# From Fear to Fluency: The Case of Indonesian English Language Learners (ELLs)

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***Abstract -*** *This study explores English-speaking anxiety among Indonesian English Language Learners (ELLs) particularly those studying abroad, with the goal of understanding how they overcome this challenge and achieve fluency. The research was carried out to address the persistent issue of speaking anxiety, which hinders language development and academic participation for many Indonesian learners. A qualitative case study approach was used which involved in-depth interviews among 14 Indonesian ELLs staying and studying in the Philippines. The findings revealed that learners experienced anxiety through physical symptoms, emotional conflict, and social pressures. These struggles were often triggered by low language proficiency, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and fear of judgment especially in formal settings, spontaneous speaking tasks, and conversations with native speakers and even among fellow Indonesians. To cope with these challenges, participants used internal strategies such as relaxation techniques, increased exposure to English, positive mindset adjustments, and committed learning efforts. They also relied on external strategies, like peer support, encouragement from teachers, and prayer. These combined efforts helped learners build speaking confidence and gradually reduce anxiety. The study recommends individualized coping strategies, supportive and inclusive teaching, culturally sensitive practices, and further research on long-term impacts of the coping strategies. This study contributes to a better understanding of English-speaking anxiety in the Indonesian context and offers insights for supporting learners in their journey from fear to fluency.*

***Keywords***: *English Speaking Anxiety, Coping Strategies, English Language Learners (ELLs), Language, Fluency, Indonesian ELLs*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to effectively communicate in English has become increasingly vital in a world where proficiency in the language is often a prerequisite for academic and professional success (Rudd & Honkiss, 2020). In Indonesia, a country where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) (Al-Mutairi, 2020), the pressure to master English is significant. Many of these learners fall under the category of English Language Learners (ELLs) who are studying English in addition to their native language (Araujo, 2013). However, for many Indonesian ELLs, speaking English is not just a matter of linguistic skill; it is often accompanied by feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and fear (Said & Weda, 2018). This anxiety, known as English speaking anxiety, is a widespread phenomenon that can severely hinder learners' ability to express

themselves confidently and effectively in English (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). English speaking anxiety manifests in various ways, including physical symptoms such as sweating, shaking, and increased heart rate, as well as psychological symptoms like nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and negative self-perception (Alenezi & Mugaddam, 2023). These symptoms can be so intense that they lead to avoidance behaviors, which negatively impact language learning, academic performance, and career prospects (Haidara, 2016; Waluyo & Panmei, 2021). Indonesian ELLs often find themselves in environments where English is viewed as prestigious and foreign, intensifying the pressure to speak flawlessly and increasing the fear of judgment (Rodriguez, 2022). This issue is not merely personal but rooted in the broader educational and cultural systems (Rof''i, 2023). Globally, English speaking anxiety is often attributed to factors such as fear of mistakes, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and peer pressure (Lee & Ye, 2021; Tekir, 2021). In Indonesia, contributing factors include traditional teacher-centered instruction, limited speaking opportunities, and the high-stakes value of English proficiency (Astuti et al., 2022; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Waluyo & Panmei, 2021). Cultural values such as harmony and avoidance of confrontation may also discourage students from speaking up in class (Zafarina, 2022). Furthermore, the perception of English as a Western language can create alienation and reduced confidence (Almubayei & Taqi, 2022).

Despite a growing body of research on English speaking anxiety, gaps remain in understanding how this phenomenon affects Indonesian learners in their unique educational and cultural contexts (Fahmi et al., 2020). Specifically, there is limited exploration of how Indonesian ELLs cope with anxiety and the influence of teachers, peers, and instructional methods (Rodriguez, 2022). Addressing these issues is essential for developing strategies that support long-term language learning and career success (Listyani et al., 2024). Based on Miles' (2017) taxonomy of research gaps, this study addresses the population gap by focusing on Indonesian ELLs while considering cultural background, language barriers, and educational context.

This research aimed to identify how Indonesian ELLs overcome their speaking anxiety and achieve fluency in English. Particularly, it endeavored to answer the following questions:
1. How do participants describe and narrate their experiences with English speaking anxiety?
2. What coping strategies do participants use to manage their English-speaking anxiety?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English plays a pivotal role in today's interconnected world, and serves as the primary medium of communication across diverse fields and industries (Atasheva, 2024). As a global lingua franca, it bridges cultural and linguistic gaps, and enables individuals from different backgrounds to collaborate and share knowledge across borders (Jenkins & Baker, 2023; Loor et al., 2024). English is now the most widely spoken second language, and its use is essential in numerous areas including business, technology, science, education, and international diplomacy (Mehrajuddin, 2022; Sharma & Puri, 2021). Proficiency in English provides access to global opportunities and is often viewed as a gateway to success, especially in countries where it is taught as a foreign language (Aqeel et al., 2023). In Indonesia, English is categorized

as a foreign language and is primarily learned in formal educational settings. It is rarely used in daily conversations, yet remains highly valued for its importance in international trade, higher education, and tourism-related industries (Jaya & Mortini, 2020). The Indonesian government has included English in the national curriculum, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels (Adipramono, 2011). However, learners still face obstacles such as limited opportunities for real-life practice, a strong focus on grammar and written exams, and a multilingual environment that creates cognitive overload (Alamsyah, 2018). These challenges contribute to the development of English speaking anxiety among learners.

English speaking anxiety is a form of communication apprehension that affects learners' ability to speak comfortably and confidently in English (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). It manifests in various ways such as hesitation, avoidance, and fear of making mistakes, and can range from mild discomfort to extreme fear (Gürbüz & Cabaroglu, 2021; Siddique et al., 2020). This anxiety is particularly evident among Indonesian ELLs who have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom and often fear public embarrassment due to cultural norms that emphasize maintaining "face" (Kurniawan & Radia, 2017; Sukmawati & Pujiani, 2024). Moreover, the emphasis on correctness and written performance in Indonesia's education system further intensifies learners' reluctance to engage in spontaneous speech. As a result, speaking anxiety negatively affects learner'' fluency, long-term language development, and psychological well-being. It interferes with their ability to communicate clearly, limits their classroom participation, and can lead to a self-fulfilling cycle of avoidance and decreased confidence (Faisal, 2016; Sana et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2023). Over time, it can diminish learners' motivation and overall interest in language learning, causing them to fall behind their peers and miss out on important speaking opportunities that contribute to language proficiency and personal development (Altun, 2023; Lu, 2024).

Multiple frameworks such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1978), Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (1981), Schumann's Model of Acculturation (1986), and Schneider's Dynamic Model of postcolonial Englishes (2007) contribute to the understanding of Second Language Acquisition. Nonetheless, this study specifically utilizes Stephen Krashen's theory of Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) and Braj Kachru's theory of World Englishes (1990).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen emphasizes the role of emotional variables in the language learning process. Factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation influence learners' ability to acquire language. A high affective filter, often caused by fear or embarrassment, prevents learners from fully absorbing language input. This emotional barrier can reduce opportunities for authentic practice, delay progress, and lead to avoidance behaviors (Krashen, 1982). In contrast, a low affective filter, facilitated by positive emotional experiences, enhances learning. Educators can lower this filter by reducing classroom stress, giving personalized encouragement, and using interactive activities aligned with students' interests. Ensuring that these strategies are present in the classroom fosters a more positive and confident learning environment.

The other framework that this study is anchored on is World Englishes, developed by Braj Kachru in 1991. It explains the global diversity of English usage. Kachru's model proposes three concentric circles to illustrate the English-speaking world. The Inner Circle consists of native English-speaking countries. The Outer Circle includes countries where English has a historical role and is used institutionally. The Expanding Circle covers countries where English is learned as a foreign language and used mainly for international communication (Kachru, 1990). The framework challenges the idea of a single English standard, and promotes the legitimacy of various English varieties around the world. For Indonesian English Language Learners, this perspective helps reduce anxiety by validating their form of English and encouraging a more flexible and confident approach to language use. It also reinforces the view of English as a tool for global communication, not limited by native-speaker norms (Kubota, 2001). Together, these theoretical perspectives support the understanding that language anxiety is not merely an individual issue but one shaped by emotional, cultural, and systemic factors. They highlight the need for learning environments that are emotionally supportive and culturally aware, enabling Indonesian English Language Learners to become more confident speakers and legitimate users of English in global contexts.

## III.    MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach, following the framework outlined by Yin (2003), to explore how Indonesian English Language Learners (ELLs) overcome speaking anxiety. Yin (2003) describes a case study as a method suitable for answering "how" and "why" questions in real-life contexts where the researcher has little control over events. This approach aligns with the study's goal of understanding the strategies learners use to manage their English-speaking anxiety.

The study was originally intended to be conducted among Indonesian students enrolled in English courses in Manado, Indonesia. However, due to an unexpected delay in the researcher's visa processing, the study location was changed. The research was eventually carried out among 14 Indonesian undergraduate students enrolled during the second semester 2024-2025, at a faith-based higher education institution in the Philippines. Despite the change in location, the participants still shared relevant characteristics such as Indonesian nationality and enrollment in English classes, making them suitable for the study. Maximum variation purposive sampling was used to select individuals with shared traits yet diverse experiences in English-speaking anxiety to ensure a range of perspectives (Friday & Leah, 2024). To protect their identities, aliases were assigned to each participant. Participants' aliases are one-word pseudonyms generated using Microsoft Copilot, based on key elements of the stories participants shared.

The primary researcher who engaged directly with participants through in-depth interviews and facilitated a conversational space that encouraged openness, served as the main instrument of this study. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews. This interview guide underwent expert validation by seven university professors with backgrounds in language and research, resulting in several revisions

that enhanced its clarity and relevance. In addition, a supplementary questionnaire, adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), was also used. This instrument provided demographic data and a clearer picture of participants' initial perceptions of their English-speaking anxiety, and served as valuable background context for the interviews.

This study was approved by the Ethics Review Board of the Adventist University of the Philippines on December 22, 2024. A pilot study was conducted with one student to test the effectiveness and clarity of the interview process. Their feedback led to minor improvements in the wording and order of the questions. Data collection officially began on February 17, 2025. Data collection concluded on March 10, 2025. Ethical guidelines were followed based on Lincoln and Guba's (1982) criteria for trustworthiness. To ensure credibility, a brief break was done after the first three one-on-one in-depth interviews to provide researchers time for debriefing and discussion of initial findings. This short pause also allowed for minor adjustments to the interview guide and protocol to enhance clarity and generate more meaningful responses. The participants were also allowed to speak in the language they were most comfortable with–English, Indonesian, or their local Indonesian dialect. Translations were reviewed by two bilingual speakers with proficiency and fluency in the languages used during interviews, and member checking was conducted after the data analysis to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Transferability was supported through detailed field notes and rich descriptions of participant backgrounds and interview settings. Dependability was ensured by using an interview guide for consistency and keeping audio recordings and verbatim transcripts to create an audit trail. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to monitor personal biases and remain grounded in participants' actual experiences.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. First, data from the questionnaires, including demographic information and FLCAS scores, provided essential background for interpreting the interviews. The demographic data identified participants' profile information, while the FLCAS scores offered a general measure of anxiety and helped guide the direction of the interviews. In the second phase, interview data were transcribed. Interviews conducted in English were transcribed using the iTranscribe Pro application, while those involving Indonesian or vernacular language were manually transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Codes were developed from significant lines and grouped into tables based on repeated phrases and key ideas, which were then organized into broader themes. This process helped form a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions and explored both shared and differing experiences. After the analysis, findings and transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy and credibility of interpretations.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings from in-depth interviews with Indonesian ELLs regarding their experiences with English speaking anxiety. The analysis is divided into two main categories: (1) narratives on English speaking anxiety and (2) coping strategies.

### A. Emerging Stories and Descriptions of English-Speaking Anxiety

To address the first research question, participants' English-speaking anxiety is presented through three themes: Battles with the Self, Battles Within the Self, and Battles with Others. These themes reflect the participants' personal narratives and how they understand and describe their anxiety.

#### 1) Battles With the Self

This theme focuses on the physical and skill-based struggles that arise during English speaking. It includes inadequate language proficiency, physiological symptoms, and speech disruptions.

a) Inadequate Language Proficiency

Limited proficiency often led to avoidance and misunderstandings. Climb said they "didn't understand anything" (Line 13, translated). Spark (Line 35) and Bloom (Line 91) reported similar challenges. Light shared: *"Everyone answered in English that it was on the bottom line. And guess what I said? 'There, ma'am, there.' Hahaha... I just shut up immediately..."* (Line 75, translated).

Respondents' responses like those mentioned in the previous paragraph support Nurmansyah and Nurmayasari (2018) who found that low proficiency is linked with higher anxiety. Path described how they withdrew from a conversation due to misunderstanding. *"She was very friendly... I couldn't understand... she got offended... I became more reserved."* (Line 56) Others like Rise and Bloom reported emotional distress when faced with comprehension difficulties.

b) Physiological Symptoms

English-speaking anxiety often manifests in the body. Learners do not only feel nervous internally, but this anxiety frequently takes a physical form that is difficult to control. Anxiety appeared in physical forms such as trembling, cold hands, and a racing heartbeat (Root, Line 62; Rock, Line 60; Bloom, Line 93).

The symptoms align with Ansari (2015) who notes that anxious students often experience sweating, trembling, and perspiration. These accounts show how the body can betray a speaker's calm exterior.

c) Speech Disruptions

Participants mentioned stuttering, forgetting, and being unable to speak fluently. Step said, *"I forgot things and I stuttered a lot"* (Line 52). Bloom shared, *"If I'm nervous or scared, I go blank... I don't know what to say"* (Line 18, translated).

Other participants like Flow and Rock also described mental blocks and confused thoughts. This experience with speech disruptions is similar to what Andrea (2022) and Oxford (1999) observed regarding how anxiety limits fluency and causes avoidance.

### 2) Battles Within the Self

This theme explores the emotional and psychological struggles learners face when speaking English. They are: lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of judgement.

#### a) Lack of Confidence

Participants identified low confidence as a major barrier. Light said, *"I'm just not confident"* (Line 38). Stretch also shared, *"Honestly, I know the answer, but... I think, 'Ah, it's fine, let someone else answer'"* (Line 24, translated). Even when learners know the answer, their fear overrides their willingness to engage. Hence, lack of confidence emerged as a major barrier that silenced learners, not because of linguistic limitations, but due to fear of failure and self-doubt.

This lack of confidence creates a constant struggle. Nunan (1999, as cited in Ahsan et al., 2020) states that students who lack confidence in their English communication skill would inevitably suffer from communication anxiety.

#### b) Fear of Making Mistakes

Participants fear grammatical and pronunciation errors. Spark said, *"When I have to speak, it really makes me afraid...whether my question is correct or if my answer is correct"* (Line 30, translated). Stretch expressed experiencing pressure to ensure accuracy (Line 50).

The findings regarding participants' fear of making mistakes support Ekalestari et al. (2023) who noted that grammar is a key cause of anxiety. Additionally, Shift linked anxiety to a desire for perfect pronunciation (Line 44), affirming Gándara's (2020) argument that many learners prioritize correctness over communication.

#### c) Fear of Judgement

Learners feared negative reactions from others. Bloom said, *"I was afraid they would judge me, like if I made a mistake, would they laugh at me?"* (Line 16, translated). Light also mentioned, *"Maybe some of them are thinking, 'Oh, she said that wrong'"* (Line 48, translated).

This reveals the underlying emotional concern that many learners carry, the fear of being mocked or ridiculed for making mistakes, which often lends to a deep sense of anxiety. Alzamil (2022) found that a large percentage of learners share this fear. Hence, the fear of judgement creates a major barrier to English fluency, causing learners to avoid speaking and miss out on opportunities to practice and improve.

*3) Battles With Others*

This theme addresses the external social struggles learners face when speaking English, such as public speaking contexts, spontaneous speaking situations, and the proficiency of the interlocutor. Additionally, factors like the "circle of ease" and the feeling of having "no place like home," also impact their communication experiences.

a) Public Speaking Contexts

Participants reported strong anxiety when speaking in front of others (Rock, Line 45; Root, Line 104; Spark, Line 43). Flow worried about teacher evaluation (Line 33). Root said anxiety worsened with audience size (Line 50).

Another participant shared, *"When presenting... I'm afraid of saying something wrong and changing the meaning"* (Branch, Line 33, translated). This resonates with what Sulastiani (2020) found that anxiety in public speaking exists regardless of experience level.

b) Spontaneous Speaking Situations

For many Indonesian English Language Learners, being asked to speak without warning elicits intense anxiety. Unlike presentations, which allow for preparation, spontaneous speaking removes any chance to mentally organize thoughts or rehearse language, making learners feel exposed and unready.

Learners described being randomly called to speak as highly stressful (Branch, Line 20; Bloom, Line 22; Bud, Line 52). Spark feared not understanding questions (Line 47). This corroborates the findings of Anggraeny et al. (2020) and Lucas (2005) that impromptu speaking, with little or no immediate preparation, is often the most intimidating.

c) Proficiency of the Interlocutor

Learners felt more anxious when speaking with fluent or native-like speakers (Bloom, Line 33; Bud, Line 46; Stretch, Line 16). The thought of interacting with fluent speakers, particularly native or near-native ones, makes them self-conscious about their own abilities and limitations.

Participants mentioned specifically Americans, Filipino- Americans, and Africans. Climb admitted feeling *"dumb"* for needing repetition (Line 47). Shift felt more comfortable with non-native speakers (Line 48). These results echo Daymiel et al. (2022), who found that higher fluency in others can trigger anxiety.

d) Circle of Ease

Anxiety lessened with familiar people. Stretch said they felt relaxed speaking with those they knew (Line 42). Spark said, *"I feel confident with people I know, but with leaders, teachers, I feel shy and anxious"* (Line 115, translated).

Two participants noted higher pressure when dealing with teachers (Branch, Line 39; Step, Line 36). Nevertheless, Bloom shared that being understood by others helped them speak more confidently (Line 46). This confirms Xethakis and Ostman (2021) findings that familiarity with peers reduces anxiety.

e) No Place Like Home

Surprisingly, some participants felt more anxious speaking English with fellow Indonesians. Climb said English was seen as pretentious back home (Line 53). Bloom explained, *"I actually didn't experience judgment from non-Indonesians"* (Lines 38, translated).

Mustamir (2024) pointed out that Indonesian cultural values, such as saving face, intensify anxiety. Spark hoped for mutual support among Indonesians abroad (Line 190, translated), but this was not always fulfilled.

Participants' narratives revealed that English-speaking anxiety is shaped by physical symptoms, internal fears, and external social conditions. The three themes–Battles with the Self, Battles Within the Self, and Battles with Others–show that anxiety is not just a language issue but a lived and complex emotional experience.

*B. Coping Strategies: The Real Pep Talk*

To address the second research question, which explores the coping strategies of Indonesian ELLs to manage English-speaking anxiety, participants' experiences were organized into two themes: R.E.A.L. and P.E.P. These themes reflect both internal resilience and external support systems.

*2) R.E.A.L.*

R.E.A.L. stands for Relaxation techniques, Exposure, Adjustment of mindset, and Learning. These strategies reflect participants' individual efforts to manage their anxiety.

a) Relaxation Techniques

One of the most common strategies participants shared in dealing with speaking anxiety is staying relaxed in the moment. Shift described using the *"four by four by four"* breathing method: inhale, hold, and exhale for four counts (Line 57).

Sajidah et al. (2021) confirmed that deep breathing helps regulate emotional balance and reduce anxiety. Bloom, Root, and others noted that breathing and focusing helped them cope (Bloom, Line 84; Root, Line 126). In critical moments, Bloom prayed silently and focused intently to stay calm and listen (Line 58). She also reminded herself not to panic in unexpected interactions (Line 53), which emphasized the value of deep breathing and self-encouragement.

b) Exposure

Exposure to English through listening, reading, and media was a common coping tool (Bloom, Line 63; Root, Line 98; Spark, Line 179). Stretch marked new words while reading and memorized them over time (Line 48). Branch avoided subtitles when watching films (Line 48). Light recalled applying phrases heard in movies (Line 86). Root emphasized the role of technology in learning English (Line 139).

Makodamayanti et al. (2020) highlighted how digital English exposure reduces anxiety and boosts confidence. Many participants practiced English daily and preferred speaking with foreigners to build fluency (Branch, Line 61; Spark, Line 165). Rise shared how she began copying phrases she overheard from peers (Line 82). Climb credited long-term exposure to foreigners as the source of increased confidence (Line 41). Path recalled being dorm-assigned with non-Indonesians, which led to Indonesians using English among themselves (Line 159). These examples show that real-life exposure can reduce anxiety and improve fluency (Ananda & Hastini, 2023).

c) Adjustment of Mindset

Participants emphasized pushing through fear (Spark, Line 167; Stretch, Line 40). Rock noted the importance of speaking confidently and correcting mistakes later (Line 33). They stressed that others often care more about understanding than grammar (Step, Line 96). Dias da Silva et al. (2018) supported the idea that embracing mistakes leads to growth. Path realized that they are not alone in this struggle, reducing their fear (Line 118).

Participants repeatedly stressed the value of stepping out of their comfort zones (Climb, Line 40; Light, Line 86; Rock, Line 62; Stretch, Line 46). Climb encouraged others to try even with the fear of being mocked, sharing how she made unexpected friendships with foreigners (Line 69). However, they acknowledged that complete confidence is rare. Path remarked that being content with one's own capacity builds genuine confidence (Line 189). This reflects how a mindset that shifts away from perfectionism toward effort and self-compassion is key to reducing anxiety (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Pishghadam & Akhondpoor, 2011).

d) Learning

Preparation was often equated with learning. Bud stated, "Preparation is the key" (Line 76). Rise took a few seconds to plan answers mentally before speaking (Line 78). Climb learned through observation, connecting English and Indonesian words (Line 38). Step and Flow prepared for presentations by practicing pronunciation and content the night before (Step, Line 88; Flow, Line 98). Milanrianto et al. (2023) also affirms that preparation was the most used strategy for managing anxiety.

One participant mentioned that anxiety decreases through continuous practice (Shift, Line 81). Another (Path) shared that practicing in front of a mirror, integrating lessons into daily life (Line 144), and being consistent would lead to fluency (Line 154).

*2) P.E.P.*

P.E.P. stands for Peer encouragement, Empowerment from teachers, and Prayer practices. This theme highlights the role of external and emotional support from Indonesian ELLs' peers, their educators, and their faith.

a) Peer Encouragement

Positive peer responses helped participants feel less anxious (Rock, Line 60). Another shared that affirming reactions and a non-judgmental environment fostered comfort (Climb, Line 17).

Huang (2023) found that peer support boosts confidence and reduces anxiety. This was proven true by Bloom when they expressed appreciation for their block mates who were understanding and supportive even when they struggled (Line 49).

b) Empowerment from Teachers

Teachers who gave constructive feedback and reassurance helped reduce anxiety (Rock, Line 29). Bloom recalled a teacher's patient response when they blanked out. *"I don't know." "Okay, that's okay, I will help you"* (Line 26).

Ibrahimi and Algazzaz (2024) emphasized how emotionally supportive teachers reduce learner anxiety. As a matter of fact, one participant shared that they retained correct pronunciation after being gently corrected (Light, Line 88).

c) Prayer Practices

Faith and prayer provided strength and calm. Spark used the English Bible to build vocabulary (Line 202). Root recited *The Lord's Prayer* before school (Line 141). Branch learned to pray in English (Line 48). Participants often prayed in moments of panic or before speaking. Light asked God to *"take away my overthinking"* (Line 54), Rock prayed for help (Line 55), and Bloom relied on prayer to focus during a medical emergency (Line 58). Stewart et al. (2019) found that faith-based practices are linked to reduced anxiety.

Participants of this study relied on both internal strategies (relaxation, exposure, mindset, and preparation) and external support from peers, teachers, and faith to manage and even counter English speaking anxiety. These strategies worked together to form a holistic system of resilience that enabled learners to speak more confidently despite their fears. Additionally, several findings revealed patterns rooted in Indonesian culture. Anxiety when speaking English to fellow Indonesians reflects the shame and honor culture where saving face matters deeply (Kurniawan & Radia, 2017). Sensitivity to hierarchy also heightened anxiety in formal settings (Aswan et al., 2024). Finally, prayer, while globally practiced, was deeply personal and cultural in the Indonesian context (Saumantri, 2022). These sociocultural dimensions significantly shaped how learners experienced and coped with English-speaking anxiety.

The Indonesian ELLs experiences related to English-speaking anxiety manifested across three major areas: physical and linguistic struggles (battles with the self), emotional and psychological conflicts (battles within the self), and external and social pressures (battles with others). Specifically, learners attributed their anxiety to factors such as low proficiency, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of judgement. These struggles are often manifested physically through symptoms like trembling or sweating, and linguistically through speech disruptions such as stuttering or loss of words. Additionally, ELLs experienced higher levels of anxiety in formal settings, spontaneous speaking tasks, and when speaking with proficient or native speakers. Surprisingly, some participants even reported heightened anxiety when speaking English with fellow Indonesians, due to fear of being judged or misunderstood.

To cope with English speaking anxiety, participants employed both internal (R.E.A.L.) and external (P.E.P.) strategies. Internally, they practiced relaxation techniques, sought more

exposure to English media, made mindset adjustments, and committed to learning and preparation. Externally, they relied on peer encouragement, empowerment from teachers, and prayer practices. These strategies formed a holistic support system that helped learners gain confidence and reduce anxiety in speaking English.

Findings reveal culturally specific patterns of English-speaking anxiety among Indonesian ELLs. Anxiety was heightened when speaking with fellow Indonesians due to the shame and honour culture. Sensitivity to formality shaped their experiences reflecting the group's respect for hierarchy, age, and authority. Prayer emerged as a common coping strategy, reflecting the country's strong religious values. To summarize the findings of this study, Figure 1 presents a model where the mountain represents English-speaking anxiety, shaped by the three battles. The climber symbolizes Indonesian ELLs, equipped with gear representing internal and external coping strategies that help them overcome these challenges and reach the summit of fluency and confidence.



Figure 1. The Mountain of English Speaking Anxiety of Indonesian ELLs

## V. CONCLUSION

The experiences of Indonesian ELLs reveal that English-speaking anxiety sits at the intersection of language, skill, environment, and emotion. Behind these pauses and hesitations are stories of learners navigating their own fears–fears of making mistakes, of being judged, of

not being good enough. These fears are not imagined; they are real. Kachru's framework of World Englishes reminds learners that English belongs to everyone who uses it. There is no single "correct" English.

For Indonesian learners who struggle with perfecting pronunciation, native-like English is not the goal. This shift in perspective is reassurance that their voice matters, even if it sounds different. English can be spoken without leaving behind one's identity. The lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis shows how English speaking anxiety does not just hold back words–it holds back willingness. Yet, the same theory shows that when the filter is lowered through safe spaces, encouragement, meaningful connection, and faith, language can flow more freely. Learners begin to open up, not just to English, but to themselves. What emerged from this study was not just a list of challenges, but a quiet kind of bravery. Learners found ways to cope–some through prayer, some through preparation, some through laughter shared with friends. These strategies, although varied, all point to the same truth: English speaking anxiety may not disappear overnight, but it can be managed. It can be softened. And eventually, it can be transformed. In the end, this is a story of becoming–of learners who in the face of self-doubt, chose to speak anyway. Learners who discovered that confidence is not the absence of fear, but the courage to keep going despite it. And perhaps, that is the most powerful lesson of all, not just for them, but for anyone who has ever felt small in the presence of a foreign language.

Several recommendations are proposed to better support Indonesian ELLs.. For Indonesian ELLs, they are encouraged to embrace mistakes as a natural part of the learning process, to practice daily, and to engage with English through various media. They are also advised to explore calming techniques that work best for them individually, and not only seek support but also be a source of support for fellow ELLs. For educators, it is important to create supportive environments where mistakes are seen as part of learning, and to encourage participation through small-group tasks. Educators are also enjoined to consider students' cultural backgrounds to better support their language learning development. For educational institutions, providing training on managing language anxiety and applying culturally-sensitive teaching methods is recommended. Institutions should also create inclusive spaces, both physical and social, such as English clubs, where students can practice speaking in a low-pressure environment. Lastly, for future researchers, it is suggested to explore the long-term impact of specific coping strategies on fluency and English-speaking anxiety, and to compare the experiences of Indonesian ELLs residing locally versus those living abroad.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Jennifer Anabel Riany Pasuhuk and Kathleen B. Flores collaboratively contributed to the completion of this research. Pasuhuk, as the primary author, was responsible for the conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and initial draft of the manuscript. Flores, as the Adviser, contributed to the refinement of the study, provided regular and continuous supervision and advice especially during the data collection and analysis period through debriefings and consultations, and guided the development and revision of the manuscript.

Both authors were actively involved in discussions throughout the research process and approved the final version of the thesis and this manuscript.

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