

EFL Learners Coping Strategy Use in Managing Their English Language Anxiety

¹ Rouhollah Adelian

² Shahram Afraz*

³Farhad Fahandezh Sa'di

Research Paper

IJEAP- 2404-2037 DOR: [20.1001.1.24763187.2024.13.2.1.8](https://doi.org/10.1001.1.24763187.2024.13.2.1.8)

Received: 2024-04-14

Accepted: 2024-05-12

Published: 2024-06-27

Abstract: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is widely recognized as a significant barrier to language learners' proficiency and achievement. While numerous studies have investigated its causes and impacts on learners' academic performance and emotions, there remains a gap in understanding the coping strategies employed by learners to manage FLA. This qualitative study explores the strategies used by Iranian English language learners to mitigate FLA. Employing a phenomenological research design, this study involved the selection of 25 teachers through theoretical sampling, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and coping mechanisms of Iranian language learners. Data collection was conducted through a combination of structured and semi-structured interviews, facilitating a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives and strategies. Subsequently, the collected data underwent rigorous analysis utilizing open and axial coding techniques. The findings of this study illuminated five primary coping strategies employed by Iranian language learners in their English language classes: preparation strategies, positive thinking, relaxation techniques, seeking support from peers, and resignation. These strategies represent adaptive responses to FLA, allowing learners to navigate and mitigate their adverse effects on their language learning journey. By recognizing and promoting effective coping mechanisms, educators can better support learners in overcoming FLA and enhancing their language acquisition experiences.

Keywords: Coping Anxiety, EFL Teachers, English Classes, Language Anxiety, Language Learners

Introduction

Over the past four decades, significant attention has been devoted to the role of affective factors in language acquisition within the domain of applied linguistics (Dörnyei, 2001, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Affective factors encompass learners' emotional responses (Scovel, 1987), with anxiety being emphasized as particularly influential among them, directly impacting learners' proficiency in acquiring second languages (Arabai, 2014a, 2014b; Liu & Huang, 2011). Anxiety is a prevalent experience for most learners at various stages of language learning (Horwitz, 2001). Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) acts as a hindrance, obstructing learners' capacity to absorb necessary linguistic information (Krashen, 1982) and negatively correlating with their language learning accomplishments (Gardner, 2001; 2006; 2020).

Considering the significant role anxiety plays in the realm of foreign language education, numerous studies have investigated this phenomenon. These studies primarily explore learners' FLA, its interaction with language proficiency and achievement, as well as its origins and repercussions (e.g.,

¹ PhD Candidate of TEFL, robertadelian@gmail.com; Department of English Language, Qeshm Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qeshm, Iran.

² Assistant Professor of TEFL (Corresponding Author), Shahram.afraz1352@gmail.com; Department of English Language, Qeshm Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qeshm, Iran.

³ Assistant Professor of TEFL, farhadfahandezh@gmail.com; Department of English Language, Bandar Lenge Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Lenge, Iran.

Aslan & Thompson, 2021; Elaldi, 2016; Gopang et al., 2017). Additionally, several scholars have conducted systematic reviews and meta-analyses examining the association between FLA and language proficiency and performance (e.g., Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Dikmen, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2013).

However, despite this extensive research, a gap exists in the exploration of strategies employed by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to manage foreign language anxiety. Moreover, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no one has ever tried to investigate the coping strategies for reducing Iranian EFL learners' language anxiety. This study aims to thoroughly investigate the strategies utilized by EFL learners to overcome FLA. Specifically, the following research questions are posed:

Research Question One: What strategies do Iranian EFL learners use to cope with English language learning anxiety?

Research Question Two: What are the major themes regarding coping Strategies EFL learners use to cope with English language anxiety?

Literature Review

In this section the main studies on FLA and coping strategies for FLA are reviewed.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Horwitz et al. (1986) underscored the significance of identifying anxious students within foreign language classrooms, acknowledging anxiety's pivotal role in language acquisition. They delineated two categories of language anxiety: detrimental or inhibiting anxiety and beneficial or facilitating anxiety. The former, as its designation implies, represents a negative manifestation of anxiety that adversely impacts students, resulting in a decline in their language performance (Brown, 2007; Kim, 2000). The repercussions of inhibiting anxiety can manifest directly, such as decreased class involvement, or indirectly through feelings of fear, apprehension, and frustration (Oxford, 1999). In contrast, the latter type of anxiety functions as a positive catalyst, motivating and empowering learners to excel in language learning.

Various definitions of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) are present in the literature. Ortega (2009) highlighted the definitions proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre (1999) as among the most prominent in previous studies. Horwitz et al. (1986) characterized language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). Similarly, MacIntyre (1999) defined language anxiety as the subjective experience of stress, worry, nervousness, and tension that activates one's nervous system in the context of learning a foreign language.

Related Studies on Coping Strategies

Chen (2002) proposes a classification of coping styles in the Foreign Language (FL) context, dividing them into two categories: the "immature" type and the "mature" type. The "immature" type encompasses coping mechanisms such as "avoidance," "imagination," and "self-reproach," which may indicate a lack of cognitive maturity. Individuals who predominantly employ these coping strategies often exhibit neurotic tendencies, with emotions and behaviors lacking stability. For example, anxious students may avoid sitting in the front of the class for fear of being called upon by the teacher, or they may reproach themselves for being unable to respond quickly enough. Avoidance, particularly, is identified as a prevalent coping strategy among learners experiencing FL-related anxiety (Prins, 1986; Bailey et al., 1999), supported by various studies (Pakdaman, et al., 2022; Pappamihiel, 2002; Chen, 2002).

Regarding Foreign Language Learning Anxiety (FLLA), Xiao and Xu (1996) suggest that younger learners experiencing anxiety tend to utilize "problem-solving" and "help-seeking" strategies rather than avoidance, reproach, or imagination. These learners often demonstrate mature and consistent

character traits and behaviors, consistent with findings from investigations into anxiety coping techniques within Foreign Language (FL) contexts (Farrokhi, et al., 2023; Kondo & Yang, 2004; Marwan, 2007; Lizuka, 2010).

Kao (2017) conducted research on gender disparities in coping strategies for FLLA, analyzing 122 Taiwanese university students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language courses. The study revealed that female students scored significantly higher than male students in two coping strategies: seeking support from peers and maintaining positive thinking, while male students tended to use relaxation as a coping mechanism. However, there was no significant difference in coping strategy selection between groups with varying levels of anxiety, nor was there an interaction effect between gender and anxiety level in coping strategy usage. This underscores the pivotal role of gender in the selection of coping strategies for FLLA among university students.

Wei (2012) investigated FL classroom anxiety and coping strategies among Chinese Bouyei college students. The study, involving 320 first- and second-year Bouyei college students from five colleges in Guizhou Province, China, revealed moderate levels of FL classroom anxiety and reported usage of anxiety management strategies. Six primary categories of coping strategies emerged, with recommendations provided for English teachers to aid in mitigating learners' FL classroom anxiety.

Methodology

The research methodology including the number of informants, research methods, data analysis and procedure are explained.

Participants

A sample of 25 participants was recruited from various language institutes in Fars province, Iran. Theoretical sampling was employed to select the informants for this study. The first author, who assumed the role of teacher-researcher, nominated the teachers and contacted them via WhatsApp to invite them to participate. The selected participants were informed of the interview date. Thirteen of the informants were interviewed in person at the language institutes, while the remaining 12 were interviewed remotely using online applications such as Skyroom and WhatsApp. Data saturation was reached after the 25th teacher interview, at which point the researchers were confident that a sample of 25 EFL learners was sufficient for the phenomenological study.

Research Method

We employed a phenomenological research approach, which entails an in-depth exploration of human lived experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). This qualitative method is particularly suitable for investigating areas with limited existing knowledge. To uphold ethical standards, participants were informed about the study's timeframe and the possibility of follow-up interviews. The primary data collection method utilized was interviews, which could be conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or online, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Tavakoli, 2012). In our study, both face-to-face and online interviews were conducted, with participants individually interviewed after providing informed consent. As the language learners were proficient in English, interviews were conducted in English.

During the interviews, participants were prompted to elaborate on the activities and strategies they utilize to manage classroom anxiety, explain why they find these strategies beneficial, and identify the most crucial and effective coping mechanisms for foreign language classes. Before transcription, the researcher reviewed and listened to each interview recording once. Subsequently, recordings were listened to again to transcribe participants' statements verbatim, including their colloquial expressions and phrases to maintain the informality of the conversation. Transcriptions were carried out daily, following each interview session. The researcher allocated time each day for transcription, typically completing one or two interviews per day, with the remainder of the time dedicated to transcribing. On average, each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, with discussions ranging from 30 to 70 minutes in duration.

Data Analysis

In this study, we employed qualitative content analysis to scrutinize the data acquired from the interviews, a method that involves systematically elucidating the meaning of qualitative data without resorting to statistical analysis (Schreier, 2013). This approach is apt for analyzing a diverse array of texts, concentrating on both explicit meaning (manifest content) and latent content (underlying themes and ideas within the text) (Trisko & Maschi, 2015). Thematic analysis, a variant of qualitative content analysis, is frequently utilized to interpret latent content and seeks to describe rather than develop theory.

During the coding process, researchers generated codes iteratively. Each new interview transcript underwent fresh coding, and the codes were compared with those derived from prior transcripts. If there was alignment between the content and a prior code, that code was applied; otherwise, a new code was designated. This iterative process persisted across all transcripts until a comprehensive catalog of codes was established to adequately depict the data gleaned from the interviews. Subsequently, in the pattern coding phase, these codes were amalgamated into different patterns, facilitating the formulation of a model of coping strategies for Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). This phase aimed to discern commonalities and interconnections among the codes, thereby enabling the construction of a cohesive framework for comprehending the coping mechanisms employed by language learners.

Results

Interviews with the informants were analyzed thematically. The extracted themes are presented as follows:

A. Preparation Strategies

It is believed that getting one ready for class is one of the crucial solutions to prevent oneself from getting anxious in class. One's success in the presentation depends on how much they know about the contents they are supposed to present. In this data, the preparation technique covers eight strategies; 1) understanding the topic, 2) preparing well, 3) practicing more, 4) recording voice, 5) remembering the text, 6) making a keyword, 7) increasing opportunities to interact in the foreign language and 8) setting up a realistic goal. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

The Frequency of Preparation Techniques

Strategy	Frequency
1. Understanding the topic	16
2. Preparing well	14
3. Practicing more	13
4. Recording voice	3
5. Remembering the text	7
6. Making a keyword	11
7. Increasing the opportunity to interact	12
8. Setting up a realistic goal	9

a. Understanding the Topic

The first technique to resolve anxiety, as posited by 16 respondents, was coded understanding of the topic well. Participants believed they could avoid FLA by trying to understand the topic well rather than memorizing the texts. The following quotation exemplifies the theme:

"If I lose words in my head, I will think, what should I do? I will smile, and suddenly there it is. It comes up immediately just like that. The significant issue is ensuring we perceive what we will articulate". P8

b. Preparing Well

As suggested by 14 participants, the second strategy was thematically coded by preparing well before doing an assigned linguistic task. P 15, for example, asserted that:

"When I have to speak in front of the public in class and am well-prepared, I will not get nervous. I used to have enough eye contact when I was presenting, but when the teacher stared at me and asked the question directly, I was afraid of answering wrong."

c. Practicing More

More practice before the presentation was another way to overcome foreign language anxiety, as suggested by 13 participants. Both participants posited that practicing is one of the robust solutions for coping with speaking anxiety. For them, before the day they are going to talk in front of the class, they must keep on practicing at home so that while speaking in the classroom, they know what they are supposed to speak about. The following excerpts exemplify the theme:

"If I am asked to do a presentation, I will prepare everything required. I kept on practicing in my room before I went to the class. I dare to myself for staying up the night practicing. I know that I do not get nervous if I am the center of attention. But I am afraid of forgetting everything in class" (P36)

"I have to practice to keep on talking. If I practice enough when I am in front of the public. It will handle calmly" (P24)

d. Recording Voice

Six participants stated that they tried to record their voices while practicing and preparing well for the presentation to resolve speaking anxiety. For instance, P 7 stated:

"Ummm... To cope with the speaking anxiety, we should record our voice."

e. Remembering the Text

Another effective strategy to mitigate the level of anxiety, as believed by seven learners, appeared to be remembering the text. The following example illuminates the issue:

"One strategy to resolve the foreign language anxiety, most notably in speaking tasks, is to focus on the remembering of the text." (P37)

f. Making a Keyword

Another technique, as suggested by 11 participants, was making a keynote for their speech. In this regard, P15 announced that:

"Oh. I think every presenter should provide a keynote for themselves to look at in due time to reduce the anxiety brought about by speaking in public."

It can be inferred from the above excerpt that to decrease anxiety, making a keynote for guidance is of crucial value. Presenters can look at their notes to make them confident and less anxious about speaking a foreign language.

g. Increasing Opportunities to Interact with Teachers and Classmates in English

Frequent practice will help the learners feel comfortable when they speak in English. Especially if they think their English language competence is limited and are concerned about it. Twelve respondents proposed it. P18, for example, believed that:

"Never stop improving your English. Welcome any opportunity to interact in English to kill two birds with one stone. First, to elevate knowledge of English and second, to mitigate the level of anxiety resulting from a lack of knowledge in the foreign language."

h. Setting Up a Realistic Goal

To manage their language anxiety, the learners must set reasonable, achievable language learning goals. Nine interviewees believed this. In this regard, P20 thinks that:

"I strongly recommend the language learners not to set an unrealistic aim because it will lead to frustration and anxiety, hindering them from effective language learning."

B. Relaxation Strategies

Relaxation is a mental image students draw in which they see themselves more confident when performing a foreign language task. This central theme consists of eight sub-themes adopted by the Iranian EFL learners to lower the level of anxiety, namely; 1) reminding to calm down, 2) praying, 3) smiling, 4) squeezing paper, 5) taking a deep breath, 6) doing leisure activities, 7) releasing psychophysical tension, and 8) refreshing physiological functions. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2*Frequency of Relaxation Techniques*

Technique	Frequency
1. Reminding to calm	5
2. Praying	4
3. Smiling	6
4. Squeezing paper	3
5. Taking a deep breath	11
6. Doing leisure activities	9
7. Releasing psychophysical tension	8
8. Refreshing physiological functions	4

a. Remind to Calm

Reminding oneself to calm down, as posited by five respondents, is one of the techniques for controlling anxiety. For example, it was believed by P18:

"Ummm... I often speak in front of different individuals, and I see my siblings and my parents speaking in public. Thus I observe, and then I adapt it. I have learned many things from watching my surrounding, like staring the audience in the eyes, and the important thing is saying 'in the name of God' before my speech."

b. Praying

Praying was coded as another technique adopted by the religious learners (4 participants) to overcome their foreign language anxiety. In this regard, P13 asserted that:

"When I forget something in a foreign language class, I start praying and believing that God, the Almighty, will help me. For instance, when I have difficulty remembering my words in my speech in front of the class, I will take recourse to the praying."

c. Smiling While Facing Inconvenience

It was unfolded that another technique to resolve language anxiety is to smile, as suggested by six learners.

"Yeah, I always try to calm down, and the important thing is smile. Do not let your audience be aware that you have a problem in doing a certain linguistic task." (P18)

It can be inferred that the language learners who smile spontaneously while performing a linguistic task can benefit from a better performance than those who are not used to smiling in such problematic situations. This illustrates that smiling can be incredibly influential in speeding up stress recovery by reducing harmful stress.

d. Squeezing Paper

Squeezing paper was one of the techniques to cope with foreign language speaking anxiety as held by three learners. For example, P24 commented that:

"One can do many things in a stressful situation. For instance, I squeeze papers so that I can chill out."

This interviewee states that squeezing paper when he has speaking anxiety can reduce his anxiety level. This technique helps us reduce the students' tension and, as a result, decreases their anxiety.

e. Taking a Deep Breath

As asserted by 11 interviewees, taking a deep breath was another technique for coping with foreign language anxiety. In this regard, participant 21 stated that:

"Sometimes I take a deep breath when I am experiencing anxiety, and it helps me lessen it."

f. Doing Leisure Activities

The interviews revealed that nine learners employed leisure activities, such as listening to music or watching films, as a means of mitigating anxiety or redirecting their attention. Here are examples from two respondents:

"When I am unable to come up with an answer to a question in the report, I listen to music for a while, or I simply cannot concentrate." (Participant 1)

"If I have something to do or another matter to attend to the next day and feel anxious about it, I may, the night before, think about wanting to handle it well, but instead, I end up watching films or doing something similar." (Participant 2)

g. Releasing Psychophysical Tension

As posited by 8 participants, releasing psychophysical tension was the next coping strategy. The quotation from P17 supports this theme.

"Like in different situations, one feels very nervous, and you have no way to mitigate it because it is impossible to make it disappear. The only way, in my opinion, is to stretch and take a deep breath."

h. Refreshing Physiological Functions

Regarding vital physiological functions, four respondents mentioned that they considered ‘eating’ and ‘sleeping’ to be the best ways to alleviate their anxious feelings. The following quotations exemplify the theme:

"If I have something, I will eat it. Eating is the best way to mitigate the anxiety and pressure for me." (P12)

"Sometimes when I get home with high pressure and stress, when back in my hometown, I want just to sleep until I wake up naturally. I mean getting up very late." (P29)

C. Positive Thinking

Positive feelings can lead to improved second language skills since negative emotions can obstruct the progress of the target language. The positive thinking technique consists of five strategies; 1) being brave to speak, 2) raising the voice, 3) starting the presentation with enthusiasm, 4) building self-confidence, and 5) positive self-talk. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

The Frequency of Positive Thinking Techniques

Technique	Frequency
1. Being brave to speak	4
2. Raising the voice	7
3. Starting with enthusiasm	2
4. building self-confidence	13
5. Positive self-talk	5

a. Being Brave to Speak

Being brave to speak, as believed by 4 participants, appeared to be one of the positive energies coming from the speakers’ minds as, for example, P19 stated:

"Most of my friends stated that if you are supposed to speak in front of the others, just imagine that all the audience is a statue. At first, I could not have a mindset like that because I thought that they were human. But I am fully aware of how to manage that; I have my friends' tips, I really have to be brave, I have to be brave to speak in front of the public."

b. Raising the Voice

As asserted by seven learners, raising the voice was believed to be another way to control the anxiety. P25, for example, commented that:

"It is like... I do not usually raise my voice when I am talking, but I have to raise my voice at that time during my presentation so the audience does not talk to each other or anything. By this, I can manage my anxiety better."

c. Starting the Presentation with Enthusiasm

The enthusiastic start was unfolded to be another strategy to overcome the foreign language pressure, as suggested by 2 participants. The participants stated that they employ this strategy to change a stressful situation into a positive and pleasant one.

"Please do not laugh, but if the instructor has a look like ‘that’ I already scared, I will automatically forget the words, so I have to open my presentation with enthusiasm, and they can give their attention to me" (P18)

d. Building Self-confidence

As stated by 13 individuals, building self-confidence appeared to be another way to overcome the anxiety. This positive energy could be an effective strategy to overcome his foreign language speaking anxiety. For example, P12 stated:

"I feel anxiety is the most important issue that should be handled to perform foreign language-related tasks better, but I have to go against my anxiety. I should not be ashamed."

e. Positive Self-talk

Five learners attempted to convince themselves of an optimistic scenario to remind themselves that it is nothing and it can be done quickly. For instance, P25 stated:

"To relax, I will tell myself that this is nothing. I will convince myself that this is nothing, everybody is the same, and everyone forgets everything tomorrow. I just tell myself that everyone will forget everything tomorrow and who will remember that I or anyone said wrong words or the like yesterday." (P25)

D. Peer-seeking Strategies

Peer seeking is related to the ability of the learners to look for other learners who seem to suffer the same problem in perceiving the class and handling their anxiety. This technique proved to be a good solution for learners to share their experiences and techniques with their partners. This strategy consists of five specific strategies 1) seeking support from peers and 2) mingling with students, 3) gaining positive feedback from peers, 4) seeking help from peers, and 5) talking with someone. The sub-themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4*The Frequency of Peer-seeking Techniques*

Technique	Frequency
1. Seeking support from peers	6
2. Mingling with students	12
3. Gaining positive feedback from peers	13
4. Seeking help from peers	8
5. Talking with someone	10

a. Seek Support from Peers

To seek support from the peers was believed by six learners to be very effective in reducing the anxiety as, for example, P26 asserts:

"When I am in trouble in a specific linguistic task, I look for other classmates who suffer from the same problem. I look for the closest person I know that he is in the same situation."

b. Mingle with Students

Having many friends in the classroom also affected the students' confidence, as felt by 12 interviewees. P15 that posits it:

"I think one should look for as many friends as s/he can to reduce his/her anxiety. If we make friends with most of our classmates, it will be quite easy for us to perform better with the least anxiety."

c. Gain Positive Feedback from Peers

Thirteen individuals disclosed positive feedback on behalf of their peers to be another solution to resolve the anxiety.

"Once I got off the stage, I asked my friends and classmates whether they had heard me say anything wrong. They replied that they were not was not listening at all. I said that I felt so embarrassed. Some of my friends said they were not embarrassed because some were playing with their phones, and some were doing other stuff. Then, I took a deep breath and calmed down." (P17)

d. Seek Help from Peers

Eight learners claimed that when faced with difficulties in tasks or activities, they felt much less anxious if they could instantly receive help from their classmates.

"I think it is significant that you and your peers can assist each other. I mean, you can let them know what you are presenting. If you really forget it, they just need to remind you of one point. Then, you can go ahead with the rest of the task." (P27)

e. Talk with Someone

Sharing their nervous feelings with someone, e.g., parents or peers, was also considered one of the coping strategies for anxiety. Ten participants employed such a way to calm themselves down. It can be exemplified in the following excerpt by P 1.

I will make a phone call. I will phone my mom and chat with her to calm down.

The above excerpt suggests that talking with others can reduce the amount of anxiety to a large extent and help the learners best promote their learning process.

E. Resignation

This category is characterized by the unwillingness of the students to do anything to mitigate their language anxiety (e.g., to give up, to sleep in class). Students who report the signs of resignation tend to be intent on decreasing anxiety by refusing to face the issue.

"When I feel that I am getting anxious about a problematic issue in language learning, I will pay more attention, accept the situation, and may even sleep in class. Yeah, that is the only way to cope with the issue you cannot solve." (P40)

The above statement suggests that when there is no solution to mitigate the problem of foreign language anxiety, the best technique is to quit the work and not think about it.

Discussion

The first research question of this study delved into the strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners to alleviate their foreign language anxiety. The coping strategies identified among these learners were categorized into five primary groups: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. The first set of strategies, termed preparation strategies, encompassed various techniques. Among these, "understanding the topic" emerged as a significant approach, deemed more influential than mere memorization. This emphasis stemmed from the belief that if a learner were to forget the exact content, they could still maintain conversation fluency. This finding resonates with Kondo and Ying-Ling's (2004) assertion that the perception of the discussed or taught topic plays a pivotal role in mitigating anxiety within EFL classrooms.

Another coping strategy revealed in the data was the practice of thorough preparation before class as a means of reducing anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. By ensuring adequate preparation, learners endeavor to equip themselves for classroom tasks, consequently bolstering their confidence in handling these tasks. This discovery aligns with Liu's (2007) conclusion that the lack of preparedness

among learners in studying the material before in-class activities poses a significant challenge experienced by many language learners when engaging in target language production.

For example, learners may feel anxious about speaking in front of a teacher or peer because they are not adequately prepared with the material they need to explain. The high levels of anxiety experienced by learners who are not well-prepared for a specific task can also be attributed to Daly's (1991) argument that it is understandable for individuals to feel panicked when faced with an ambiguous or novel situation, including new circumstances, unfamiliar issues, or uncertain outcomes.

In essence, the data revealed that thorough preparation before class was another strategy employed by the Iranian EFL learners to mitigate their foreign language anxiety, as being well-prepared enhanced their confidence and reduced the sense of uncertainty or unfamiliarity that can contribute to language learning anxiety.

Rehearsal and practice before the presentation day proved to be another contributing factor in reducing EFL learners' language anxiety. Practicing more, for example, is very important to have a good presentation or come up with a good piece of written work. It is in line with Young (1990) that practicing self-talk can be specifically helpful in dealing with anxiety. Another strategy to reduce speaking anxiety appeared to be recording their voice before the presentation session. It is again in congruence with what was discussed by Young (1990) putting that by recording their voice; they can be aware of which part are they lacking, which part they should practice more, and they know the way it sounds like when they are in front of the public. By recording their voice and self-talk, learners could know their strengths and weaknesses to prepare themselves before talking in front of the public.

Handling the anxiety is by remembering the whole text was another strategy adopted by the learners, which is echoed by Saarahwati (2020), stating that one of the learners' ways to overcome anxiety is remembering the text, outline reviewing before speaking in front of the class and writing down what is the point they are going to talk about in class in the form of keynote to help them remember the topics. Another technique that learners employ to reduce their anxiety is making a keynote for their direction if they are asked to speak in front of the class. They have to look at their keynote to make them confident and less anxious about speaking a foreign language. This is also agreed by Saarahwati (2020), positing that learners apply a keynote as a tactic to mitigate their speaking anxiety and reduce the chance of failure, such as mind blank or forget with the main point of their speech. They make a keynote before the day of their presentation to help them remember their speech outline from the beginning about the sequences of the topic and some essential ideas in case they forget what they are going to articulate.

Another strategy that emerged to lower foreign language learning anxiety was increasing opportunities for interaction in the target language. This finding aligns with the work of Sampasivam and Clément (2014), who posit that creating or maintaining suitable interactions and contexts has been implemented to address learners' anxieties in EFL classrooms. By facilitating more opportunities for interaction, learners can mitigate the problem of anxiety and enhance their proficiency in the target language.

Finally, the data revealed that learners need to set reasonable and achievable language learning goals in order to manage their language anxiety. As noted by Horwitz et al. (2010), mistakes and errors are a natural part of the learning process, and some beliefs held by learners may be too unrealistic to result in a positive learning experience. For instance, the belief in the importance of achieving native-like pronunciation can lead learners to become frustrated or depressed as they find it nearly impossible to attain. Therefore, it is understandable for EFL learners to make mistakes, and they should not be afraid of committing errors as part of their language learning journey. In summary, increasing opportunities for target language interaction and setting reasonable, achievable learning goals were identified as additional strategies employed by the EFL learners to manage their language anxiety.

The second group of strategies was labeled relaxation, subdivided into various tactics. The first one appeared to be reminding himself to calm down. It agrees with Akkakoson (2016), asserting that by calming them down, a learner can lower their anxiety and control/her feeling of anxiety or frightened. When learners are in a relaxed situation, they can eliminate their anxiety. The second relaxation strategy

to alleviate the second language anxiety appeared to be praying, adopted by the religious learners. This is also reflected by Nasiri et al. (2014), reporting the positive impact of Tavasol prayer on lowering learners' anxiety. Thus the application of prayer as a low-cost and straightforward way is suggested for learners. Another taken strategy was smiling to decrease the amount of anxiety. According to Kraft and Pressman (2012), the learners who smile spontaneously in stressful situations return to a cardiovascular resting level more quickly than those who do not smile. This illustrates the critical place of smiling in accelerating stress recovery by lowering negative stress.

Squeezing paper was one of the techniques to cope with his foreign language speaking anxiety. Acreman, et al. also report this (2014) maintain that something occurs in the body when a person is stressed and anxious, called muscle tension. By squeezing something and counting to 10, one can eliminate the tension from the body. This is why squeezing paper can influence anxiety since such a tactic decreases the tension and makes the body and mind relax again. Taking a deep breath was another technique for coping with foreign language anxiety, as Tasan, Mede, and Sadeghi (2021) commented, suggesting that learners perceived deep breathing implementation as an influential and practical tool in mitigating the anxious feelings. Also, some learners mitigated their anxiety or shifted their attention through some leisure activities. This is in line with what Zawadzki et al. (2015) argued, stressing that leisure activities can suggest abrupt stress relief and other health benefits. They further asserted that when individuals are involved in a leisure activity, they have less stress, a better mood, a lesser heart rate, and more psychological engagement.

Releasing psychophysical tension appeared to be the seventh strategy taken by the Iranian EFL learners to overcome their EFL anxiety level, which is also echoed by Hershner (2015), stating that in case of suffering from the heavy pressure of presenting in the target language, it is of high significance to be carefree and not be stressed about. Finally, refreshing physiological functions is believed to be another tactic employed by the learners to alleviate their anxiety which is also indicated by Saarahwati (2020), announcing that when one is highly pressed to carry out a foreign language task, one way to get rid of such stress and pressure is to abandon for a while and take a rest.

The third group of strategies was labeled positive thinking, which in turn was subdivided into various tactics. The first one appeared to be being brave to speak. He (2017) carried out a study to identify the strategies Chinese learners apply to deal with foreign language anxiety and their effectiveness in reducing their anxiety. Raising the voice was believed to be another way to control the anxiety, which is also supported by Akramy (2020), claiming that a learner has to force her limit, from a quiet individual to raising their voice when s/he has a presentation so that to have the audiences' attention. By having the audience's attention, they can control their anxiety. However, another strategy appeared to be starting the presentation with enthusiasm, as is also emphasized by Saarahwati (2020), who believed that enthusiasm suppresses the negative feeling of language learning. Building self-confidence appeared to be another way to overcome the anxiety. This is witnessed by Tridinanti's (2018) study maintaining that learners built up their self-confidence by telling themselves not to be ashamed and afraid of speaking in front of the public. This positive energy can be an effective strategy for coping with foreign language anxiety. Positive self-talk is confirmed to be the last strategy of learners to overcome their anxiety, as also reflected in Toyama and Yamazaki's (2021) work stressing the critical role of positive self-talk in reducing EFL anxiety levels among Japanese undergraduate EFL students.

The fourth group of strategies was labeled peer seeking, which in turn was subdivided into various tactics. According to Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), peer seeking is identified by the capability of the learners to look for other learners who seem to have the same problem in understanding the class and controlling their anxiety. The perception that others have the same trouble may function as a source of emotional management through a social comparison for an anxious learner. Such learners should seek an appropriate learning partner to talk with or build support for each other. This tactic is a suitable solution for learners to share their experiences and strategies with their learning peers. In the current investigation, peer-seeking strategies include seeking support from peers, mingling with students, gaining positive feedback from peers, seeking help from peers, and talking with someone which all are supported by Tsehaya and Kahsay (2020), who asserted that the students' anxiety could be decreased to a certain amount by raising peer support in the cooperative learning setting so that learners can be

encouraged to increase their confidence and self-esteem in language classes. The last group was labeled resignation, characterized by the unwillingness of the students to do anything to mitigate their language anxiety. Here, as Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) commented, learners, manifest signs of resignation inclined to be intent on reducing anxiety by refusing to encounter the problem.

Concluding Remarks

We found that language learners employ different types of strategies to cope with the FLA in their English classes. Each of these strategies can somehow turn out to be effective in reducing FLA. As the findings were quoted by a small number of language learners in a particular context, they cannot be easily generalized to the other contexts. It seems that the cultural and religious trends of the language learners affect their choice of coping strategies for lowering FLA. Due to the limitation of the study, it was not possible to validate the model of coping strategies. The other researchers are therefore strongly recommended to replicate the study using a large number of participants to validate the model. As another limitation, it was not possible to investigate the perceptions of the language learners about the effectiveness of each of these coping strategies. Further quantitative studies can shed light on the quality and effectiveness of each of these strategies.

Acknowledgement

I sincerely thank all those who helped us conduct the research and provided the data.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

We declare that we do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding Details

This research did not receive any funding from any agency.

References

- Akkakoson, S. (2016). Speaking anxiety in English conversation classrooms among Thai students. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 13(1), 63-82.
- Akramy, S.A. (2020). Speaking anxiety in an Afghan EFL setting: A case study of an Afghan university. *Language in India*, 20(12), 161-182.
- Alrabai, F. (2014a). A Model of Foreign Language Anxiety in the Saudi EFL Context. *English Language Teaching*, 7(7), 82-101.
- Alrabai, F. (2014b). Motivational practices in English as a foreign language classes in Saudi Arabia: Teachers beliefs and learners perceptions. *Arab World English Journal*, 5(1), 224-246.
- Alrabai, F., & Moskovsky, C. (2016). The relationship between learners' affective variables and second language achievement. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 7(2), 1-28.
- Al-Saraj, T. M. (2011). *Foreign Language Anxiety: What Is It?* Paper presented at 4th Bloomsbury Student Conference in Applied Linguistics. London: University of London.
- Al-Shboul, M., Ahmad, M., Nordin, I., & Rahman, Z. (2013). Foreign Language Anxiety and Achievement: Systematic Review. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 3(2), 31-45. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v3n2p32>
- Aslan E., Thompson A. S. (2021). The interplay between learner beliefs and foreign language anxiety: insights from the Turkish EFL context. *Lang. Learn. J.* 49, 189–202. DOI: 10.1080/09571736.2018.15406
- Bailey, P., Daley, C. E., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J., (1999). Foreign language anxiety and learning style. *Foreign Language Annals*, 32 (1), 63-76. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1999.tb02376.x>

- Chen, H. (2002). College students' English learning anxiety and their coping styles. Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Southwest Normal University, China.
- Chen, X.L., & Zhang, M. (2004). Foreign language anxiety and students' achievements of college-English. *Journal of Chongqing University (Social Sciences Edition)*.
- Cook, V. (2001). *Second language learning and language teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- George, D. and Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference*. 11.0 Update (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Elaldı, Ş. (2016). Foreign language anxiety of students studying English language and literature: A sample from Turkey. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 11(6), 219-228.
- Farrokhi, F., Zohrabi, M., & Gholizadeh, A. (2023). A sociocognitive account of willingness to communicate from the perspective of complex dynamic systems theory. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 36, 35-54.
- Gardner, R. C. (2001). Integrative motivation and second language acquisition. In Z. Dörnyei, & R. Schmidt, *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 1-19). Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Gardner, R. C. (2006). The socio-educational model of second language acquisition: A research paradigm. *EUROSLA Yearb*, 6, 237-260.
- Gardner, R. C. (2020). The Socio-educational model of second language acquisition. In M. Lamb, K. Csizér, A. Henry, & S. Ryan, *Palgrave Macmillan handbook of motivation for language learning* (pp. 21–37). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- Gopang, L., Bughio, F., & Pathan, H. (2015). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety among students learning English in a public sector university, Pakistan. *The Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science*, 3(4), 27-37.
- He, D. (2017). How to Cope with Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Effectively? The Case of University Students in China. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 14(2), 159-174.
- Hershner, K. (2015). *Strategies to reduce foreign language anxiety in adult EFL students of the European Union*. Unpublished MA thesis, The University of San Francisco: San Francisco
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21(1), 112-126.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Horwitz, E. K., Tallon, M., & Luo, H. (2010). Foreign Language Anxiety. In J.C. Cassady (Ed), *Anxiety in schools: The causes, consequences, and solutions for academic anxieties* (pp. 95-115). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kondo, D. S., & Ying-Ling, Y. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: the case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal*, 58(3), 258-264.
- Kraft, T. L., & Pressman, S. D. (2012). Grin and bear it: The influence of manipulated facial expression on the stress response. *Psychological Science*, 23(11), 372-378.
- Liu, M. (2007). Anxiety in oral English classroom: A case study in China. *Indonesia Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(1), 128-132.
- Liu, M., & Huang, W. (2011). An Exploration of Foreign Language Anxiety and English Motivation. *Education Research International*, 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2011/493167>
- Kondo, D. S., & Yang, Y. L. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal*, 58, 258-265. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258>
- Liu, M (2006). Anxiety in Chinese EFL students at different proficiency levels. *System*, 34(3): 301-316. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.04.004>
- Lizuka, K. (2010). Learner coping strategies for foreign language anxiety. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.
- Marwan, A. (2007). Investigating students' foreign language anxiety. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 3, 37-55.

- Nasiri, M., Adarvishi, S., Ganjou, M., & Asadi, M. (2014). Effect of Tavasol prayer on reducing test anxiety of new registered nursing students of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of medical sciences, *Journal of Medical Development*, 7(15), 1-9.
- Pakdaman, A., Alibakhshi, G., & Baradaran, A. (2022). The Impact of Negotiated Syllabus on Foreign Language Learners' Language Anxiety and Learning Motivation. *Teaching English Language*, 16(1), 35-63.
- Pappamihel, N. E. (2002). English as a second language students and English language anxiety: Issues in the mainstream classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36(3), 327-355.
- Paunch, K. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (2nd ed.). Longdon: SAGE.
- Saarahwati, H.H. (2020). *EFL undergraduate students' strategies to cope with speaking anxiety*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Islamic University of Indonesia, Yogyakarta.
- Sampasivam, S. & Clément, R. (2014). The dynamics of second language confidence: Contact and interaction. In S. Mercer & Williams, M. (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on the Self in SLA* (pp. 23-40). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Tasan, M., Enisa, M., & Sadeghi, K. (2021). The effect of Pranayamic breathing as a positive psychology exercise on foreign language learning anxiety and test anxiety among language learners at tertiary level. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(2), 1-12.
- Teimouri, Y., Goetze, J., & Plonsky, L. (2019). Second language anxiety and achievement: A metaanalysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 41, 363-387
- Toyama, M., & Yamazaki, Y. (2021). Anxiety reduction sessions in foreign language classrooms, *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(3), 330-342.
- Tridinanti, G. (2018). The Correlation between speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and speaking achievement of undergraduate EFL students of private university in Palembang, *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 6(4), 35-39.
- Tsehay, A.A., & Kahsay, M.T. (2020). Relationship of language learning anxiety with teacher and peer support. *Bahir Dar Journal of Education*, 20(2), 175-190.
- Xiao, J. H & Xu, X. F (1996). The validity and reliability of the Coping Styles Questionnaire. *The Journal of Chinese Psychological Sanitation*. 4, 164-168.
- Young, D. J. (1990). An investigation of students' perspectives on anxiety and speaking. *Foreign Language Annals*, 23(6), 539-551.
- Zawadzki, M.J., Smyth, J.M. & Costigan, H.J. (2015). Real-time associations between Engaging in leisure and daily health and well-being. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 49(4), 605-615.
- Zhang, X., Dai, S., & Ardasheva, Y. (2020). Contributions of (de)motivation, engagement, and anxiety to English. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 1-13.