

Skill-specific language anxiety and coping strategies in Philippine virtual English classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Language anxiety has been widely examined in face-to-face classrooms since the 1980s, yet comparatively limited attention has been given to second language anxiety in online learning environments, particularly in the post-pandemic educational context. This descriptive-correlational study investigated second language anxiety across the four core English language skills and the coping strategies used by junior high school students in virtual English classrooms. The participants were 217 junior high school students enrolled in online English classes. Data were collected using structured questionnaires adapted from the Second Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (SLCAS) and a coping strategies measure. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and Spearman's rho correlation analysis. The findings showed that students experienced moderate levels of anxiety in speaking ($M = 3.46$), writing ($M = 3.91$), and listening ($M = 3.93$), while reading anxiety was reported at a high level ($M = 4.35$). Although descriptive differences were found between male and female students in their anxiety levels and coping strategy use, the correlation results indicated that these differences were not statistically significant. Positive thinking emerged as the most frequently used coping strategy for managing language anxiety in online English learning. These findings suggest that language anxiety in virtual classrooms remains a relevant pedagogical issue, especially in relation to reading. The study highlights the need for English teachers to design supportive, engaging, and flow-oriented virtual learning environments that can reduce anxiety and promote students' confidence across language skills.

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Introduction

Second language acquisition research has long emphasized the role of affective factors in shaping learners' engagement, performance, and persistence in language learning. Among these factors, second language anxiety has received sustained scholarly attention because it can influence learners' willingness to communicate, classroom participation, and perceived competence. Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as a distinct set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with the unique demands of learning a foreign or second language. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, anxiety is commonly linked to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related pressure. These concerns may become more complex in virtual English classrooms, where reduced face-to-face interaction, limited nonverbal cues, unstable connectivity, and feelings of isolation can shape learners' emotional experiences and participation.

The Philippine context provides an important setting for examining this issue because English has long occupied a central position in the country's language-in-education policy, public communication, and academic literacy practices (Madrurnio et al., 2016). Although national English proficiency rankings have often positioned the Philippines among relatively strong English users in Asia, recent English Proficiency Index reports indicate fluctuations in the country's ranking, from 27th in 2020 to 18th in 2021 and 22nd in 2022 (EF Education First, 2020, 2021, 2022). However, national-level proficiency indicators do not fully explain the learner-level conditions that shape English learning outcomes. Previous research on Filipino ESL learners has shown that language learning outcomes are influenced not only by broad national or institutional factors, but also by learner-level variables and learning conditions (Bernardo, 2023). One important learner-level factor is second language anxiety, which can affect learners' confidence, participation, cognitive processing, and language performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; Papi & Khajavy, 2023). Therefore, examining language anxiety among Filipino junior high school students in virtual English classrooms can provide a more situated understanding of how affective factors operate within a national context where English is institutionally valued but learners' classroom experiences remain diverse.

Although national English proficiency rankings provide valuable insights into a country's overall language performance, they do not fully reflect the individual factors that influence learners' success. Variations in proficiency levels may be partly explained by affective factors experienced in the classroom, particularly language anxiety. Recognized as a major obstacle to effective language learning and communication, language anxiety can reduce learners' willingness to participate in class, increase hesitation during speaking activities, and negatively affect performance even when they possess adequate language knowledge. For this reason, examining learners' experiences of language anxiety is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of broader trends in English proficiency. Such an

investigation can also inform the development of targeted interventions, especially in virtual learning environments where the nature of classroom interaction and communication continues to evolve.

Existing studies have documented the manifestations and consequences of language anxiety across various language-learning contexts. Learners with higher levels of foreign language anxiety tend to show lower academic achievement, reduced willingness to communicate, limited classroom participation, and weaker confidence in using the target language (Botes et al., 2020). Language anxiety has also been associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related pressure, which may interfere with learners' ability to process and perform in a second or foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). In the Philippine context, recent studies similarly suggest that anxiety affects learners' language experiences across different skills and learning modalities. For instance, (Labicane, 2021) examined Filipino learners' foreign language anxiety across the four macro skills in remote learning, while Regidor & Labiste (2024) found that Filipino high school learners experienced language anxiety related not only to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, but also to distance-learning conditions. Other Philippine-based studies have also linked language anxiety with learners' motivation and speaking performance (Daymiel et al., 2022). These studies indicate that language anxiety remains a significant issue in both face-to-face and remote learning contexts; however, limited attention has been given to how junior high school students cope with second language anxiety in post-pandemic virtual English classrooms.

Despite this growing body of literature, existing research has tended to focus on language anxiety in face-to-face classrooms or on specific skills, particularly speaking anxiety. Comparatively less attention has been given to second language anxiety in online or virtual English classrooms, especially in the post-pandemic learning context. This gap is important because virtual classrooms may reshape the sources and expressions of anxiety through digitally mediated interaction, reduced immediacy, limited nonverbal cues, connectivity problems, and varying levels of learner engagement. In addition, online English learning requires students to listen, speak, read, and write through digital platforms, suggesting that anxiety should not be examined only as a general classroom phenomenon. Rather, it needs to be investigated across the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Examining anxiety from this skill-based perspective can provide a more nuanced understanding of how learners experience second language anxiety in post-pandemic virtual English classrooms.

Another important issue concerns how students cope with second language anxiety in virtual English classrooms. Coping strategies are pedagogically important because they can help learners regulate emotional pressure, maintain participation, and sustain engagement when learning English under anxiety-provoking conditions. Foundational

research on language anxiety coping identifies preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation as common categories of learner responses to anxiety (Kondo & Ying-ling, 2004). More recent studies in online EFL contexts have also shown that learners and teachers use strategies such as preparation, positive thinking, peer support, creating less threatening classroom environments, increasing interaction, and strengthening communication support to reduce anxiety during online learning (Liu & Wang, 2023; Maharani & Roslaini, 2021). These studies indicate that coping strategies are central to managing language anxiety in online learning; however, more evidence is needed from younger learners in post-pandemic virtual English classrooms.

In the Philippine junior high school context, this issue deserves particular attention. Junior high school represents a formative stage in the K-12 curriculum because English is taught as a core subject from Grades 7 to 10 and is intended to develop learners' communicative competence, language awareness, and academic literacy. The Department of Education's K to 12 English Curriculum Guide for Grades 1-10 emphasizes language and literacy development through listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing, indicating that English learning at this level provides an important foundation for later academic and discipline-specific learning (Department of Education, 2016). In senior high school, English-related learning is increasingly embedded in core, applied, and specialized subjects, such as Oral Communication, Reading and Writing, English for Academic and Professional Purposes, and Practical Research. Understanding second language anxiety among junior high school students can therefore help educators identify affective barriers at a formative stage of English learning and design more supportive virtual instruction.

To address these gaps, this study examines second language anxiety across listening, speaking, reading, and writing, along with the coping strategies used by Grade 9 students in post-pandemic virtual English classrooms in the Philippines. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Grade 9 students' levels of second language anxiety in online English learning across listening, speaking, reading, and writing?
2. Is there a significant difference in second language anxiety levels between male and female students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' time spent in online English classes and their second language anxiety levels?
4. What coping strategies do Grade 9 students use to manage second language anxiety in online English classes?
5. Is there a significant difference in coping strategy use between male and female students?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence on skill-specific second language anxiety and coping strategy use among junior high school learners in virtual English learning contexts. The findings are expected to inform the design of more supportive, engaging, and anxiety-sensitive online English instruction for junior high school students.

Literature Review

Second Language Anxiety and Skill-Specific Anxiety

Second language anxiety is a situation-specific affective construct that emerges when learners are required to understand, produce, or be evaluated in a language that they have not fully mastered. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualize foreign language classroom anxiety as a distinct set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with the specific demands of language learning. This construct is commonly linked to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. In English language learning, these dimensions are especially relevant because students are expected to participate orally, respond to teacher questions, complete language tasks, and demonstrate competence in front of teachers and peers.

The effects of second language anxiety are not limited to emotional discomfort. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) argue that anxiety can interfere with different stages of language learning, including input, processing, and output. When students experience anxiety, they may find it more difficult to attend to language input, organize linguistic knowledge, and produce language accurately or fluently. Recent research also shows that language anxiety is associated with lower academic achievement, reduced confidence, weaker willingness to communicate, and limited classroom participation (Botes et al., 2020; Papi & Khajavy, 2023). Therefore, second language anxiety provides an important theoretical lens for understanding students' engagement and performance in English learning.

Recent research suggests that language anxiety should be understood not only as a general classroom phenomenon but also as a skill-specific affective construct. Learners may experience anxiety differently in listening, speaking, reading, and writing because each skill requires distinct cognitive, linguistic, and communicative processes. Cheng (2017) argues that L2 skill-specific anxiety should be examined through separate dimensions, as these four skills may generate different anxiety patterns. Similarly, Schimpff & Botes (2026) note that many existing measures privilege oral performance and should be expanded to capture anxiety across skills and contexts. Speaking anxiety often involves fear of mistakes and evaluation, listening anxiety relates to unclear input, writing anxiety to linguistic accuracy, and reading anxiety to vocabulary and text difficulty levels overall.

This skill-specific perspective is important because traditional measures of foreign language classroom anxiety have often emphasized oral performance. Schimpff and Botes

(2026) argue that existing tools for measuring language anxiety have been largely oriented toward oral competence and traditional classroom contexts. Their development of the Context Inclusive Language Skill Anxiety Scale (CILSAS) responds to this limitation by measuring anxiety across reading, writing, listening, and speaking in different learning contexts. Their findings suggest that anxiety levels may vary not only according to learning context but also according to language skill. This supports the need to examine second language anxiety across the four core English skills rather than treating it as a single, undifferentiated construct.

Language Anxiety in Virtual English Classrooms

Virtual English classrooms have reshaped how language anxiety is experienced because online learning changes patterns of interaction, feedback, social presence, and participation. Unlike face-to-face classrooms, students must complete language tasks through digital platforms while managing limited physical presence and technological constraints. From the Community of Inquiry perspective, meaningful online learning depends on social, teaching, and cognitive presence, which shape students' connection, engagement, and instructional clarity (Garrison et al., 1999). These conditions may increase anxiety through reduced immediacy, limited nonverbal cues, unstable connectivity, delayed feedback, unclear task instructions, and isolation (Huang et al., 2024; Hurd, 2007; Pichette, 2009). However, virtual classrooms may also reduce anxiety through anonymity, flexible participation, and mediated interaction (García-Castro & O'Reilly, 2022; Resnik et al., 2023).

The relationship between online learning and second language anxiety is complex because anxiety in virtual classrooms is shaped not only by technology but also by interaction, task design, learner characteristics, and instructional support. From the Community of Inquiry framework, meaningful online learning depends on social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence, which influence students' sense of connection, engagement, and instructional clarity (Garrison et al., 2000). In language learning, these elements are crucial because students need interaction, feedback, and emotional support to use English confidently. Huang et al. (2024) show that different online modalities may influence foreign language classroom anxiety through gender, task-related language skills, self-perceived proficiency, engagement, and immediate task experiences. Therefore, virtual English classrooms should be viewed not merely as technological spaces, but as affective and interactional environments that can either intensify or reduce second language anxiety.

Coping Strategies and Learner Differences

Coping strategies are cognitive, emotional, and behavioral efforts used by learners to manage anxiety-provoking situations. In second language learning, these strategies help students regulate pressure, sustain participation, and remain engaged in English tasks. Based on the transactional theory of stress and coping, learners use coping to manage

demands perceived as stressful or beyond their resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) identify five language anxiety coping strategies: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. In online EFL contexts, coping can also be supported through safe learning environments, interaction, and teacher-guided activities (Liu & Wang, 2023; Zarei et al., 2024).

Beyond identifying the types of coping strategies, it is important to consider their pedagogical value. Adaptive strategies such as preparation, positive thinking, relaxation, and peer support may help learners sustain participation and develop confidence, whereas avoidance-oriented responses such as resignation may limit opportunities for language practice. In online EFL contexts, coping is also shaped by classroom conditions because supportive interaction, clear communication, and emotionally safe learning environments can reduce learners' anxiety (Liu & Wang, 2023; Zarei et al., 2024). Learner differences should also be considered, as gender and language mindsets may influence how students experience and regulate foreign language classroom anxiety (Billington et al., 2026).

Based on these gaps, the present study examines second language anxiety across listening, speaking, reading, and writing, along with the coping strategies used by Philippine junior high school students in virtual English classrooms. This theoretical framing aligns with the focus of the study by connecting second language anxiety, skill-specific language learning, coping strategies, online English learning, and learner differences. It also supports the pedagogical relevance of investigating how younger learners experience and manage language anxiety in virtual settings so that teachers can design more supportive, engaging, and anxiety-sensitive English instruction.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to address the research objectives. The design was appropriate because the study sought to describe Grade 9 students' levels of second language anxiety and coping strategy use in virtual English classrooms, and to examine the statistical relationships among selected variables. In survey research, quantified data are collected from a defined population to describe existing conditions or identify patterns of covariation among variables (Sapsford, 2007). Therefore, the present study used a non-experimental design because no instructional treatment or variable manipulation was introduced.

The descriptive component was used to determine students' levels of second language anxiety across the four macro skills, namely speaking, writing, reading, and listening, and to identify the coping strategies they adopted in virtual English classrooms. The correlational component was used to examine whether students' anxiety levels were associated with coping strategy use and selected learner-related variables. This approach

enabled the researcher to analyze the strength and direction of relationships among variables while avoiding causal claims.

Participants

This study involved 217 Grade 9 students, 148 female and 69 males, enrolled in two secondary schools located in Laguna and Cavite. The participants were predominantly between 14 and 15 years of age, which corresponds to the typical age range for Grade 9 students. All participants were enrolled in a fully online learning modality during the School Year 2020–2021 and had accumulated at least one year of experience with virtual learning as a result of the school closures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research used convenience sampling to gather data from high schools that implemented a full online modality in Cavite, Philippines. This sampling method was considered appropriate given the accessibility constraints and practical challenges of conducting data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, because respondents were selected based on availability rather than through random sampling, the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population of junior high school students in the Philippines. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as their generalizability may be limited.

Data Collection

In this study, the researcher utilized two adopted survey instruments. The first instrument was adapted and modified from the Second Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (SLCAS) developed by (Ali Khalaf Ali, 2017). The instrument consists of 32 statements that employ a five-point Likert scale with selections ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). However, the five-point Likert scale found in the instrument was changed to a forced-choice hybrid six-point system to eliminate neutral responses. The researcher found this necessary in order to clarify the existence or lack of anxiety. The second factor supporting this decision is based on research showing that Asian (Chinese and Japanese) respondents are more likely to choose a middle response (Wang et al., 2008). These findings are also supported by Harzing (2006), who examined the response patterns of 26 different countries and found that Japanese respondents have the highest prevalence to choose the middle answer (when given an odd number of choices). It is theorized that Asians, Japanese respondents, are not choosing a neutral response due to ambivalence, indifference, or confliction as it was designed, but rather due to a unique cultural element prevalent in collectivist societies (Johnson et al., 2010). The modified six-point scale includes the following measures and weights: (1) strongly agree; (2) moderately agree; (3) slightly agree; (4) slightly disagree; (5) moderately disagree; and (6) strongly disagree.

This modification was made to eliminate the neutral midpoint, encouraging respondents to provide more decisive answers and reducing the tendency to select neutral

responses. The use of an even-numbered response scale is a common practice in survey research because it improves the sensitivity of the instrument and enhances its ability to distinguish differences in respondents' perceptions. For data analysis, responses were assigned numerical values ranging from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating greater levels of language anxiety or more frequent use of coping strategies. Mean scores were calculated across the relevant items to determine participants' overall levels of language anxiety and coping strategy use. To minimize response bias, negatively worded items were reverse coded before analysis, ensuring that all items were scored consistently and interpreted in the same direction. This scoring procedure contributed to a more accurate and reliable interpretation of the data. The instrument was pilot tested with a class of 53 students involved in online English classes. It reported reliability coefficients of 0.887, 0.910, 0.851, and 0.887 for items on speaking, writing, reading, and listening anxiety, respectively (Cronbach's alpha; N of items=8).

The second instrument used in the study was adopted and modified from Kondo & Ying-ling, (2004) and Marwan (2007). It consists of 15 statements grouped into five clusters namely: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Furthermore, the instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to always (5). Both research instruments underwent expert validation by four specialists with doctoral degrees in relevant fields to ensure its content validity and overall quality. The experts evaluated the instrument based on its relevance to the research objectives, clarity of the items, suitability for the target participants, and alignment with the constructs being measured. Their recommendations led to minor revisions that improved the clarity and precision of several items. These refinements strengthened the instrument's validity and enhanced the overall methodological rigor and transparency of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, the Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman's rho correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to assess students' levels of second-language anxiety and their use of coping strategies. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender-based differences in second-language anxiety, with Levene's test used to assess the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Because the coping strategy data did not meet the assumption of normality, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed as a non-parametric alternative to compare coping strategy use between male and female respondents. Spearman's rho correlation analysis was then used to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between students' time spent in online English classes, their second language anxiety levels, and their coping strategies.

Results

The data on *Table 1* shows the levels of anxiety of the respondents in terms of speaking, writing, reading, and listening respectively. Using criterion method, levels are interpreted as very low (1.00–2.00), low (2.01–3.00), moderate (3.01–4.00), high (4.01–5.00), and very high (5.01–6.00). Using equal intervals to interpret Likert-scale responses is a well-established practice in educational and social science research. This approach provides a systematic and consistent basis for classifying mean scores, thereby enhancing the objectivity and interpretability of the findings (Taherdoost, 2021).

Table 1. Levels of Language Anxiety of Grade 9 Students

Language Anxiety	Mean	Interpretation (Level)
Speaking	3.46	Moderate Anxiety
Writing	3.91	Moderate Anxiety
Reading	4.35	High Anxiety
Listening	3.93	Moderate Anxiety
OVERALL MEAN	3.91	Moderate Anxiety

Legend: Very Low=1.00–2.00; Low=2.01–3.00; Moderate=3.01–4.00; High=4.01–5.00; Very High=5.0 –6.00

As shown in *Table 1*, reading anxiety obtained the highest mean score ($\bar{x}=4.35$), indicating a high level of anxiety. Speaking ($\bar{x}=3.46$), writing ($\bar{x}=3.91$), and listening ($\bar{x}=3.93$) were all interpreted as moderate levels of anxiety. The overall mean of 3.91 likewise indicates a moderate level of language anxiety among the respondents.

Among the individual indicators, the statement ‘I feel bored when I read in English’ obtained the highest mean score ($\bar{x}=4.76$). For speaking anxiety, the statement “*I feel ashamed when I reply in English to teacher's questions*” obtained a mean of 3.74. In writing anxiety, the statement “*I feel upset during writing activities*” recorded a mean of 4.20, while the listening anxiety statement “*I find difficulty in understanding lectures, news, speeches and dialogues delivered in English*” also obtained a mean of 4.20.

Table 2. Language Anxiety of Male and Female Respondents

Language Anxiety	Group	Mean	Median	<i>p</i> -value
Speaking	Female	3.42	3.31	0.268
	Male	3.55	3.50	
Writing	Female	3.90	3.88	0.805
	Male	3.93	4.00	
Reading	Female	4.39	4.38	0.396
	Male	4.27	4.38	
Listening	Female	3.88	3.88	0.407
	Male	4.02	4.00	

Table 2 presents the differences in the mean and median for the male and female respondents of each language anxiety. Male respondents obtained slightly higher mean scores in speaking ($\bar{x}$ = 3.55), writing ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93), and listening anxiety ($\bar{x}$ = 4.02), whereas female respondents recorded a slightly higher mean score in reading anxiety ($\bar{x}$ = 4.39). However, the Mann-Whitney U test showed that none of these differences was statistically significant. The p -values for speaking (.268), writing (.805), reading (.396), and listening (.407) all exceeded the predetermined significance level of .05. These findings indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in language anxiety between male and female respondents across the four language skills. On the other hand, the table suggests that these differences are not significant since the p -values (speaking=0.268; writing=0.805; reading=0.396; listening=0.407) for each language anxiety is not less than 0.05.

Table 3. Language Anxiety and Number of Class Hours

Language Anxiety	Spearman's rho	p -value
Speaking	0.102	0.134
Writing	0.134	0.050
Reading	0.031	0.650
Listening	0.117	0.087

To investigate the relationship between the number of class hours that the respondents spend in online English classes and the respondents' level of language anxiety, the researcher used Spearman's rank correlation. It can be noted in Table 3 that the p -values for each language anxiety type (speaking=0.134; writing=0.050; reading=0.650; listening=0.087) are not less than 0.05. Notably, the correlation between writing anxiety and coping strategies was not statistically significant based on the predetermined significance level of $p < .05$ ($p = .050$). Although the result did not meet the criterion for statistical significance, the p -value falls at the conventional threshold which suggests that the relationship may warrant further investigation.

Table 4. Strategies in Coping with Language Anxiety

Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation
Preparation	3.26	0.641
Relaxation	3.33	0.704
Positive Thinking	3.44	0.827
Peer Seeking	3.06	0.850
Resignation	2.43	0.769

Displayed in *Table 4* are the strategies that the respondents use in coping with language anxiety. Notably, the respondents' best way of dealing with language anxiety is the positive thinking strategy ($\bar{x}=3.44$). In contrast, the least strategy used by the respondents is resignation ($\bar{x}=2.43$).

Table 5. Coping Strategies of Male and Female Respondents

Coping Strategies	Group	Mean	Median	<i>p</i> -value
Preparation	Female	3.28	3.25	0.685
	Male	3.22	3.25	
Relaxation	Female	3.38	3.50	0.174
	Male	3.23	3.25	
Positive Thinking	Female	3.49	3.50	0.240
	Male	3.32	3.50	
Peer Seeking	Female	3.06	3.00	0.773
	Male	3.04	3.00	
Resignation	Female	2.41	2.25	0.913
	Male	2.48	2.25	

Table 5 shows the differences between the mean and median of coping strategies used by male and female respondents. The table shows that the preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer seeking strategies are predominantly used among female respondents. Notably, male respondents are more likely to use resignation strategies to cope with language anxiety. It can also be seen from the data that there are slight differences in the mean and median of coping strategies between the male and female respondents. However, using the Mann-Whitney U test, the *p*-values for each coping strategy (preparation=0.685; relaxation=0.174; positive thinking=0.240; peer seeking=0.773; resignation=0.913) were not less than 0.05. The results may prove insufficient to claim that there is a significant difference between the coping strategy used by male respondents and female respondents.

Table 6. Coping Strategies and Number of Class Hours

Coping Strategies	Spearman's rho	<i>p</i> -value
Preparation	-0.098	0.153
Relaxation	-0.121	0.075
Positive Thinking	-0.029	0.675
Peer Seeking	-0.150	0.027
Resignation	0.079	0.245

Moreover, the researcher used Spearman's rank correlation to investigate the relationship between the number of class hours that the respondents spend in online English classes and the strategies that they use to cope with language learning anxiety. It can be noted in *Table 6* that the *p*-values for the preparation strategy, relaxation strategy, positive thinking strategy, and resignation strategy are not less than 0.05. Therefore, the results suggest that none of these correlations is significant.

Discussion

The findings show that second language anxiety was not experienced uniformly across the four English language skills. Reading anxiety obtained the highest mean score and was interpreted as high, whereas speaking, writing, and listening anxiety were reported at moderate levels. This pattern supports the skill-specific view of language anxiety, which argues that anxiety should not be treated only as a general classroom phenomenon because listening, speaking, reading, and writing involve different cognitive, linguistic, and communicative demands (Cheng, 2017; Schimpff & Botes, 2026). In relation to the study's theoretical framing, the finding extends Horwitz et al.'s (1986) notion of foreign language classroom anxiety by showing that anxiety in virtual English classrooms may be more strongly associated with particular language tasks than with classroom participation in general.

The prominence of reading anxiety is particularly important because earlier research on foreign language classroom anxiety has often emphasized oral performance and communication apprehension. The present finding suggests that receptive skills, especially reading, can also be anxiety-provoking when students are required to process English texts independently in a virtual environment. This is consistent with the argument that language anxiety may interfere with input, processing, and output stages of language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). In online classes, reading tasks may become more demanding because students must rely on screen-based texts, self-regulation, and limited immediate clarification from teachers or peers. Therefore, the high level of reading anxiety in this study indicates that online English instruction should provide more explicit scaffolding for vocabulary, text comprehension, and reading engagement.

The moderate levels of speaking, writing, and listening anxiety also require attention. Speaking anxiety remains theoretically consistent with communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, two central dimensions of foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The result suggests that even when students participate from a virtual setting, they may still feel self-conscious when responding in English to teachers or classmates. Writing anxiety may reflect concerns about linguistic accuracy, organization, and evaluation, while listening anxiety may be related to difficulties in understanding spoken input, especially when audio quality, speech rate, or online connectivity affects comprehension. These findings reinforce the need to understand language anxiety as a multidimensional construct rather than reducing it to speaking anxiety alone.

The virtual learning context helps explain why anxiety may vary across tasks and skills. From the Community of Inquiry perspective, meaningful online learning depends on social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence, which shape students' sense of connection, instructional clarity, and engagement (Garrison et al., 2000). When students experience limited interaction, unclear task expectations, delayed feedback, or reduced opportunities for clarification, their anxiety may increase. Recent studies on online language

learning similarly show that anxiety in virtual classrooms is shaped by digital modality, task design, learner engagement, and immediate learning experience (Huang et al., 2024; Resnik et al., 2022; Garcia-Castro & O'Reilly, 2022). Thus, the findings suggest that anxiety in virtual English classrooms is not caused by technology alone, but by the interaction between digital learning conditions and the language tasks students are expected to complete.

The gender comparison should be interpreted cautiously. Although male respondents obtained slightly higher mean scores in speaking, writing, and listening anxiety, and female respondents reported slightly higher reading anxiety, none of these differences was statistically significant. This indicates that the data do not provide sufficient evidence to claim gender-based differences in second language anxiety across the four skills. This finding is important because previous studies on gender and language anxiety have produced mixed results. For example, Billington et al. (2026) found that gender, together with language mindsets, predicted foreign language classroom anxiety, whereas other studies have reported non-significant or context-dependent gender effects. In the present study, the shared experience of virtual English learning may have minimized gender-related differences because both male and female students faced similar online learning conditions, technological constraints, and task demands.

No statistically significant relationship was found between the number of online English class hours and students' language anxiety. This result suggests that the amount of time spent in virtual English classes alone may not be sufficient to explain students' anxiety levels. Although the correlation for writing anxiety approached the predetermined significance threshold ($p = .050$), it should still be interpreted as non-significant when the criterion is set at $p < .05$. The finding implies that anxiety may be influenced more by the quality of online interaction, teacher support, task clarity, and emotional safety than by class duration. This interpretation aligns with online learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of interaction, presence, and instructional design in shaping students' learning experiences (Garrison et al., 2000; Huang et al., 2024).

The coping strategy findings show that students used several strategies to manage anxiety in virtual English classrooms, with positive thinking emerging as the most frequently used strategy and resignation as the least frequently used. This result is consistent with Kondo and Ying-Ling's (2004) framework, which identifies preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation as common responses to language anxiety. Positive thinking can be understood as an adaptive cognitive strategy because it helps learners reframe anxiety-provoking situations and maintain confidence during English learning tasks. In contrast, the lower use of resignation suggests that most respondents did not rely primarily on avoidance or passive acceptance. This pattern indicates that Grade 9 students tended to use more constructive coping responses when managing second language anxiety in online English classes.

The moderate use of preparation, relaxation, and peer seeking also has pedagogical implications. Preparation may help students reduce uncertainty before language tasks, relaxation may help them manage emotional and physiological tension, and peer seeking may provide social reassurance when students realize that classmates experience similar difficulties. In online EFL contexts, such strategies are not only individual responses but can also be supported through classroom design. Liu and Wang (2023) emphasize that teachers can reduce online language anxiety by creating less threatening learning environments and strengthening interaction, while Zarei et al. (2024) highlight the role of teachers in creating safe and supportive classrooms. Therefore, coping should be understood as both a learner-level and pedagogical issue.

The findings revealed no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents in coping strategy use. Although female students reported slightly higher use of preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer seeking, and male students reported a slightly higher use of resignation, these differences were not statistically significant. This indicates that both groups used broadly comparable strategies to manage anxiety in virtual English classrooms. The result also suggests that coping strategy use may be shaped less by gender and more by shared learning conditions, such as the online modality, classroom interaction, task expectations, and the availability of teacher and peer support.

The significant negative correlation between class hours and peer seeking should be interpreted carefully. The result suggests that students who spent more time in online English classes tended to report lower use of peer seeking as a coping strategy. However, because the study used a correlational design, this relationship should not be interpreted causally. One possible explanation is that prolonged online learning may not automatically strengthen peer interaction unless collaborative structures are intentionally designed. Research on online learning emphasizes that interaction and social presence must be actively supported through pedagogical design rather than assumed to occur naturally in digital environments (Garrison et al., 2000; Gonzalez-Lloret, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Thus, teachers may need to integrate structured pair work, peer discussion, and collaborative reading or writing tasks to sustain peer support in virtual English classrooms.

Overall, the findings contribute to the literature by showing that second language anxiety among Philippine junior high school students in virtual English classrooms is skill-specific, context-sensitive, and closely connected to students' coping responses. The high level of reading anxiety, the non-significant gender differences, and the prominence of positive thinking suggest that virtual English instruction should not focus only on increasing exposure to English. Instead, teachers need to design anxiety-sensitive online learning environments that provide clear instructions, meaningful interaction, guided reading support, constructive feedback, and opportunities for students to regulate anxiety through adaptive coping strategies. These pedagogical implications are consistent with the

study's theoretical foundation, which views language anxiety as an affective construct shaped by learner characteristics, task demands, and instructional conditions.

Conclusion

This study examined second language anxiety and coping strategies among Philippine Grade 9 students in virtual English classrooms. The findings show that students experienced different levels of anxiety across the four core English language skills, with reading anxiety emerging as the most pronounced form. Speaking, writing, and listening anxiety were reported at moderate levels. These results support the view that language anxiety should not be treated as a single general classroom phenomenon, but as a skill-specific and context-sensitive affective experience shaped by the demands of virtual English learning.

The study also found that students used coping strategies at a moderate level, with positive thinking emerging as the most frequently used strategy and resignation as the least frequently used. This suggests that students tended to rely more on adaptive internal coping responses than on avoidance-oriented strategies. No statistically significant gender differences were found in students' anxiety levels or coping strategy use. Similarly, the number of hours spent in online English classes was not significantly associated with most dimensions of anxiety and coping. These findings indicate that the quality of interaction, task design, teacher support, and emotional climate of virtual classrooms may be more important than online exposure alone in shaping students' language anxiety and coping responses.

Pedagogically, the findings highlight the need for anxiety-sensitive virtual English instruction, particularly in relation to reading. Teachers may support students by providing clearer task guidance, accessible reading materials, scaffolded comprehension activities, supportive feedback, and structured opportunities for interaction. Since positive thinking was the most frequently used coping strategy, teachers can also help students develop constructive self-talk, confidence-building practices, and peer-supported learning routines. Such practices may help reduce anxiety while promoting students' engagement and confidence across language skills.

This study has several limitations. The use of convenience sampling and the inclusion of participants from only two school contexts may limit the generalizability of the findings. The study also relied on self-reported survey data and did not examine other potentially relevant factors, such as socioeconomic background, English proficiency, access to technology, motivation, teacher support, or online learning fatigue. Future studies may use more diverse and representative samples, longitudinal designs, and mixed-methods approaches to examine how language anxiety develops over time in virtual learning environments. Further research may also employ skill-specific anxiety measures to investigate reading, writing, listening, and speaking anxiety in greater depth. Overall, this

study contributes to the growing literature on second language anxiety by showing that junior high school learners' anxiety and coping experiences in virtual English classrooms are shaped by the interaction of language skills, learning context, and pedagogical support.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Jackielyn S. Andalecio-Co: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Data Curation, Visualization

Leonardo B. Dorado: Validation, Supervision, Project Administration, Writing – Review and Editing

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