

Facing the Fear: Investigating the Factors and Classroom Strategies Associated with Public Speaking Anxiety among ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking anxiety (PSA) is a common challenge among ESL learners, often affecting their academic performance, and classroom participation. Developing speaking skills is a challenging process that requires learners to use correct vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, intonation, and body language. This study explores the key factors contributing to public speaking anxiety (PSA) and examines effective classroom strategies to help ESL learners manage their fear of speaking in front of an audience. Drawing on existing literature, the study identifies several major factors associated with speech anxiety, including fear of negative evaluation, lack of preparation, low self-confidence, limited speaking experience, and peer pressure. The study also highlights four classroom strategies theory by Kondo and Ying Ling (2004) that can create a supportive learning environment and reduce anxiety levels. A total of 106 students from the English study program at a Malaysian public university participated in this quantitative study. The findings indicate that relaxation strategies were the most frequently adopted by students to manage their public speaking anxiety (PSA), with a mean score of 3.8. Preparation strategies ranked second, also recording a mean score of 3.8. This was followed by positive thinking strategies, while peer-seeking strategies were the least preferred among the participants. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for ESL learners, educators, and policymakers in developing effective approaches to reducing public speaking anxiety and enhancing speaking performance.

Keywords: ESL learners, speaking skills, speaking, PSA, classroom strategies theory, quantitative method

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become increasingly important for language users in various aspects of life. To meet their daily communication needs, individuals engage in both verbal and non-verbal interactions. Effective communication requires the use of language that is clear and easily understood by others. Therefore, constructing simple and comprehensible sentences is essential, as communication takes place regularly in both formal and informal settings (Abdul Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). Speaking can be defined as the ability to produce spoken language and express ideas, thoughts, and opinions (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). Furthermore, Arini and Wahyudin (2022) emphasize that language learners should develop strong speaking skills, as speaking serves as a vital tool for conveying information, sharing ideas, and expressing meaning during interactions with others.

Speaking skills requires learners to be engaged in meaningful and well-designed classroom activities that support their oral communication abilities. Arini and Wahyudin (2022) describe speaking as a means through which individuals express their thoughts and ideas in a way that can be understood by others. As a result, language classrooms should incorporate appropriate speaking strategies and activities to help learners achieve communicative competence and communicate more effectively. Additionally, a positive and supportive classroom environment plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning experience, enabling students to enjoy the learning process and actively work towards achieving the objectives of the lesson independently (Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

Despite the importance of speaking skills, ESL learners face difficulties when communicating in English due to various challenges. Mandasari and Oktaviani (2018) found that factors originating from the learners themselves,

such as confidence and motivation, can significantly affect their ability to speak fluently. In addition, Abdul Aziz and Kashinathan (2021) identified the learning environment and teachers' attitudes as contributing factors to learners' speaking difficulties. Therefore, implementing effective and engaging classroom activities is crucial to help reduce these challenges and improve students' language proficiency. Thus, the study aims to identify the factors affecting students' speaking performance and determine methods for improving their speaking skills.

In the process of learning English, ESL learners are expected to use the language effectively to express their ideas and thoughts (Vellayan et al., 2021; Kamaliah et al., 2018; Rusli, 2018; Raba, 2017). This is because communicative competence is often assessed through an individual's ability to speak and convey messages clearly so that others can understand the intended meaning. According to Mooneb Ali et al. (2020), speaking serves as an important indicator of language proficiency, as it plays a vital role in the communication of information and ideas.

However, challenges arise when ESL learners are unable to express their thoughts and ideas effectively in English. According to Abdul Aziz and Kashinathan (2021), many Malaysian employers identify English communication as a major concern among graduates, as inadequate proficiency in the language often hinders their ability to perform and complete work-related tasks effectively. Furthermore, several factors contribute to ESL learners' difficulties in communicating and speaking fluently. Mooneb Ali et al. (2020) noted that speaking can be particularly challenging because learners are expected to master various linguistic components, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. While learning the language, they found that the major factors that influence them to speak fluently may come from the students themselves (Mandasari and Oktaviani, 2018). Meanwhile, Abdul Aziz and Kashinathan (2021) found that learning environment and teachers' attitude are among the factors of learners' speaking failure. Additionally, students often encounter difficulties in different aspects of spoken communication, such as language mechanics, communicative functions, and the social and cultural norms that govern language use (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety (PSA) among ESL students, as the causes of anxiety may stem from a variety of sources. Martiningsih et al. (2024) recommended that future studies examine public speaking anxiety from different perspectives by involving a larger number of participants, adopting more rigorous research methodologies, utilizing multiple research instruments, assessing students' anxiety levels, and exploring additional coping strategies beyond those included in existing questionnaires. Furthermore, studies by Abdul Aziz and Kashinathan (2021) and Sugiyati and Indriani (2021) emphasized the need for future research to identify effective classroom strategies that can enhance students' speaking abilities. This recommendation aligns with Rajitha et al. (2020), who argued that targeted interventions, combined with strong commitment and focus, are essential for improving students' speaking skills and helping them achieve their learning objectives.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research questions.

- a. What are ESL learners' perception of the factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety?
- b. How do ESL learners perceive the effectiveness of strategies for reducing public speaking anxiety?
- c. How do the means scores differ among the factors contributing to public speaking anxiety?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Speaking, Speaking Skills and Public Speaking

Speaking is defined as an individual's ability to produce language sounds and communicate ideas, thoughts, and opinions effectively (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). Similarly, Pratiwi and Ayu (2020) describe speaking as the ability to use language to express and share ideas with others. According to Crisianita and Mandasari (2022) further emphasise that speaking is one of the most essential communication skills, as it enables individuals to convey important information and messages. In addition, Argawati (2014) and Mart (2012) view speaking as the ability to communicate and exchange thoughts through language use. Therefore, speaking is perceived as

students' ability to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and opinions fluently and effectively through the appropriate use of language features.

Speaking skills play a vital role in language learning. Despite its importance, this skill remains one of the most challenging aspects of language learning. TumurKhuyag (2021) found that many ESL learners struggle to communicate effectively in English, making speaking a particularly difficult skill to develop. Based on the literature reviewed, speaking can be regarded as a crucial language skill that allows learners to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and information effectively. Therefore, language learners should continuously develop and improve their speaking abilities to achieve successful communication and meet their language learning objectives. As a result, numerous studies have been conducted to explore effective approaches and strategies for teaching English speaking skills.

Public speaking is a crucial skill in academic and professional contexts, as it allows individuals to convey ideas effectively, influence others. Public speaking is generally described as the act of conveying a message to an audience through spoken communication in an organized and purposeful manner (Lucas&Stob, 2020). According to Munz et al., (2024), public speaking plays a vital role in building interpersonal relationships, shaping opinions, and promoting social change. Public speaking can take place in various settings, such as classrooms, conferences, meetings, ceremonies, and social events. Effective public speaking requires not only a good command of language but also the ability to organise thoughts logically, engage the audience, and use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (Zhang et al.,2020). These strategies include maintaining eye contact, using suitable gestures, controlling voice tone and volume, and demonstrating confidence throughout the presentation. Public speaking also helps individuals develop critical thinking, leadership, and interpersonal communication skills, which are valuable in academic, professional, and social contexts (Johari et al.,2023). Despite the importance of public speaking, many people experience anxiety due to overly concerns about making errors, facing criticism, or forgetting their speech. This phenomenon, referred to as public speaking anxiety, can impede speakers' ability to present effectively.

2.2. Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

Public speaking anxiety, commonly known as glossophobia, is among the most prevalent forms of social anxiety and can significantly impair an individual's ability to communicate effectively (Ayiz&Tauchid,2024). It is often associated with a range of physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms, such as a rapid heartbeat, excessive sweating, feelings of nervousness, and difficulty maintaining concentration (Horwitz, 2017). According to Palupi (2022), anxiety is an uncontrollable emotional state that can negatively affect the language learning process. Therefore, understanding the influence of anxiety on public speaking is crucial for developing effective strategies to reduce its impact and improve speakers' overall performance. Public speaking anxiety significantly influences speakers' performance. Excessive anxiety may negatively affect fluency, pronunciation, and the ability to recall information, making it difficult for speakers to communicate their messages effectively. As a result, individuals may choose to avoid speaking in public, potentially missing valuable opportunities in academic and workplace settings (Tee et al., 2020). Such avoidance can limit opportunities for academic achievement and professional development. Furthermore, public speaking anxiety may be expressed through various physical symptoms, including trembling, excessive sweating, dry mouth, and an accelerated heart rate. These physiological reactions can distract both the speaker and the audience, thereby increasing the speaker's anxiety (Li, 2020). Therefore, the ability to recognize and manage these symptoms is essential for speakers to maintain confidence and control throughout their presentations. According to Tee et al. (2020), managing anxiety is essential for enhancing public speaking skills. While a moderate level of anxiety can be beneficial by increasing concentration and alertness, excessive anxiety may impair performance by causing mental blocks, discomfort, and difficulties in communication.

2.3 Factors Influencing Public Speaking Anxiety among ESL Learners

2.3.1 Poor Command of the Language

One of the primary factors contributing to ESL learners' speaking difficulties is poor command of the language. Insufficient knowledge of the language can create obstacles that lead to further challenges in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Qasim, 2021; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). These researchers also

identified grammatical competence as a key factor influencing students' speaking anxiety. Additionally, pronunciation difficulties have been recognised as another significant factor that hinders learners' oral communication. Amoah and Yeboah (2021), in their study of Chinese EFL learners, similarly reported that linguistic factors, including grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, play an important role in causing speaking difficulties and communication breakdowns. They further argued that learners' oral proficiency largely depends on their ability to use these linguistic components accurately and appropriately. Besides that, pronunciation factor has also been identified as the factor that causes students to have difficulties in the way of speaking. The finding is also agreed by Abdul Azizi and Kashinathan (2021) who found that learners with a limited vocabulary often struggle to express themselves effectively in English. Based on the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that deficiencies in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary are among the major language-related factors that contribute to learners' difficulties in communicating confidently and effectively in English.

2.3.2 Shyness and Lack of confidence

Another significant factor contributing to ESL learners' speaking failure in the classroom is shyness and low self-confidence. According to Farhan (2017) many learners are naturally reluctant to speak in public and often feel shy and uneasy when required to speak in front of the audience. This finding is supported by McCains (2012), who revealed that nearly 90% of individuals have experienced feelings of shyness or discomfort when speaking in front of others at some point in their lives. Furthermore, Tan and Nhung (2024) identified several confidence-related concerns among students. Their study found that learners often lack confidence when speaking in front of their peers and teachers, fear that they may not perform well, and worry about being negatively evaluated by others. To address these concerns, the researchers proposed several coping strategies to enhance students' confidence. Similarly, Abdul Aziz and Kashinathan (2021) found that low self-confidence is a major challenge faced by learners, particularly those with limited English proficiency. In addition, Mandasari and Oktaviani (2018) suggested that factors originating from the learners themselves play an important role in influencing their speaking fluency. Based on the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that low self-confidence is one of the primary factors that hinders ESL learners' ability to perform effectively in public speaking and oral presentation activities.

2.3.3 Teachers' role and Feedback in Classroom

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting students' speaking development and helping them overcome public speaking anxiety. Therefore, it is important for educators to create a positive and supportive classroom environment that encourages students to learn and perform confidently during public speaking activities. Farhan (2017) emphasised that teachers are instrumental in providing encouragement and building learners' confidence, which can help reduce anxiety associated with public speaking. Similarly, Vu Anh (2024) highlighted the significant influence of teachers on students' experiences with speaking anxiety. Supportive teachers who provide constructive feedback can help learners improve their speaking abilities, whereas excessive focus on errors during speaking tasks may increase students' self-consciousness and intensify their anxiety. Furthermore, Tan and Nhung (2024) identified lecturer-related pressure as one of the contributing factors to speaking anxiety. Their findings revealed that students often experience symptoms such as a racing heartbeat when called upon by their teachers or when they are unable to answer questions confidently. In addition, teachers have the responsibility to ensure that instructions are delivered clearly and are easily understood by students. Difficulties in understanding classroom instructions may further contribute to learners' anxiety. Mohd Sobri Palaluddin and Ruohan (2023) reported that teachers' pronunciation and accent can also become sources of anxiety when students struggle to comprehend what is being said. Consequently, effective teacher engagement and support are essential in helping learners perform successfully in oral presentations while minimizing their levels of speaking anxiety.

2.3.4 Fear of making mistakes

In addition to linguistic factors, non-linguistic factors also play a significant role in contributing to students' public speaking anxiety. One of the most identified factors is the fear of making mistakes. Haidara (2016) reported that students often associate their speaking anxiety with concerns about making errors, feeling embarrassed, and lacking confidence in their speaking abilities. Furthermore, many learners fear making

mistakes during oral communication because they worry about receiving negative evaluations from their teachers and peers. Similarly, Fathikasari et al. (2022) found that many respondents experienced feelings of helplessness, fear of being judged, and a tendency to compare themselves with others. Meanwhile, Hasibuan et al. (2021) suggested that public speaking anxiety varies across different stages of a presentation. During public speaking activities, students are required to focus on multiple aspects of oral communication, including vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, and grammar, to deliver effective speech. However, the challenge of managing all these language components simultaneously often increases their anxiety and concern about making mistakes. Consequently, learners may become overly cautious during their presentations. Moreover, Nik Fauzi et al. (2023) reported that most participants in their study experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety when presenting in front of an audience. Their findings revealed that fear of the audience, inadequate presentation skills, and concerns about exposing weaknesses or mistakes were among the major contributors to public speaking anxiety. Likewise, Vu Anh (2024) found that worrying about making mistakes in front of others was one of the primary perceived sources of anxiety during public speaking. Based on the literature reviewed, fear of making mistakes can be considered a major non-linguistic factor contributing to public speaking anxiety among ESL learners.

2.4. Classroom Strategies and Theory of Public Speaking Anxiety Strategies (Kondo&Ying Ling, 2004)

Various techniques and strategies can be applied by ESL learners to reduce public speaking anxiety. Raja (2017) found that anxiety related to public speaking can be reduced through consistent practice and rehearsal prior to delivering speeches or presentations. The researcher also outlined ten techniques that may assist learners in overcoming their fear of public speaking. These findings are supported by Mohd Sobri Paridaluddin et al. (2023), who reported that students commonly rely on practice and thorough preparation to cope with speaking anxiety. Their study further revealed that learners adopt various strategies based on the specific causes of their anxiety and subsequently apply techniques to reduce errors and improve accuracy during presentations.

Besides that, Kondo and Ying Ling (2004) proposed several strategies for reducing public speaking anxiety (PSA), namely relaxation, preparation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking strategies. According to Kondo and Ying Ling (2004), the preparation strategy involves learners actively engaging with the content they are going to present. This includes reading presentation materials, expanding vocabulary and grammar knowledge, reviewing relevant resources, and enhancing understanding through reading newspapers, books, as well as watching television programs and films. Students may also seek feedback, opinions, and advice from teachers and peers regarding their presentation topics. Meanwhile, positive thinking and peer-seeking strategies are primarily related to learners' psychological state. Positive thinking is considered effective in reducing anxiety and improving students' ability to cope with stress (Shokrpour et al., 2021). Learners who adopt a positive mindset are better able to connect their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors during presentations. On the other hand, the peer-seeking strategy helps learners feel supported by others, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing their confidence in developing speaking skills.

Furthermore, Netta et al. (2020), in their qualitative study, found that both participants agreed that preparing and practicing at home before delivering a speech helped to reduce their public speaking anxiety. During the interviews, the students reported that they would feel significantly nervous if they had not engaged in prior preparation and practice. These findings are consistent with Nasir et al. (2025), who reported that students tend to experience panic when required to speak without preparation. The participants also highlighted that speaking in a second language is more challenging than speaking in their mother tongue. Similarly, Hamdani et al. (2022) reported comparable findings, noting that relaxation strategies can help regulate physiological responses associated with stress and anxiety. They identified two main relaxation techniques, namely deep breathing and muscle relaxation. Correspondingly, Nik Fauzi et al. (2023) also supported the use of these techniques as part of public speaking training. The researchers further emphasized that relaxation practices, such as deep breathing and positive self-talk, are effective in managing the physical symptoms of anxiety experienced by speakers. Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that strategies for managing public speaking anxiety are typically applied in stages, beginning with identifying the sources of anxiety and subsequently implementing appropriate techniques during speech delivery to reduce errors and improve overall performance.

2.5 Past Studies

In a study conducted by Muhibbah et al. (2025), various strategies for reducing public speaking anxiety (PSA) among English Study Club (EDSA) members were investigated. The researchers noted that PSA had restricted students' ability to participate effectively in English-based public speaking activities. An action research design was employed, involving 22 participants. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and reflective journals. The findings indicated that relaxation and preparation strategies were the most frequently used approaches among the participants. In addition, the preparation strategy, particularly thorough readiness, was identified as the most effective, with 90.9% of respondents reporting a reduction in PSA after its use. Based on these results, the study recommended the implementation of training programs that focus on coping strategies to enhance learners' speaking performance. Furthermore, the researchers suggested that future studies should broaden the scope by involving larger samples, comparing different groups of EFL learners, and conducting longitudinal research to examine the long-term effectiveness of coping strategies in reducing public speaking anxiety.

Furthermore, Martiningsih et al. (2024) found that among the strategies used by students, relaxation strategies were the most frequently applied, followed by preparation strategies. Their study showed that learners adopted various techniques when preparing for presentations, including revising presentation materials beforehand, consulting multiple sources, expanding their vocabulary, and reading books to enhance their grammatical competence. In addition, Sugiyati and Indriani (2022) investigated the level and main causes of public speaking anxiety (PSA) among English Department students. The study aimed to identify both the intensity and primary sources of students' PSA in order to inform the development of effective intervention strategies. A total of 34 third-semester English Department students at Universitas Tidar, Indonesia, participated in the study. Data were collected using the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012). The findings indicated that 58.8% of the students experienced a moderate level of PSA. Moreover, fear of negative evaluation was identified as the most significant factor contributing to PSA, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety. The researchers recommended that future studies focus on developing effective strategies to reduce students' anxiety and improve their public speaking performance both inside and outside the classroom.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.6 presents the conceptual framework of the study. This study investigates the contributing factors of public speaking anxiety. It also explores the coping strategies that learners use to overcome fear.

Internal & External factors

(Nughor, 2020)

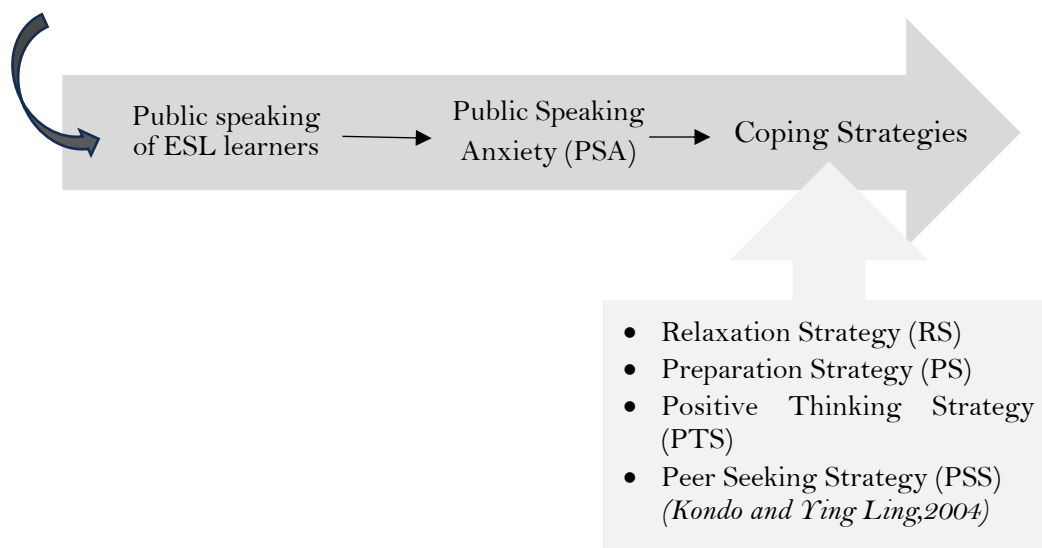


Figure 2.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Effective communication in English is essential for ESL learners, yet delivering presentations in the language can be challenging as they are required to manage both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. These difficulties often arise from internal and external factors that contribute to fear and anxiety among learners. According to Nugroho (2020), such internal and external influences can hinder learners' performance during public speaking activities, resulting in public speaking anxiety (PSA). However, PSA can be reduced with effective coping strategies. Various classroom-based strategies have been developed to address learner anxiety, including those proposed by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), who identified four strategies aimed at helping students manage their public speaking anxiety. Numerous studies have further examined these strategies and reported a noticeable reduction in anxiety among participants after their application.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study aims to investigate the contributing factors of public speaking anxiety and the classroom strategies used to cope with fear. A convenience sample of 105 participants from a public university in Malaysia took part in the survey. The research instrument was a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, adapted from Nugroho (2020) for the causes of public speaking anxiety (PSA) and Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) for classroom strategies, in order to examine the variables presented in Table 3 below. Table 1 outlines the Likert scale categories, where 1 represents Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4 Very Often, and 5 Always.

Table 1- Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Very Often
5	Always

Table 2 presents the distribution of items in the survey. Section B is divided into B1 (Internal factors) comprising 6 items and B2 (External factors) consisting of 4 items. Meanwhile, Section C is categorized into C1 (Preparation Strategies), C2 (Relaxation Strategies), C3 (Positive Thinking Strategies), and C4 (Peer Seeking Strategies), with each sub-section containing 5 items.

Table 2- Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE	SUB-SECTION	CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	CRONBACH ALPHA
B	CAUSES OF PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY (PSA) Nugroho (2022)	B1	INTERNAL	6	.908
		B2	EXTERNAL	4	.867
C	CLASSROOM STRATEGIES	C1	PREPARATION STRATEGIES	5	.812
	Kondo & Ying Ling (2004)	C2	RELAXATION STRATEGIES	5	.841

		C3	POSITIVE THINKING STRATEGIES	5	.870
		C4	PEER SEEKING STRATEGIES	5	.783
TOTAL				30	.896

Table 2 also presents the reliability results of the survey instrument. SPSS was used to analyze and report the reliability of the questionnaire. The B1 (Internal factors) section recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of .908, while B2 (External factors) obtained .867. For Section C, C1 (Preparation Strategies) showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .812, C2 (Relaxation Strategies) recorded .841, C3 (Positive Thinking Strategies) achieved .870, and C4 (Peer Seeking Strategies) obtained .783. Overall, the 30-item instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .896, indicating a good level of reliability. In addition, further descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS to present the findings and address the research questions of the study.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data obtained from observation and semi-structured interview procedures. The findings are discussed according to the following research questions.

- What are ESL learners' perception of the factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety?
- How do ESL learners perceive the effectiveness of strategies for reducing public speaking anxiety?
- How do the means scores differ among the factors contributing to public speaking anxiety?

4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

The following table indicates demographic profile of respondents including gender and self-rate English proficiency.

Table 3- Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	28%
		Female	72%
2	Self-Rate English Proficiency	Can communicate in English	96%
		Cannot Communicate in English	4%

Table 3 presents the findings for demographic profile. 28% of the respondents are male while 78% are female students. Next, 96% of the respondents reported they could communicate in English while 4% reported they could not communicate in English.

4.2 Findings for Contributing Factors of PSA

This section presents the findings in response to Research Question 1: What are ESL learners' perception of the factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety?

In this study, the causes are categorized into (i) internal factors and (ii) external factors. Figure 2 illustrates the mean scores for internal factors of public speaking anxiety experienced by the respondents. The results indicate that six internal factors have potentially contributed to the anxiety faced by respondents during their public speaking activities.

(i) Internal Factors

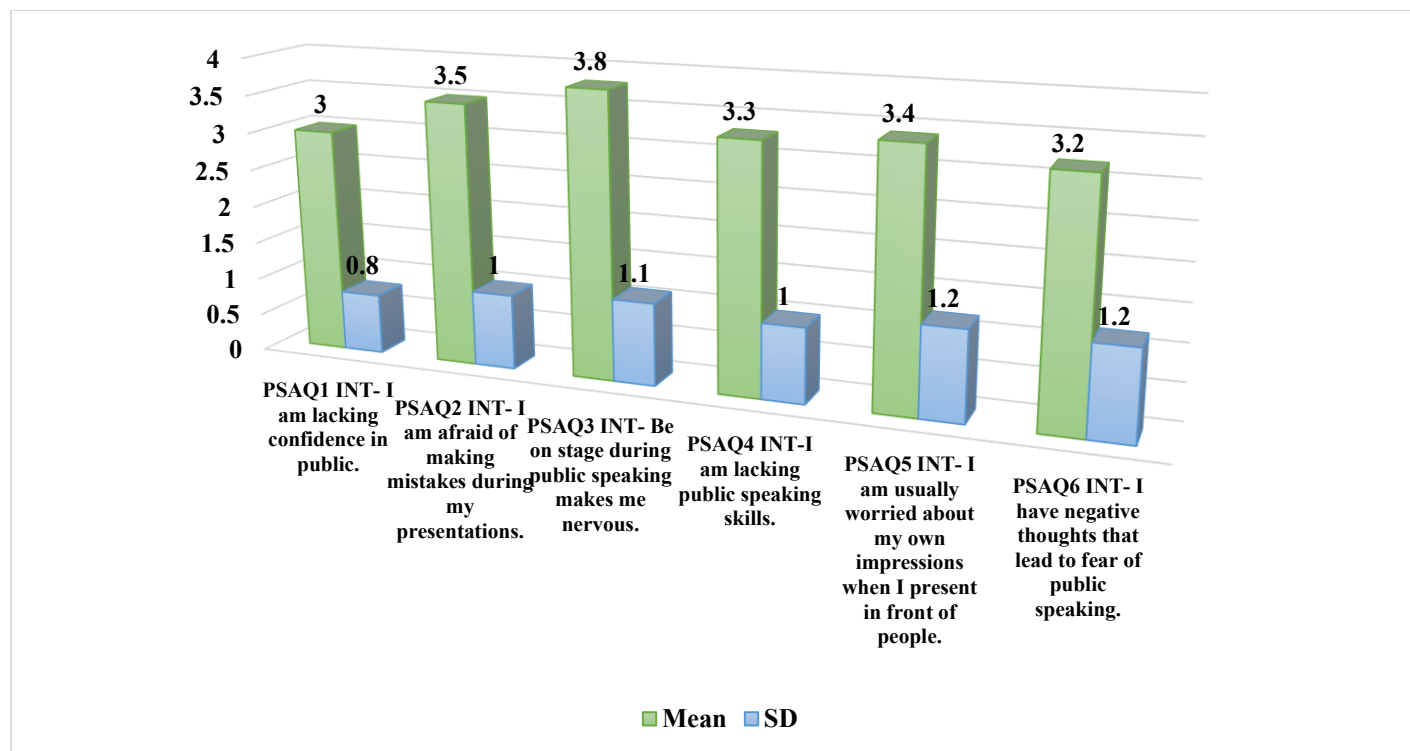


Figure 2- Mean for Internal factors

Based on figure 2, the highest mean is 3.8 (SD=1.1) for item 3 which states that being on stage makes the learners nervous. Next, item 2 (mean=3.5, SD=1.0) states that the learners were afraid of making mistakes during presentations. The lowest mean is 3 (SD=0.8) for item 1 which states that the learners lacked confidence.

(ii) External Factors

Meanwhile, Figure 3 presents four external factors contributing to public speaking anxiety among ESL learners. These factors include fear of others noticing their weaknesses during presentations, fear of being laughed at while presenting, concern about audience perceptions of their performance, and nervousness caused by large audience sizes.

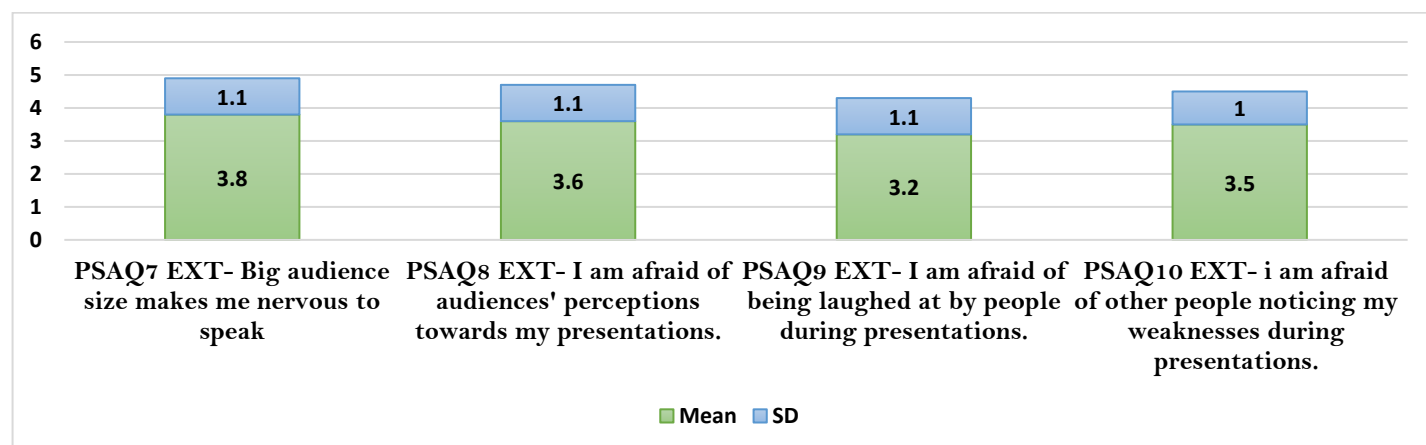


Figure 3- Mean for External factors

Figure 3 shows the mean for external factors. The highest mean is 3.8(SD=1.1) for item 7 which states that the big audience size made them nervous. The lowest mean is 3.2 (SD=1.0) for item 9 which states that the learners were afraid they were laughed at during presentations.

4.3 Findings for Classroom Strategies

This section presents the findings in response to Research Question 2: How do ESL learners perceive the effectiveness of strategies for reducing public speaking anxiety?

In this study, the strategies are categorized into (i) preparation strategies, (ii) relaxation strategies, (iii) positive thinking strategies, and (iv) peer-seeking strategies. Figure 4 illustrates the preparation strategies employed by the respondents to reduce anxiety during presentations. A total of five items were included under the preparation strategies category.

(i) C1-Preparation Strategies (PS)

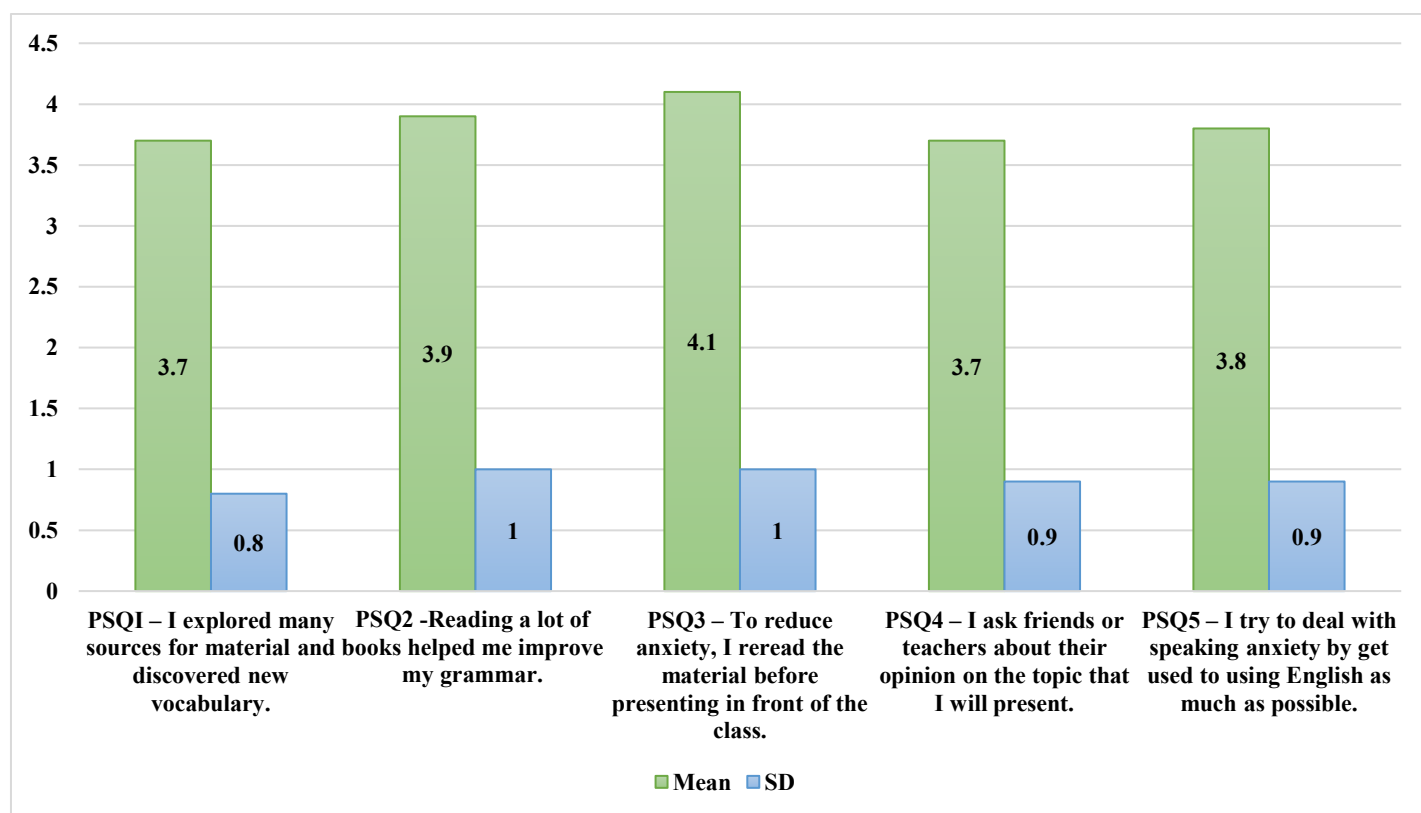


Figure 4- Mean for Preparation Strategies

Figure 4 presents the mean scores for preparation strategies. The highest mean score is 4.1 (SD = 1.0) for Item 3, which indicates that learners reread materials before presenting to reduce anxiety. Two items share the lowest mean score of 3.7. Item 1 (Mean = 3.7, SD = 0.8) shows that learners explored multiple sources when preparing, while Item 4 (Mean = 3.7, SD = 0.9) indicates that learners sought opinions from friends or teachers regarding the topic they intended to present.

(ii) Relaxation Strategies (RS)

The following table illustrates relaxation strategies that the respondents used to manage their anxiety during public speaking. Based on the table, five relaxation strategies used were ‘I play with my hands, so I don’t feel anxious’, ‘when speaking in front of the class, I try to relax so I don’t feel anxious’, ‘I would move during a performance in front of the class to calm myself down’, ‘I try to be calm when speaking in front of the class’, and ‘I take a deep breath when I feel anxious while speaking in front of the class.’ The data presents analysis of mean for these items.

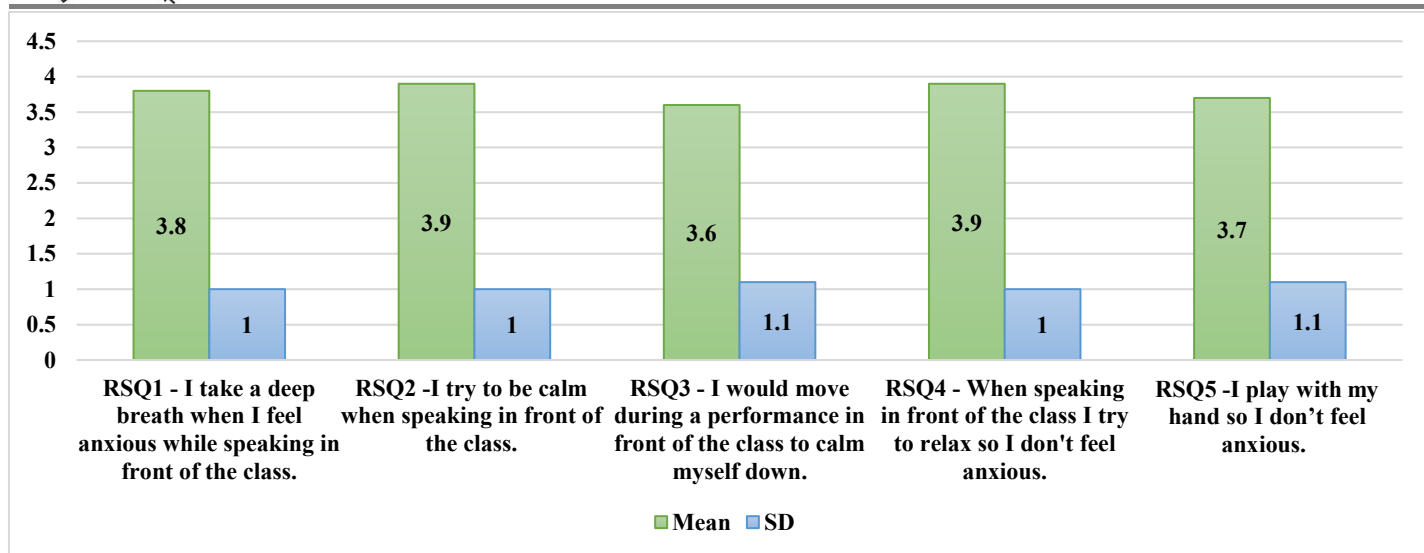


Figure 5- Mean for Relaxation Strategies

Figure 5 shows the mean for relaxation strategies. Two items share the highest mean of 3.9. The first is item 2 (mean=3.9, SD=1.0) which states that the learners tried to be calm when they spoke in front of the class. Item 4 (mean=3.9, SD=1.0) states that they learners tried to relax when they spoke in front of the class. The lowest mean is 3.6 (SD=1.1) for the item 3 which states that the learners would move during the presentation to calm themselves.

(iii) C3-Positive Thinking Strategies (PTS)

Figure 4 is the analysis of mean for positive thinking strategies. Based on the following table, it shows that there were five items under this strategy that the respondents used to reduce their anxiety in public speaking performances.

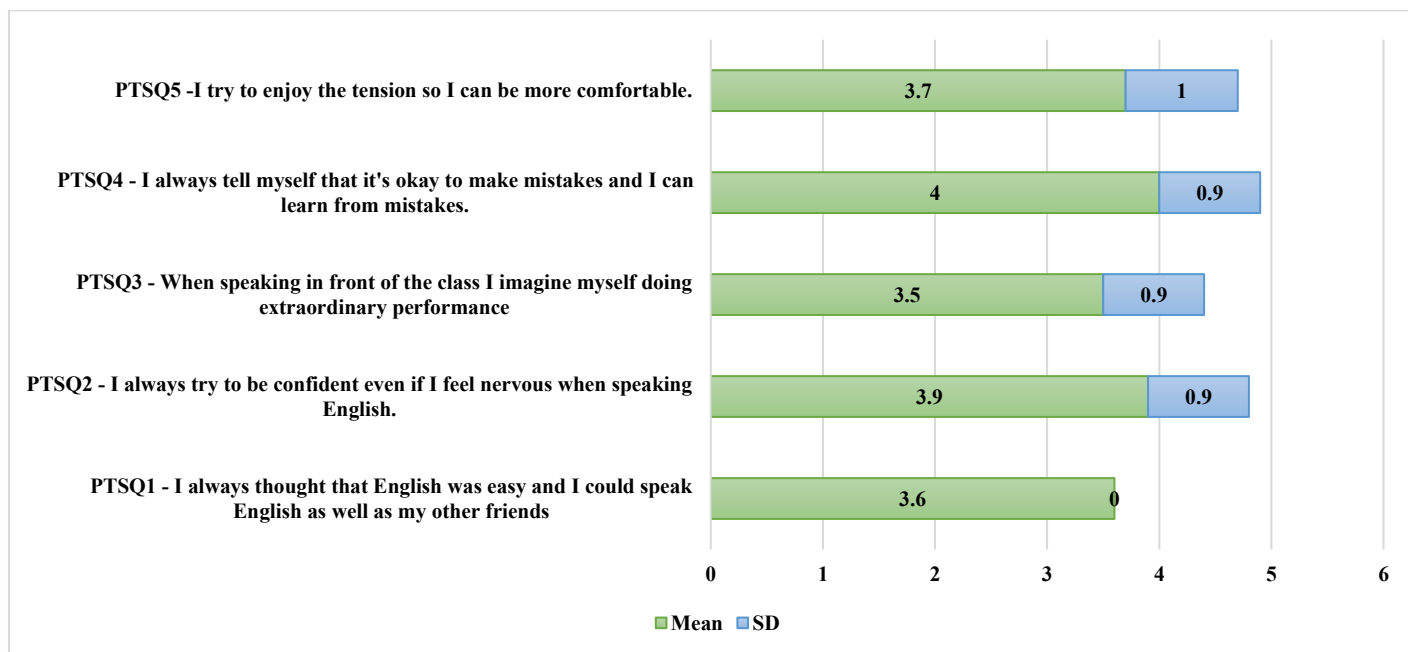


Figure 4- Mean for Positive Thinking Strategies

The table presents the mean for positive thinking strategies. The highest mean is 4 (SD=0.9) for item 4 which states that the learners always told themselves that it was alright to make mistakes. Next, the lowest mean is 3.5 (SD=0.9) for item 3 which states that when they spoke in front of the class, they imagined themselves doing extraordinary performance.

(iv) C4--Peer Seeking Strategies (PSS)

The next strategy used by ESL learners to mitigate their PSA is peer-seeking strategies. There were five strategies under this PSS that the respondents applied when they feel anxious during their speaking activities. The following figure presents mean for peer-seeking strategies.

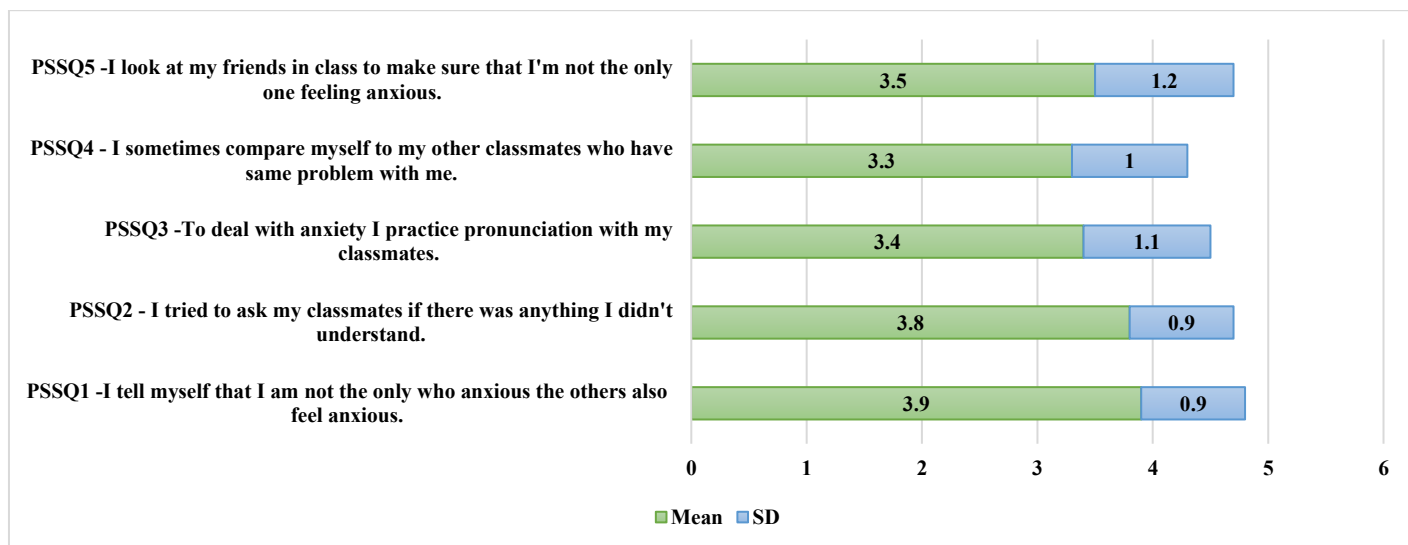


Figure 5- Mean for Peer Seeking Strategies

Based on figure 5, the highest mean is 3.9 (SD=0.9) for item 1 which states that the learners told themselves that they were as anxious as others. Next, the lowest mean is 3.3 (SD=1.0) for the item 4 which states that the learners sometimes compared themselves to their classmates who had the same problem.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings and Discussion

This section summarizes and discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions. First, the study sought to identify the contributing factors of public speaking anxiety among ESL learners, which were categorized into internal and external factors. Regarding internal factors, the findings show that “being on stage during public speaking” was the most significant trigger of PSA, followed by “fear of making mistakes.” These results are consistent with Pratama et al. (2018), who found that participants experienced nervousness when speaking in front of large audiences and often feared embarrassment due to making mistakes that could lead to negative evaluation. Similarly, a qualitative study by Duong and Trang (2023) reported that all participants felt heightened anxiety when required to speak in front of the class, particularly when responding to teachers’ questions through presentations. However, the study also found that lack of confidence did not significantly contribute to PSA, as it recorded the lowest mean score. This aligns with Nuraeni et al. (2024), who noted that anxiety levels did not have a strong impact on students’ confidence in speaking English. In terms of external factors, the findings indicate that a large audience size made respondents feel more nervous during public speaking. Lo et al. (2022) similarly identified audience size as a contributing factor to speaker anxiety, suggesting that the greater the number of listeners, the higher the level of anxiety experienced by the speaker. On the other hand, respondents reported that they were not particularly afraid of being laughed at during presentations, as this item recorded the lowest mean score.

The second research question aimed to examine ESL learners’ perceptions of strategies used to reduce public speaking anxiety. These strategies were grouped into four categories: (i) preparation strategies, (ii) relaxation strategies, (iii) positive thinking strategies, and (iv) peer-seeking strategies. For preparation strategies, the findings revealed that the most commonly used approach was rereading materials before presenting to reduce anxiety. A similar result was reported by Martiningsih et al. (2024), where 88% of participants indicated that rereading materials was the most frequently used strategy, while seeking feedback from friends or teachers was

among the least used (72%). This aligns with the present study, which also found that exploring multiple sources and asking peers or teachers for opinions were the two least preferred preparation tactics. Regarding relaxation strategies, participants showed a strong preference for remaining calm and relaxed while speaking in front of the class. This finding is consistent with Martiningsih et al. (2024), who reported that students commonly tried to stay calm when presenting. Nuraeni et al. (2024) also supported this, noting that staying calm and silent were effective methods for reducing anxiety. In addition, Lintang Sari and Kurniawati (2024) observed that teachers often encouraged students to remain calm as a way to reduce stress, lower anxiety levels, and improve cognitive focus. However, moving during presentations was not a preferred relaxation strategy among the respondents. In contrast, Nuraeni et al. (2024) suggested that maintaining focus by looking at objects or walls and referring to notes can help sustain composure during presentations. For positive thinking strategies, the findings indicated that learners often reassured themselves that making mistakes was acceptable. This is supported by Nurcholis and Andesta (2022), who found that anxious students tend to manage their anxiety by comparing themselves with peers who face similar challenges, although imagining perfect performance was less effective in reducing anxiety during speaking tasks. Finally, for peer-seeking strategies, the most commonly used approach was the realization that others also experience similar levels of anxiety. Lintang Sari and Kurniawati (2024) noted that peer-seeking strategies encourage students to connect with classmates who face similar difficulties, helping them manage anxiety more effectively. However, simply comparing oneself with peers was not found to significantly reduce public speaking anxiety. Instead, Ariska (2019) emphasized that consistent practice in group settings is more effective, as increased interaction and rehearsal with peers can gradually reduce fear and improve confidence in speaking English.

Moreover, the third research question aimed to identify the differences in the overall mean scores between external and internal factors of public speaking anxiety. The findings revealed that external factors recorded a higher mean score than internal factors. In relation to external causes, participants expressed concern about audience perceptions and fear of others noticing their weaknesses. This is consistent with Grieve et al. (2021) and Almira et al. (2018), who found that fear of judgment and classroom-related tension often interfere with students' fluency during presentations. However, Baritanya et al. (2025) reported that anxiety in academic presentations is shaped by both internal and external factors. In contrast, Syafryadin and Yulianawati (2023) argued that internal factors are the primary contributors to public speaking anxiety, particularly those related to learners' self-perceptions and attitudes.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications of the study

This discussion is based on the revised conceptual framework. In this study, ESL learners' public speaking performance was found to be significantly influenced by both internal and external factors. However, the participants indicated that external factors had a stronger impact on their performance. Among these, large audience size, concern about audience perceptions, and fear of others noticing their weaknesses were frequently reported. These external influences contributed to the development of public speaking anxiety (PSA), which is believed to negatively affect learners' speaking performance. To address this issue, learners employed various strategies to reduce their anxiety. The findings showed that preparation strategies were the most used, followed by relaxation strategies, while peer-seeking strategies were the least frequently adopted. Therefore, it is important for ESL learners to recognise the factors that contribute to their public speaking anxiety. By being aware of these factors, they can apply appropriate strategies to manage and reduce their anxiety during presentations. In addition, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students by introducing effective techniques to cope with PSA. For instance, teachers may encourage students to remain calm and relaxed before presentations, as suggested by Lintang Sari and Kurniawati (2024), who emphasised that staying calm helps reduce stress hormones and improves brain circulation. Ultimately, reducing PSA can lead to better public speaking performance among ESL learners.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, the study revealed that a considerable number of students continue to experience public speaking anxiety, especially when they are required to present in front of their classmates. Both internal and external factors contributing to PSA were identified, alongside effective strategies suggested by Kondo and Ying Ling (2004) to help alleviate or manage anxiety during speaking activities. Nevertheless, several aspects of this issue

were not fully addressed in the study. Despite these limitations, the researchers propose that future studies explore the level of PSA, its specific characteristics or symptoms, and potential differences in strategy use based on gender. Overall, the study offers valuable insights into ESL learners' perceptions of the factors influencing their public speaking anxiety.

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