

## *Articulation Under Pressure: Students' Experiences In Enhancing Their English-Speaking Proficiency*

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Speaking anxiety is a significant challenge for students learning English, yet the underlying causes and coping strategies remain poorly understood - especially among first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education English majors. This qualitative study delves into the psychological barriers, external factors, and coping mechanisms that influence these students' speaking performance. Through one-on-one interviews conducted via Google Meet, the researchers used a phenomenological approach to gain a deep understanding of the students' lived experiences. Analyzing the data using Miles and Huberman's framework, several key themes emerged. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety often stems from a fear of being judged, pressure from the audience, and negative experiences in the past. This leads to issues like stuttering, difficulty articulating thoughts, and a lack of confidence. Despite the challenges, they employ various strategies to manage their anxiety, such as thorough preparation, self-affirmation, and seeking support from peers and mentors. This study underscores the importance of creating supportive environments and structured learning opportunities to reduce anxiety and foster growth among English language learners. By doing so, this study offers practical insights to enhance language teaching practices and empower students to become confident, proficient communicators in academic and professional settings.

**Keywords:** speaking anxiety, English proficiency, coping strategies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a dynamic process involving the construction, reception, and interpretation of meaning, making it the most immediate and interactive of the four macro skills (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Unlike reading, writing, and listening, speaking cannot be practiced alone—it requires interaction and feedback, making it both essential and challenging for language learners (Indrianty, 2016). In academic settings where English is the medium of instruction, such as in the Philippines, speaking proficiency is a crucial skill. However, it is also the most difficult to master, often hindered by psychological barriers like anxiety. Speaking anxiety, particularly in public or classroom contexts, can negatively affect learners' confidence and performance, especially when they fear judgment or failure (Pike, 2024).

Language anxiety, defined as the tension and apprehension associated with second-language learning, is a significant affective factor in language acquisition (Horwitz et al., 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1994). It manifests in various forms: trait anxiety (inherent personality traits), state anxiety (situation-based), and situation-specific anxiety (long-term anxiety in specific settings), all of which can hinder students' ability to process and produce language (Spielberger, 1983; Scovel, 1978). According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), high anxiety can block language input, while a low-anxiety environment facilitates better learning outcomes. Despite global research on language anxiety, there remains a lack of localized studies focusing on how speaking anxiety affects English proficiency among Filipino learners in higher education.

This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between speaking anxiety and English proficiency among first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English. It explores not only how anxiety impairs performance but also the contextual and classroom-based factors that contribute to it—such as peer pressure, time constraints, teacher behavior, and high-stakes speaking situations. Numerous studies confirm that anxiety can significantly reduce speaking performance. Learners who feel anxious tend to hesitate, struggle to articulate thoughts, or avoid speaking altogether, directly impacting their proficiency (Sari, 2017; Christy et al., 2020). Scovel (1978) noted that excessive worry leads to inconsistent outcomes in language tasks, further demonstrating how anxiety can undermine even well-prepared students.

To address these challenges, several coping strategies have been identified in the literature. Kondo and Young's (2004) five-dimensional framework—preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer support, and resignation—offers students practical ways to manage anxiety. Cooperative learning methods, as suggested by Nagahashi (2007), also help reduce anxiety by creating peer-supported environments. Fujii (2017) and Lee et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of student-teacher interaction and supportive teaching practices in building confidence. By fostering a non-threatening classroom atmosphere, teachers can help reduce stress and encourage student participation. These strategies collectively contribute to improving learners' ability to perform and participate in English-speaking tasks more effectively.

In sum, this study seeks to investigate the underlying causes of speaking anxiety and its direct effects on English-speaking proficiency among first-year English majors. It also aims to explore the influence of classroom environment and coping strategies in mitigating anxiety and improving academic performance. In doing so, this research contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education and aligns with the AMBISYON NATIN 2040 Agenda by promoting inclusive learning and enhancing communication skills vital for personal growth and national development. The following questions guide this inquiry: (1) What factors contribute to speaking anxiety among first-year students that affect their English proficiency? (2) How does the classroom environment influence their speaking anxiety? and (3) How does this anxiety impact their English language performance?

## II. METHODS

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative design to explore the relationship between speaking anxiety and English proficiency among first-year BSEd English majors. It aimed to capture students' lived experiences during English-speaking tasks. Data was gathered through one-on-one online interviews via Google Meet, where participants shared their thoughts, emotions, and

coping strategies. The responses were thematically analyzed to uncover common factors influencing their speaking anxiety and its effect on language performance, providing insight into the psychological barriers affecting English proficiency.

The research involved eight purposively selected participants from a state university in Cebu City, all of whom met the inclusion criteria: first-year standing, enrollment in BSEd-English, and voluntary consent. The researchers served as primary instruments for data collection, using a validated interview guide adapted from Bogodad et al. (2021). Interviews lasted around 30 minutes and were conducted virtually for convenience and comfort. Ethical protocols—including ERC clearance (Code: 1263 / 2024-10), informed consent, and data confidentiality—were strictly followed throughout the study.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) three-phase framework: reduction, display, and verification. Initial responses were organized and filtered to identify key patterns and themes, which were then displayed visually to aid interpretation. Findings were cross-validated with existing literature to ensure credibility. Ethical considerations included protecting participant privacy, avoiding coercion, offering flexible scheduling, and providing incentives responsibly. Overall, the study ensured academic rigor and participant welfare while contributing valuable insights into managing speaking anxiety in English language learning.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the relationship between second-language anxiety, speaking anxiety, and their impact on students' academic performance. It also examined students' coping strategies. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, three major themes emerged: **Second-Language Speaking Anxiety**, **Strengths and Weaknesses**, and **Coping Strategies**.

<b>A. Second Language Speaking Anxiety</b>	
Key Problem Areas	Description
Fear of Judgment	Caused nervousness, stuttering, and loss of thought flow during public speaking.
Public Speaking Anxiety	Large audiences and live speaking heightened anxiety.
Limited Preparation and Topic Familiarity	Unfamiliar topics and lack of prep time worsened performance and confidence.

Students like S1, S2, and S3 experienced heightened anxiety due to peer judgment, past trauma, or unfamiliar speaking environments.

<b>B. Strengths and Weaknesses in Speaking</b>			
Respondent	Strengths	Weaknesses	Effective Activities
S1	Good vocabulary, improved through training	Mental blocks, fluency struggles	English Festival Q&A
S2	Confident, fluent with prep	Overthinking, fear of judgment	Fluent class report
S3	Pronunciation, participated in competitions	Stuttering, vocab recall issues	Mr. Intramurals Q&A
S4	Articulation	Vocabulary gaps, recall issues	-
S5	Volume, articulation, confidence when prepared	Expressing thoughts quickly	Reports on familiar topics
S6	Pronunciation, conversational skill	Vocabulary and fluency gaps	English games, conversations
S7	Improved via ESL teaching	Fear of public speaking	ESL teaching (1-on-1)
S8	Strong vocabulary	Stuttering, hesitation in impromptu scenarios	-
S3	Pronunciation, participated in competitions	Stuttering, vocab recall issues	Mr. Intramurals Q&A

Students thrive in supportive or familiar environments and underperform in pressured or judgmental settings.

<b>C. Coping Strategies</b>			
Respondent	Effective Strategies	Least Effective	External Support
S1	Self-affirmation and self-challenge	-	-
S2	Self-motivation, resting	-	Mentor/classmate tips
S3	Careful studying, mindfulness	Repetitive unprepared answers	Teacher guidance
S4	Sweets, initiative from peers	Post-task feedback discussion	Peer initiative encouragement
S5	Practice with friends	Group communication (e.g., forums)	Select friend support
S6	Reassurance from partner	-	Peer/professional advice
S7	Deep breathing, mental grounding	-	Reassurance from close friends
S8	Preparation, deep breathing, organized thinking	-	Advice from experienced speakers (e.g., DJ friend)

Common coping mechanisms included **preparation, emotional support, and mental grounding**. Unhelpful approaches involved group pressure and misaligned self-talk.

### Practical Implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance of creating safe and supportive environments where students can practice speaking in English without fear of judgment. Schools and universities should prioritize constructive feedback and encouragement over criticism, particularly when students engage in public speaking tasks. Educators are encouraged to implement personalized strategies that cater to individual student needs—such as one-on-one feedback sessions for introverted students and collaborative group activities for those who are more extroverted. Gradually exposing students to more challenging speaking situations, starting with familiar topics or small audiences, can effectively build their confidence over time. Moreover, educators must be trained to identify signs of speaking anxiety and respond with empathy and appropriate support. To help students manage their anxiety more effectively, reflective practices such as journaling can be integrated into the curriculum, allowing learners to monitor their progress, thoughts, and emotional responses to speaking tasks.

### Theoretical Implications

The study emphasizes the complex interplay of emotional, cognitive, and environmental factors in the development of second-language speaking anxiety. It underscores the necessity of considering both internal aspects, such as self-perception and self-belief, and external influences, such as audience reactions and previous experiences, when developing intervention strategies. By doing so, it offers a more holistic understanding of the psychological and social dynamics affecting language learners. These insights contribute to the growing body of research that calls for learner-centered and context-sensitive approaches to language anxiety. Future research should explore the long-term effectiveness of specific coping strategies, particularly how they influence not only academic outcomes but also professional communication and public speaking confidence beyond the classroom. This broader perspective can help develop more sustainable and personalized support systems for students dealing with speaking anxiety in diverse educational and real-world settings.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the profound impact of speaking anxiety on learners' English-speaking proficiency, highlighting how it stems from a combination of internal and external factors, such as fear of judgment, peer pressure, time constraints, and teacher feedback. By addressing these often-overlooked contributors, the research bridges a significant gap in understanding the causes of speaking anxiety. It underscores the importance of supportive environments where learners can gradually build confidence through preparation, constructive feedback, and tailored interventions. On the other hand, the findings emphasize the need for educators to

adopt strategies that not only reduce anxiety but also empower learners as effective communicators. Practical applications include designing programs that prioritize personalized support, fostering resilience, and encouraging reflective practices to help students overcome challenges. Thus, this study contributes to the broader discourse on language learning by offering insights that guide educators, curriculum designers, and mental health professionals in creating solutions that promote both academic success and personal growth.

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