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English Language Learners' (ELLs) Journey: Challenges, Strategies, and Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract

This study explored the experiences of English language learners at Kalinga State University (KSU), a multilingual institution where English is often a third or fourth language. Despite the recognized importance of English for academic success and global communication, many learners continue to face persistent challenges in acquiring proficiency, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts. Thus, this study aimed to examine the academic, socio-cultural, and psychological challenges faced by Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) students, as well as the strategies and coping mechanisms they employ. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the research gathered narrative responses from participants through structured interview questions in English, Filipino, Ilocano, or their preferred language. Findings revealed key academic challenges, including difficulties with grammar, limited vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Socio-cultural barriers such as anxiety over accents and psychological struggles like low self-confidence and performance anxiety were also noted. To address these, students adopted strategies such as collaborative learning, peer mentoring, active class participation, and multimedia resources. Coping mechanisms included relaxation techniques, goal setting, and leveraging positive classroom environments. Thus, the study highlights the need for targeted support and inclusive practices to help multilingual learners thrive. By addressing these challenges, institutions can enhance English proficiency, improve academic outcomes, and promote student well-being, thereby contributing to more equitable and inclusive quality education.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, English language learners (ELLs), higher education, language anxiety, language learning strategies, language learning challenges, multilingual learners

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Introduction

The world has placed great significance on learning English as an international language due to rapid globalization. The English language is seen as a necessary tool in different fields such as communication, education, politics, media, business, technology, and medicine, among others. Its importance for professional development across various sectors is recognized, making it an essential component of higher education curricula worldwide. In the Philippines, English has an important place in the academic curriculum, as it is one of the country's official languages, along with Filipino. The English language is perceived as one great way for better career opportunities and academic success. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on English, students, especially in areas where English is not used daily, continue to experience challenges in mastering it.

This study seeks to discover the distinct challenges experienced by the Bachelor of Arts in English Language learners at Kalinga State University (KSU). KSU, located in the northern part of the Philippines, serves a population of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These students are non-native English speakers, many of whom learn English as a third or even fourth language. They learn English in addition to their native tongues such as Kalinga or Ilokano and Filipino. This diversity in language, while enriching, can also make the process of English language acquisition a complicated one.

While previous studies have examined English language learning difficulties, much of the existing literature focuses on general ESL/EFL contexts and often emphasizes either academic challenges or classroom-based strategies. There remains limited research that holistically explores the combined academic, socio-cultural, and psychological experiences of learners in multilingual and indigenous contexts, particularly within higher education institutions in the Philippines. Moreover, the specific strategies and coping mechanisms employed by students learning English as a third or fourth language are not sufficiently documented.

Thus, this study addresses this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of BAEL students at KSU, integrating their challenges, strategies, and coping mechanisms within a single framework.

Literature Review

Challenges in English Language Learning

English language learners (ELLs), particularly those from multilingual and rural contexts, often experience a range of academic, socio-cultural, and psychological challenges. Academic difficulties frequently include issues with grammar (Awan et al., 2023), limited vocabulary (Nation, 2013), and reading comprehension (Lucas et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2023). These foundational skills directly influence learners' ability to engage with academic texts and classroom discourse. In the Philippine setting, where English serves as a second or third language, Chua et al. (2016) document that "interference between Filipino and English prepositions... [occurs among] Filipino bilingual learners in the World Englishes paradigm" (p.3), highlighting how local dialect structures directly impede grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Tupas and Rubdy (2020) observe that "codeswitching practices from 'other tongues' to the 'mother tongue' among minority-language speakers" (p.5) limit consistent English exposure in multilingual classrooms, aggravating proficiency gaps for rural and dialect-dominant students.

Socio-cultural barriers, such as anxiety over accents and fear of judgment, have been noted to reduce students' willingness to participate in class. As McCrocklin and Link (2019) found, EFL learners experience "anxiety [from] fear of negative evaluation from their peers" due to non-native

accents (p. 8). This often leads to silence or avoidance behavior, limiting oral language development (Xue, 2020). Psychological factors such as low confidence, performance anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation further exacerbate learning difficulties (Alamer & Lee, 2021; Botes et al., 2022).

Language Learning Strategies

To cope with language difficulties, learners adopt a range of strategies both inside and outside the classroom. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies—cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective—provides a framework for understanding these methods. Classroom-based strategies, such as collaborative learning, peer mentoring, and active participation, support learners by providing social scaffolding and reducing the pressure to perform (Meng, 2023; Pascual et al., 2022).

Outside the classroom, students engage in personal learning activities like reading, writing, and using digital resources to support vocabulary and grammar development (Li, 2024). Multimedia tools such as films, online videos, and language apps help learners simulate real-life communication contexts and foster informal language exposure (Ancheta, 2022). These strategies enhance learner autonomy and motivation, thereby contributing to successful language acquisition (Lin et al., 2017).

Coping Mechanisms for Language Learning Anxiety

Coping with the emotional and cognitive stress of language learning is essential for academic persistence and success. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, individuals use a mix of emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies to manage academic stressors. KSU students, for example, employ relaxation techniques, such as listening to music (Shen, 2022), deep breathing exercises, positive self-talk, and seeking social support from peers and teachers (Alshehri, 2024) to manage anxiety. Others stay motivated by setting personal goals and visualizing successful outcomes, reinforcing Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy.

Supplemental resources like YouTube videos and dictionary apps help students reduce uncertainty and build understanding (Alghasab, 2025), while positive classroom environments, where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, play a significant role in lowering anxiety. These coping mechanisms align with recent studies that highlight the importance of emotional resilience and psychological support in second language learning (Alamer & Lee, 2024; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

Purpose of the Present Study

This research aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4: Quality Education. It aims to address the challenges multilingual indigenous learners face in acquiring proficiency in English, thereby improving educational outcomes and promoting inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone. Furthermore, the study supports SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by seeking to understand and support linguistic diversity within KSU's student body, ensuring that all students have access to effective learning opportunities, irrespective of their linguistic backgrounds. By examining and highlighting these issues, the research calls for the development of tailored educational strategies that empower marginalized communities, ultimately leading to greater educational equity and social inclusion.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) students at Kalinga State University (KSU) in learning English as a second, third, or even fourth language. The phenomenological approach was chosen to gain deep insights into students' academic, socio-cultural, and psychological challenges, along with their learning strategies and coping mechanisms.

Participants

The study utilized purposive sampling, selecting participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved or no new significant patterns emerged from subsequent interviews. A total of 15 BAEL students participated in the study. The distribution across year levels was as follows: four First-Year students (26.7%); four Second-Year students (26.7%); four Third-Year students (26.7%); and three Fourth-Year students (20.0%). This distribution ensured representation from all academic levels within the BAEL program, allowing for a comparative understanding of how language learning experiences evolve from entry-level to graduating students.

Instruments

Data were collected through a structured interview guide divided into four sections: personal background, language learning challenges, strategies, and coping mechanisms. Instead of face-to-face interviews, students were asked to write narrative responses in English, Filipino, or Ilocano, depending on their preference, to ensure comfort and authenticity.

Procedures

Responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which involved coding and identifying recurring themes across the narratives. Ethical protocols were followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Results

Challenges Faced by English Language Learners

Based on the learners' challenges, three major themes emerged. Their responses are categorized into academic, socio-cultural, and psychological and emotional challenges.

Academic Challenges

English language learners at Kalinga State University reported some academic challenges that affect their English language learning. These challenges revolve around grammar, limited vocabulary, and comprehension.

Grammar Difficulty

Many students reported being unsure about the uses of verb tenses and articles (P1, P4), and confusion was mentioned regarding Subject-Verb Agreement (P3). Participant four (P4) admitted, "*It is very difficult for me to use the verb tenses correctly. I don't understand their differences even if teacher explains them many times. Teacher always marked my paragraphs with verb tense mistakes. Really very hard.*" Another participant reported difficulty in grammar,

specifically understanding the syntax tree (P1).

Limited Vocabulary

Many of the participants reported that their limited vocabulary made them feel restricted in expressing themselves articulately and completely (P3, P5, P6, P7, P12, P13) . As Participant five (P5) explained, *"The biggest challenge I have faced in learning English at the university is limited vocabulary because I struggle to find the right words to clearly explain my thoughts, leading to vague or incomplete statements."* Participant nine (P9) also mentioned, *"I find it difficult to express myself in English because I struggle to find words or translate my thoughts or write my thoughts on paper."*

Comprehension Difficulties

Participants reported difficulty understanding what they read and heard due to limited vocabulary and grammar difficulties (P4, P7, P12). Participant 13 indicated, *"Sometimes, I do not understand my teacher's explanation. Uray ulit uliten na piman iexplain ket madik maaw awatan nu dadduma. (Even when she repeats the explanation, I still do not understand, sometimes.) She also made me read PowerPoint and asked me to explain it. I cannot answer because I do not understand the word. So, I just say I do not know."*

Socio-cultural Challenges

One salient issue was a persistent sense of self-consciousness regarding their accents and pronunciation. The students expressed concern that their 'natural' accent was very different from that of fluent English speakers. The students felt that their speaking skills might be judged by their classmates or teachers because of their accent and pronunciation (P2, P6, P10, P11, P14). This challenge is exemplified in the statement of Participant 10: *"I feel ashamed of speaking in class because of my intonation. My classmates might laugh at me because when I speak English, my intonation sounds like my dialect. Kasla latta agsasao ak Kalinga uray I say my words in English (It seems like I am speaking in Kalinga even though I say my words in English."* Participant 14 also mentioned, *"I feel shy when speaking English in front of others because I might make a mistake in speaking English. Also, I am afraid I might mispronounce words, and my classmates will laugh at me. My teachers also sometimes say speak properly, pronounce properly, make your accent a little better."*

Psychological Challenges

A very common challenge that they experienced was performance anxiety. Some participants reported feeling nervous or anxious when asked to share in class (P2, P6, P8, P11, P15). Participant 11 admitted, "*Im very very very nervous. I think of what will my classmates say or what will my teacher say?"*

Students also revealed fear of being judged or laughed at by their classmates when they made errors in grammar or pronunciation (P9, P14, P15) as a challenge. The participants echoed the same sentiment, which made them shy away from participating more in speaking activities. One participant said, *"During recitation, it's difficult to talk. I do not know what to say even though I know the answer. My mind says my classmates will laugh at me when I make mistakes. Or they will correct me!"*

Another psychological challenge reported by participants was self-doubt and low self-

confidence (P3, P8, P10, P14, P15). This sentiment was captured in one participant's statement, *"I feel nervous when I am required to speak in English in the classroom because I might make mistakes, and my classmates will just laugh at me. I want to speak more, but I do not have the confidence to speak Sometimes I feel low when I hear my classmates speak English so confidently and easily. My mind says wow, and I feel more ashamed."*

Strategies Employed by Language Learners

It is also noted that the English language learners at Kalinga State University are using different strategies to facilitate English language acquisition. These strategies can be categorized into two themes: classroom and academic approaches and personal learning strategies.

Classroom and Academic Approaches

A significant context in which students strive to improve their English language skills is the classroom environment, where educators implement instructional strategies designed to foster student engagement and participation in the learning process. Participants noted that such collaborative exercises provide a supportive atmosphere conducive to language development (P3, P15). As Participant three expressed, *"I like it when the teacher says work as a group. I feel more comfortable. At least I speak a little English."*

Another effective strategy identified by students is peer mentoring (P6, P13). This approach is considered important because it allows learners to do tasks without the anxiety associated with traditional teacher-student interactions, as they find confidence with their peers. As Participant 13 (P13) shared, *"I ask for help from my classmates who are better than I am to make me understand lessons and homework."*

In addition to group activities and peer mentoring, students emphasized that active participation in classroom activities is a crucial strategy for language skills development (P1, P3, P7, P8, P12). Their belief in the benefit of speaking during class is narrated in Participant 8's (P8) reflection: *"I still try to talk or recite in class even though I feel very nervous and shy. I even make mistakes and think my classmates will laugh at my accent. One teacher always says that the classroom is our training ground, and that makes me feel good."* Similarly, Participant 1 (P1) remarked, *"The most helpful strategies or techniques are reading aloud when the teacher says read and making sentences when the teacher says construct sentences, even if very nervous."*

Personal Learning Strategies

One dominant approach identified by the students is engagement in independent writing and reading activities. Many students have adopted the practice of reading English literature, such as novels and blogs, because they believe that this habit facilitates the acquisition of new vocabulary (P2, P5, P10, P11, P15). Participant 10 noted, *"I read a lot of English books like novels and such. Little by little, you can pick up how the grammar works, and at the same time, you can find new words to add to your vocabulary."* Participant four (P4) added, *"Sometimes I write almost about anything and ask my friend to read it."*

Furthermore, students noted using multimedia resources, such as English-dubbed movies and online content, to improve their native-like pronunciation and language use (P4, P9, P10, P11, P14). Participant six stated, *"Watching English movies and YouTube videos without subtitles helps me familiarize English better and learn new words."*

Coping Mechanisms Employed by the Learners

Given the challenges KSU language learners encountered, they employ coping mechanisms, such as relaxation techniques, goal-setting, and supplemental learning resources.

Students use relaxation techniques to mitigate stress in language acquisition (P1, P5, P14). Here, students resort to enjoyable activities to escape the pressures of language study for a moment. Participant 14 emphasized this coping mechanism by stating, *"I try to take a break and do something I enjoy to relax my mind, as I eat, I sleep, I play online games, or I listen to music to help me feel better." Similarly, P1 noted, "I take a nap sometimes."*

Goal Orientation

Cultivating a strong sense of purpose is another effective coping mechanism adopted by language learners (P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, P12, P13, P15). By maintaining a clear focus on their ultimate objectives, students can counteract the challenges they face. Participant 13 noted, "*I try to remind myself of why I started it in the first place. Knowing the benefits of being fluent in English, like better job opportunities or connecting with people from around the world, keeps me motivated."*

Supplemental Learning Resources

In addition to relaxation strategies and goal setting, learners frequently turn to additional educational resources to cope with the challenges (P5, P8, P10). As Participant five explained, *"I try to cope with it by watching videos on YouTube for further explanations and hoping that it will help me take a grasp on the lesson to reduce feeling lost about the lesson, which is causing the stress and anxiousness I am feeling."*

Discussion

Analysis of the learners' challenges revealed three main recurring themes. Their responses were grouped into academic, socio-cultural, and psychological and emotional challenges.

Most participants reported difficulties in understanding and applying grammar rules in both speaking and writing. The result implies that grammar problems not only weaken students' technical proficiency in written and spoken communication but also decrease their participation and confidence in class. Shen and Chiu (2019) found that anxiety and fear of grammatical errors decrease learners' motivation to speak in class. Shen and Chiu (2019) established that anxiety and fear of grammatical error decrease the learners' motivation to speak in class. Also, while speaking anxiety and a fear of grammatical errors have been shown to significantly reduce students' self-confidence, research suggests that many learners maintain a willingness to communicate and persist in oral interactions despite these psychological barriers (Aprilia, 2020; Sari & Ashadi, 2020). In addition, Zhang (2024) documents anxiety driven by fear of errors and its negative impact on confidence and interest, and Ramli et al. (2021) report that poor grammar and anxiety contribute to low self-confidence and unwillingness to speak. Shafira et al. (2025) report that an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy may reduce learners' confidence due to anxiety and social pressure in their EFL sample, while Nerea Oto-Millera et al. (2025) note that grammar remains a challenging domain for gifted learners even when other skills improve, which aligns with the idea that grammar-related difficulties can limit expressive confidence in speaking.

Direct grammatical guidance coupled with corrective feedback and frequent exposure was shown to improve learners' grammatical skills and academic achievement (Baasiri, 2025; Sumida, 2018). Recent research by Labad et al. (2024) among junior high school learners, however,

revealed that while vocabulary and pronunciation issues were found to have a highly significant relationship with lower academic achievement, grammar issues failed to show a statistically significant impact on academic performance in English. This suggests that grammar instruction should be integrated into situational and communicative learning rather than taught explicitly.

The grammatical problems are not unique to Kalinga State University; studies across different educational contexts identify universal grammar issues due to outdated pedagogy, lack of adequate exposure to authentic language use, and psychological reasons such as anxiety or lack of motivation (Lu et al., 2019; Montano, 2022; Xavier, 2023). These results indicate the necessity of more learner-focused, situationally appropriate teaching of grammar, as well as of cognitive and affective learning approaches to grammar.

In addition to grammar, participants identified vocabulary as another challenging aspect of language learning. Vocabulary-related problems are most frequently reported by English language learners, which impede their ability to express their thoughts effectively. Research on lexical coverage indicates that knowledge of the most frequent 3,000 word families can provide close to minimal acceptable comprehension of many written and instructional texts, although more in-depth understanding typically requires larger vocabularies (Benson & Madarbakus-Ring, 2021; Brooks et al., 2025). This lack of vocabulary not only negatively affects their academic progress but also inhibits their full participation in academic and social settings.

Other studies have shown that students with limited vocabulary encounter difficulties in comprehending academic texts, engaging in classroom discussions, and expressing complex ideas, which may consequently result in feelings of frustration and isolation (Andriani, 2025; Jidah & Tarigan, 2025). This is worsened by the lack of explicit vocabulary instruction throughout much of the curriculum, where insufficient provision or time results in vocabulary gaps being addressed informally.

Another area of difficulty for language learners is comprehension. Participants reported struggling to understand both written and spoken English due to limitations in vocabulary and grammar. These difficulties are echoed in the research by Vettori et al. (2023), which indicates that comprehension issues, compounded by native-language interference, are common among language learners. These findings are corroborated by the existing literature, which shows that difficulties with understanding, often compounded by interference from the learner's native language, are common among beginning language learners. Research demonstrates that English language learners are more likely than native speakers to experience comprehension difficulties due to vocabulary and oral language deficiencies (Kritsotakis & Morfidi, 2024; Oktavianti et al., 2026).

Recent research supports these issues further. For instance, in the study by Bongcawil et al. (2024), they found that even when English students are aware of explicit information in written texts, they still struggle with higher-order comprehension abilities, such as interpretation and application; hence, exposure alone is not sufficient to guarantee comprehension success. Similarly, Bolhan and Ismail (2024) found that Extensive Reading (ER) positively affects reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension among ESL students but is constrained by factors such as inadequate resources and weak teacher support, thereby limiting overall achievement.

Listening comprehension issues also play a vital role in the overall understanding complexity. Studies suggest that learners encounter difficulties with speech rate, unfamiliar accents, and limited vocabulary, which affect their ability to comprehend spoken English, particularly in digital or less controlled listening environments (Pham & Le, 2025; Zong et al.,

2024). These listening issues further intensify challenges in learning contexts where verbal instructions and multimedia resources are commonly employed.

Zeng et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review and concluded that vocabulary knowledge is a critical determinant of reading comprehension and academic achievement among English learners. Their review underscores that explicit vocabulary instruction, enhanced with context and supported with repeated exposure, greatly improves comprehension outcomes. This aligns with prior studies and further underscores the need to implement evidence-based, multi-strategy instruction in vocabulary instruction to address comprehension difficulties among English learners.

Recent developments in instructional technology further support these findings. Li (2024) demonstrates that natural language processing (NLP) models can enhance English reading comprehension by analyzing textual features such as word representation and contextual relationships, thereby improving the efficiency and accuracy of comprehension tasks. The research finds that integrating NLP feedback with explicit strategy instruction can significantly enhance comprehension outcomes for English language learners, particularly in regions where conventional instructional strategies are ineffective.

The current study suggests that poor comprehension can hinder academic performance across all subjects, as students cannot access and understand English-language information. The literature attributes such difficulties to limited vocabulary, limited exposure to academic language, and first-language interference (Lervåg et al., 2017). Without targeted interventions such as differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and rich interaction with academic texts, second-language learners rarely close the understanding gap with native-speaking peers.

Therefore, this research emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems that address reading and listening comprehension through evidence-based practices such as Extensive Reading, vocabulary instruction, and listening skill development to enhance academic achievement among English language learners.

Participants highlighted several socio-cultural factors they believed influenced their progress in English learning. A prominent concern was a persistent self-consciousness about their accents and pronunciation. They worried that their "natural" accent differed noticeably from those of fluent English speakers and feared that classmates or teachers might judge their speaking skills based on these differences, aligning with research on cultural integration and language-related anxiety (Baran-Łucarz, 2014). This accent-related concern among the students prevents them from speaking more openly in public and participating in class discussions. Their fear of being laughed at eventually limits their opportunity to improve their English skills.

Numerous studies have shown that students' self-esteem and participation in class are greatly influenced by their pronunciation and accent. According to Baran-Łucarz (2014) and Kimura (2021), learners who perceive their accent as different often experience heightened anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, which may reduce their confidence and willingness to communicate in the target language. This anxiety is often self-imposed because of the fear that others will judge them, even if that judgment does not actually occur (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). This type of fear leads to avoidance behaviors, in which students shy away from speaking and miss opportunities to practice their speaking skills in class *(*Cedar, 2024).

These socio-cultural pressures are not restricted to the classroom but affect social integration and career progression. A review found that students who experience language anxiety, particularly accent anxiety, tend to struggle across academic, social, and affective domains,

resulting in lower academic performance and reduced social interaction (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). Research indicates that classrooms with supportive, encouraging environments can help reduce language anxiety by fostering positive interactions and emotional support among learners (Han et al., 2022). Teachers who create supportive classroom environments, focus on communication rather than perfection, and minimize negative evaluation can help reduce learners' anxiety, including concerns related to pronunciation and accent (Teimouri et al., 2019). Furthermore, engaging in authentic interaction with proficient or native speakers has been shown to improve pronunciation and reduce speaking anxiety over time (Attia & Algazo, 2025; Chong et al., 2025).

In addition to academic and socio-cultural challenges, participants reported experiencing psychological difficulties that significantly impacted their language learning journey. A particularly common issue was performance anxiety, with some participants describing feelings of nervousness or apprehension when required to speak in class.

One psychological challenge the students faced was the fear of being judged or laughed at by their classmates when they made errors in grammar or pronunciation. Another psychological challenge identified by the participants was self-doubt and low self-confidence. This sense of inadequacy can hinder language learning, as students may become preoccupied with negative self-perceptions rather than concentrating on their learning goals (Alcalá, 2025; Zhao, 2022). Psychological traits such as self-doubt, low confidence, and fear have been widely known to affect students' willingness to communicate and participate in classroom activities. These obstacles align with extensive research on language learning anxiety.

Moreover, performance anxiety and fear of negative judgment are likely to lead to avoidance behavior and a decrease in classroom participation, as anxious learners tend to withdraw from interaction and become silent in language learning contexts (Véliz-Campos et al., 2023). Hence, it is relevant that the nature of a student's motivation can reduce the effects of anxiety on academic performance.

Alamer and Lee (2021) demonstrated that intrinsic motivation plays a protective role in language learning by promoting engagement and resilience, thereby reducing the negative impact of anxiety on students' academic performance. Hence, promoting student autonomy and intrinsic motivation is deemed critical in language education contexts. Hence, the promotion of student autonomy and intrinsic motivation is deemed to be critical in language education contexts. Supportive teaching behavior, positive peer interactions, and classroom environments that prioritize communication over accuracy and view errors as a natural part of learning can enhance students' confidence and reduce language anxiety (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). In addition, self-regulation and independent learning are recognized as effective strategies in second language learning, as they support learner autonomy, enhance motivation, and help mitigate the effects of anxiety (Flores & Escandallo, 2024).

Language learners at Kalinga State University reported using a variety of strategies to support their English language acquisition. A commonly used approach by instructors to encourage active self-expression is to integrate group activities. Participants noted that these collaborative tasks create a supportive environment that facilitates language development. These strategies align with the findings of Pascual et al. (2022), who emphasize that teacher-guided strategies play a crucial role in facilitating vocabulary acquisition in second language learning.

Aside from group work and peer mentoring, students highlighted active participation in classroom activities as a key strategy for developing their language skills. Such practices highlight the role of a supportive learning environment and active classroom participation in facilitating

more effective second language learning (Meng, 2023). Research further indicates that learners who actively engage in planning, monitoring, and emotional regulation tend to achieve better language outcomes (Dawadi, 2017). Moreover, the use of strategies is positively associated with higher language proficiency because learners who apply effective strategies tend to perform better (Li et al., 2024).

Beyond classroom-based approaches, learners have also identified personal strategies that support their language development outside formal educational settings. A common practice among students is engaging in independent reading and writing activities. Reading significantly enhances writing skills, as emphasized by Celik (2019), who asserts that it is a highly effective method for developing proficiency in a second language (L2). As students engage more with reading, their writing inevitably improves and flourishes.

Moreover, learners make use of multimedia resources, including English-language films and online content, to enhance their comprehension of native pronunciation and everyday language use. These practices resonate with Meng's (2023) emphasis on multimedia and dual-channel learning, as well as Pascual et al. (2022), who note that integrating technology enhances the overall learning experience by providing varied and engaging language exposure. Additionally, the findings also align with the results of Ancheta's (2022) study stating that the use of digital media has become prevalent, with tools like Google Translate, YouTube, and language learning applications facilitating language acquisition. Additionally, cognitive strategies, including techniques for understanding and processing information, are widely utilized, particularly in reading and writing tasks (Rao & Ibrahim, 2023; Sabar et al., 2026). Through collaborative and individual strategies, language learners at Kalinga State University demonstrate a commitment to enhancing their English proficiency in a variety of engaging and effective ways.

Learners employ coping mechanisms. Relaxation techniques provide a much-needed respite, enabling students to return to their studies with renewed focus and calmness. This approach aligns with Shen's (2022) findings, which emphasize mindfulness as an effective mechanism to enhance awareness of the psychological-physical link and reduce anxiety. Another coping mechanism is goal orientation. This forward-looking perspective not only mitigates anxiety but also instills a sense of achievement and progress. Theriana (2023) highlights that learners use cognitive techniques such as *visualization* — imagining successful speaking scenarios — as part of their strategy repertoire to mentally prepare for real-life interactions and reduce anxiety in speaking tasks. Finally, by using digital educational resources, learners can fill knowledge gaps and reduce feelings of uncertainty or confusion about lesson content. Similarly, Pabro-Maquidato (2021) notes that strategies such as reading English texts and consulting dictionaries help learners organize and express their ideas more effectively, which can increase confidence and foster greater receptiveness to feedback in language learning.

Furthermore, a considerable body of scholarly literature suggests that a supportive and approachable learning environment—characterized by positive teacher behavior, enjoyment, and reduced learner pressure—can help lower anxiety among ESL students (Rahmawati et al., 2025; Sclafani, 2017). When the educational context is perceived as non-threatening and conducive to comfort, students tend to experience a reduction in anxiety levels. In a positive, supportive setting, students are better positioned to realize their full potential, as they are more motivated to engage and interact with lower levels of apprehension and stress.

Conclusion

The results show that classroom instruction alone is not enough for effective English language learning, particularly in a multilingual setting. There is a need for a comprehensive support system that satisfies academic, sociocultural, and psychological needs. Moreover, the varied learning strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by students indicate that they are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in the learning process. Hence, this supports the need to adopt learner-centered approaches, inclusive pedagogies, and emotionally safe learning environments.

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