Jadila: Journal of Development and Innovation
in Language and Literature Education
Publisher: Yayasan Corolla Education Center

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

Exploring EFL University Students' Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety in the English Corner Program

Reza Pratama
Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari
tamareza042205@gmail.com
Lailatul Kodriyah
Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari
lailatulkodriyah@gmail.com
Nurhasanah
Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari
nurhasanahsanah100@gmail.com
Fitra Ramadani
Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari
rookiefitra85@gmail.com
Hartatya Novika
hartatyanovika@gmail.com
Corresponding Email: tamareza042205@gmail.com

Abstract

Speaking anxiety remains one of the most persistent psychological barriers faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly when they are required to communicate spontaneously in front of others. This study aims to explore the strategies employed by EFL university students to overcome speaking anxiety within the English Corner Program, an informal speaking activity conducted outside the classroom at the Islamic University of Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari (UNISKA MAB) Banjarmasin. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, involving ten undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that to cope with these challenges, students applied psychological strategies (self-motivation, positive thinking, and relaxation), social strategies (peer and instructor support), and practical strategies (continuous practice and exposure). Repeated participation was found to significantly reduce anxiety and strengthen students' confidence over time. These findings suggest that informal, low-pressure speaking environments such as the English Corner Program play an important role in helping EFL university students manage speaking anxiety and develop their oral communication skills.

Keywords: coping strategies; EFL university students; English Corner Program; speaking anxiety

A. Introduction

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most essential language skills because it serves as the most visible evidence of a person's communicative competence. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking ability enables learners to exchange ideas, build relationships, and function effectively in academic, professional, and social settings.

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

Crisianita and Mandasari (2022) emphasize that speaking is one of the most fundamental communication skills, as it is used to convey information directly to others, particularly across linguistic and cultural boundaries. For EFL university students, mastering speaking skills is therefore not merely an academic requirement but also a practical necessity in an increasingly globalized environment in which English functions as a lingua franca in education, business, and tourism.

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners to master. Alfina et al. (2025) note that learners commonly struggle to speak English fluently due to a combination of linguistic and psychological barriers. Among these barriers, anxiety is frequently identified as one of the most disruptive psychological factors, generating feelings of nervousness, apprehension, and fear that interfere with learners' ability to perform confidently in spoken communication. Aida et al. (2020) further argue that speaking anxiety deserves closer scholarly attention because, despite its prevalence, it remains comparatively underexplored relative to other aspects of language learning.

At the Islamic University of Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari (UNISKA MAB) Banjarmasin, students in the English Language Education Study Program frequently exhibit visible signs of nervousness and hesitation when required to speak in front of an audience. This pattern appears closely related to the limited availability of sustained, informal opportunities to build an English-speaking habit outside the formal classroom. In response to this need, the English Corner Program was established as a recurring activity in which participants are required to communicate exclusively in English within a relaxed, low-pressure setting. Rather than functioning merely as a supplementary speaking exercise, the program is intended to help students confront and gradually manage their speaking anxiety while expanding their vocabulary, fluency, and confidence through the discussion of diverse topics.

Although speaking anxiety among EFL learners has been widely investigated, much of the existing research has concentrated on formal, classroom-based contexts and has tended to examine isolated dimensions of the phenomenon, such as its contributing factors, its measurable levels, or instructors' perceptions of it. Comparatively little attention has been given to how students subjectively experience and cope with speaking anxiety within informal, non-academic learning activities such as English Corner programs, particularly within the context of Indonesian higher education. This study addresses that gap by offering an in-depth,

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

experience-centered account of how EFL university students live through, interpret, and respond to speaking anxiety in such an informal setting.

Accordingly, this study explores the coping strategies of EFL university students participating in the English Corner Program at UNISKA MAB Banjarmasin. Specifically, to investigate the strategies they employed to overcome their speaking anxiety. By focusing on the subjective, first-person accounts of ten undergraduate participants, this research is expected to provide meaningful insights for students, program organizers, lecturers, and future researchers interested in strengthening informal, learner-centered approaches to reducing speaking anxiety. The remainder of this article presents the research methodology, followed by the results and discussion of the study, and concludes with the implications and suggestions arising from the findings.

B. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore EFL university students in coping with speaking anxiety in the English Corner Program. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine participants' motivations, perceptions, and behaviors holistically rather than measuring predetermined variables (Siagian & Adam, 2017). As qualitative inquiry is fundamentally an interpretive investigation of meaning, the descriptive design enabled the researcher to capture participants' subjective experiences in a detailed and contextualized manner (Rohmah & Wijaya, 2025).

The participants consisted of ten undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program, comprising five male and five female students aged between 19 and 22 years. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) active enrollment in the English Language Study Program, (2) direct experience of challenges and coping strategies related to speaking anxiety, and (3) active participation in the English Corner Program with willingness to be interviewed. The number of participants was determined based on data saturation, ensuring that the range of perspectives relevant to the research topic was adequately represented (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

Data were collected through two complementary instruments: in-depth interviews and field observations. In-depth interviews served as the primary instrument, as they enabled participants to narrate their experiences openly and reflectively, an approach appropriate for descriptive, experience-based research (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). Each interview lasted

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

approximately 30 to 45 minutes, was audio-recorded related to their coping strategies. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or through online platforms according to participants' preferences. Field observations were additionally conducted during actual English Corner sessions to capture participants' speaking behavior in a naturalistic context and to validate the interview data (Smiley, 2015). Data collection was carried out over approximately two to three weeks, with each participant interviewed at least once.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique widely used in qualitative research to identify recurring patterns and themes within descriptive data (Naeem et al., 2023). The analytical procedure involved (1) transcribing the interview recordings, (2) familiarizing with the data by reviewing transcripts and field notes, (3) coding meaningful segments related to the research focus, (4) categorizing codes into broader themes, (5) refining themes to ensure accurate representation of the data, and (6) interpreting and reporting the themes in narrative form. Triangulating interview and observation data strengthened the reliability and relevance of the findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study addressed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through verification of the interview data with participants; transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants; dependability was maintained by clearly documenting the research procedures and analytical steps; and confirmability was ensured by grounding the findings in direct excerpts from participants' responses.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

This section presents the main findings derived from interviews and observations involving ten EFL university students who participated in the English Corner Program. Table 1 summarizes the central themes identified through thematic analysis, encompassing students' lived experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used to overcome speaking anxiety.

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

Table 1. Summary of Themes on Students' Coping Strategies

Research Focus	Main Themes	Illustrative Indicators
Strategies	Psychological, social, and practical coping strategies	Self-motivation, positive self-talk, relaxation; peer support; continuous practice and exposure

Strategy Category	Sub-Strategies Identified	Description	Representative Participants
Psychological Strategies	Self-motivation and self-encouragement	Participants motivated themselves by stepping out of their comfort zone and reframing mistakes as part of the learning process	P1, P2, P3
	Self-affirmation and positive thinking	Participants reduced overthinking by affirming their own ability and viewing sessions as informal practice rather than formal performance	P4, P9
	Relaxation techniques	Participants used deep breathing, humor, or a deliberate pause to ease tension before speaking	P5, P7
Social Strategies	Peer support and assistance	Participants sought help from familiar friends for vocabulary or emotional reassurance during the activity	P7, P8
	Facilitator guidance	Instructors' encouragement and corrective feedback helped participants speak with less fear of being judged	P4
Practical Strategies	Continuous practice and exposure	Participants increased their exposure to English through regular practice and media consumption to strengthen fluency	P6, P10
	Contextual/topical adaptation	Participants linked discussion topics to personal interests or existing knowledge to sustain the flow of conversation	P9
Development through Repeated Participation	Gradual increase in confidence and comfort	Participants reported feeling more relaxed, familiar with the setting,	P1, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

		and better able to control nervousness after several sessions	
Peer Encouragement for Reluctant Students	Motivational advice to hesitant peers	Participants who had overcome their anxiety encouraged others to actively participate, embrace mistakes, and take advantage of the free, non-judgmental learning environment	P1–P10

Lived Experiences in the English Corner Program. Participants generally described their participation in the English Corner Program as an emotionally mixed experience. Most students (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7) reported positive feelings such as increased confidence, motivation, and enjoyment, particularly because the program provided a rare opportunity to practice English regularly outside the classroom and to build relationships with peers from different classes and semesters. At the same time, several participants (P4, P5, P8, P9, P10) admitted experiencing nervousness, especially during their initial sessions or when grouped with unfamiliar participants, and some expressed discomfort when comparing their own proficiency with that of more fluent peers. Observational data corroborated these accounts, showing that the program generally created a participatory and comparatively relaxed atmosphere in which students exchanged ideas and responded to one another more comfortably than in formal classroom settings.

Regarding to the strategies overcome speaking anxiety. To manage these challenges, participants applied a range of personal, social, and practical strategies. The most frequently reported strategies were psychological in nature, including self-motivation, positive self-talk, self-affirmation, and deliberate relaxation techniques such as taking a deep breath before speaking. Several participants also relied on social strategies, such as seeking support from familiar peers, asking friends for assistance with vocabulary, or drawing confidence from the presence of people they already knew. Practical strategies included continuous practice, increasing exposure to English through media consumption, and connecting discussion topics to matters within their existing knowledge or interest in order to sustain the flow of conversation.

Participants also reflected on how their experiences changed with repeated participation. Most reported a marked improvement in comfort and confidence after attending

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

several sessions, even though some residual nervousness remained. This pattern was corroborated by observation, which recorded visibly greater ease, willingness to speak, and active engagement among returning participants compared with newer ones. Finally, participants who had successfully coped with their anxiety offered encouragement to peers who remained hesitant to join, generally emphasizing that active participation, acceptance of mistakes as part of the learning process, and consistent exposure were the most effective ways to gradually overcome speaking anxiety.

2. Discussion

The discussion is organized around four themes emerging from the results: students' lived experiences within the program, the multidimensional challenges related to speaking anxiety, the influence of anxiety on speaking performance, and the strategies employed to manage that anxiety.

Students' Lived Experiences in the English Corner Program. The finding that participants generally experienced the English Corner Program as a positive, engaging, and low-pressure learning environment aligns with Ayiz and Tauchid (2024), who found that peer interaction in informal speaking activities provides emotional support and enables students to develop public speaking skills without the intense anxiety typically associated with formal presentations. The encouragement and feedback exchanged among peers in this study appeared to counteract participants' fear of making mistakes, gradually reducing their anxiety over successive sessions. This supports the broader argument that communicative, student-centered learning environments strengthen learners' engagement and willingness to speak by shifting the emotional stakes of speaking away from formal evaluation and toward collaborative practice.

Challenges Encountered by EFL University Students. The linguistic, psychological, and situational challenges identified in this study did not operate independently but appeared closely interconnected, jointly affecting students' capacity to participate effectively. Linguistically, participants' difficulties with vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and listening comprehension reduced their ability to construct and follow spoken discourse in real time. Psychologically, feelings of inferiority when compared with more fluent peers frequently led to self-doubt and overthinking, a pattern consistent with Puspitasari et al. (2025), who similarly found that linguistic and psychological factors jointly undermine EFL students' fluency,

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

confidence, and overall communicative competence. Situationally, unfamiliar interlocutors, unpredictable topics, and physical discomfort added further cognitive burden, consistent with Abdulaal et al. (2022), who demonstrated that speaking anxiety and external pressures can measurably reduce learners' cognitive capacity to organize ideas and perform effectively during speaking tasks. Taken together, these findings suggest that speaking difficulties among EFL university students in informal settings cannot be attributed to linguistic limitations alone, but must be understood as the product of intersecting linguistic, psychological, and environmental conditions.

The Influence of Anxiety on Speaking Performance. Anxiety was found to affect participants' fluency, confidence, and concentration, manifesting as hesitation, stuttering, and reduced clarity of expression, findings consistent with Botes et al. (2020), who demonstrated that anxiety interferes with learners' fluency and cognitive processing during speaking tasks. However, the data also suggest that anxiety was not exclusively debilitating; several participants described it as a motivating challenge that pushed them to prepare more thoroughly and to take greater interactional risks. This dual function of anxiety mirrors the findings of Teimouri et al. (2018), who observed that language anxiety, despite undermining self-confidence, can simultaneously motivate learners to invest more effort in performance improvement when the surrounding environment remains supportive rather than punitive. This suggests that speaking anxiety within informal, low-stakes programs such as English Corner may be more manageable, and potentially more constructive, than anxiety experienced in high-stakes, formally evaluated speaking contexts.

Strategies Implemented to Overcome Speaking Anxiety. Participants' coping strategies fell into three broad categories: psychological, social, and practical. Psychological strategies, namely self-motivation, positive self-talk, and deliberate relaxation, were the most frequently reported, suggesting that participants relied primarily on internally regulated coping mechanisms rather than external interventions. Social strategies, including peer assistance and facilitator guidance, were also prominent, indicating that the collaborative structure of the English Corner Program itself functioned as a protective factor against anxiety. Practical strategies, such as increasing English exposure and connecting discussion topics to personal interests, reflect an emphasis on cumulative preparation rather than one-time performance. These findings correspond closely with Martiningsih et al. (2024), who identified relaxation, preparation, peer support, and positive thinking as the primary strategies EFL students use to

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

manage public speaking anxiety, reinforcing the notion that effective anxiety management typically combines internal regulation with external, socially embedded support.

Students' Development Through Repeated Participation. Perhaps the most consistent pattern across participants was the reported improvement in comfort and confidence with repeated attendance. Students who initially felt uncomfortable, nervous, or hesitant described becoming progressively more familiar with the setting and better able to regulate their anxiety, even when nervousness did not disappear entirely. This trajectory is consistent with Maulana and Kaniadewi (2025), who found that the quality of student-instructor relationships, mutual respect among peers, well-managed sessions, and opportunities for collaboration are key factors in creating environments that reduce anxiety and strengthen students' willingness to communicate in English over time. Collectively, these findings indicate that speaking anxiety among EFL university students is not a fixed or purely individual trait, but a dynamic condition that can be substantially reshaped through sustained participation in supportive, informal speaking environments such as the English Corner Program.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

The findings of this study carry several implications for EFL speaking pedagogy in higher education contexts. First, they suggest that informal, low-pressure speaking activities such as the English Corner Program can serve as a complementary space to formal classroom instruction, allowing students to confront speaking anxiety gradually through repeated, voluntary exposure rather than through evaluative pressure. Second, the interconnectedness of linguistic, psychological, and situational challenges identified in this study implies that interventions aimed solely at improving linguistic competence may be insufficient; equal attention should be given to fostering supportive peer relationships and comfortable physical and social conditions during speaking sessions. Third, the range of coping strategies reported by participants, particularly psychological strategies such as self-motivation and positive self-talk, indicates that explicit strategy instruction may help students who have not yet developed effective personal coping mechanisms.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are based on the accounts of ten students from a single study program at one university, and therefore may not be transferable to EFL learners in other institutional or cultural contexts without further verification. In addition, as a qualitative study relying primarily on self-reported interview data, the findings

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

reflect participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences rather than objectively measured levels of anxiety or speaking performance.

For future research, studies involving larger and more diverse samples, or conducted across multiple institutions, would help establish the extent to which these findings can be generalized. Researchers may also consider examining related constructs such as willingness to communicate, motivation, and long-term speaking achievement, or employing quantitative or mixed-method designs to complement the depth offered by qualitative inquiry. Longitudinal designs tracking students' anxiety levels across an academic term would further clarify how sustained participation in informal speaking activities such as English Corner programs contributes to speaking development over time.

For program organizers and lecturers, the findings point toward the value of maintaining a supportive, judgment-free atmosphere, adjusting discussion topics to students' proficiency levels, and encouraging consistent, voluntary participation as a means of helping EFL university students manage speaking anxiety and develop their oral communication skills. For students, the findings suggest that regular, low-stakes speaking practice, combined with realistic acceptance of mistakes as part of the learning process, may be a more sustainable path toward speaking confidence than avoidance of speaking opportunities altogether.

References

Abdulaal, M. A. A.-D., Alenazi, M. H., Tajuddin, A. J. A., & Hamidi, B. (2022). Dynamic vs. diagnostic assessment: Impacts on EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy, learning anxiety, and cognitive load. *Language Testing in Asia*, 12(1), 32.

Aida, N., Supiani, S., & Perdana, I. (2020). An analysis of students' anxiety in speaking English at junior high school in Banjarmasin. Proceeding of SHEPO 2020 (International Conference on Social Sciences & Humanity, Economics, and Politics), 1(1), 51–55.

Alfina, W., Suriaman, A., & Hasyim, Z. (2025). Student difficulties in speaking English encountered by the eleventh grade of Ma Alkhairat Pusat Palu. IDEAS: Journal on Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature, 13(2), 6398–6410.

Ayiz, A., & Tauchid, A. (2024). Mitigating public speaking anxiety among EFL learners through peer teaching: An evaluative survey study. Indonesian Journal of Education and Pedagogy, 1(3), 174–184.

Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2020). The power to improve: Effects of multilingualism and perceived proficiency on enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language learning. European Journal of Applied Linguistics, 8(2), 279–306.

Crisianita, S., & Mandasari, B. (2022). The use of small-group discussion to improve students' speaking skill. Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 3(1), 61–66.

E-ISSN: 2723-6900
P-ISSN: 2745-9578
Volume 6 Number 4, 2026
Page 220-230

Lopez, V., & Whitehead, D. (2013). Sampling data and data collection in qualitative research. Nursing & Midwifery Research: Methods and Appraisal for Evidence Based Practice, 123(7), 140.

Martiningsih, I., Susilawati, E., & Rezeki, Y. S. (2024). Students' strategies to overcome public speaking anxiety. Inspiring: English Education Journal, 7(1), 66–86.

Maulana, S., & Kaniadewi, N. (2025). Exploring the supportive classroom environment in relation with students' willingness to communicate in English. Jurnal Studi Guru Dan Pembelajaran, 8(2), 1295–1305.

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22, 1–18.

Puspitasari, N. M. S. D., Jamiluddin, J., & Kamaruddin, A. (2025). Difficulties in speaking skill encountered by English students at Tadulako University. IJEAL (International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics), 5(1), 1–7.

Rohmah, F., & Wijaya, K. W. (2025). A case study of students' speaking anxiety in learning English in the classroom. Sell (Scope of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature) Journal, 10(1), 1–20.

Rutledge, P. B., & Hogg, J. L. C. (2020). In-depth interviewing. The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology, 1–6.

Siagian, U. M., & Adam, A. (2017). An analysis of students' anxiety in speaking. Anglo-Saxon: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, 8(1), 3–9.

Smiley, S. (2015). Field recording or field observation?: Audio meets method in qualitative research. The Qualitative Report, 20(11), 1812–1822.

Teimouri, Y., Goetze, J., & Plonsky, L. (2018). Second language anxiety and achievement: A meta-analysis. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 41(2), 363–387.