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Emergent But Unsupported: Speaking Anxiety and Self-Regulation Among Non-English Major Students in an Indonesian ESP Context

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety is a recognized obstacle to oral proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, yet research has focused largely on English majors, leaving non-English major learners in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses underexplored. This qualitative descriptive study examined speaking anxiety among 17 Digital Business students at a private university in Palopo, South Sulawesi. Data were collected through an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and an open-ended questionnaire completed by eight participants and were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Sixteen of the seventeen participants reported moderate to high anxiety, with cognitive anxiety yielding the highest mean. Five themes were generated: pronunciation as the main source of anxiety; fear of negative evaluation linked to how errors were corrected rather than to correction itself; mind blanking despite preparation; instructor feedback valued as a resource; and a preference for low-exposure practice. Interpreted through Zimmerman's cyclical model, these findings indicate emerging but instructionally unsupported self-regulation, as participants identified strategies such as environmental structuring, help-seeking, and self-evaluation but no course structures supporting them. The study argues that ESP speaking instruction should explicitly scaffold learner-identified strategies rather than treat anxiety reduction as a by-product of increased exposure.

Keywords: *Speaking anxiety; Self-regulated learning; English for specific purposes; non-English major students; Foreign language classroom anxiety*

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Introduction

English proficiency is now expected across academic disciplines and is no longer the specialized concern of language majors. Graduates of business, health, and technology programs are increasingly expected to read professional literature in English, participate in international collaboration, and present their work to audiences beyond their immediate institutional context. Of the four language skills, speaking carries much of this expectation, since it is the skill in which competence is most publicly displayed and most immediately judged.

For students outside English-related disciplines, this expectation often comes without the supporting conditions that language majors take for granted. In many Indonesian universities, non-English major students receive only a few semesters of English instruction, usually delivered as a service course with large class sizes, limited contact hours, and few opportunities for sustained oral practice. For these students, English is an institutional requirement added to their main disciplinary identity rather than the object of their study. It is in the gap between what is expected of them and what their program provides that speaking anxiety is likely to develop.

Speaking anxiety refers to the apprehension, discomfort, and physiological arousal arising when learners are required to produce a second or foreign language orally. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized it as a situation-specific anxiety rather than a manifestation of general trait anxiety, identifying communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as its interrelated components. Meta-analytic evidence confirms a consistent negative association between foreign language anxiety and achievement (Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019), and a recent systematic review of longitudinal studies indicates that anxiety is malleable rather than fixed, which makes instructional intervention a worthwhile focus of inquiry (Sun, Alhowail, & Beckmann, 2025).

Current scholarship has moved towards examining anxiety alongside positive affect and towards more differentiated accounts of how it operates across tasks and populations (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2025; Jin, Dewaele, & MacIntyre, 2021; Rajendran, Srinivasan, Ilangovan, Singh, & Bakhromdjanovna, 2025). Research on oral presentations is particularly relevant here: Ding, Chen, and Xu (2025) found that anxiety and enjoyment co-occurred in presentation performance rather than varying inversely, and Tsang (2025) showed that learners' self-perceived pronunciation predicted oral presentation anxiety independently of measured proficiency. Anxiety is also unevenly distributed across skills, with speaking consistently generating higher levels than reading, writing, or listening (Jee, 2018; Limeranto & Subekti, 2021), and its effect on fluency intensifies as task complexity rises (Reitsma & Ruigendijk, 2024).

Within the Indonesian context, speaking anxiety has been documented among secondary learners (Hidayati, Abdullah, Andriani, Rosmala, & Nurvianti, 2022), in online university classrooms (Awaliyah & Irianti, 2022), and in general EFL settings (Nurilahi & Suhartono, 2022; Sulistyowati & Utomo, 2024). More recent work has

examined speaking anxiety among Indonesian university students directly (Fauzi & Asi, 2023), the linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties students encounter in English presentations together with their coping mechanisms (Khasinah, Akmal, Izza, Amiruddin, & Farhan, 2024), the relationship between self-efficacy and speaking achievement (Santoso, Affandi, & Basthomi, 2024), strategies for minimizing anxiety (Azhari, Candrasari, Rizki, Sari, & Nasir, 2026), and the role of enjoyment and engagement alongside anxiety (Kuncoro, Anam, & Munir, 2024).

This body of work, however, has two limitations. First, most Indonesian studies recruit English Education or English Literature students, that is, learners for whom English is a chosen field of study. Findings from this group cannot simply be assumed to apply to learners whose relationship with English is instrumental and, at times, reluctant. Second, research remains concentrated in Java-based institutions, so learners in smaller cities, where exposure to English differs considerably, remain under-represented.

The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context adds a dimension that general EFL research does not capture. ESP is grounded in the primacy of learner needs, with content and assessment derived from analysis of the target situation rather than from a general language syllabus, a principle that continues to organize contemporary needs-analysis research across professional domains (Huang & Yu, 2023).

Because ESP tasks simulate professional performance, difficulty in an ESP speaking task may affect learners' professional self-concept and not only their sense of language competence: struggling learners may see themselves not merely as weak speakers of English but as less capable future practitioners. Yet the intersection of ESP and speaking anxiety has received limited attention, and Lin and Bollen (2025) are among the few to address it directly. Combined with the two limitations noted above, this leaves non-English major ESP learners in institutions outside Java largely absent from the evidence on which speaking instruction in such courses might draw.

A further gap is analytic and methodological. Most studies document anxiety and its sources but stop short of examining what learners themselves do, or say they would do, in response. If speaking anxiety is treated purely as a deficit to be reduced through exposure, instruction tends to default to more speaking tasks under the very conditions that produced the anxiety; if, however, learners already hold intuitions about which conditions make speaking tolerable, those intuitions become a resource on which instruction can build.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) theory provides a framework for taking such intuitions seriously. Zimmerman's (2000) cyclical model frames self-regulation as moving through forethought, performance, and self-reflection phases; Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) showed that its component strategies, including environmental structuring, self-evaluation, and help-seeking, can be identified and described by learners themselves; and Oxford (1990) treats affective strategies as a legitimate and teachable category alongside cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

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Recent work links these constructs directly to anxiety: Yuksel, Soruç, Horzum, and McKinley (2023) found language learning anxiety and self-regulation skills jointly implicated in academic success, and Nakata, Takeuchi, and Sugita McEown (2025) demonstrated the role of ability beliefs in self-regulated language learning.

Methodologically, existing studies tend to rely either on closed-response scales, which establish how much anxiety learners report but not what it consists of for them, or on open accounts, which capture its texture but leave its distribution within the group unknown. Combining the two allows each to inform the other, yet this combination remains uncommon in Indonesian research on speaking anxiety.

Responding to these gaps, this study aims to describe how speaking anxiety is manifested among Digital Business students taking a compulsory ESP course at a private university in Palopo, South Sulawesi, to identify the sources of anxiety they report, and to examine the forms of support and practice they consider helpful in relation to established constructs of self-regulated learning.

This population is of particular interest because its future professional environment is explicitly international, involving e-commerce platforms, digital marketing, and cross-border client communication, while its curriculum gives English only a marginal position. Three research questions guide the inquiry: (1) How is speaking anxiety manifested among non-English major students enrolled in an ESP course in an Indonesian higher education setting? (2) What sources of speaking anxiety do these students identify in their own accounts? (3) What forms of instructional support and practice arrangements do they report as helpful, and how do these relate to established constructs of self-regulated learning?

The novelty of the study lies in its population, non-English major ESP learners at an institution, and in its analytic stance: rather than treating anxiety solely as a deficit to be reduced, it interprets learner-identified strategies through Zimmerman's cyclical model as emergent self-regulation that instruction can explicitly scaffold.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2000; Stanley, 2023). Qualitative description is appropriate when the aim is a comprehensive summary of experiences in the everyday terms participants themselves use, without the theoretical transformation required by phenomenology or grounded theory. Because this study sought to document how students describe their own anxiety and preferences, and to remain close to their formulations, qualitative description offered an appropriate level of interpretive commitment.

The design is qualitative-dominant rather than purely qualitative. A quantitative measure was administered alongside the open-ended instrument, but its role was limited: to characterize the anxiety profile of the participant group and

thereby contextualize the qualitative accounts. No inferential statistics were computed, and no claim of statistical generalization is made. This limitation is stated explicitly because the scope of the dataset bears directly on the interpretation offered, and it is revisited in the Conclusion.

Participants

The study was conducted at Universitas Kurnia Jaya Persada, a private university in Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Palopo is a small city approximately 380 kilometers from the provincial capital, and the university serves a predominantly local student population with limited exposure to English outside formal instruction.

Participants were 17 undergraduate students enrolled in the Digital Business program, recruited through purposive sampling because they were expected to use English in their future professional communication yet received limited English provision in their curriculum. Inclusion criteria were current enrolment in the compulsory Business English course and non-enrolment in any English-related major. The group comprised 13 women and 4 men aged between 18 and 20 years, all enrolled in their first semester of study. All 17 completed the closed-response questionnaire; 8 of them also provided written responses to the open-ended items, and these 8 accounts form the qualitative dataset analyzed below. All participants had studied English as a compulsory subject throughout secondary education but reported no formal English instruction outside the classroom.

The Business English course carried 3 credits, met once a week for 150 minutes across a 16-week semester, and assessed oral competence mainly through individual presentations. This assessment structure is relevant to the findings reported below, since several participants framed their anxiety specifically in relation to presentation contexts.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Two instruments were used. The primary data source was an open-ended questionnaire comprising three items administered in Bahasa Indonesia, asking participants what makes them feel anxious when speaking English, what support they most need to feel more confident, and which practice method they find most helpful and why. Participants were encouraged to answer at length and in whichever language they preferred.

A questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) was administered to characterize the group's anxiety profile. The adapted instrument comprised 20 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, yielding a possible range of 20 to 100. Items addressed five dimensions drawn from the original scale and from subsequent adaptations: communication apprehension (4 items), physiological symptoms (3 items, one of which was later excluded; see below), fear of negative evaluation (5 items), cognitive anxiety (4 items), and self-efficacy (4 items). The four self-efficacy items were positively worded and were

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reverse scored before analysis, so that on every item a higher score indicates greater anxiety.

The instrument was administered in Bahasa Indonesia so that comprehension would not act as a confounding factor. It was translated into Bahasa Indonesia by the first author and reviewed for clarity and conceptual equivalence by the second author. No back-translation was performed, and this is acknowledged as a limitation.

One item, concerning voice trembling, was affected by a configuration error in the online form and returned an un scorable response option for 8 of the 17 participants. That item was therefore excluded from scoring, and all quantitative results reported below are based on the remaining 19 items, with a possible range of 19 to 95. Internal consistency of the 19-item scale in this sample was high, with Cronbach's alpha = .87. Subscale reliabilities were acceptable for self-efficacy (alpha = .85), physiological symptoms (alpha = .77), cognitive anxiety (alpha = .72), and fear of negative evaluation (alpha = .72), but low for communication apprehension (alpha = .43); results for that subscale are therefore treated as indicative only and the weakness is revisited in the Conclusion. Content validity was established through expert judgement by two lecturers in English language education, who reviewed each item for clarity and for relevance to the dimension it was intended to represent.

Data collection proceeded in three stages. First, institutional permission was obtained, and the adapted instrument was reviewed for linguistic and content equivalence. Second, participants received written information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without academic consequence and provided informed consent. Third, the instruments were administered online through Google Forms outside class on November 2025. Participants completed the open-ended items without time limit to encourage elaborated responses; the open-ended items were optional, which accounts for the difference between the number of closed-response returns (17) and the number of written accounts (8).

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Formal review by an institutional research ethics board is not currently mandated for classroom-based educational research at the host institution; permission to conduct the study was granted by the leadership of the Digital Business program. Participation was voluntary and based on written informed consent, and participants were free to withdraw at any point without academic consequence. Responses were anonymized at the point of data export, with participants identified by number only. Because the first author was affiliated with the institution, particular care was taken to ensure that participation was not perceived as connected to course assessment. Raw data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.

Data Analysis

Responses to the open-ended items were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2021), with the procedural sequence applied as set out by Byrne (2022). Responses were exported verbatim from the online form and read repeatedly for familiarization. Initial codes were generated inductively across the full dataset, staying close to participants' own wording. Codes were collated into candidate themes, which were reviewed against both the coded extracts and the full dataset, then refined, defined, and named.

Three features of the dataset should be acknowledged. The qualitative corpus comprises the written accounts of 8 participants rather than all 17, since the open-ended items were optional. Open-ended questionnaire responses are also shorter and less elaborated than interview data, and some responses here consisted of a single clause. Reflexive thematic analysis is applicable to such data, but the depth of interpretation it can sustain is correspondingly bounded, and the themes reported below are therefore descriptive-level rather than latent-level constructions. Further, because responses could not be probed in real time, ambiguous formulations could not be clarified at the point of data generation. Questionnaire data of this kind also constrain claims about saturation (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2024), and no such claim is advanced here.

Quantitative responses were summarized descriptively as mean scores per item, so that dimensions comprising different numbers of items remain directly comparable. Participants were then banded into three categories by dividing the response scale into three equal intervals: a low band (mean item score 1.00–2.33), a moderate band (2.34–3.66), and a high band (3.67–5.00), corresponding on the 19-item total to scores of 19–44, 45–70, and 71–95 respectively. The banding was used solely to describe the composition of the group and carries no diagnostic status.

Quotations are presented in the original Bahasa Indonesia with English translations in parentheses. Translations were produced by the first author and independently checked by the third author for fidelity to participants' register, including the code-switching and informal forms several participants used.

Trustworthiness was addressed against the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, following recent guidance on their application in applied linguistics research (Riazi, Rezvani, & Ghanbar, 2023). Credibility was supported mainly through transparency of evidence: participants' verbatim wording is reported in the original Bahasa Indonesia alongside English translations, so that readers can assess for themselves the correspondence between the data and the themes constructed from them. Member checking was not conducted, and this is acknowledged as a limitation in the Conclusion. Coding was conducted by the first author.

To support dependability, the coding frame and successive theme maps were reviewed by the second author, who examined the fit between codes and extracts and challenged theme boundaries; revisions were made where a code was not adequately

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supported by its data. An audit trail comprising raw responses, the initial coding frame, successive theme maps, and analytic memos was maintained to support dependability and confirmability. Contextual detail regarding setting, participants, and course structure has been reported above to allow readers to assess transferability. The first author is the lecturer of the Business English course in which participants were enrolled. To reduce the risk that participation would be perceived as obligatory, data were collected after final grades had been released, and participants were informed in writing that their responses would not be linked to any assessment.

Results

Levels of Speaking Anxiety

Scores on the adapted instrument indicated that speaking anxiety was present across the group, with no participant scoring near the floor of the scale. The mean item score across the 19 scored items was 3.30 (SD = 0.53) on a five-point scale, and total scores ranged from 44 to 77 out of a possible 95. Table 1 presents the distribution across bands.

Table 1. Distribution of speaking anxiety levels among participants (N = 17)

Category	Mean item score	Total score	*n*	%
High anxiety	3.67–5.00	71–95	6	35.3
Moderate anxiety	2.34–3.66	45–70	10	58.8
Low anxiety	1.00–2.33	19–44	1	5.9
Total			17	100.0

Ten participants (58.8%) fell in the moderate band and six (35.3%) in the high band, so that 16 of 17 participants (94.1%) recorded anxiety at a moderate level or above. Only one participant (5.9%) fell in the low band, and that score sat at the band boundary.

Mean scores by dimension are reported in Table 2, where k denotes the number of items contributing to each dimension. Because the dimensions comprise different numbers of items, scores are expressed as means per item on the original five-point scale.

Table 2. Mean scores by anxiety dimension (N = 17)

Dimension	*k*	*M*	*SD*	α
Cognitive anxiety	4	3.53	0.66	.72
Communication apprehension	4	3.32	0.56	.43
Self-efficacy (reverse-scored)	4	3.31	0.68	.85
Physiological symptoms	2	3.18	1.09	.77
Fear of negative evaluation	5	3.14	0.75	.72

Cognitive anxiety recorded the highest mean of the five dimensions. At item level, the two highest-scoring statements in the whole instrument were "*Saya merasa lega setelah presentasi bahasa Inggris selesai"* (I feel relieved once the English presentation is over; M = 3.88, SD = 0.99) and *Saya merasa kehilangan kata-kata ketika berdiri di depan kelas untuk berbicara bahasa Inggris* (I lose my words when standing in front of the class to speak English; M = 3.76, SD = 0.83). Fear of negative evaluation recorded the lowest dimension mean, although at 3.14 it remained above the scale midpoint.

Reflexive thematic analysis of the open-ended responses generated five themes, presented below. Notably, pronunciation, which dominated the written accounts, was not represented by any item in the closed-response instrument.

Pronunciation as the Main Source of Anxiety

Pronunciation was the most frequently mentioned concern across the responses. Participants associated their anxiety with the risk of pronouncing words incorrectly rather than in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, or discourse organization. No participant named grammar or vocabulary as a primary source of anxiety.

Some responses were brief. Participant 12 wrote: "*Takut salah pengucapan*" (Afraid of wrong pronunciation), and Participant 17 wrote: "*Takut salah dalam pengucapan kalimat*" (Afraid of making mistakes in sentence pronunciation). Participant 16 answered the question of what made them anxious with three words: "*Cara mengucapkan nya*" (The way of pronouncing it).

Other participants specified the consequence they feared. Participant 13 wrote: "*Saya merasa cemas karena takut salah pengucapan dan tidak dipahami oleh teman-teman atau dosen*" (I feel anxious because I am afraid of mispronouncing and not being understood by my classmates or lecturer). This response links pronunciation to communicative success and identifies a specific audience, namely classmates and the lecturer, in front of whom such a failure would occur.

Fear of Negative Evaluation and the Manner of Correction

The second theme concerned evaluation by others. Participants did not object to correction itself; rather, they objected to how it was delivered.

Participant 9 wrote:

> "*Saya hanya cemas ketika orang yang lebih tau English itu langsung menjudge dengan keras bahwa pengucapan ku salah. Saya suka di koreksi tapi tidak dengan suara besar*" (I only feel anxious when people who know English better immediately judge harshly that my pronunciation is wrong. I like being corrected, but not in a loud voice.)

The response contains both an explicit statement of receptiveness to feedback, "*Saya suka di koreksi*" (I like being corrected), and a specified condition on its delivery, "*tidak dengan suara besar*" (not in a loud voice). The source of feared judgment is

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identified as "*orang yang lebih tau English*" (people who know English better), a formulation that includes peers as well as instructors.

Participant 15 identified "*tidak menghakimi*" (not judging) as the condition they most needed to feel confident.

Cognitive Interference: Mind Blanking Despite Preparation

The third theme concerned the temporary loss of access to prepared content during performance, which participants distinguished from simply not knowing what to say.

Participant 15 wrote:

> "*sometimes otak sering nge blank tiba-tiba jadi yang bikin cemas tuh takut ketika berhadapan dengan teman teman di kelas otak nge blank tidak tau harus berkata apa lagi padahal semua sudah ada di kepala*" (Sometimes my brain suddenly goes blank, so what makes me anxious is the fear that when facing my classmates in class my brain goes blank and I don't know what to say any more, even though it is all already in my head.)

The response distinguishes possession of the content, "*semua sudah ada di kepala*" (it is all already in my head), from the ability to retrieve it in the presence of an audience. It also identifies the anticipation of going blank as itself a source of anxiety.

Instructor Feedback as a Valued Resource

When asked what support they most needed, participants consistently pointed to practice opportunities and feedback from their lecturer.

Participant 12 answered: "*Feedback dari dosen*" (Feedback from the lecturer). Participant 13 combined both elements: "*Saya paling membutuhkan latihan dan feedback dari dosen agar bisa merasa lebih percaya diri*" (What I need most is practice and feedback from the lecturer to feel more confident). Participant 9 added a social dimension: "*Latihan dan dukungan orang sekitar dan tentu arahan dosen juga*" (Practice and support from the people around me, and of course guidance from the lecturer as well).

Participant 14 distinguished between the functions of the two:

> *"Menurut saya, yang paling dibutuhkan untuk merasa lebih percaya diri dalam berbicara adalah latihan dan feedback yang konstruktif. Latihan membantu saya untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara dan merespons secara spontan, sedangkan feedback yang konstruktif membantu saya untuk memperbaiki kesalahan dan meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara saya" (In my opinion, what is most needed to feel more confident in speaking is practice and constructive feedback. Practice helps me improve my speaking ability and respond spontaneously, while constructive feedback helps me correct mistakes and improve my speaking ability.)*

Across the responses in this theme, the recurring qualifier was konstruktif (constructive).

Preference for Low-Exposure Practice Formats

The final theme concerned practice arrangements. Three formats were repeatedly mentioned: pair work, role play, and private self-recording.

Participant 15 explained a preference for pair work in terms of audience size: "*secara berpasangan, bcz lebih terkhusus audiensnya. jadi gak bikin gugup*" (In pairs, because the audience is more specific. So, it doesn't make me nervous). Participants 12 and 16 named the same format without elaboration, each answering simply "*Berpasangan*" (In pairs).

Participant 14 preferred role play on different grounds:

> "*Menurut saya, role-play adalah metode yang paling membantu. Alasannya adalah role-play memungkinkan saya untuk berlatih berbicara dalam situasi yang lebih realistis dan interaktif, sehingga saya bisa meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara dan merespons secara spontan*" (In my opinion, role play is the most helpful method. The reason is that role play allows me to practice speaking in more realistic and interactive situations, so I can improve my speaking ability and respond spontaneously.)

Participant 11 provided the most detailed response in the dataset:

> "*Saya memilih metode latihan rekaman suara atau video pribadi, karena dengan cara ini saya bisa berlatih secara mandiri tanpa merasa gugup. Selain itu, saya dapat meninjau kembali hasil rekaman untuk melihat kesalahan dan memperbaikinya. Metode ini membantu meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan kemampuan berbicara secara bertahap*" (I choose the method of practicing with private audio or video recordings, because this way I can practice independently without feeling nervous. In addition, I can review the recording to see my mistakes and correct them. This method helps build confidence and speaking ability gradually.)

This response contains three elements: practice without an audience, a review procedure applied to the recording, and an expectation of gradual improvement.

Discussion

Pronunciation-Centered Anxiety in a Professionally Oriented Course

The central place of pronunciation in participants' accounts calls for explanation, particularly because no participant named grammar or vocabulary as a source of anxiety. Tsang (2025) offers a direct parallel, finding that learners' self-perceived pronunciation is associated with oral presentation anxiety independently of measured speaking proficiency: beliefs about how one sounds operate apart from how one performs. The present findings suggest that this pattern extends to an ESP context.

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One plausible explanation lies in the visibility of errors. Pronunciation is the most immediately audible feature of oral production. Grammatical errors may pass unnoticed in rapid speech and lexical gaps can be circumvented through paraphrase, whereas a mispronounced word is available to every listener now of utterance and cannot be repaired invisibly. Participant 13's linkage of pronunciation to being understood by "*teman-teman atau dosen*" clarifies what participants took to be at stake: not abstract conformity to a native-speaker model but the concrete prospect of communicative failure in front of a familiar audience.

In an ESP setting, this concern takes on an additional dimension. Because ESP derives its tasks from the target professional situation (Huang & Yu, 2023), an audience evaluates not only language but professional credibility. For Digital Business students preparing for client-facing roles, the prospect of being incomprehensible bears on occupational self-concept as well as on course marks. Lin and Bollen (2025), in one of the few studies to address ESP and anxiety jointly, similarly found that changing the conditions of performance, rather than increasing its quantity, moved learners from anxiety towards engagement.

The pedagogical implication is specific. Pronunciation instruction in ESP courses for non-English majors should prioritize intelligibility over accent approximation, because intelligibility is what participants report being anxious about. Framing pronunciation goals in terms of being understood, rather than of sounding native-like, addresses the stated concern and sets an attainable target.

The Manner of Correction as the Anxiety Trigger

The second theme adds nuance to the standard account of fear of negative evaluation, with direct implications for instruction. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified fear of negative evaluation as a core component of language anxiety, and the present data confirm its presence. Participant 9's account, however, clarifies how it operates: the anxiety is tied to the public audibility of correction rather than to correction itself.

This distinction matters because the two readings imply opposite responses. If learners fear feedback, the instructional response is to reduce or soften it, which deprives them of the information they need. If learners fear public exposure during feedback, the response is to change the delivery channel while preserving the information. Participant 9's statement clearly supports the second reading, and the fourth theme, in which participants repeatedly requested feedback, reinforces it: participants who reported fearing judgment, such as Participant 9, also explicitly asked for correction and guidance.

One nuance is worth noting. Fear of negative evaluation recorded the lowest of the five-dimension means (M = 3.14), which may seem inconsistent with the prominence of evaluative concern in the written accounts. The two findings are not necessarily in conflict. The closed-response items ask about evaluation in general terms, whereas the written accounts specify the conditions under which evaluation becomes intolerable, namely its public delivery. A learner may not fear assessment

as such while still finding loud, public correction difficult, and it is precisely that distinction the written accounts make visible, and the instrument does not capture.

This finding is consistent with research on corrective feedback and learner affect. Papi, Wolff, Nakatsukasa, and Bellwoar (2021) demonstrated that learner preferences for corrective feedback are systematically structured rather than idiosyncratic, and Rassaei (2026) showed that the timing of corrective feedback interacts with foreign language anxiety in shaping second language development, with anxious learners responding differently to immediate and delayed correction. Tang and Wang (2024) further found perceived teacher support to operate on engagement through anxiety and self-efficacy.

Taken together, these results support private or written corrective feedback, correction delayed until after a task rather than interrupting it, and explicit classroom norms governing how errors are treated. Because participants named peers as well as instructors as sources of feared judgment, intervention cannot be confined to instructor behavior; the peer evaluative climate requires deliberate management.

Cognitive Interference and the Preparation–Performance Gap

Participant 15's account of going blank "*padahal semua sudah ada di kepala*" is consistent with established theory. Language anxiety does not merely inhibit willingness to participate; it disrupts cognitive processing itself, and attentional control theory specifies the mechanism: worry-related intrusive thoughts consume working memory capacity, reducing the resources available for task execution and impairing goal-directed attention (Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007).

Schillinger, Mosbacher, Brunner, Vogel, and Grabner (2021) provide converging evidence that the worry component, rather than affective arousal as such, accounts for much of the anxiety–performance relationship. The closed-response data converge on the same point from a different direction: cognitive anxiety recorded the highest dimension mean in this sample (M = 3.53), and the item on losing one's words while standing before the class was the second highest-scoring statement in the entire instrument (M = 3.76). The phenomenon Participant 15 describes is therefore not an isolated account but one of the most strongly endorsed experiences in the group.

The participant's account matches this mechanism closely. The content had been encoded and was available; retrieval failed under conditions of divided attention, with resources diverted to monitoring the audience and anticipating judgment. Reitsma and Ruigendijk's (2024) finding that anxiety effects on fluency intensify with task complexity suggests that the standard individual presentation, combining high complexity, high exposure, and a single unrepeatable attempt, may represent a particularly demanding configuration for anxious learners. Santoso et al. (2024), working with Indonesian learners, describe a comparable phenomenon of "getting stuck" in relation to self-efficacy and speaking achievement, and Khasinah

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et al. (2024) document the non-linguistic difficulties Indonesian students encounter specifically in English presentations.

The self-reinforcing pattern in Participant 15's response is also theoretically coherent: anticipating cognitive failure generates the arousal that produces it. Interrupting this cycle therefore calls for reducing the performance stakes of any single attempt rather than urging more thorough preparation, since preparation was not where the failure occurred.

Emergent but Unsupported Self-Regulation

Analytically, the most significant finding is that participants stated preferences correspond closely to established self-regulatory strategies, even though no participant used the vocabulary of self-regulation and the course provided no instruction in it. Table 3 sets out the correspondence.

Table 3. Participant-nominated preferences mapped to self-regulated learning constructs

Participant preference	SRL strategy	Phase
Pair work; smaller, specified audience	Environmental structuring	Forethought
Role play simulating target situation	Task analysis and strategic planning	Forethought
Requests for constructive lecturer feedback	Help-seeking from adults	Performance
Private self-recording	Self-monitoring	Performance
Reviewing recordings to identify errors	Self-evaluation	Self-reflection
Incremental improvement expectation	Goal setting and adaptive inference	Self-reflection

Note. Strategy categories follow Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986); phases follow Zimmerman (2000).

Participant 11's self-recording account is the clearest instance. It describes environmental structuring through practicing alone, self-monitoring through recording, self-evaluation through reviewing to identify errors, and an incremental improvement model, amounting to an almost complete cycle in Zimmerman's terms, developed without any instruction.

This finding reframes the pedagogical problem. These students are not simply passive sufferers of anxiety waiting for relief; they have independently generated a repertoire of strategies that the self-regulation literature would recognize as productive. What they lack is not insight but institutional support. The course structure they describe, weekly meetings assessed through individual presentations, provides no scheduled pair work, no role play, no self-recording task, and no protected channel for private feedback. Every strategy participant identified must be enacted on their own initiative, outside class, without guidance or accountability. In

this sense, their self-regulation is emergent but instructionally unsupported.

This interpretation is consistent with recent evidence linking self-regulation and anxiety. Yuksel et al. (2023) found language learning anxiety and self-regulation skills jointly implicated in academic success, indicating that the two are not independent problems requiring separate remedies. Nakata et al. (2025) show that learners' beliefs about their own capability shape self-regulated language learning, which suggests that strategies enacted in isolation and without feedback may not durably build the confidence participants sought. Ye, Ren, Lian, and Zou (2024) demonstrate that feedback can itself be designed to foster self-regulation, offering a mechanism by which the feedback participants requested and the strategies they described could be integrated rather than pursued separately.

Because self-regulatory strategies can be identified by learners (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986) and can be taught (Oxford, 1990), the gap documented here can be addressed through course design rather than through anxiety reduction as a separate project. This constitutes the study's principal contribution: it relocates the object of intervention from the learner's affect to the instructional structure that leaves learner-generated strategies unsupported. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy supports the same reading, positioning the affective strategies participants describe as a legitimate category that can be taught explicitly rather than left to individual discovery. That some participants arrived at these strategies independently while others did not is itself an equity concern: the students who most need them may be the least likely to develop them on their own.

Pedagogical Implications

Four implications follow; each grounded in a specific finding. First, pronunciation objectives should be reframed around intelligibility rather than accent approximation, because participants' pronunciation anxiety is anchored in the fear of not being understood. Second, the feedback channel rather than the feedback volume should be redesigned: instructors should preserve corrective information while altering its modality through written feedback, individual consultation, or correction delayed until after a task, and should establish explicit norms governing peer response. Third, the stakes of individual performance attempts should be lowered, distributing oral assessment across multiple lower stakes attempts rather than concentrating it in a single presentation, and permitting a second attempt or a recorded submission. Fourth, the strategies participants already named should be built into the assessed structure of the course rather than left as optional private activity.

Self-recording with a structured review protocol is particularly well suited to ESP contexts: it is low-cost, requires only a mobile phone, produces an artifact the instructor can respond to privately, and simultaneously develops the self-evaluation capacity participants were already attempting to exercise alone.

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Conclusion

This study examined speaking anxiety and self-regulatory responses among 17 Digital Business students in a Business English course at a private university in Palopo, Indonesia, 16 of whom recorded moderate or high speaking anxiety and 8 of whom provided written accounts of their experience. Anxiety appeared mainly as concern about pronunciation and as cognitive interference, experienced as mind blanking during retrieval despite adequate preparation. Participants located the sources of their anxiety in the prospect of communicative failure before a known audience and in the public delivery of correction, by peers as well as instructors, rather than in correction itself. They identified pair work, role play, private self-recording, and constructive instructor feedback as helpful conditions.

The study's principal contribution lies in how this third finding is interpreted. Participants stated preferences correspond closely to established self-regulated learning constructs, including environmental structuring, help-seeking, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, despite the absence of any instruction in these strategies. These learners have independently developed a productive repertoire of strategies, yet their course structure does not support it; their self-regulation is, in other words, emergent but instructionally unsupported. The problem, therefore, is not a lack of learner insight but a lack of instructional scaffolding for the insight learners already has.

Treating speaking anxiety in non-English major ESP courses as a deficit to be reduced through additional exposure misidentifies the point of intervention; building the strategies students have already named into the assessed structure of the course addresses both the anxiety and the self-regulatory capacity that anxiety currently constrains.

These claims are subject to seven limitations. The qualitative dataset consists of the written accounts of 8 of the 17 participants, since the open-ended items were optional, and those accounts are questionnaire responses rather than interviews; because several consisted of a single clause and probing was not possible, the themes reported are descriptive-level rather than latent-level constructions. The sample comprises 17 students in a single program at a single institution, so findings are offered for transferability to comparable contexts rather than for statistical generalization. Data were generated at a single point in time and cannot capture the fluctuation of speaking anxiety across a semester's assessment cycles.

All data are self-reported and were not triangulated against observed classroom behavior or performance measures, leaving the relationship between stated preference and enacted practice unexamined. The themes were not returned to participants for confirmation, so the interpretation presented here has not been corroborated by those whose experience it describes, and coding was carried out by a single researcher with review rather than independent duplication.

The closed-response instrument carried two weaknesses of its own: a configuration error in the online form rendered one item un scorable for 8 participants, and the communication apprehension subscale returned low internal consistency (alpha = .43), so results for that dimension are indicative only. Finally, the quantitative component was administered to describe the composition of the group rather than to test relationships and supports no inferential claim.

Suggestions

In practical terms, ESP instructors working with non-English major students are recommended to frame pronunciation goals around intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy, to deliver corrective feedback through private, written, or delayed channels while preserving its informational content, to distribute oral assessment across several lower-stakes attempts rather than a single presentation, and to build pair work, role play, and structured self-recording into the assessed structure of the course.

Four directions for future research are suggested. Interview-based or longitudinal designs would permit deeper interpretation and would track how anxiety and strategy use evolve over time, an approach supported by evidence that foreign language anxiety is malleable rather than fixed (Sun et al., 2025). Classroom observation triangulated with self-report would establish whether stated strategy preferences translate into enacted behavior.

Intervention studies implementing the self-regulation scaffolding proposed above would test whether explicit strategy instruction reduces speaking anxiety and improves oral performance in ESP settings. Comparative work across disciplinary programs, including health sciences, engineering, and hospitality, would establish whether the pronunciation-centered profile documented here is specific to business-oriented ESP or characterizes non-English major populations more broadly.

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Nila Kencana, Sam Hermansyah THE DIGITAL DILEMMA: OPPORTUNITIES