Strategies for Managing EFL Speaking Anxiety in an Indonesian University: A Sequential Explanatory Study

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Abstract

This study examines how EFL students in Kalimantan, Indonesia, handle speaking anxiety. Using a sequential explanatory design, data were collected from 50 fifth-semester university students through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Results reveal that trait anxiety (64%) is more dominant than specific-situation anxiety (36%). The most widely used strategies include preparation (100%), relaxation (88%), and positive thinking (88%), while peer seeking (50%) is less frequent, and no students adopt resignation. These findings highlight the need for structured practice, relaxation methods, and collaborative learning to build confidence. Integrating these approaches into EFL instruction can foster better communication skills. Future research should assess their long-term impact and explore technology-based solutions for anxiety reduction.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English proficiency plays a crucial role in academic and professional success. As a global lingua franca, English facilitates international communication, education, and career advancement. However, despite the increasing emphasis on English education in Indonesia, many students struggle with fluency, particularly in spoken communication. The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2023) ranks Indonesia 79th out of 113 countries and 13th in Asia with a score of 473, highlighting persistent challenges in achieving adequate English proficiency. Among the various factors influencing language learning, speaking anxiety remains a significant psychological barrier that hinders students from communicating effectively in English (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Liu & Hong, 2021). Speaking anxiety manifests as nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence, often leading students to avoid speaking tasks and consequently impeding their language development ((Alhasan et al., 2024; Prasetyaningrum et al., 2023).

While many studies have investigated the causes and effects of speaking anxiety, fewer have explored the specific coping strategies students employ,

particularly within real classroom settings in the Indonesian EFL context. Most research on this topic has been conducted in urban areas or outside Indonesia, leaving under-researched regions like Kalimantan with limited representation. Sociocultural and linguistic factors unique to Kalimantan may shape students' experiences and coping mechanisms differently compared to their counterparts in more developed regions (López-Medina & Casado, 2024; Quvanch et al., 2024). Given the context-dependent nature of language anxiety, further investigation is needed to understand how students in this region develop coping strategies in their learning environments.

Previous studies predominantly rely on quantitative methodologies, which provide statistical insights but often fail to capture students' lived experiences and adaptive strategies (Jin et al., 2021; Kumari & Rahman, 2024). Although technological interventions such as automatic speech recognition (ASR) and virtual reality (VR) have been introduced to help students practice speaking (Huang, 2024; Li et al., 2025), they lack the spontaneity and real-world social interactions present in classroom settings. This underscores the importance of exploring student-centered coping strategies that enable learners to regulate their emotions and build confidence in authentic speaking environments. Research in other EFL settings, such as Afghanistan, has identified strategies like engaging with authentic English materials, using social media for speaking practice, and seeking peer feedback (Quvanch et al., 2024). These findings highlight the role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping anxiety management strategies, reinforcing the need for localized approaches tailored to Indonesian learners.

Employing a qualitative approach, this study focuses on fifth-semester students from the English Department at a university in Kalimantan. By shifting the focus from measuring anxiety to exploring student-driven coping mechanisms, this research expands the existing literature and presents practical solutions for EFL educators. Grounded in Foreign Language Anxiety Theory (Horwitz et al., 1986) and Coping Strategies Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this study integrates both models to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students regulate emotions and develop confidence in speaking activities. Instead of merely identifying anxiety triggers, this research prioritizes practical solutions for students and educators.

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative exploration of coping strategies in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly in under-researched regions like Kalimantan. By emphasizing students' personal experiences and self-driven coping mechanisms, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering context-specific recommendations for reducing speaking anxiety. The findings will provide practical insights for refining teaching methodologies, ensuring that anxiety reduction strategies are not only theoretically sound but also applicable in real-world language learning environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Sequential Explanatory Study, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in two distinct phases. The initial quantitative phase aimed to identify the levels and types of speaking anxiety among students, followed by a qualitative phase to explore the specific coping strategies they employed. This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students manage their anxiety, allowing the qualitative findings to explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

The primary instrument used in the quantitative phase was a survey questionnaire adapted from Spielberger & Smith (1966) Anxiety Measurement Scale, which is widely recognized for measuring different types of anxiety. Spielberger conceptualized anxiety as a multidimensional construct, distinguishing between State Anxiety, Trait Anxiety, and Specific-Situation Anxiety. State Anxiety refers to temporary feelings of anxiety that fluctuate depending on situational factors, Trait Anxiety reflects a person's general tendency to experience anxiety across different situations, and situation anxiety arises in response to particular events, such as public speaking. The instrument consisted of 15 closed-ended statements, each measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Table 1. Classification of Anxiety Types Based on Spielberger (1966)

Aspects	Indicators	Statements	Type of Anxiety by Spielberger (1966)
State Anxiety	1-5	Self-report on situational nervousness	State Anxiety
Trait Anxiety	6-10	Long-term anxiety tendencies	Trait Anxiety
Specific-Situation Anxiety	11-15	Anxiety triggered by particular events	Specific-Situation Anxiety

(Adopted from Siwi Apri Astuti, 2023)

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were employed to gather in-depth insights into students' coping strategies for managing speaking anxiety. The interview protocol was adapted from Alfia Dwi Handayani, 2021) to align with the research objectives and focused on students' experiences with speaking anxiety and the specific strategies they used to manage it. Additionally, document analysis was conducted using students' Academic Speaking course grades as a secondary data source to validate the self-reported data.

Table 2. Focus Areas in Semi-Structured Interviews

Category	Focus Area
1	Preparation strategies for managing speaking anxiety
2	Relaxation strategies used by students

3	Positive thinking strategies to boost confidence
4	Peer-seeking behaviors for support
5	Resignation or avoidance tendencies

(Adopted from Alfia Dwi Handayani, 2021)

The survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed to 50 fifth-semester students at a university in Kalimantan. The link to the questionnaire was shared via WhatsApp, allowing students to conveniently access and complete it. Before full implementation, a pilot study was conducted with 10 students to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire aimed to measure students' speaking anxiety based on three dimensions: State Anxiety, Trait Anxiety, and Specific-Situation Anxiety.

Based on the quantitative findings, eight students were selected using purposive sampling with stratified criteria to ensure the representation of both high and low anxiety levels within each anxiety type (Campbell et al., 2020). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted via Google Meet to ensure accessibility and accurate data recording. The interview questions, adapted from Alfia Dwi Handayani (2021), focused on five key strategies: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation.

Additionally, document analysis was performed by reviewing students' Academic Speaking course grades as an additional data source to validate their self-reported strategies for managing speaking anxiety (Li et al., 2025).

The collected responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically through the calculation of frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores for each anxiety type. The frequency distribution was used to determine how many students experienced each level of anxiety across the three categories, while percentage analysis helped to compare the proportion of students experiencing different levels of anxiety. The mean score for each category was also computed to assess the overall anxiety tendency within the sample. The analysis revealed that Trait Anxiety (64%) was the most prevalent, followed by Specific-Situation Anxiety (36%), consistent with findings in previous studies in EFL contexts (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2023; Quvanch et al., 2024). These results served as the basis for selecting participants for the qualitative phase.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Sugiyono, 2021), which involved three stages. First, data reduction was conducted to filter relevant information from interviews and document analysis, ensuring that only essential data related to students' coping strategies were included. Second, data display was performed by categorizing the findings into major themes, such as preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were carried out through member

checking and triangulation, ensuring the credibility and consistency of the findings.
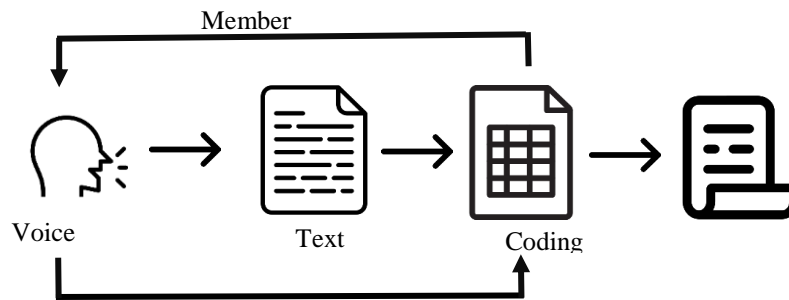

Figure 1. Data Analysis Process

The Sequential Explanatory Design provided a structured approach in which the quantitative results guided the qualitative inquiry, ensuring that the study captured both the prevalence of speaking anxiety and the detailed experiences of students in managing it. To enhance research credibility, member checking allowed participants to review and confirm their interview transcripts, while triangulation of self-reported and objective data sources strengthened research validity (Syahid, 2025).

However, the study was limited to a single institution, requiring future research to compare findings across different contexts. Future research should also consider integrating physiological measures, such as heart rate variability, to complement self-reported anxiety levels and provide a more objective assessment of speaking anxiety (Li et al., 2025; Quvanch et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

The quantitative phase of this study aimed to identify the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by students using a survey questionnaire adapted from Spielberger & Smith (1966) Anxiety Measurement Scale. The questionnaire was administered to 50 fifth-semester students at an Indonesian university, and the results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and percentage calculations.

The findings revealed that Trait Anxiety (64%) was the most dominant type of anxiety, followed by Specific-Situation Anxiety (36%). Trait Anxiety, which refers to a persistent tendency to feel anxious across various speaking situations, affects a significant portion of students. On the other hand, Specific-Situation Anxiety, which arises in particular speaking contexts, such as class presentations or impromptu speaking tasks, was experienced by fewer students.

The statistical results indicate that anxiety is a significant barrier to students' English-speaking abilities. High levels of Trait Anxiety suggest that many students experience a chronic fear of speaking English, regardless of

preparation or context. Meanwhile, students with Specific-Situation Anxiety tend to experience anxiety only in certain high-pressure situations.

These results provide a foundation for understanding the extent of speaking anxiety among EFL learners in Kalimantan and serve as the basis for the qualitative phase of the study, which explores students' strategies for managing their anxiety.

Table 3. Types of Anxiety Experienced by Students

Type of Anxiety	Percentage of Students (%)
Trait Anxiety	64%
Specific-Situation Anxiety	36%

The qualitative phase of this study explored how students cope with speaking anxiety through semi-structured interviews with eight participants, selected based on their anxiety levels identified in the quantitative phase. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key strategies students used to manage their anxiety.

The findings revealed five major strategies employed by students: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Among these, preparation (100%) was the most commonly used strategy, followed by relaxation (88%) and positive thinking (88%). A smaller proportion of students engaged in peer seeking (50%), while none relied on resignation (0%) as a coping mechanism.

Students emphasized the importance of preparation as a way to reduce their anxiety. Many reported practicing in front of a mirror, recording themselves, and rehearsing extensively before speaking tasks. One student stated, *"I always prepare my speech in advance and practice multiple times to feel more confident before presenting in class."*

Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and mindfulness, were also commonly used. Students shared that these methods helped them calm their nerves before speaking. One participant mentioned, *"Before I speak, I take deep breaths and remind myself to stay calm. It helps me focus and reduces my nervousness."*

Positive thinking plays a crucial role in helping students manage anxiety. They frequently engaged in self-motivation and reminded themselves that making mistakes is part of the learning process. One student explained, *"I tell myself that errors are part of learning. This mindset helps me feel less pressured when speaking English."*

Peer seeking was used by only half of the participants, indicating that some students preferred practicing with friends before formal presentations, while others avoided seeking help due to fear of negative judgment. A student noted, *"I feel more comfortable practicing with friends first before speaking in class, but not all students like to do this."*

None of the students reported using resignation as a coping strategy, suggesting that despite their anxiety, they actively tried to manage it rather than avoiding speaking tasks altogether.

Table 4. Strategies Used by Students to Overcome Speaking Anxiety

Strategy	Percentage of Students (%)
Preparation	100%
Relaxation	88%
Positive Thinking	88%
Peer Seeking	50%
Resignation	0%

The qualitative findings confirm that students actively engage in strategies to manage their speaking anxiety instead of avoiding speaking tasks. The strong preference for preparation and relaxation strategies aligns with previous research, highlighting the importance of structured practice and emotional regulation. The relatively low use of peer seeking suggests that cultural or personal factors may influence students' willingness to seek support from their classmates.

By integrating these qualitative findings with the quantitative results, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety among EFL students in Kalimantan and offers practical insights for educators to develop effective anxiety-reduction strategies in the classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that speaking anxiety significantly affects students' participation in EFL classrooms, aligning with previous research that highlights how anxiety can hinder oral skill development (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Liu & Hong, 2021). This study extends prior research by exploring not only the presence of speaking anxiety but also the specific coping strategies used by students, particularly within the underexplored context of Kalimantan. The strong preference for preparation strategies (100%) supports (Jin et al., 2021), who emphasized that structured preparation can significantly reduce speaking anxiety. Additionally, (M. A. Chen & Hwang, 2019) found that concept mapping-based flipped learning enhances speaking performance while decreasing anxiety, reinforcing the role of preparation in building students' confidence. The dominance of preparation in this study may reflect the learning culture in Kalimantan, where structured and repetitive practice is commonly used to reduce uncertainty and improve performance.

Relaxation and positive thinking (88%) also emerged as widely used strategies, aligning with studies that highlight the benefits of mindfulness and breathing exercises in reducing speaking anxiety (Alhasan et al., 2024). Furthermore, (Chen et al., 2021) demonstrated that emotional intelligence plays a key role in managing foreign language anxiety, as students with higher

emotional intelligence tend to cope better with stressful speaking situations. However, while relaxation techniques were common, some students still struggled with self-regulation, suggesting a need for explicit instruction on anxiety management in EFL classrooms.

Peer seeking (50%) was used less frequently than other strategies, differing from findings in Afghanistan, where students relied more on peer support to overcome speaking anxiety (Quvanch et al., 2024). This difference may stem from cultural factors, as students in Kalimantan might be more accustomed to independent learning and hesitant to seek peer assistance due to fear of social judgment. This highlights the importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment where peer collaboration is encouraged and normalized.

These findings align with Ahmetovic & Becirocvic (2020), who found that motivation negatively correlates with speaking anxiety—students with higher motivation tend to experience lower anxiety levels. Similarly, Bárkányi (2021) noted that while MOOC-based learning enhances students' self-efficacy, speaking anxiety remains a persistent challenge. With the increasing prevalence of online learning in Indonesia, particularly in remote regions like Kalimantan, future research should explore how digital platforms can better support EFL learners in managing anxiety.

In terms of educational interventions, López-Medina & Casado (2024) demonstrated that CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) reduces speaking anxiety through competency-based learning. Additionally, Lintner & Belovecová (2024) found that virtual reality interventions can help mitigate anxiety, particularly in academic presentation settings. Implementing such approaches in Kalimantan may be beneficial, as students could practice speaking in low-pressure, technology-enhanced environments before engaging in real-world communication.

These findings have several implications for EFL instruction in Kalimantan. Given that preparation is the most preferred strategy, educators should integrate structured rehearsal activities, such as guided speech planning and mock presentations, into the curriculum. Explicit instruction in relaxation techniques, such as controlled breathing and positive visualization, should be incorporated into speaking exercises to help students regulate their anxiety. Additionally, fostering a classroom environment that encourages peer seeking can be achieved through peer coaching strategies, where students provide constructive feedback to each other, reducing the stigma of seeking help. The integration of technology-based interventions, such as virtual reality simulations or online discussion platforms, could also provide students with safe spaces to practice speaking and build confidence before engaging in face-to-face communication.

This study contributes to the literature by offering a qualitative perspective on speaking anxiety, an area that has been predominantly studied using quantitative methods. While much of the existing research focuses on

measuring anxiety levels (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 2017), this study provides deeper insights into students' personal coping strategies within a specific cultural and educational context. By focusing on Kalimantan, this research highlights the need to consider regional and cultural variations in language learning experiences, which are often overlooked in mainstream EFL studies.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of preparation, relaxation, and peer seeking as key strategies for managing speaking anxiety. However, the variation in coping strategies suggests that no single approach works for all students. A more context-sensitive and flexible approach is necessary when designing interventions to help EFL learners overcome speaking anxiety, particularly in regions with unique cultural and educational dynamics, such as Kalimantan.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how EFL students in Kalimantan manage speaking anxiety, revealing that trait anxiety (64%) is more dominant than situation-specific anxiety (36%). The findings indicate that students primarily rely on preparation (100%), relaxation techniques (88%), and positive thinking (88%), while peer seeking (50%) is used less frequently, and none of the participants resorted to resignation. The results suggest that sociocultural factors and learning environments in Kalimantan shape students' coping strategies differently from those in urban or more technologically advanced regions. The preference for preparation strategies reflects a structured learning culture where students emphasize practice and rehearsal. However, the lower reliance on peer support suggests a need to foster a more collaborative and supportive classroom environment. For EFL educators, integrating structured preparation activities, emotional regulation techniques, and peer-assisted learning into curricula can help students develop confidence and overcome speaking anxiety. Additionally, incorporating digital tools such as Virtual Reality (VR) or Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) could provide low-risk environments for students to practice speaking before engaging in real-world communication. Future research should compare speaking anxiety management strategies across different regions in Indonesia to identify cultural and institutional influences. Additionally, exploring the long-term effectiveness of technology-based interventions could provide deeper insights into sustainable solutions for reducing speaking anxiety among EFL students.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

RL conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, conducted data collection, and performed data analysis. RL also interpreted the findings and wrote the original draft. RL was responsible for reviewing and editing the manuscript to ensure coherence and academic quality. AS and HW supervised

the research process, providing guidance, constructive feedback, and critical revisions throughout the study. They also assisted in refining the analysis and improving the overall clarity of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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