English Language Learning Anxieties of Last-Mile Learners As A Basis for Developing The V.O.I.C.E. Framework

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Abstract. Anxiety is a significant factor affecting learners' language performance. Hence, this study aimed to explore the anxieties that last-mile learners experienced when learning English using a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Eight Grade 7 participants were selected through purposive and convenience sampling for in-depth interviews, given their accessibility and availability within the school setting. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected. Findings revealed that last-mile learners experienced both positive and negative aspects of English language learning. The negative aspects included inadequate English language proficiency, fear of making mistakes, inability to answer questions, and fear of embarrassment, particularly during speaking tasks and assessments. To cope with these, learners employed various strategies, such as emotional regulation, seeking social support from peers and teachers, and engaging in academic practices like self-study and repetition. In response to the findings, the V.O.I.C.E. Framework was developed to address English language learning anxiety. The study recommends that English instruction be made more interactive, inclusive, and learner-centered to reduce anxiety and enhance student engagement. Future research is encouraged to examine this phenomenon further to uncover deeper insights and inform effective educational interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Language is considered a medium of communication. It serves as a tool for communicating, understanding, and sharing our thoughts with others. One of the many languages that serves as a medium of communication is English.

According to Eberhard et al. (2025), when second, third, and other language speakers are to be taken into account, English will be the most commonly spoken language in the world. In addition to serving as a lingua franca worldwide, English is now institutionalized in many former American and British colonies and serves as a medium of communication among native speakers (Al-Mutairi, 2020).

However, a number of barriers often keep students from mastering English, especially in remote areas where access to high-quality resources is limited. These students are more vulnerable to language acquisition difficulties due to their unique learning needs. One of the many challenges that arises as a significant obstacle when learning English is anxiety. However, a number of barriers often keep students from mastering English, especially in remote areas where access to high-quality resources is limited.

Anxiety is the fear or worry that comes with learning or using a second language, and it has a detrimental effect on students' self-confidence, mental health, and academic performance. According to Abdullaev (2021), it is one of the factors that can affect learners' ability to speak not only a second or foreign language but also their L1. Language learning anxiety is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural differences, self-perception, and the fear of making mistakes.

For instance, Sadighi and Dastpak's (2017) study in Iran found that the primary causes of anxiety in students were a lack of vocabulary, a fear of making mistakes, and a fear of receiving a poor grade. Similarly, Japanese EFL students exhibit a high degree of communication anxiety, according to a study by Jalleh et al. (2021). These reflect that these students have a high level of fear and anxiety when they communicate in English with others outside of Japan. Furthermore, it was found that Japanese EFL students exhibited the highest level of oral communication apprehension during group discussions.

Among Filipino learners, the study by Sansaluna et al. (2021) revealed that students' anxiety levels in speaking English, in terms of inter-language phonology, inter-language grammar, and inter-language meaning system, contributed to students' performance in learning English. This suggests that students' overall ability to learn and use the language is negatively impacted when they experience anxiety when speaking English.

In a remote school situated in the mountainous area of Barangay Camagong, Nasipit, Agusan del Norte—specifically, Hinandayan National High School—learners face unique challenges due to the geographic isolation and limited resources characteristic of rural settings. The community's remote location results in minimal exposure to English in everyday life, compounded by limited access to English-language media and limited opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom. Frequent power interruptions further restrict the use of digital or audio-visual learning tools, making it even harder for students to engage with English-language materials. These environmental and infrastructural constraints significantly contribute to students' heightened anxiety, as they often feel unprepared and insecure about their language abilities. This anxiety can lead to disengagement and negatively affect their learning outcomes.

Although much research has explored language learning anxiety in general, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature focused on the lived experiences of learners in rural and remote communities. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the English language learning anxieties of Grade 7 learners at Hinandayan National High School. Specifically, it aims to identify the contextual factors that contribute to their anxiety and to offer insights into how these challenges can be addressed through inclusive, context-sensitive language education practices. Based on the findings, this study introduces the V.O.I.C.E. Framework, a contextually grounded model designed to support last-mile learners in overcoming English language learning anxiety by integrating Values, Opportunities, Interactions, Challenges, and Engagement.

The study aims to investigate the English language learning anxiety of Grade 7 learners. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:
1. How do Grade 7 learners describe their lived experiences of English language learning anxiety within their educational context?
2. What internal and external factors do Grade 7 learners identify as contributing to their language learning anxiety, and in what ways do these factors affect their English language acquisition?
3. What coping strategies do Grade 7 learners employ to manage the challenges associated with English language learning anxiety in both academic and personal contexts?
4. What practical framework can be developed to address language learning anxiety can be developed?

Method

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to investigate the anxieties of Grade 7 students regarding English language learning. Phenomenology, as a research approach, focuses on understanding and interpreting individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences (Byrne, 2001). Through this approach, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews to uncover the students' personal perceptions, challenges, and emotional responses to learning English. This design was particularly appropriate, as it provided a framework for deeply exploring students' unique experiences in a remote educational setting.

This study utilized purposive and convenience sampling techniques to select participants. These non-probability sampling methods were deemed appropriate given the accessibility and availability of Grade 7 learners at the researcher's school. Participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their accessibility during the data collection period. A total of eight (8) Grade 7 learners who met these criteria were included in the study. To avoid conflict of interest, even though the participants were the researcher's students, necessary measures were implemented. It was emphasised that participation was voluntary, and learners' decisions to participate or not would not affect their academic standing.

The informed consent process was carefully observed in accordance with the principle of respect for persons. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained approval from the school principal and coordinated with the class adviser to identify eligible participants. Because the study involved minors aged 12–13, both parental consent and learner assent were obtained before data collection. Since the study involved minors aged 7–17, the procedures for obtaining parental consent and learner assent were strictly followed before data collection.

Consent was solicited personally by the researcher in the presence of the class adviser to ensure transparency and voluntary participation. Parents or guardians were given a clear explanation, both verbally and in writing, of the study's purpose, the procedures involved, the expected duration, and their child's rights, including the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without penalty. The learners were also briefed using age-appropriate language to guarantee their understanding of the study and their freedom to participate.

Signed parental consent and assent forms were collected before any data were gathered. All information obtained from participants was treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. Each participant was assigned a code number instead of using real names. The recorded interviews and transcripts were securely stored in a password-protected computer and an external drive accessible only to the researcher. At the same time, printed documents were kept in a locked cabinet. After the completion of the study, the data will be permanently deleted and shredded to ensure participants' privacy.

A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was used. It consisted of two parts: Part I gathered the basic profile of the participants, while Part II contained nine (9) open-ended questions translated into Cebuano to ensure comprehensibility. The questions focused on learners' perceptions, the anxieties they encountered, and their coping mechanisms. Before data collection, the researcher presented the instrument to language teachers to establish its validity and ensure clarity and appropriateness.

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the School Head through a formal letter. Upon approval, the researcher explained the study's nature and purpose to the participants and reassured them of the confidentiality of their responses. The researcher then conducted audio-recorded one-on-one interviews with the learner-participants. The interviews, which lasted about 45 to 60 minutes, were held in a quiet, vacant room on the school premises to ensure privacy and minimise distractions.

Afterward, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Initial codes were generated based on recurring ideas or phrases related to language learning anxiety. These codes were then clustered into themes that captured underlying patterns or experiences. The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges participants face in learning English, particularly in a remote learning context. The findings were presented with supporting quotes from the interviews to illustrate the themes and provide a comprehensive overview of students' language-learning anxieties.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data exploring the participants' experiences of anxiety in English language learning were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis identified five main themes: (1) struggles and challenges in learning English; (2) self-perception and self-awareness; (3) perceived value of learning English; (4) English learning anxiety; and (5) coping strategies. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences, highlighting key factors contributing to their anxiety as well as the various ways they manage and cope with these challenges. The findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Language Learning Anxieties Among Grade 7 Learners

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Significant Statements	General Descriptions of the theme
Struggles and challenges in learning English	Cognitive Struggles	P1: "Kaya pero dili man ko as in dali ra kasabot ug English sir" *(I can do it, but I don't really understand English quickly)* P4: "Lisod ang questions" *(The questions are hard)*	Learners find it hard to understand English quickly.
	Emotional and Motivational Challenges	P2: "Walay sayon sa English" *(There's nothing easy in English)* P4: "Dili ganahan kay lisod... kanang pag-istorya, lisod magsuwat ug English" *(I don't like it because it's hard, especially speaking and writing in English)*	Learners feel discouraged by the perceived difficulty of English, especially when speaking and writing.
Self-perception and self-awareness	Awareness of limitations in English language skills	P3: "Kung pasulaton ug English, dili kayo" *(If I'm asked to write in English, it's not that good)* P2: "Kung paistoryahon, dira nako kulbaan sir" *(If I'm asked to speak, that's when I get nervous)*	Discomfort with both writing and speaking in English causes anxiety.
	Occasional confidence in abilities	P1: "Dili makulbaan kay maka answer man usahay" *(I don't get nervous because sometimes I can answer)*	Confidence helps alleviate learners' nervousness.
Perceived value of learning English	Recognizing the importance of English for future opportunities	P7: "Nindot magtuon sa English kay makabalo ka sa English" *(It's nice to learn English because you get to know English)* P5: "Ganahan kay naa man koy ma-learn" *(I like it because I get to learn something).*	The importance of English motivates one to learn the language.

English Learning Anxiety	Fear of Failure and Making Mistakes	P3: Mahadlok ko kung dili ko ka-answer" *(I'm afraid if I can't answer)* P8: "Kanang pagkuan sir kanag ma-wrong kanang di ka kabalo bitaw, mabalaka ko ana" *(When I make a mistake, or when I don't know something, I get anxious)* P2: "Kulbaan ko sir basin gamay ra akong score sir ba" *(I'm nervous, sir, because my score might be low)*	Anxiety is caused by the fear of failing and making mistakes.
	Fear of embarrassment and judgment	P6: "Makulbaan kay basin dili matarong ug explain ba nya kataw-an ka nila… basin mamali" *(I get nervous because I might not be able to answer)* -P4: "Mahadlok kay basin mauwawan" *(I'm scared because I might get embarrassed)* P8: "Kulbaan kay basin mauwawan di kabalo mo-translate" *(I get nervous because I might get embarrassed for not being able to translate)*	Anxiety is caused by the fear of being embarrassed and judged.
	Anxiety in speaking English	P3: "Kung paistoryahon, dira nako kulbaan sir" *(If I'm asked to speak, that's when I get nervous)*	The fear of not performing well in front of others causes anxiety in speaking.
	Fear of inadequate knowledge	P5: "Mahadlok ko kay wala ko nagtuon." (I'm scared because I didn't study.) P7: "Naa kanang dili ko ka-answer." *(There are times when I can't answer.)*	Anxiety is caused by inadequate knowledge.
Coping strategies	Emotional Coping	P2: "Mag-ampo" *(Pray)* P4: "Maghilom" *(Be quiet)* P5: "Kanang gusto nako nga kada adlaw ko i-encourage sa akong pamily"(I want to be encouraged by my family every day) P6: Kuan kannag ikalma nako akong kaugalinon" *(I calm myself down)* P8: "Mohangad sa langit kanang maghuna-huna ko sa akong pamilya" *(Look up to the sky and think of my family)*	A reflective moment eases anxiety and brings peace.
	Academic Coping	P5: "Mangutana ko sir, akong ipa-translate" *(I'll ask, sir, and have it translated)*	Anxiety can be alleviated by seeking resources and

	P7: "Mag study, maggamit ug dictionary ug Google" *(Study, use a dictionary, and Google)* P8: "Kanang every day nga magbasa" (Read every day.)	support to improve one's English skills.
Social Coping	P2: "Tabangan sa assignment, mangutana" *(Help with assignments, ask questions)* P4: "Kanang pag-abot sa eskwelahan mag tinabangay mis akong classmate" *(When I get to school, I work with my classmates.)* P6: "Suporta gikan sa ginikanan" *(Support from parents)* P7: "Magpatabang sa akong teacher, sa akong classmate, ug sa akong pamilya" *(Ask for help from my teacher, my classmates, and my family.)* P8: "Kalipay sir, suporta sa akong mga friends, classmates, teachers" *(Happiness, sir, support from my friends, classmates, and teachers.)*	Anxieties can be coped with through social support.
Relaxation and Stress-Relief Mechanisms	P3: "Mag relax" *(Relax)* P4: "Maghilom nalang"*(Just keep quiet)*	Practicing calmness and stillness can help cope with learning anxieties.

Theme 1: Struggles and challenges in learning English
Sub-theme 1.1: Cognitive Struggles
Learners face various cognitive challenges in learning English, influenced by factors such as their native language, level of English exposure, and individual learning styles (Nosirova, 2023). A common difficulty identified by participants was their limited ability to understand and use English, both in speaking and in writing. For example, P1 shared, *"Kaya pero dili man ko as in dali ra kasabot ug English sir" (I can do it, but I don't really understand English quickly)*, while P4 remarked, *"Lisod ang questions" (The questions are hard)*.

These statements reflect learners' struggles with comprehension, especially when tasks become cognitively demanding. This aligns with Cordova et al. (2019), who emphasize that learners often struggle when instructional content exceeds their current language proficiency. To address these challenges, it is essential that instruction be scaffolded appropriately. Materials such as simplified instructions, visual aids, contextualized examples, and interactive tasks can make learning more accessible and engaging.

Moreover, translanguaging emerges as a powerful strategy for bridging comprehension gaps. According to Alasmari et al. (2022), translanguaging supports smoother transitions into English use by allowing learners to access complex concepts through their first language. Villamor

(2025) further highlights that strategic use of translanguaging in instruction can boost learner confidence and participation, particularly in linguistically diverse settings.

Sub-theme 1.2: Emotional and motivational challenges

The learners described English as a challenging subject, often accompanied by feelings of frustration and demotivation. P2 expressed, *"Walay sayon sa English" (There's nothing easy in English)*, while P4 shared, *"Dili ganahan kay lisod... kanang pag-istorya, lisod magsuwat ug English" (I don't like it because it's hard, especially speaking and writing in English)*. These responses indicate that learners perceive English as inherently difficult, which may negatively affect their motivation and willingness to participate in English-related tasks.

Akbari (2015) emphasizes that one of the primary reasons students struggle to communicate in English is their limited fluency, which restricts their ability to express themselves effectively. This connection suggests that emotional and motivational barriers are closely linked to learners' perceived lack of competence, particularly in oral and written communication.

To address these challenges, teachers need to implement strategies that promote fluency in a supportive and low-anxiety environment. Regular speaking drills, guided dialogues, and expressive writing activities that prioritize communication over grammatical accuracy can help learners build confidence. Juwitawati and Pratiwi (2018) found that the drill method not only improved speaking skills but also reduced learner anxiety, as students felt more at ease when they were familiar with the structure and routine of the learning activity. Thus, fostering a safe space for practice can enhance both emotional resilience and language development among learners.

Theme 2: Self-perception and self-awareness
Sub-theme 2.1: Awareness of limitations in English language skills

The findings reveal that learners possess a conscious awareness of their limitations in English, particularly in speaking and writing. For instance, P3 shared, *"Kung pasulaton ug English, dili kayo" (If I'm asked to write in English, it's not that good)*, and P2 admitted, *"Kung paistoryahon, dira nako kulbaan sir" (If I'm asked to speak, that's when I get nervous)*. These reflections highlight a critical aspect of language learning: self-perception of skill deficits, which can significantly influence learners' engagement and confidence.

Recognizing this, teachers play a pivotal role in addressing these limitations through targeted pedagogical support. Scaffolding strategies—such as guided writing practice, peer collaboration, and language modeling—have been shown to improve learners' writing skills and facilitate gradual language development (Singh et al., 2020). Moreover, creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment is essential to help learners take linguistic risks, make errors without fear, and gain confidence in using English both orally and in writing. When teachers respond to learners' self-awareness with empathy and structure, they turn a perceived weakness into a stepping stone for growth.

Sub-theme 2.2: Occasional confidence in abilities

The findings reveal that while learners often experience nervousness in using English, this feeling can be lessened when they encounter moments of success. For example, P1 expressed, *"Dili makulbaan kay maka answer man usahay" (I don't get nervous because sometimes I can answer)*, suggesting that the ability to respond correctly even occasionally boosts learners' confidence. These instances of success, though sporadic, play a vital role in affirming their capabilities and motivating continued engagement with the language.

This observation aligns with the findings of Liani and Hamid (2023), who reported that both self-perception (how they view their own abilities) and exteroception (how they perceive external feedback and the classroom environment) influence learners' speaking performance. These two interconnected factors significantly shape a learner's willingness to participate and perform in speaking tasks.

Given this, it is important for teachers to nurture both the internal and external conditions that promote learner confidence. Creating a classroom climate that encourages risk-taking and acknowledges effort is essential. Strategies such as providing affirming and constructive feedback, recognizing students' progress (no matter how small), and giving them regular opportunities to succeed in speaking tasks can help strengthen their sense of competence. In turn, these practices may reduce learners' anxiety and foster more positive attitudes toward English language use.

Theme 3: Perceived value of learning English
Sub-theme 3.1: Recognizing the importance of English for future opportunities
The findings reveal that learners are motivated to learn English because they recognize its significance in achieving future goals. For instance, P7 shared, *"Nindot magtuon sa English kay makabalo ka sa English" (It's nice to learn English because you get to know English)*, while P5 stated, *"Ganahan kay naa man koy ma-learn" (I like it because I learn something)*. These expressions indicate that despite the difficulties they face, learners still value English as a beneficial skill that can open doors to future educational, professional, and personal opportunities.

This finding supports the study of Sherlock and Nakao (2016), which concluded that students perceive English as important for practical and future-oriented reasons. These include the ability to secure jobs requiring English proficiency, the desire to communicate with people from other countries, or the aspiration to travel, study, or work abroad. This suggests that learners' instrumental motivation—driven by the perceived usefulness of English—is a significant factor influencing their attitudes toward learning.

Given this, teachers can build on this motivation by helping learners connect classroom activities with real-world applications of English. This may include career-oriented language tasks, simulations of authentic communication scenarios, or exposure to stories of people who benefited from learning English. By reinforcing the practical value of English, teachers can sustain learners' motivation and help them persevere through challenges.

Theme 4: English Learning Anxiety
Sub-theme 4.1: Fear of failure and making mistakes
The findings indicate that learners' anxiety in using the English language stems largely from their fear of making mistakes, particularly during speaking and writing activities. For instance, P8 shared, *"Kanang pagkuan sir kanang ma-wrong, kanang di ka kabalo bitaw, mabalaka ko ana" (Like when I make a mistake, or when I don't know something, I get worried)*, while P3 expressed, *"Mahadlok ko kung dili ko ka-answer" (I'm afraid if I can't answer)*. These statements reflect a deep concern about not being able to respond correctly in class, which may stem from limited vocabulary, lack of preparation, or fear of negative evaluation.

Additionally, some learners revealed that their anxiety is connected to academic performance, particularly fear of receiving low scores or failing. P2's statement, *"Kulbaan ko sir, basin gamay ra akong score sir ba" (I'm nervous, sir, because my score might be low)*, highlights the pressure they associate with assessments and performance tasks. This fear of failure, often tied to self-esteem and academic expectations, can hinder students' willingness to participate and take risks in using English.

These findings echo Ritt's (2016) assertion that traditional testing practices may fail to capture the full extent of students' abilities, especially when learners face external stressors or anxiety that negatively affect performance. Fear of failure becomes a significant barrier when learning is perceived as a high-stakes endeavor rather than a process of growth.

To address this, educators must intentionally foster a low-stakes and supportive learning environment. Teachers should emphasize that mistakes are an essential part of language learning. Encouraging a growth mindset, offering constructive and compassionate feedback, and integrating more formative assessments can help reduce learners' fear and foster a more positive, resilient attitude toward English. Through this approach, learners may feel safer exploring the language, making mistakes, and growing in confidence.

Sub-theme 4.2: Fear of embarrassment and judgement

The findings reveal that learners experience anxiety due to fear of being judged or ridiculed for their limited proficiency in English. This concern often manifests during speaking tasks, where they feel exposed to possible mistakes. P8 shared, *"Kulbaan kay basin mauwawan di kabalo mo-translate"* (I get nervous because I might get embarrassed for not being able to translate), while P6 expressed, *"Makulbaan kay basin dili matarong ug explain ba nya kataw-an ka nila... basin mamali"* (I get nervous because I might not explain things properly and they might laugh at me... I might make a mistake). These statements highlight that learners are not only worried about making linguistic errors but also about how their peers might react to those errors, which adds a social-emotional layer to their anxiety.

This result aligns with the findings of Mahfuz et al. (2024), who identified that speaking in front of peers and the fear of being laughed at are significant contributors to students' anxiety in English learning. Such social fears can inhibit learner participation and prevent them from practicing the language, which is essential for improvement.

To address this, teachers must prioritize building a psychologically safe and supportive classroom culture where mistakes are normalized and not sources of shame. Creating a judgment-free learning space involves explicitly setting ground rules for respectful interaction, modeling empathy, and encouraging peer support. Teachers can also use strategies such as pair or small-group discussions, anonymous responses, and celebrating effort over correctness to reduce the fear of public failure. When learners feel safe and valued, they are more likely to engage actively and take the necessary risks to develop their English communication skills.

Sub-theme 4.3: Anxiety in speaking English

The data reveal that speaking English is a significant source of anxiety for learners. For example, P3 shared, *"Kung paistoryahon, dira nako kulbaan sir"* (If I'm asked to speak, that's when I get nervous), highlighting how oral communication triggers nervousness in English learning. Sultana and Jamin (2021) explain that this anxiety often stems from insufficient language exposure, which limits learners' opportunities to develop fluency. Consequently, this lack of practice inhibits their willingness and ability to speak English confidently. These findings suggest that teachers should provide more frequent, supportive speaking activities to help learners build confidence and improve their English fluency.

Sub-theme 4.4: Fear of inadequate knowledge or understanding

The findings reveal that learners experience anxiety due to fears of having inadequate knowledge or understanding. This fear makes them hesitant to answer questions or participate actively in discussions. This is evident in statements such as, *"Naa kanang dili ko ka-answer" (P7) (There are*

times when I can't answer) and *"Mahadlok ko kay wala ko nagtuon" (P5) (I'm scared because I didn't study)*. These expressions reflect learners' concern that their lack of preparation or understanding may lead to failure or embarrassment.

According to Zhenlei et al. (2024), knowledge anxiety is a complex phenomenon arising from multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. These factors include fear of being wrong, pressure to perform, comparisons with peers, low self-confidence, and limited access to learning resources. Together, these elements contribute to learners' anxiety, reinforcing the need for supportive instructional approaches that reduce pressure and build learners' confidence and competence gradually.

Theme 5: Coping Strategies

There are several ways that learners employ to cope with the anxieties they experience in English language learning, namely: Emotional Coping Mechanisms, Academic Coping Mechanisms, Social Coping Mechanisms, Relaxation and Stress-Relief Mechanisms. Each of these is discussed below.

Sub-theme 5.1: Emotional Coping

The findings clearly show that learners cope with their anxiety through a variety of emotional strategies. One prominent strategy is praying, as expressed by the simple response, *"Mag-ampo" (P2) (Pray)*, indicating that some learners turn to spirituality for comfort during stressful moments. Additionally, learners calm themselves by being quiet or still, as reflected in the phrase *"Maghilom" (P4) (Be quiet)* and the statement *"Kuan kanang ikalma nako akong kaugalinon" (P6) (I calm myself down)*.

Beyond self-soothing, learners also find emotional strength by thinking positively and seeking support from their families. For example, P8 shared, *"Mohangad sa langit kanang maghuna-huna ko sa akong pamilya kanang kada adlaw adisir ko moanhi sa eskwelahan" (Look up to the sky and think of my family, especially when I come to school every day)*, while another learner expressed a desire for daily encouragement from family, saying, *"Kanang gusto nako nga kada adlaw ko i-encourage sa akong pamilya" (I want to be encouraged by my family every day)*.

These findings clearly highlight that family support and emotional self-regulation are essential for managing learners' anxiety in English language learning. Emotional coping plays a key role in helping learners handle stress related to language tasks. To support this, teachers should incorporate activities that promote emotional well-being and encourage students to rely on their personal support networks. This approach aligns with Coverdale and Long (2015), who emphasize that promoting emotional well-being is crucial for the psychosocial development of children and young people.

Sub-theme 5.2: Academic Coping

The findings reveal that learners actively use study and practice as strategies to cope with their anxiety related to learning English. This is evident in statements such as, *"Mag study, maggamit ug dictionary ug Google" (P7) (Study, use a dictionary, and Google)*, and *"Kanang every day nga magbasa" (P8) (Read every day)*. These responses demonstrate learners' determination to improve their English skills despite recognizing its difficulty.

In addition to independent study, learners also seek help from others whom they believe can assist them. For instance, P5 shared, *"Mangutana ko sir, akong ipa-translate" (I'll ask, sir, and have it translated)*, showing that they value collaborative learning and support.

These findings suggest that accessible resources and peer assistance are important components in learners' academic coping strategies. Therefore, teachers should promote regular

study habits and encourage peer-assisted learning activities to foster language development. Bugaj et al. (2019) also emphasized the role of empathy in student learning, noting that student tutors gain personal growth and develop expertise through teaching, which further supports collaborative learning as a beneficial practice.

Sub-theme 5.3: Social Coping

The findings highlight the significant role of social support and collaboration in helping learners cope with anxiety related to learning English. Learners frequently seek encouragement and assistance from their family and friends, as shown in the statements, *"Suporta gikan sa ginikanan" (P6) (Support from parents)* and *"Kalipay sir, suporta sa akong mga friends, classmates, teachers" (P8) (Happiness, sir, support from my friends, classmates, and teachers)*. These responses indicate that learners view their social circle as a crucial source of emotional and academic support throughout their educational journey.

Moreover, learners emphasize the value of collaborative efforts with classmates. For example, P4 stated, "Kanang pag-abot sa eskwelahan mag tinabangay mis akong classmate" (When I get to school, I work with my classmates), and P2 shared, "Tabangan sa assignment, mangutana" (Help with assignments, ask questions). This demonstrates learners' belief that group work and peer support are effective strategies for overcoming challenges in English learning.

These findings support the findings of Bolzan et al. (2020), which underscore the benefits of peer-to-peer social learning as a powerful tool for overcoming academic difficulties. Thus, fostering a collaborative learning environment that encourages peer and family support is essential not only for academic success but also for enhancing learners' emotional resilience. Creating such supportive spaces can significantly reduce learners' anxiety in English language learning.

Sub-theme 5.4: Relaxation and Stress-Relief Mechanisms

The findings reveal that learners use relaxation and disengagement strategies to cope with anxiety during English learning. This is evident from statements like *"Mag relax" (P3) (Relax)* and "*Maghilom nalang" (P4) (Just keep quiet)*, showing that when learners feel anxious, they tend to calm themselves by either relaxing or withdrawing temporarily from the stressful situation. These actions help them reduce their anxiety and regain composure, enabling them to better prepare for and continue with their learning activities.

This suggests that integrating mindfulness practices or quiet reflection periods into classroom routines could be beneficial for learners. Such activities may help students manage their stress, enhance their emotional regulation, and improve their engagement in learning. Supporting this, Pino-Juste and Fernandez-Feijoo (2016) found that relaxation sessions before tests can reduce inhibition and, positively, though not always significantly, impact academic performance.

Incorporating these strategies into teaching can create a more supportive learning environment that acknowledges learners' emotional needs, potentially reducing anxiety and improving learning outcomes.

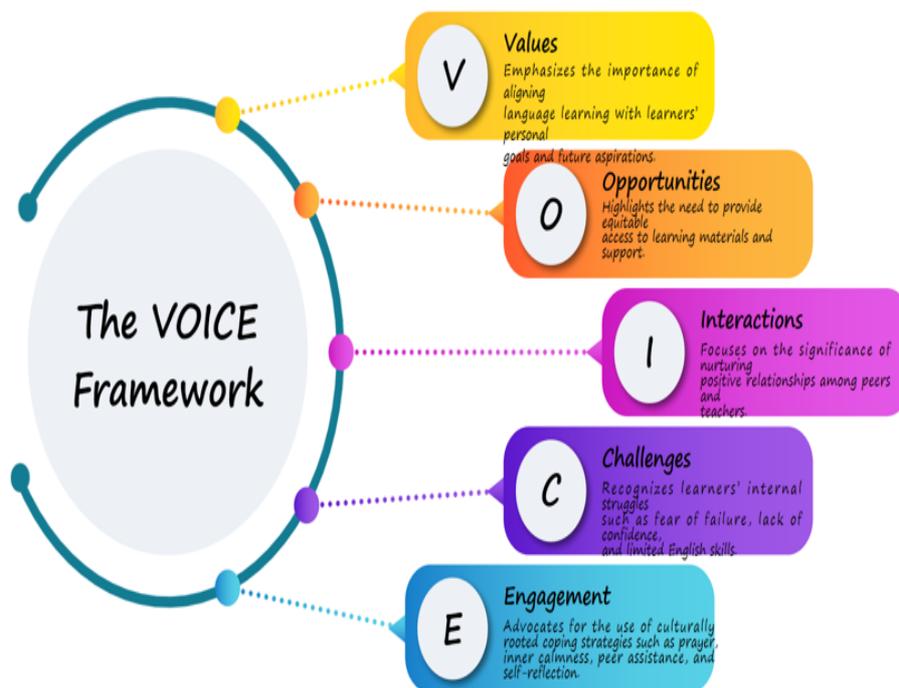**The VOICE Framework to Reduce English Language Learning Anxiety**

Figure 1. The Voice Framework

Grounded in the lived experiences of far-flung Grade 7 learners, the VOICE Model emerges as a practical, context-sensitive framework to reduce English language learning anxiety. This model serves as the output of the study and is designed to guide teachers, school leaders, and curriculum developers in creating emotionally safe, responsive, and empowering learning environments for marginalized learners, especially those in last-mile schools where access to technology, stable electricity, and internet connectivity is severely limited.

The model encapsulates five interrelated components:

V – Values: This emphasizes the importance of aligning language learning with learners' personal goals and future aspirations. When learners value English for its role in their success, they are more motivated to overcome anxiety-inducing situations.

O – Opportunities: This highlights the need to provide equitable access to learning materials and support. In communities with minimal or no access to digital devices, learning opportunities must be flexible and analog-friendly. Adequate exposure to low-tech learning tasks helps alleviate stress caused by unpreparedness and academic pressure.

I – Interactions: This focuses on the significance of nurturing positive relationships among peers and teachers. In the absence of online peer forums or virtual classrooms, face-to-face, interpersonal support systems become vital. Supportive social environments reduce the fear of embarrassment and judgment, thereby easing anxiety during speaking or writing.

C – Challenges: This recognizes learners' internal struggles, such as fear of failure, lack of confidence, and limited English skills. These are further compounded by geographic isolation and poor learning infrastructure, which often magnify feelings of inadequacy. By identifying these specific challenges, educators can design low-stakes tasks and safe spaces where learners feel encouraged to take risks without fear.

E – Engagement: This advocates the use of culturally rooted, low-tech coping strategies such as prayer, inner calm, peer support, and self-reflection. These strategies empower learners to remain

engaged even when faced with anxiety-provoking experiences in environments where modern motivational or gamified tech tools are unavailable.

Rationale of the VOICE Framework

The VOICE Framework is not merely a thematic summary but a conceptual intervention tool. It is designed to address the emotional and psychological dimensions of language learning—dimensions often overlooked in traditional instructional frameworks. For last-mile learners, whose exposure to English may be limited and whose learning contexts are under-resourced, digitally disconnected, and structurally challenged, addressing these emotional aspects becomes crucial.

The rationale of this model lies in its capacity to:

1. Serve as a guide for English teachers in developing instruction that is responsive to learners' emotional and psychological needs;
2. Inform teacher training programs that emphasize empathy, learner-centeredness, and anxiety reduction;
3. Support the creation of inclusive policies that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by last-mile learners; and
4. Empower learners to become active participants in their learning journey by validating their experiences and coping efforts.

By providing a structured yet flexible approach, the VOICE Model opens a pathway for designing classroom practices that not only teach English but also heal emotional barriers—especially in environments with limited digital access—thereby making learning more effective, humane, and inclusive.

The study revealed that learners face various challenges in learning English, including comprehension difficulties, anxiety about speaking and writing, and fears of failure, embarrassment, and judgment. Despite these struggles, they remain motivated due to the recognized importance of English for their future. They cope through prayer, seeking support, and practicing calmness. Their experiences reflect a complex interplay of emotional and contextual factors, which align with the VOICE Framework, which highlights how values, limited opportunities, social interactions, challenges, and engagement shape their learning journey. These findings offer valuable insights into learner anxiety and call for broader research to better support far-flung learners better.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that learners encountered various challenges in learning English. They have difficulty understanding English and are often discouraged by their perceived inability. It was also revealed that they are aware of their limitations. These limitations in language skills sometimes make them feel nervous or anxious, especially when speaking and writing.

However, when they gain occasional confidence, especially by answering some questions, they can alleviate their nervousness. Apart from that, the importance of English motivates them to continue learning despite the challenges they encountered. The study also revealed that their anxieties stem from fear of failure and making mistakes, fear of embarrassment and judgment, fear of speaking, and inadequate knowledge. To cope with these challenges, they employ various strategies, including but not limited to praying and seeking resources and support to improve their English skills. They also practice calmness and stillness to cope with their learning anxieties.

Based on the study's findings, it can be inferred that a mix of challenges, anxieties, and motivation shapes learners' experiences in learning English. Despite their struggles with comprehension, speaking, and writing, they remain motivated to overcome these challenges and continue learning. Though they are anxious about failing, judged, and embarrassed, they are still determined to continue learning, for they see the importance of learning English, especially for their future.

The study's findings also have important implications for the theoretical framework of language learning anxiety, especially for far-flung learners. It can serve as the source of essential knowledge on how various factors contribute to anxiety. Apart from that, this provides meaningful insights into how learners actively employ various coping strategies to mitigate the challenges they encounter.

Future researchers could explore the long-term effects of various coping strategies and identify additional support systems to alleviate anxiety and improve English language learning. Since the sample size of this study is focused on a single school, the study focuses only on a single school and does not reflect the experiences of the wider student population. Hence, the researcher recommends that future researchers address these limitations by including a more diverse sample. They may also examine the impact of different teaching methodologies on anxiety management in language learning.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that teachers create a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment where learners feel safe to take risks and view mistakes as part of the learning process. Increasing opportunities for regular, low-pressure speaking and writing activities can help reduce anxiety and build learners' confidence in using English. Additionally, integrating emotional coping strategies such as mindfulness exercises, promoting calmness techniques, and encouraging social support from peers and family members can further assist learners in managing their anxiety. Since learners recognize the importance of English for their future, connecting lessons to practical, real-life applications can sustain their motivation and engagement. Educational stakeholders should also focus on expanding access to resources and support for far-flung learners by providing appropriate learning materials, technology, and teacher training to address the unique challenges faced by students in remote areas. Finally, further research is encouraged to deepen understanding of last-mile learners in diverse contexts, which will help develop more effective and inclusive language-learning interlanguage competencies.

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