety can also be significantly decreased by using behavioral techniques like gradual exposure, frequent practice, and asking for peer support. The study emphasizes that students' capacity to identify their stressors and use appropriate emotional or behavioral regulation techniques is frequently a prerequisite for effective coping. In general, self-directed coping strategies enable students to perform better in public speaking situations and lessen anxiety (Tee et al., 2020).

2.4 Strategy-Based instruction on EFL University student speaking proficiency

Strategy-Based Instruction improves EFL students' speaking proficiency by training learners to employ cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies in a systematic manner while speaking. Cognitive strategies like planning ideas, using organizational thoughts, and employing compensatory techniques will help students deal with linguistic demands while communicating. Metacognitive strategies, like goal-setting, monitoring performance, and self-evaluation, strongly enhance the learners' control over their speaking process. Social-affective strategies involve requests for clarification, cooperation with peers, and anxiety management; thus, such strategies enhance their confidence and lower communication barriers. All these groups of strategies together raise the students' fluency, accuracy, motivation, and self-confidence, thus making SBI an effective approach to developing stronger speaking skills in university EFL contexts.

2.5 Digital and Multimodal Engagement for the Enhancement of EFL Speaking Skills

The study therefore puts strong emphasis on the fact that the multimodal and multimedia approach significantly enhances EFL learners' speaking through rich, interactive input and meaningful communication opportunities. Visual-audio materials help model correct pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns, while video-based tasks support better understanding of conversational cues and body language. Interactive digital tools, such as speech recognition apps, discussion platforms, and simulation videos, create low-pressure environments for learners to practice speaking more frequently. Second, these multimodal resources engage learners more and build up confidence, thereby encouraging spontaneous speaking and improving fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence (Yi et al., 2024).

2.6 Instructor Agency and Innovation in Classroom Behavior of EFL Learners

EFL learners' classroom behavior is strongly rooted in the interplay between their perception of agency, levels of anxiety, and engagement in learning activities. The study points out the learners who have higher perceived levels of agency-meaning those subjects who believe they are in control-will, consequently, take part in activities more actively and cope with anxiety more successfully. At the same time, limited agency leads to withdrawal, fear of negative evaluation, and decreased willingness to communicate. Indeed, findings indicate that structured classroom tasks, teacher support, and peer influences play a significant role in

determining whether learners feel empowered or anxious while participating in speaking activities (Gkonou, 2014).

2.7 Research Gap

People have spent years studying EFL speaking anxiety, coping strategies, motivation, and teaching methods, but most of the time, these get looked at one by one. Rarely do researchers dig into how these things come together and actually shape how students speak in real life. Plus, a lot of studies just stick to one method either surveys with numbers or interviews with stories which leaves us with only part of the picture. There's not much research that blends both approaches to show the full story.

Furthermore, we still don't fully understand how students manage their anxiety in the classroom or how they employ coping mechanisms while speaking.

These blind spots are even bigger in Bangladeshi universities, where students face all kinds of unique challenges: classes focused on passing exams, hardly any real English use outside the classroom, and a ton of pressure to perform. Researchers haven't really explored how different groups of students experience anxiety, use strategies, or stay motivated, either.

It's clear we need research that actually connects all these dots something that looks at anxiety, motivation, coping, teaching styles, and the environment, all at once, and takes the local context seriously. Without that, we're missing the real story about what makes speaking English so tough for university students in Bangladesh.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study, describing the research design, target population and sampling techniques, data collection tools and procedures, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Its aim is to offer a clear and detailed explanation of the study's procedures to ensure reliability, validity, and relevance to the research context.

3.1 Context and Participants

Context

This study explores the coping strategies that EFL learners utilize to improve their English speaking development, focusing specifically on university students in Bangladesh. An inability to speak English has been a common, persistent problem in this setting, with many learners experiencing social and psychological impediments, such as low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and few opportunities for practice. All these factors can thus create speaking anxiety that may further reduce learners' academic performance and general communicative competence. The university setting provides an especially relevant and rich context in which to investigate these issues. In fact, most students are expected to take part in various oral activities, presentations, and discussions within their academic requirements. Drawing upon how learners navigate these challenges and what kind of strategies they would adapt to alleviate anxiety allows the generation of meaningful insights into practical interventions that could support an effective growth of English speaking among Bangladeshi tertiary-level learners.

Participants

The participants of this research project were a diverse group of learners, including learners of different backgrounds, with the majority coming from university students at IUB. Because the emphasis of this research is on their coping strategies for speaking development, the target learners are those who face challenges in oral English communication due to low confidence, anxiety, and limited chances for practice. For a more in-depth investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected group of university students who were actively engaged in performing English-speaking activities. This provided the opportunity to explore in depth learners' experiences, perceptions, and strategies for dealing with speaking anxiety for a comprehensive understanding of contextual and personal factors that shape the EFL speaking development process in the Bangladesh university setting.

3.2 Research Design

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), a mixed-methods research approach integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than either method alone. Its key advantages include the possibility to

confirm the findings through triangulation, explain numerical results with rich qualitative insights, and capture both breadth and depth of participants' experiences. In this regard, the rationale for adopting a mixed-methods design is that speaking anxiety and coping strategies involve complex issues measurable by both numerical patterns and personal, context-dependent experiences. The quantitative phase identifies the common challenges and trends among EFL learners, while the qualitative phase explains why such challenges do occur and how learners interpret their coping processes. This thus forms a part of increasing the credibility of the study and forms a more holistic perspective of how Bangladeshi university students maintain and manage speaking-related difficulties.

This was an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design, where first a quantitative phase was conducted and followed by a qualitative phase. The quantitative component was used to determine the most frequent problems encountered by EFL learners, such as their confidence levels, anxiety-provoking aspects, and areas where additional help was needed. This quantitatively oriented phase gave insights into broad patterns that are measurable in nature regarding coping strategies and speaking difficulties. It was further elaborated on through the qualitative phase, which gave in-depth and contextual information about the experiences of the learners. The study looked at participants' physical manifestations, body language, and emotional responses during speaking tasks through interviews and observations, enabling one to get closer to real-life communication situations. This sequential approach ensured that the qualitative data meaningfully elaborated on and explained the quantitative results. These provided a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of how university learners in Bangladesh cope with speaking-related challenges in English.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Participant Survey

The survey gives solid numbers on things like how anxious learners feel, what coping tricks they use, what keeps them motivated, how confident they are, and how often they actually speak up. It shows patterns like which strategies everyone seems to rely on, or how strongly people feel about getting support in class. Basically, this part paints a big-picture view of the challenges people face when speaking and the ways they try to handle them. It's a key step for spotting trends and figuring out what's really going on across the whole group.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interview

Interviews dive deeper. They let students talk about how they actually feel, what personal hurdles they hit, and the ways they try to get through speaking in English. You get the "why" behind their choices—details you'd never catch in a survey. These conversations add real stories and context, making the numbers from the survey mean something. They help you see the bigger picture and understand what's behind the data.

3.3.3 Document Analysis

Looking at classroom documents like reflection journals, teacher notes, feedback, and observation rubrics give another layer of evidence. These aren't just opinions also they show what students actually do and how they perform. By bringing in these real-life artifacts, the

study gets stronger, because you're not relying on one single source. This approach backs up the findings and keeps everything rooted in actual classroom practice.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

To really get the full story, the study used both numbers and personal stories. The structured survey gathered broad trends from university students where lots of voices, all at once. On top of that, a semi-structured interview guide helped dig into individual experiences and personal views. Together, these tools captured both the big, measurable trends and the smaller, more personal details.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data came in two main waves. First, the survey went out to a broad group so the study could get a sense of overall attitudes and habits. After that, the team invited a smaller group of university students for one-on-one interviews, which helped clear up questions and add context to the survey's findings. This step-by-step setup made sure the interviews filled in the gaps and added depth to the survey results, giving a fuller picture of what's happening.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis mixed both numbers and stories, staying true to the study's design. Survey answers were broken down with basic stats, which helped spot patterns and trends across everyone who took part. For the interviews, the team used thematic analysis, pulling out key themes and insights straight from what participants shared. In the end, they brought both sets of findings together, so the results made sense as a whole.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study took ethics seriously from start to finish. Everyone who joined knew exactly what the research was about and could leave at any time. The team got clear consent before collecting any data. All personal info stayed private and secure. These steps protected participants' rights, privacy, and well-being the whole way through.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the key findings gathered from 32 participants regarding their English-speaking experiences, confidence levels, and classroom practices. The data include both quantitative Likert-scale responses and qualitative open-ended answers. The analysis focuses on identifying major patterns related to speaking anxiety, motivation, language-use strategies, and students' perceptions of classroom support. The following tables and summaries highlight the most significant trends to provide a clear understanding of learners' speaking challenges and the factors that influence their confidence and performance. The findings are structured around the research questions:

1. What coping strategies do EFL learners currently use to develop their speaking skills?
2. How effective do learners perceive these coping strategies to be?
3. How do classroom environment, teacher feedback, peer interaction, and learner psychology (e.g., anxiety, self-efficacy) influence learners' choice and effectiveness of coping strategies?

4.2 Interpretation of Findings

This part examines the actual findings of the study by combining survey data, interview answers, and document analysis. It examines how students describe their behavior, the effectiveness of their coping mechanisms (at least in their own opinion), and the role that psychological variables and the classroom environment play. The analysis closely adheres to the primary research questions. The research doesn't only feel stronger after combining all these many sources. It provides a more complete view of how EFL students handle speaking difficulties and what influences their coping mechanisms.

RQ1: What coping strategies do EFL learners currently use to develop their speaking skills?

Item-wise Findings

Item No.	Questionnaire Focus	Key Findings
1	Pause before answering	65.6% of students pause before answering
2	Using Bangla when forgetting words	81% sometimes/often/always use Bangla
3	Speaking despite grammar uncertainty	62.5% sometimes speak despite grammar doubts
4	Asking for help or	71.9% ask for help at least

	clarification	sometimes
5	Practicing outside the classroom	56.3% sometimes practice outside class
6	Having ideas before speaking	75.1% report having ideas before speaking

Table 2Coping Strategies Used by EFL Learners for English Speaking

Survey results indicate that most learners rely heavily on strategies to keep conversations going. About two-thirds pause before answering to take a moment to think. When they forget an English word, nearly everyone (81%) switches to Bangla instead. Many learners do not let shaky grammar slow them down; in fact, 62.5% continue speaking even if they are unsure about accuracy. They are willing to take risks. Additionally, more than 70% ask for clarification when they encounter difficulties, and most learners (75.1%) prefer to plan what they will say in advance. However, when it comes to practicing outside the classroom, the numbers decrease, with only about half saying they practice occasionally.

Interview Findings

The results of the survey are supported by the interview data. When faced with speech production challenges, learners often reported using tactics including halting, paraphrasing, or resuming phrases. In order to keep the conversation going, some participants also mentioned a propensity to switch to Bangla. A small percentage of students acknowledged that at times of increased worry, they would omit words or change their wording. Speaking preparation was typically restricted to activities that were thought to be important, like intellectual gatherings or speeches.

Document Analysis

The document analysis backs up what the surveys and interviews found. You can see clear signs that students use coping strategies during speaking tasks. Their notes and lists have a few keywords here and they like to get their thoughts together before they start talking. When teachers watch them, they keep seeing the same things such as students' pause, fix mistakes as they go, rephrase, or hesitate. All of that points to students working hard to keep their speech moving, even when they hit a rough patch. In their journals, students talk again and again about forgetting words, switching to Bangla, or starting over in the middle of a sentence whatever it takes to keep the conversation going. Put it all together, and it's clear these learners lean on quick, practical strategies right in the moment to stay fluent and avoid getting stuck.

Discussion

Woodrow (2006) observed that when anxiety interferes with fluency, learners often resort to quick fixes to maintain the flow of conversation. This is commonly seen when individuals pause, switch languages, or continue speaking despite grammatical errors. In such cases, learners prioritize conveying their message over achieving perfect accuracy. While these strategies help sustain communication, they primarily serve as short-term solutions rather than genuine progress in language acquisition.

RQ2: How effective do learners perceive these coping strategies to be?

Item-wise Findings

Item No.	Questionnaire Focus	Key Findings
1	Confidence after preparation	71.9% feel confident when prepared
2	Speaking reduces shyness	84.4% believe speaking reduces shyness
3	Practice improves fluency	93.8% believe regular practice improves fluency
4	Practicing outside the classroom	56.3% sometimes practice outside class

Table 3Learners' Perceived Effectiveness of Speaking Coping Strategies

Most learners perceive coping strategies as genuinely helpful for managing their emotions. Approximately 72% report that being prepared increases their confidence, while around 84% believe that speaking up in class helps them overcome shyness. Furthermore, nearly all respondents (94%) are convinced that regular practice contributes to improved fluency. However, only slightly more than half of the learners maintain consistent practice outside the classroom. This indicates a clear discrepancy between learners' beliefs and their actual behaviors.

Interview Findings

Learners reported feeling proud and confident following their prepared performances, particularly when they received positive feedback. Nonetheless, many admitted that anxiety interfered with their performance, despite attempting various coping strategies. Some participants noted that while these strategies helped them manage speaking tasks, they did not significantly improve their overall fluency.

Document Analysis

The documents make it pretty clear students mostly see coping strategies as a way to calm their nerves and get things done. In their reflection journals, they talk about feeling more confident after getting ready and a big sense of relief once they finish speaking, especially when it comes to presentations. Still, a lot of them admit they are still nervous and don't really feel like they're getting much better at speaking off the cuff. Teachers notice some quick responses of students who speak more clearly and join in more right after using these strategies, the old problems stick around. Hesitation and not knowing the right words keep popping up. So, while these strategies help students feel better in the moment, the documents show they don't do much for long-term language growth.

Discussion

Wirentake (2025) argues that coping strategies assist students in managing speaking situations, but they do not inherently enhance fluency. Learners perceive that these strategies reduce anxiety and help maintain engagement; however, without consistent practice, improvements fail to persist. This distinction is crucial: employing strategies to navigate immediate challenges is not equivalent to investing the effort required for genuine language development.

RQ3: How do classroom environment, teacher feedback, peer interaction, and learner psychology influence learners' choice and effectiveness of coping strategies?

Item-wise Findings

Item No.	Questionnaire Focus	Key Findings
1	Nervousness while speaking	43.8% feel nervous speaking English
2	Motivation from classmates	78.1% feel motivated by classmates
3	Teacher feedback	81.2% find teacher feedback useful
4	Preference for pair/group speaking	71.9% prefer pair or group speaking

Table 4Influence of Classroom Environment and Teacher Support on Speaking Behavior

Psychological and social stuff really shapes how people approach strategies. Almost half of the learners (43.8%) say they feel nervous, so they lean on coping strategies a lot. Most folks, around 78%, feel more motivated when their peers cheer them on. 81.2% of people agree that the teacher feedback genuinely helps them and 71.9% prefer working in pairs or groups, probably because it just feels less intimidating.

Interview Findings

A lot of learners talk about feeling anxious when they have to speak for a long time. Their minds go blank, and they're afraid others will judge them. But when they work in pairs or small groups, they feel more at ease and their confidence grows. When teachers step in with gentle corrections and a bit of encouragement, it really helps. It takes the edge off their fear and gets them to try out different strategies.

Document Analysis

The data derived from peer evaluations, observation rubrics, and student journals collectively demonstrate that a supportive classroom environment is foundational to linguistic achievement. Affirmative peer feedback serves to bolster individual self-efficacy, while the transition from whole-class instruction to small-group collaboration significantly enhances oral fluency by reducing the perceived risks of participation. Furthermore, student reflections

confirm that instructor empathy and low-stakes corrective feedback are instrumental in mitigating performance anxiety. Consequently, a secure and positive classroom ecology functions as a catalyst for student resilience, fostering an environment where learners are more willing to communicate and better equipped to capitalize on the pedagogical experience.

Discussion

The efficacy of individual coping strategies is fundamentally mediated by the sociocultural dynamics of the classroom environment, including peer interaction and pedagogical intervention. Research indicates that heightened levels of foreign language anxiety can significantly impede the utility of these strategies; conversely, a supportive atmosphere characterized by constructive instructor feedback and collaborative group tasks facilitates greater student engagement. As Woodrow (2006) suggests, the functional success of coping mechanisms is contingent upon a low-anxiety environment that prioritizes communicative interaction, thereby allowing students to more effectively navigate the linguistic and psychological demands of the learning process.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This research provides an in-depth exploration of the factors that contribute to oral communication anxiety among EFL learners and the specific methods they use to manage these challenges. The findings reveal that several core issues, including the fear of being judged by peers, a deep-seated lack of confidence, and limited opportunities for verbal practice, combine to create a significant psychological barrier. These factors discourage students from participating and hinder their linguistic growth. While learners do attempt to use personal coping mechanisms such as mental rehearsal, relaxation efforts, and seeking social support from classmates which are the success of these strategies depends heavily on the overall classroom climate.

Drawing upon the Affective Filter Hypothesis and stress-coping theory, the study explains how high levels of anxiety act as an emotional block that interferes with a student's ability to process and produce language effectively. This highlights that managing speaking anxiety is a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden. For educational institutions, particular universities in Bangladesh, it is vital to move toward a more empathetic teaching model. By providing constructive feedback and designing interactive, low-pressure activities, educators can create a secure environment where students feel safe to take risks. Ultimately, when the instructional setting prioritizes emotional well-being alongside academic rigor, learners' are better equipped to overcome their anxieties, build lasting confidence, and achieve higher proficiency in English speaking.

5.2 Implication

5.2.1. Classroom Participation Gap

These results indicate that anxiety in speaking leads to a significant gap in participation in the classroom. Most of the students who feel nervous or afraid to make mistakes prefer to remain silent, even when they understand what is being taught. The silence disrupts English practice among such students, while relatively confident students continue to improve. With time, this difference in speaking ability grows even wider, affecting overall classroom balance.

5.2.2. Need for Supportive Learning Environment

Other implications concern the establishment of a comfortable environment for students to talk confidently. When learners are afraid of negative judgment, they refuse to talk and thus slow down their progress. Instructors can lower this anxiety by allowing small-group conversations, peer encouragement, and positive feedback. Such approaches allow anxious learners to use English without feeling overwhelmed.

5.2.3. Importance of Gradual Exposure

Findings also indicate that graded exposure to speaking activities can significantly reduce anxiety. Instead of plunging students into more pressured activities, for example, the teacher may first introduce simpler, low-stakes activities, such as pair discussions or short responses. As students experience small successes, their confidence grows. Gradual progression in this manner prepares students over time for more complex speaking activities.

5.2.4. Long-Term Impact on Communication Skills

The final implication pertains to real-life communication. Students who avoid speaking English continuously in the class may struggle later in academic, professional, or social contexts. Building their confidence in class helps them communicate more effectively outside school as well. It shows that early addressing of speaking anxiety is essential for long-term language development.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaires (Likert scale)

1. I feel nervous when I speak English in front of others?(1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

2. Do you take a short pause to think before you answer?

- 1 ☐ Never
- 2 ☐ Rarely
- 3 ☐ Sometimes
- 4 ☐ Often
- 5 ☐ Always

3. I feel motivated when my classmates encourage me. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

4. Do you use Bangla when you can't remember an English word?

- 1 ☐ Never
- 2 ☐ Rarely
- 3 ☐ Sometimes
- 4 ☐ Often
- 5 ☐ Always

5. I feel confident when I prepare before speaking. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

6. Do you ask for help or clarification when you don't understand English?

- 1 ☐ Never
- 2 ☐ Rarely
- 3 ☐ Sometimes

- 4 ☐ Often
5 ☐ Always

7. My teacher gave me useful feedback to improve my speaking. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

8. Do you try to speak even when you are not sure about correct grammar?

- 1 ☐ Never
2 ☐ Rarely
3 ☐ Sometimes
4 ☐ Often
5 ☐ Always

9. I think speaking English in class helps me overcome shyness. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

10. Do you practice speaking English outside the classroom?

- 1 ☐ Never
2 ☐ Rarely
3 ☐ Sometimes
4 ☐ Often
5 ☐ Always

11. I believe regular speaking practice can improve my fluency?(1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

12. Do you have any ideas before you start speaking in English?

- 1 ☐ Never
2 ☐ Rarely
3 ☐ Sometimes

4 ☐ Often

5 ☐ Always

13. I prefer speaking in pairs or groups rather than alone. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

14. Open-ended question:

What helps you the most to feel confident when speaking English?

(Short paragraph response)

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions (Qualitative Phase) Participants: Students

1. How do you usually feel when you have to speak English in class?
2. What makes you feel more confident when speaking English?
3. Can you describe a time when you felt comfortable or proud speaking English?
4. What difficulties do you face when you try to speak English?
5. When you forget a word or make a mistake, what do you usually do?
6. Is it harder for you to speak in front of the class or in pairs/groups? Why?
7. How do you prepare before speaking in English?
8. Do you use Bangla when you cannot express something in English? Why or why not?
9. What do you do to practice speaking English outside of the classroom?
10. How does your teacher help you improve your speaking skills?

Appendix C

Document Analysis

1. Survey questionnaires – Quantitative responses indicating frequency and agreement levels related to coping and speaking strategies.
2. Student reflection journals – Post-speaking reflections describing feelings and progress.
3. Teacher feedback sheets – Written evaluations of students' speaking performance.
4. Peer evaluation forms – Comments from classmates during group activities.
5. Speaking task outlines – Notes or preparation materials made before oral tasks.
6. Teacher observation rubrics – Classroom records of fluency, hesitation, and accuracy.