



EFL Students' Experiences of Coping with Speaking Anxiety in English Presentations at an Islamic Senior High School in Maros

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Received: 2025-12-01 Accepted: 2025-12-31

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.12122

Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences, underlying causes, impacts, and coping strategies of EFL students in managing speaking anxiety during English presentations, with particular attention to the integration of religious and cultural values within an Islamic educational context. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design was employed to understand the phenomenon from the participants' own perspectives. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six students at an Islamic Senior High School in Maros, Indonesia. The study is grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, further enriched by Islamic values such as *Sabr* (patience), *Tawakkul* (reliance on God), and *Ukhuwah* (brotherhood) as a distinctive framework for understanding stress management. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety is primarily triggered by fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, linguistic limitations, and pressure from the learning environment, with impacts spanning psychological discomfort, physical symptoms, and cognitive interference during performance. Students were found to draw on a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, frequently integrating spiritual and religious practices alongside practical preparation techniques to mitigate anxiety. The study concludes that speaking anxiety is a complex emotional experience shaped by both internal and external factors, and that the learning environment together with the internalization of Islamic values plays a pivotal role in transforming anxiety into a manageable challenge. These findings suggest that educators should attend not only to students' linguistic competence but also to fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere and incorporating value-based approaches that build resilience and confidence in public speaking.

Keywords: *coping strategies; EFL learners; Islamic values; qualitative research; speaking anxiety*

Introduction

Speaking anxiety is a psychological condition characterized by fear, nervousness, and tension that negatively affects students' ability to communicate effectively (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). It commonly arises from the fear of making mistakes, failing to deliver a presentation well, lacking confidence, or being ridiculed, laughed at, or judged by others. Public speaking anxiety exerts a significant negative influence on student performance, as it hinders learners' ability to progress and achieve academically (Mohd Naser & Mat Isa, 2021). Beyond academic outcomes, speaking anxiety often leads students to feel inferior and unable to perform well (Rizkiya & Pratolo, 2023), ultimately becoming a barrier that prevents them from mastering the language and communicating effectively. As EFL learners, Indonesian students frequently experience public speaking anxiety when delivering English presentations (Amelia, 2022).

This phenomenon typically stems from limited linguistic confidence and a profound fear of making errors in public and is further intensified by concern over negative evaluation from instructors and peers (Fauzi & Asi, 2023). Speaking anxiety often manifests physically through a racing heart, cold sweats, trembling, and difficulty concentrating (Rizkiya & Pratolo, 2023).

At the Islamic Senior High School in Maros, students experience these challenges acutely during English presentations; many are reluctant to perform due to a deep-seated fear of embarrassment or negative judgment from teachers and peers. Despite these challenges, students employ a range of coping strategies, such as thorough preparation, repeated practice, relaxation techniques including deep breathing, and self-motivation, to reduce their anxiety and participate more confidently in English learning (Warna & Uyun, 2024). With appropriate strategies, EFL students at this school can build their confidence and deliver English presentations more smoothly and effectively.

Understanding how students experience and overcome speaking anxiety during English presentations is therefore crucial, particularly in EFL contexts where English is rarely used in daily communication. Exploring students' lived experiences allows educators and researchers to gain deeper insight into the emotional, psychological, and pedagogical challenges learners face, and can inform the development of supportive classroom strategies and effective anxiety-reduction techniques.

Several studies have examined EFL students' speaking anxiety. Kho and Ting (2023) identified fear of public speaking as a significant obstacle for many learners of English as a second or foreign language. Similarly, Quvanch et al. (2024) reported that high levels of speaking anxiety can substantially impair individuals' communication skills, causing difficulties in organizing thoughts, sustaining

concentration, and articulating ideas. Siregar (2022) further found that excessive public speaking anxiety may compromise the professional competence of pre-service teachers.

In a study involving 21 Indonesian EFL students, Amelia (2022) revealed that learners hold a dual attitude toward oral presentations, perceiving them as both challenging and beneficial; the main difficulties reported included psychological barriers such as fear of negative evaluation (90.5%), stage fright (73%), and low self-confidence (57%), alongside skill-related problems such as difficulty explaining content in English (90.5%) and insufficient presentation techniques (52.4%). Using interviews and a literature review, Lukman and Widiastuty (2024) explored EFL students' experiences of public speaking, focusing on barriers and coping mechanisms; their findings indicated that the primary challenges stem from fear of communication, negative evaluation, and test pressure, compounded by linguistic limitations, such as insufficient vocabulary, poor grammar, and unclear pronunciation, and unsupportive classroom environments.

Although prior research has extensively examined the causes of students' speaking anxiety, considerably less attention has been paid to how students actually cope with this anxiety during English presentations. To date, only Lukman and Widiastuty (2024) have directly addressed this question. A related study by Johari et al. (2025), which examined EFL learners' anxiety across five universities in Indonesia, China, and Cambodia, recommended that educators implement interactive speaking exercises, provide constructive feedback, and encourage relaxation techniques to build learners' confidence; however, this study focused primarily on the causes of and general remedies for anxiety rather than on the specific coping strategies students themselves employ. The present study addresses this gap by examining how EFL students at an Islamic Senior High School cope with speaking anxiety during English presentations, while also considering the role of Islamic religious and cultural values in shaping their coping processes, an aspect that remains underexplored in the existing literature.

This research is significant because it enhances EFL students' understanding of effective ways to manage anxiety during English presentations and identifies the preparation strategies that enable them to perform with confidence. It also offers practical insights for teachers on cultivating a supportive learning environment that strengthens students' self-confidence. Specifically, this study explores EFL students' lived experiences of coping with speaking anxiety during English presentations and seeks to: 1) identify the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among EFL students; 2) examine the coping strategies used by EFL students to manage speaking anxiety in English presentations; and 3) explain how speaking anxiety influences students' presentation performance and language learning process. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, it adds to the growing body of literature on foreign language anxiety, particularly within Islamic educational contexts. Practically, it provides teachers with concrete, evidence-based strategies for managing speaking anxiety, enhancing students' confidence, and supporting learning and training policies that foster students' emotional well-being alongside their language development.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), a seminal theory that conceptualizes coping as a dynamic, reciprocal interaction between individuals and their environment rather than as a fixed personal trait or singular behavioural response (Lazarus, 1993). This framework comprises four core constructs adapted to the context of the present study. First, EFL students are defined as learners for whom English is neither the primary medium of instruction nor the main language of daily communication but is instead learned as a foreign language within a formal educational setting.

This study specifically focuses on students at an Islamic Senior High School, who additionally hold a distinct identity as learners of Islamic knowledge (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Second, speaking anxiety is understood as a situational affective response manifesting in three interrelated dimensions: physiological arousal (e.g., increased heart rate, muscular tension), cognitive apprehension (e.g., fear of negative evaluation, worry about linguistic errors, self-doubt), and behavioural adjustment (e.g., reduced fluency, avoidance of eye contact, avoidance of oral performance) (Aini & Lubis, 2023). Third, English presentations refer to formal academic tasks requiring the structured, systematic, and purposeful delivery of content before an audience of peers and instructors.

Within Islamic educational institutions, such tasks are not viewed merely as assessments of linguistic proficiency but are also interpreted as opportunities for *da'wah* (the dissemination of knowledge), expressions of responsibility, and means of fostering discipline and character (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Fourth, coping encompasses the cognitive and behavioural efforts individuals employ to manage internal and external demands appraised as taxing or exceeding their available resources, including strategies aimed at solving problems, regulating emotions, or, in some cases, avoiding the source of stress (Warna & Uyun, 2024).

According to the Transactional Model, the coping process unfolds through three sequential yet interrelated stages: primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and the selection of coping strategies. During primary appraisal, students evaluate the significance of the English presentation task, determining whether it is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful to their well-being (Tulis et al., 2016).

For EFL learners at Islamic Senior High Schools, this evaluation is deeply shaped by their sociocultural and religious background (Farah, 2025): on one hand, they perceive English as a valuable tool for accessing global Islamic scholarship and broader knowledge; on the other, they must meet academic standards while preserving their cultural and linguistic identity (Farah, 2025). Consequently, presentation tasks are rarely viewed solely as academic assessments; rather, they are frequently reframed as religious duties, opportunities for self-improvement, or acts of worship in the pursuit of knowledge (Hasibuan et al., 2025). This distinctive interpretation plays a crucial role in transforming a potentially threatening situation into a meaningful challenge, thereby moderating the psychological impact of anxiety.

Based on the outcomes of these appraisal processes, students select specific coping strategies, which can be categorized into three types. *Problem-focused coping* refers to actions directed at addressing the root cause of anxiety through practical, solution-oriented measures, such as repeated rehearsal, thorough revision of materials, active feedback-seeking, and intensive content study (Theriana, 2023). *Emotion-focused coping* involves efforts to regulate the emotional distress and psychological discomfort associated with anxiety (Theriana, 2023).

Alongside common strategies such as relaxation techniques, mindfulness, and positive self-affirmation, students in this setting also draw on Islamic-based practices, such as performing prayers, reciting verses from the Qur'an, and reflecting on religious teachings, to cultivate emotional resilience, patience (*sabr*), and inner peace. Furthermore, the Islamic Senior High School environment functions as a critical moderating variable influencing every stage of the coping process described above, as religious principles and values provide a distinctive framework through which students understand, interpret, and manage stress.

Together, these core constructs, the sequential stages of the coping process, and the moderating role of the Islamic educational context form an interconnected dynamic system. The reciprocal relationships among the antecedents of anxiety, the cognitive appraisal process, the selection of coping strategies, and the resulting outcomes, all filtered and shaped by Islamic values, are illustrated in Figure 1.

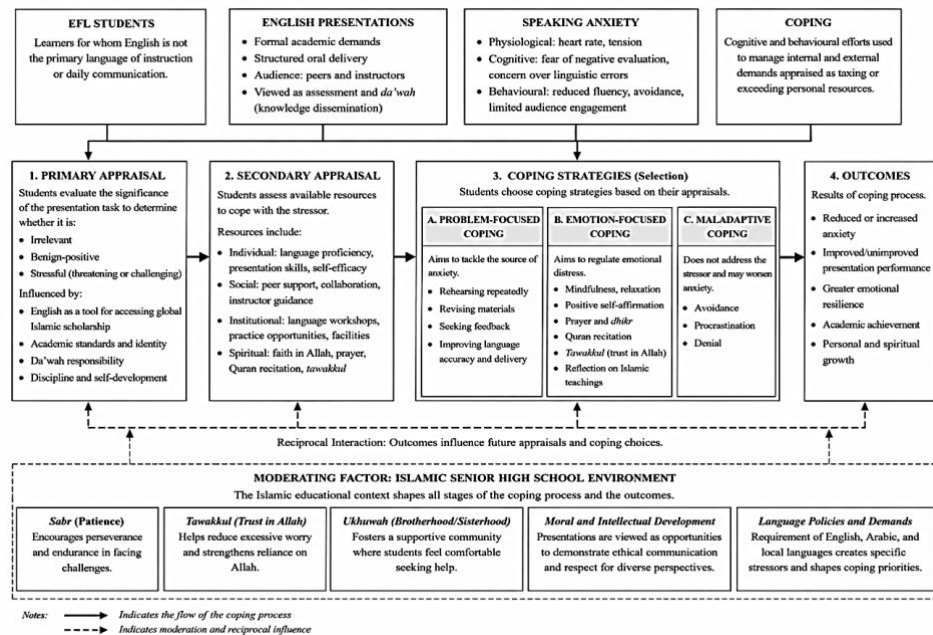


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Adapted to the Context of Islamic Senior High Schools

As illustrated in Figure 1, the antecedents of speaking anxiety include individual factors (e.g., self-perceived proficiency, prior learning experiences, self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and identity as Muslim learners) and environmental factors (e.g., task difficulty, audience expectations, peer dynamics, and institutional language policies); together, these factors trigger the stress response and shape the primary and secondary appraisal processes (Noorashid & Jamil, 2024). The Islamic school context moderates these relationships by determining how stressors are interpreted and which coping resources are deemed relevant, accessible, and effective.

Coping strategy selection then acts as a mediating variable linking anxiety to outcomes: adaptive strategies, particularly those enriched by Islamic values, are associated with reduced anxiety, improved presentation performance, and enhanced self-efficacy in speaking English, whereas maladaptive strategies are associated with persistent anxiety, poorer academic performance, and decreased motivation to engage in future oral communication tasks.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore in depth the lived experiences of students in navigating and overcoming speaking anxiety during English presentations (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a technique selected for its capacity to elicit rich, emotionally nuanced, and narrative-based information

regarding the personal strategies students use to manage fear and psychological pressure when speaking in public (Theriana, 2023).

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at an Islamic Senior High School in Maros, selected because it is the site where the research participants study and where the phenomenon under investigation occurs. Participants were EFL students at the school who had prior experience delivering English presentations and were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they had experienced anxiety when speaking or presenting in English, and (2) they were willing to share their experiences and strategies for managing that anxiety. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, typically ranging from six to ten students; in this study, saturation was reached with six participants.

Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were selected because they afford the flexibility needed to explore participants' experiences in depth (Lukman & Widiastuty, 2024). The researcher prepared a set of guiding questions while remaining free to develop follow-up questions based on participants' responses, allowing participants to freely express their feelings, experiences, and coping strategies. Data collection followed five steps: (1) preparing the interview guideline based on the research questions, (2) contacting participants and obtaining their informed consent, (3) conducting interviews face-to-face or online via Zoom or WhatsApp, (4) audio-recording the interviews with participants' permission, and (5) transcribing the interview data verbatim.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, as cited in Peel, 2020), which involves three concurrent activities: data condensation (formerly termed data reduction), data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings verbatim and distilled the raw data by identifying key segments related to students' lived experiences with speaking anxiety (Mezmir, 2020).

These codes were then organized into a narrative format during the data display phase to highlight major themes, including the psychological triggers of anxiety and the coping strategies employed by students. Finally, during conclusion drawing, the researcher interpreted the patterns identified in the narrative data to develop a deeper understanding of how EFL students navigate and overcome anxiety during presentations (Arrahmani & Ekowijayanto, 2025).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, this study employed several validation techniques. First, member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts and preliminary findings with participants to confirm that the data accurately reflected their experiences (Noble & Smith, 2025). Second, the researcher employed triangulation and maintained a detailed audit trail documenting every step of the research process to ensure transparency and consistency. This study also strictly adhered to ethical research principles (Noble & Smith, 2025): informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, their privacy was protected through the use of pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, ensuring that the research was conducted with respect for their voluntary participation and well-being.

Results

Analysis of the interview data identified several psychological triggers, cognitive and technical challenges, coping strategies, and environmental factors that shape students' speaking anxiety. These themes are summarized in Table 1 and elaborated below through direct excerpts from the six participants' interview transcripts. For readability, quotations have been lightly edited to remove false starts, filler words, and interviewer interjections typical of spoken transcripts, while their original meaning and wording have been preserved; pseudonyms (Student 1–Student 6) are used throughout to protect participants' identities.

Table 1. Summary of Speaking Anxiety Themes by Student

Student (Pseudonym)	Psychological Triggers	Technical & Cognitive Challenges	Coping Strategies	Environmental Factors
Student 1	Nervousness, rapid heartbeat, and sweaty palms; fear of being judged by the teacher.	Anxiety over grammar and pronunciation; difficulty translating complex ideas spontaneously.	Deep breathing; practicing in front of a mirror; using simpler words; focusing on friendly peers.	Highly influenced by the teacher's style; a stiff atmosphere increases anxiety.
Student 2	Fear of making mistakes and overthinking, rooted in past experiences of forgetting words.	Difficulty constructing sentences spontaneously and using formal language.	Explaining material more simply; holding a pen to stay calm.	A tense atmosphere or strict teachers substantially increase anxiety.
Student 3	Fear of being	Difficulty	Praying; using	Peers

(Male)	laughed at by peers; low self-confidence.	connecting words due to limited English knowledge.	digital tools to check correct pronunciation.	(especially male classmates) laughing when mistakes are made.
Student 4	Feeling embarrassed and afraid of being laughed at.	Pressure to speak English fluently.	Studying materials beforehand; being honest with the teacher when forgetting what to say.	Peers making fun of or laughing at mistakes.
Student 5	Feeling tense yet challenged; fear of mispronunciation and audience judgment.	Difficulty speaking fluently and confidently.	Speaking slowly; taking deep breaths; focusing on learning goals.	A relaxed classroom atmosphere and friendly teachers reduce anxiety.
Student 6	Feeling depressed and embarrassed when laughed at; anxiety from eye contact with the audience.	Difficulty arranging sentences quickly and maintaining speech flow.	Pausing briefly, smiling, and ignoring negative peer comments.	A calm, quiet classroom environment helps reduce the burden.

Psychological Manifestations and Triggers

Speaking anxiety among the students manifests both physically and emotionally, including nervousness, rapid heartbeat, sweating, tension, embarrassment, and, in some cases, feelings of depression. Student 1 described a visceral physical response that preceded most of his presentations:

I feel very nervous, my heart beats fast, and my palms are sweating... I feel like I want to finish it quickly so that the burden is gone (S1).

Student 6 similarly reported that a past mistake left her feeling overwhelmed after her classmates laughed at her error:

When I made a mistake during a presentation, my friends laughed at me. So I felt embarrassed and wanted to fix it right away... I immediately felt depressed, embarrassed, and lost for words (S6).

The primary trigger identified across participants was the fear of negative evaluation, being judged, corrected harshly, or laughed at by teachers and peers. Student 3 explained that his anxiety was rooted largely in social comparison with

classmates:

My first feeling is that I am afraid, because I am afraid that if I go up there, my friends will laugh at me if I make a mistake, especially if my friends speak English better than me (S3).

Several participants attributed their anxiety to a combination of fear of judgment and self-perceived linguistic inadequacy:

There is a burden of wanting to look competent in front of others (S1).

Everything makes me nervous, but the biggest thing is that I am afraid of making mistakes (S2).

Past negative experiences were also found to create lasting worry that resurfaces whenever students are required to speak publicly:

I really forgot a word in the middle of a sentence. That made me stay silent for a long time and feel very embarrassed... After that, I was more afraid to move on (S1).

In the middle of the presentation, I forgot what I was going to say. Since then, I feel nervous when I have to give a presentation, and I overthink (S2).

Variations in perception were evident among participants. While most students described speaking tasks as inherently threatening, Student 5 reframed the same situation as an opportunity:

I usually feel nervous and a bit tense when I have to present in English, but I also feel challenged to try (S5).

Gender-related dynamics were also noted, with Student 3 observing that male peers were particularly prone to mocking one another's mistakes:

Especially for boys, sometimes we laugh when we make a mistake (S3).

Cognitive and Technical Challenges

The main difficulties students reported relate to the gap between their receptive knowledge and productive competence. Although students generally understand the material, they struggle to transform their thoughts into accurate, fluent, and grammatically correct English sentences spontaneously. Student 1 illustrated this gap directly:

Delivering a complex idea with limited vocabulary... sometimes what is in my mind is difficult to translate spontaneously into English (S1).

Student 3 described a related difficulty in connecting his ideas into coherent speech:

It's when I have to connect the words, because I don't know much about English (S3).

Student 6 likewise identified spontaneity, rather than knowledge itself, as the central obstacle:

Arranging sentences quickly and spontaneously and maintaining smoothness of speech (S6).

Several participants also linked their technical struggles to concerns about formality and fluency:

It is difficult for me to make sentences in a formal way (S2).

Speaking fluently and confidently in English [is the biggest challenge] (S5).

Pronunciation emerged as another recurring concern:

When I look at my friends' eyes and teachers' eyes, I usually feel nervous, or afraid of mispronunciation (S6).

This fear was echoed by Student 1, who worried that unclear delivery would confuse his audience:

I am often afraid that the words I say are wrong and confuse the audience (S1).

Taken together, these accounts suggest that the pressure to appear competent and to speak flawlessly adds a cognitive load that disrupts students' thinking process, often producing mental blocks or an inability to express complex ideas under time pressure.

Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

All participants actively developed strategies to manage and reduce their anxiety, which can be grouped into three categories: psychological, practical, and social strategies.

Psychological strategies.

Students relied on relaxation techniques, prayer, and cognitive reframing to regulate their emotional and physiological responses to anxiety. Student 1 described a simple in-the-moment routine:

I will stop for a moment, take a deep breath, and try to explain the point with simpler words (S1).

Prayer emerged as a particularly salient strategy among several participants:

When I'm alone, I would like to pray. I would like to try to stay calm even though the situation is complicated. I would like to stay focused (S3).

Cognitive reframing was also evident, with students actively reinterpreting mistakes as acceptable or even necessary:

If I am afraid of making a mistake, it is okay to make a mistake. The important thing is to be brave. If I don't try, I will never be able to do it (S2).

I usually remind myself that learning is a process and everyone has their own mistakes (S6).

Practical strategies.

Thorough preparation was the most frequently reported practical strategy:

I usually make notes of important points, practice speaking in front of the mirror, and do deep breathing techniques to calm my nerves (S1).

Practicing, speaking in front of the mirror, preparing the material, and praying (S6).

Some students used digital tools to verify their pronunciation beforehand:

Sometimes when I type something on Google, I can hear it [the correct pronunciation] from Google (S3).

During presentations, students adapted in real time by simplifying their language or seeking help from the teacher:

I explain the material in a simpler way than what I have memorized (S2).

Usually, I ask my teacher. I say, I don't know what to say next (S4).

This latter act of honesty, notably, was generally met with understanding rather than criticism (see Discussion). Physical aids were also used to manage nervous energy:

When I am [nervous], I hold a pen or talk with a pen so that I don't get confused (S2).

Social strategies.

Students frequently drew on supportive peer relationships to feel safer while speaking:

I try to focus on one or two friends in the class who seem friendly, to give a sense of security rather than looking at the whole audience (S1).

When I'm in class, I think of my friends. I don't want to be shy (S4).

Conversely, other students coped by deliberately disengaging from negative peer feedback:

I usually try to ignore my friends' comments (S6).

Role of Environmental Factors

The learning environment played a decisive role in shaping students' anxiety levels. Teachers' attitudes and teaching styles were consistently identified as highly influential:

If the teacher looks calm and supportive, I feel calmer. However, if the atmosphere is stiff or the teacher is very critical, my anxiety increases many times (S1).

If the atmosphere is tense and the teachers are strict, the anxiety... will increase by 100%. But if the teachers are calm and smile, and the students are supportive, I feel calmer, even though I am still nervous (S2).

Peer interaction exhibited two contrasting effects. For some participants, classmates' laughter or teasing served as a major source of anxiety:

Usually, my classmates laugh at me. They make fun of me... if I make a mistake (S4).

For other participants, however, a generally relaxed classroom climate meant that peers were experienced as a source of reassurance rather than threat:

A relaxed classroom atmosphere and a friendly lecturer can reduce my anxiety (S5).

Usually, the class atmosphere is calm... not too noisy (S6).

These findings confirm that anxiety is not merely an internal problem but is strongly shaped by the social context and classroom culture.

Interconnection of Factors

A clear relationship exists among the identified factors. Psychological fear triggered by environmental conditions, such as a strict teacher or unsupportive peers, leads to cognitive constraints and technical difficulties, which in turn heighten students' fear of making mistakes, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of anxiety. Student 1's experience illustrates this cycle: after forgetting a word in front of a critical audience, he became increasingly reluctant to continue:

After that, I was more afraid to move on (S1).

However, effective coping strategies combined with a supportive environment can break this cycle, enabling students to perform better despite their anxiety, as reflected in Student 3's more settled outlook:

I believe in myself. This is the process (S3).

Discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to the study's objectives, identifying the triggers, challenges, coping strategies, and environmental factors influencing students' speaking anxiety, and situates them within relevant theory and prior research. The discussion is organized around four main themes that emerged from the data: psychological triggers, cognitive challenges, coping mechanisms, and environmental influences. One of the major findings is that students' speaking anxiety is significantly triggered by fear of negative evaluation from both teachers and peers. Student 1 and Student 2, for instance, reported that a strict or critical teaching style considerably heightens their anxiety.

This fear is also closely linked to students' concerns about the quality of their performance, particularly their pronunciation and grammar; Student 1, for example, described being afraid that incorrect usage or unclear pronunciation would confuse the audience or lead to misunderstanding. Past negative experiences further shape how students perceive and respond to speaking situations.

As reflected in Student 2's narrative, previous unpleasant incidents, such as forgetting words during presentations or receiving harsh corrections, leave a lasting sense of worry that resurfaces whenever students are required to speak in front of others. This triggers a tendency to overthink, in which students anticipate making mistakes or failing before they even begin to speak, disrupting their cognitive processing and impairing their ability to express ideas smoothly and coherently. This pattern suggests that speaking anxiety is not merely a transient emotional state but a cumulative psychological response formed through repeated interactions and experiences within the classroom environment.

In addition to these psychological factors, cognitive and technical challenges contribute substantially to the pressure students experience, particularly the gap between their receptive knowledge and productive speaking competence. Although most students demonstrate a good understanding of English vocabulary and materials, many still struggle to translate their thoughts into accurate, fluent, and well-structured sentences spontaneously. This difficulty was explicitly acknowledged by Student 3 and Student 4, who reported that their limited vocabulary range and lack of practice in formal speaking contexts left them feeling unprepared and insecure. They frequently expressed concern that using simple words or short sentences might make them appear less competent in the eyes of their teachers and peers, a concern that adds a further layer of pressure and worsens their anxiety.

Despite these challenges, all participants demonstrated a proactive attitude by actively developing personal strategies to manage and reduce their anxiety rather than allowing fear to prevent them from participating in speaking activities. These coping mechanisms fall into three main categories: psychological strategies, practical techniques, and social strategies. On a psychological level, students relied heavily on relaxation methods, such as deep breathing, brief pauses, and prayer, to calm their minds and regulate physical symptoms of anxiety, including rapid heartbeat, trembling, and nervousness. They also engaged in cognitive reframing: Student 5, for example, viewed presentations not as a threatening evaluation but as a valuable opportunity for learning and self-development, while Student 6 adopted a strategy of deliberately ignoring negative reactions from classmates to protect self-esteem and maintain confidence.

Practical strategies were likewise widely used and proved highly effective: students prepared thoroughly by studying materials in advance, rehearsing in front of mirrors or trusted friends, and using digital tools to verify pronunciation and word usage. When encountering difficulties or mental blocks during presentations, they adapted by simplifying complex ideas, speaking more slowly to allow time to think, or honestly admitting to the teacher when they forgot what to say, an approach that, notably, was met with understanding and support rather than punishment. Some students also used physical aids, such as holding a pen or a piece of paper, to channel nervous energy and remain grounded while speaking.

Regarding environmental factors, the classroom atmosphere and the behaviour of teachers and peers exert a direct and powerful influence on students' anxiety levels. A supportive, relaxed, and respectful environment, where teachers provide constructive feedback gently and peers refrain from mocking mistakes, creates a sense of safety that enables students to express themselves more confidently. In contrast, a tense, rigid, or overly critical environment significantly heightens anxiety, shifting students' focus away from communicating ideas effectively and toward avoiding errors or negative evaluation.

This finding confirms that speaking anxiety is not solely an internal issue or a personal weakness but is strongly shaped by the social context and learning culture in which communication takes place. Peer interaction exhibited two contrasting effects: while some students reported that laughter, teasing, or negative comments from classmates were major anxiety triggers, others found strong motivation and encouragement from supportive friends. Student 1 and Student 5, for example, both noted that simply looking at supportive or smiling friends during their presentations helped them feel calmer, more secure, and more motivated to complete their speaking tasks. This suggests that fostering positive peer relationships and a culture of mutual respect and empathy is a collective and effective way to reduce speaking anxiety across the classroom.

Overall, these lived experiences illustrate that speaking anxiety is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon involving psychological, cognitive, technical, and environmental dimensions. It should not be interpreted merely as an indicator of low language proficiency or insufficient preparation, but rather understood as a natural response to the pressure of being evaluated, the inherent challenges of using a foreign language, and the specific conditions of the learning environment. Nevertheless, this study confirms that anxiety is manageable and can be significantly reduced through adaptive coping strategies, adequate preparation, and consistent support from teachers and peers. Students are fully capable of navigating these challenges and, notably, often grow more confident and skilled as they gain experience and learn to regulate their emotions over time.

These findings suggest that helping students overcome speaking anxiety cannot be achieved through a partial approach; rather, it requires a comprehensive and integrated strategy. Focusing solely on students' linguistic skills or grammatical knowledge is insufficient; equal attention must be directed toward their psychological well-being, confidence building, and the cultivation of a supportive classroom culture. Language teaching, therefore, should not focus on linguistic competence alone but should also prioritize emotional support.

Teachers are encouraged to design speaking activities that are low-risk, inclusive, and encouraging, allowing students to build confidence alongside their language skills. In this regard, teachers play a central and determining role, as their teaching style, feedback methods, and attitudes toward mistakes fundamentally shape how students perceive and feel about speaking English. When teachers successfully frame mistakes as a natural and essential part of the learning process and encourage active participation without harsh judgment, students are far more likely to develop the courage, willingness, and competence to speak confidently and freely.

These findings align with Oranga and Matere (2023), who noted that speaking anxiety in EFL contexts is deeply rooted in the fear of negative evaluation and the pressure to perform perfectly. The symptoms reported by students in this study, including rapid heartbeat, sweating, and mental blocks, are consistent with the

characteristics of foreign language anxiety widely documented in the literature (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Similarly, Theriana (2023) emphasized that personal coping strategies are key to overcoming such pressure, a pattern clearly reflected in the present study through students' use of relaxation techniques, systematic preparation, and positive reframing. In line with Tanzin Ara Ashraf (2019), this study also confirms that anxiety is not merely an internal psychological state but is heavily shaped by the surrounding learning environment: when teachers adopt a supportive attitude and the classroom atmosphere remains relaxed and open, students' anxiety decreases significantly, and they become more willing to take risks and participate actively in speaking activities. This finding supports Lukman and Widiastuty (2024), who argued that flexible, non-judgmental, and empathetic teaching approaches are highly effective in lowering psychological barriers and reducing affective filters in language learning.

From a theoretical perspective, the coping strategies identified in this study correspond closely to the concept of adaptive coping, which describes the process through which individuals actively modify their thoughts and behaviours to manage stressful or demanding situations. Rather than avoiding speaking tasks or escaping difficulties, students in this study developed practical solutions, such as simplifying language, using learning aids, and practicing repeatedly, to bridge the gap between their current competence and the demands of public speaking.

This provides strong evidence that although speaking anxiety is a real and challenging issue, it is not permanent: it can be regulated, controlled, and gradually reduced through experience, consistent practice, and a well-established support system. In sum, speaking anxiety among EFL students at the Islamic Senior High School in Maros is a multifaceted issue shaped by psychological, cognitive, technical, and environmental factors, yet students possess a remarkable capacity to navigate these challenges. Their lived experiences show that anxiety is not a permanent barrier but a natural part of the learning process that can be successfully managed through appropriate strategies, continuous confidence building, and a supportive classroom culture.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that EFL students at an Islamic Senior High School in Maros experience speaking anxiety in unique ways, shaped by their individual personalities, past learning experiences, and the specific classroom environment. However, they are not passive victims of anxiety; rather, they actively construct, adapt, and employ a range of strategies to face, manage, and mitigate their fears.

Their experiences demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a normal and integral part of foreign language learning that, with proper support, deep understanding, and effective coping skills, can be transformed into a meaningful learning experience that enhances not only students' language competence but also their self-confidence and

personal growth.

These findings carry both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they extend the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) by demonstrating how Islamic religious and cultural values, particularly *sabr*, *tawakkul*, and *ukhuwah*, function as a distinctive appraisal and coping resource within an Islamic educational context. Practically, the findings suggest that helping students overcome speaking anxiety requires a comprehensive, integrated approach rather than a narrow focus on linguistic competence alone. Equal attention should be directed toward students' psychological well-being, confidence building, and the cultivation of a supportive classroom culture. Teachers are encouraged to design speaking activities that are low-risk, inclusive, and encouraging, and to frame mistakes as a natural and essential part of the learning process rather than a source of judgment.

This study is not without limitations. First, the findings are based on a small sample of six students from a single Islamic Senior High School in Maros, which may limit their transferability to other educational settings. Second, as a qualitative, interview-based study, the findings rely on students' self-reported experiences, which may be subject to recall or social desirability bias. Future research could employ a larger and more diverse sample across multiple schools, incorporate classroom observations or longitudinal designs to triangulate self-reported data, and further investigate the specific mechanisms through which Islamic values shape students' coping processes, potentially through a mixed-methods or quantitative approach.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the leadership, teachers, and staff of the Islamic Senior High School in Maros for granting permission to conduct this research, and extends sincere gratitude to the six student participants for generously sharing their time and personal experiences.

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