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## ENGLISH COMMUNICATION ANXIETY AND PEER COMPARISON AMONG INTERNATIONAL CLASS STUDENTS IN BALI

By

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates English communication anxiety among first-semester students in an international class at a private university in Bali, focusing on peer comparison and support and coping. Drawing on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Social Comparison Theory, it examines how these two factors relate to students' anxiety. Data were collected from 38 students using a bilingual questionnaire with Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The results show that students experienced a moderate level of English communication anxiety. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that peer comparison is positively associated with anxiety, whereas support and coping are negatively associated with anxiety. Qualitative responses indicate that students feel both motivated and anxious and that teacher clarity, a relaxed classroom atmosphere, peer encouragement, and gentle correction help them manage anxiety. The findings suggest that EMI programmes need to address affective as well as academic dimensions to build more supportive international-class environments.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many Indonesian universities have established international classes or English-medium instruction (EMI) programs as part of wider efforts to internationalize higher education, strengthen institutional competitiveness, and improve graduates' English proficiency (Coleman et al., 2024; Monica et al., 2025). These initiatives are expected to prepare students for cross-border collaboration, academic mobility, and participation in global labour markets (Pozniak et al., 2025). At policy level, EMI and international-class programs are often presented as straightforward routes to "global standards" (Hillman, 2025). At classroom level, however, they require substantial psychological, linguistic, and social adjustment, especially for students whose earlier schooling did not use English as the main medium of instruction (Phan et al., 2024). For first-semester students, the need to adapt at the same time to university life and to an English-dominant environment can give rise to tension, uncertainty, and self-doubt, particularly in spoken interactions. In this context, English communication anxiety has become a central concern that may quietly undermine the equity and effectiveness of international-class initiatives in Indonesia.

International classes typically bring together students with varied linguistic repertoires and educational histories (Kalthoum, 2024; Sung, 2022; Tai, 2022). Some have attended

international or bilingual schools, taken part in exchange programmes, or used English regularly in academic and social settings. These students often enter university with relatively high proficiency and confidence. Others come from public or local schools where English is taught mainly as a subject, not as a vehicle for learning content. Their experience may be limited to grammar-focused lessons, examination practice, or short private courses, with fewer opportunities for spontaneous communication. Within the same classroom, students may be native or near-native speakers of English, bilingual or multilingual users of English as an additional language, or non-native speakers whose primary exposure has been classroom based. On one hand, this diversity can support authentic exposure, peer learning, and rich interactional opportunities (Brännkärr et al., 2025; Zhou & Colomer, 2024). On the other hand, it can create implicit hierarchies of proficiency that shape participation and self-perception (Hossain, 2024). Students who see themselves as less proficient may withdraw from interaction, rely on more proficient peers, or position themselves as weaker language users. As a result, international classes may reproduce unequal access to English rather than simply broaden global opportunities.

Language anxiety has long been identified as a persistent affective barrier in second language acquisition (Horwitz et al., 1986; Lin et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025a; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualised foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as a situation-specific form of anxiety that involves communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Learners who experience FLCA often report nervousness, self-consciousness, and a strong fear of making mistakes when speaking, which can lead them to avoid using the language even when they have sufficient linguistic resources. Subsequent studies have consistently shown that higher levels of anxiety are associated with lower self-confidence, reduced classroom participation, and weaker academic achievement (Lizarte Simón et al., 2024; Shang & Ma, 2024). More recent work has emphasised that anxiety is dynamic rather than fixed and can fluctuate across tasks, skills, interlocutors, and classroom events (Yetkin & Özer-Altinkaya, 2025). In some cases, moderate levels of anxiety may even have a facilitative effect when learners interpret it as productive challenge rather than threat (Luo & Xiong, 2025)

Research in Asian educational contexts, for example Japan and China, has highlighted that language anxiety is closely linked with sociocultural factors (Li et al., 2024; Nakao & Reinders, 2022). Peer pressure, high-stakes assessment, teacher-centred classroom norms, and concerns about losing face can intensify communication anxiety and make learners particularly sensitive to the judgements of others. Despite this growing body of work, English communication anxiety in Indonesian EMI and international-class programs remains relatively underexplored. In these settings, students are not only dealing with a foreign language but are also negotiating new academic expectations, institutional discourses about being “international,” and social norms associated with prestige and status. This combination may create distinctive forms of pressure that are not fully captured by research conducted in other Asian contexts. However, there is still very little empirical research on English communication anxiety in Indonesian EMI and international-class programmes, particularly among first-semester undergraduate students.

A prominent and often underexamined feature of international classes is the visibility of differences in students’ English proficiency and learning histories. These differences invite

social comparison (Spangler, 2025). Social Comparison Theory proposes that individuals evaluate their abilities by comparing themselves with others, especially peers whom they regard as similar (Festinger, 1954). In EMI classrooms, learners frequently compare their English skills on the basis of visible features such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, and frequency of participation in discussion (Siegel, 2022). Studies in language learning suggest that perceptions of classmates' abilities strongly influence learners' confidence and willingness to communicate (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Gu, 2023). (Le Blanc-Brillon et al., 2025; Rijsman, 1974; Y. Wang et al., 2023a) argues that upward comparison, which involves comparison with similar or slightly more competent peers, can create strong upward pressure. This pressure may motivate some students to work harder but can also increase stress and the likelihood of negative self-evaluation. Comparison with weaker peers tends to create less pressure and has a weaker impact on behaviour.

Previous research therefore portrays peer comparison as a process that can have both constructive and harmful consequences (Janesarvatan & Asoodar, 2024; Kam & Prihadi, 2021). In the context of first-semester international-class students, however, there are strong reasons to treat peer comparison primarily as a potential risk factor for English communication anxiety. Empirical work in Asian EMI settings points in this direction (Aizawa et al., 2023; Bae, 2024). Janesarvatan & Asoodar (2024) found that Korean university students regularly compared their speaking performance with that of classmates; while some students felt motivated, many reported increased anxiety. (Aizawa et al., 2023) reported that Japanese students in EMI courses felt pressure to match their peers' fluency and accuracy and that this pressure sometimes led them to reduce their classroom participation in order to avoid embarrassment. Yet, the way peer comparison shapes English communication anxiety has not been systematically examined in Indonesian international classes, where EMI functions as both a policy goal and an everyday communicative requirement. Building on these studies, the present research examines peer comparison as a process that is likely to heighten English communication anxiety when students perceive themselves as less capable than their classmates.

The emotional impact of peer comparison is shaped by the wider classroom ecology, particularly the presence of support and coping resources (Tan & Jung, 2024). Instructors who are responsive to students' affective needs, who frame errors as a natural part of learning, and who offer constructive, nonjudgemental feedback can help reduce anxiety and foster a sense of safety when speaking English. At the same time, students draw on other sources of support and coping, such as encouragement from peers, their own self-regulation strategies, and the general classroom climate (Li & Li, 2024). Research indicates that strong teacher student rapport and a positive classroom atmosphere are related to lower levels of anxiety and higher willingness to communicate (An et al., 2024; Zhang, 2023). Supportive classroom interactions can strengthen students' sense of belonging, which in turn enhances motivation and engagement (Xu et al., 2025). In collectivist contexts such as Indonesia, where maintaining social harmony and avoiding public embarrassment are highly valued, perceived support and coping resources may be especially important in buffering the negative effects of peer comparison on communication anxiety. Moreover, previous studies have rarely considered how peer comparison and perceived support and coping operate together in shaping students' anxiety in EMI classrooms, especially in collectivist contexts such as

Indonesia.

From a pedagogical perspective, the intersection of language anxiety, peer comparison, and support and coping forms a critical but still underexplored dimension of international education in Indonesia. Much of the literature on EMI has focused on policy implementation, curriculum change, and institutional rationales, while students' lived emotional and relational experiences receive less attention. This imbalance is problematic, because affective variables such as anxiety, confidence, and perceived belonging shape learners' participation trajectories, identity positions, and long-term engagement with English (Dewaele et al., 2023). For first-semester students, early encounters with success or difficulty in English communication can solidify into durable beliefs about their abilities and their place within the international class. If communication anxiety and maladaptive forms of comparison are not addressed, international-class programs may quietly undermine some of their own goals related to inclusion and empowerment. Taken together, there is a lack of research that simultaneously addresses English communication anxiety, peer comparison, and support and coping among first-semester students in Indonesian international classes.

In view of these issues, the present study investigates English communication anxiety among first-semester students in an international class at a private university in Bali. The study focuses on three variables, namely peer comparison, support and coping, and English communication anxiety. It explores how students compare their English abilities with those of their peers, how they perceive the support and coping resources available to them, and how these factors are associated with their emotional responses and willingness to communicate in English. Drawing on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Social Comparison Theory, the quantitative strand of the study tests two main hypotheses: first, that students who report higher levels of peer comparison will show higher levels of English communication anxiety, and second, that students who report higher levels of support and coping will show lower levels of English communication anxiety. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by extending and contextualising FLCA and social comparison frameworks in a Southeast Asian EMI setting, and practically by offering pedagogical insights for designing more supportive international-class environments that can reduce anxiety, promote constructive forms of comparison, and enhance first-semester students' communicative confidence in English.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Internationalisation, EMI, and International Classes

The internationalisation of higher education is often defined as the systematic integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the functions of teaching, research, and service. In Indonesia, one prominent strategy is the development of international classes and English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes, in which English is used as the main language of instruction (Coleman et al., 2024; Monica et al., 2025). These programmes are expected to enhance institutional competitiveness, increase the attractiveness of universities for local and international students, and improve graduates' English proficiency so that they are better prepared for cross-border collaboration, academic mobility, and participation in global labour markets (Pozniak et al., 2025). At the policy level, EMI is frequently framed as a straightforward route to achieving "global standards" (Hillman,

2025). In practice, however, EMI requires students to manage complex psychological, linguistic, and social adjustments, especially when their prior schooling did not use English as a medium of instruction (Phan et al., 2024). For first-semester students, this dual transition into university life and an English-dominant academic environment may trigger tension, uncertainty, and self-doubt, particularly in spoken communication, and may give rise to English communication anxiety.

### **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and English Communication Anxiety**

Research on second language acquisition has long recognised anxiety as a key affective barrier to successful learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Lin et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025a; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the construct of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which refers to a type of situation-specific anxiety that arises in language learning contexts and involves communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Learners who experience FLCA often feel nervous, self-conscious, and afraid of making mistakes, especially when speaking, which may lead them to avoid using the target language even when they possess adequate linguistic resources. Empirical studies have repeatedly shown that higher levels of language anxiety are associated with lower confidence, reduced classroom participation, and weaker academic outcomes (Lizarte Simón et al., 2024; Shang & Ma, 2024). More recent work conceptualises anxiety as dynamic rather than fixed, fluctuating across tasks, skills, interlocutors, and classroom events (Yetkin & Özer-Altinkaya, 2025), and under some conditions moderate anxiety can be facilitative if interpreted as a challenge rather than a threat (Luo & Xiong, 2025). In EMI classrooms, where content learning and language learning occur simultaneously, spoken English often becomes the most anxiety-provoking aspect of participation, and English communication anxiety may be especially important for first-semester students.

### **Social Comparison Theory and Peer Comparison in EMI Classrooms**

An important feature of international classes is the visible diversity of students' English proficiency and learning histories. Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals evaluate their abilities by comparing themselves with others, particularly with peers they perceive as similar (Festinger, 1954). In EMI contexts, students often compare their English performance based on observable indicators such as fluency, pronunciation, lexical range, and frequency of participation in discussion (Siegel, 2022). Studies in language learning show that perceptions of classmates' English ability strongly influence learners' confidence and willingness to communicate (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Gu, 2023). (Le Blanc-Brillon et al., 2025; Rijsman, 1974; Y. Wang et al., 2023a) argues that upward comparison with similar or slightly more proficient peers can create strong upward pressure that may motivate effort but also increase stress and negative self-evaluation, whereas downward comparison with weaker peers typically has weaker effects. Research in Asian EMI settings indicates that frequent peer comparison can function as a double-edged process. For some learners it encourages improvement, but for many it heightens anxiety and discourages participation (Aizawa et al., 2023; Bae, 2024). In the context of Indonesian international classes, where EMI is both a policy goal and a daily communicative requirement, peer comparison is therefore conceptualised in this study primarily as a potential risk factor that can intensify English communication anxiety among first-semester

students.

### **Support, Coping, and Classroom Climate**

The emotional impact of peer comparison is shaped by the broader classroom ecology, particularly by the availability of support and coping resources. Support includes, but is not limited to, teacher support in the form of constructive feedback, encouragement, and a nonjudgemental stance toward errors, as well as peer support through collaboration, reassurance, and shared strategies (Jansen et al., 2022; Sheffler & Cheung, 2024; Y. Wang et al., 2023b). Coping refers to the ways in which students regulate their emotions and manage stress in challenging situations. Previous research has shown that strong teacher–student rapport and positive classroom climate are associated with lower language anxiety and higher willingness to communicate (Li & Li, 2024). Xu et al. (2025) further report that supportive classroom interactions can enhance students’ sense of belonging, which in turn promotes motivation and engagement. In collectivist contexts such as Indonesia, where maintaining social harmony and avoiding public embarrassment are important values, perceived support and effective coping strategies may play a crucial role in buffering the negative effects of peer comparison on English communication anxiety.

### **Conceptual Model of the Study**

Drawing on FLCA and Social Comparison Theory, this study adopts a conceptual model in which peer comparison and support and coping are viewed as key predictors of English communication anxiety in an Indonesian EMI international class. Peer comparison is expected to have a positive association with English communication anxiety, since frequent upward comparison with more proficient classmates can heighten fears of negative evaluation and communication apprehension. In contrast, support and coping are expected to have a negative association with English communication anxiety, since higher levels of perceived support and more effective coping should help students manage stress and feel safer when communicating in English. Within this framework, the study examines how these two factors relate to English communication anxiety among first-semester international class students and how they shape students’ willingness to communicate in an English-medium learning environment.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design with embedded qualitative reflection to examine English communication anxiety and peer comparison among first-semester students in an international class. The quantitative data measured levels and relationships between anxiety, peer comparison, and coping strategies, while the qualitative reflections explored students’ experiences and perceived support in managing English-related anxiety.

The participants were 38 first-semester students enrolled in an international class at a private university in Bali. All were taking English-medium courses for the first time and participated voluntarily with informed consent. Participation was confidential, and no identifying information was collected. Participants’ previous English learning experiences (e.g., school type) and language background (native, bilingual/mixed, non-native) were recorded to explore potential differences in English communication anxiety.

Data were collected using the English Communication Anxiety and Peer Comparison

Questionnaire, developed based on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope’s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Theory and Festinger’s (1954) Social Comparison Theory. Although both frameworks were introduced several decades ago, they remain highly relevant and widely applied in recent studies on second language learning and educational psychology. Horwitz’s model explains the emotional and cognitive reactions that interfere with communication in a second language, while Festinger’s theory addresses self-evaluation through peer comparison, which is an important process in international classrooms where proficiency levels vary.

To ensure contextual relevance, several items were adapted to fit the experiences of first-semester international students. The questionnaire was bilingual, with English items followed by Indonesian translations, and the translation–back translation procedure (Brislin, 1986) ensured conceptual accuracy. The instrument consisted of six sections: background information (including previous English learning experiences and language background), English communication anxiety (8 items), peer comparison (4 items), support and coping (3 items), and three open-ended reflection questions. Likert-scale items used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Expert review confirmed content validity, and a pilot test with ten students yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.87, indicating strong reliability.

Questionnaires were administered during class and took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) to summarize participants’ characteristics, including language background, and Pearson correlation to examine relationships among variables. Where relevant, differences in English communication anxiety across language background groups were explored. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis to identify patterns in students’ experiences, including sources of anxiety, peer influence, and supportive teaching practices.

All ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent, were carefully maintained. Students were informed that participation would not affect their academic performance and that their responses would be used only for research purposes.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Finding**

#### **Instrument Testing**

The research instrument consisted of three variables, namely peer comparison (5 items), support and coping (3 items), and English communication anxiety (8 items). Validity was tested using Pearson item–total correlations with a cut-off criterion of  $r > 0.30$ . The results showed that all items had correlation coefficients ranging from 0.386 to 0.911, indicating that all items were valid and could be used in the study.

Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. The coefficients obtained were 0.769 for peer comparison, 0.726 for support and coping, and 0.918 for English communication anxiety. A summary of the reliability test results is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Results of Instrument Reliability Testing**

<b>No</b>	<b>Variabel</b>	<b>Jumlah</b>	<b>Cronbach’s</b>	<b>Keterangan</b>

		Item	Alpha	
1	Pair Comparison (X <sub>1</sub> )	5	0,769	Reliabel
2	Support and Coping (X <sub>2</sub> )	3	0,726	Reliabel
5	English Communication Anxiety (Y)	8	0,918	Reliabel

(Source: primary data, processed in 2025)

### Descriptive Statistics

This study involved 38 respondents with complete data (N = 38; no missing data). The descriptive statistics for each variable are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables**  
Statistics

	english communication anxiety	peer comparison	support and coping
N			
Valid	38	38	38
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	21.1842	13.2368	12.2895
Median	21.5000	13.0000	13.0000
Mode	16.00 <sup>a</sup>	11.00 <sup>a</sup>	13.00 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation	7.74197	4.41395	2.35851
Variance	59.938	19.483	5.563
Range	28.00	18.00	8.00
Minimum	8.00	5.00	7.00
Maximum	36.00	23.00	15.00
Sum	805.00	503.00	467.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The table presents the mean, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score for each variable. The mean score for English communication anxiety was 21.18 (SD = 7.74), with a minimum score of 8 and a maximum score of 36. The mean score for peer comparison was 13.24 (SD = 4.41), with a score range of 5–23. Meanwhile, support and coping had a mean of 12.29 (SD = 2.36), with a score range of 7–15.

### Assumption Testing

Before conducting the regression analysis, the basic assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were examined.

The normality of residuals was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200 (> 0.05), indicating that the residuals were normally distributed.

The multicollinearity test showed tolerance values of 0.905 and VIF values of 1.105 for both independent variables, indicating no multicollinearity problems (tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10).

The heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test produced significance values of 0.088 for peer comparison and 0.252 for support and coping (> 0.05). These results were also supported by the random pattern of points around the zero line in the scatterplot. Thus, the regression model met the assumption of homoscedasticity.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to examine the relationships between

the independent variables and the dependent variable. A summary of the correlation results is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Pearson Correlations between the Independent Variables and English Communication Anxiety Correlations**

		Peer comparison	English Communication Anxiety
Peer Comparison	Pearson Correlation	1	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	38	38
English Communication Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.600**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	38	38

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the analysis showed a significant positive relationship between peer comparison and English communication anxiety ( $r = 0.600$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Conversely, support and coping showed a significant negative relationship with English communication anxiety ( $r = -0.493$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

#### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

To examine the simultaneous effects of peer comparison and support and coping on English communication anxiety, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The resulting regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 23.431 + 0.868X_1 - 1.118X_2$$

where  $Y$  = English communication anxiety,  $X_1$  = peer comparison, and  $X_2$  = support and coping.

The F-test indicated that the regression model was significant overall, with  $F(2, 35) = 15.192$  and  $p = 0.000$ . The values  $R = 0.682$  and  $R^2 = 0.465$  show that 46.5% of the variance in English communication anxiety can be explained by the combination of peer comparison and support and coping, while the remaining 53.5% is accounted for by other factors outside the model.

The full regression coefficients are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Results Predicting English Communication Anxiety**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.682 <sup>a</sup>	.465	.434	5.82397

a. Predictors: (Constant), support and coping, peer comparison

#### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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	Regression	1030.560	2	515.280	15.192	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1	Residual	1187.150	35	33.919		
	Total	2217.711	37			

a. Dependent Variable: english communication anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), support and coping, peer comparison

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	23.431	6.873		3.409	.002
peer comparison	.868	.228	.495	3.807	.001
support and coping	-1.118	.427	-.341	-2.620	.013

a. Dependent Variable: english communication anxiety

Based on Table 4, the unstandardised regression coefficient for peer comparison is 0.868, with  $t = 3.807$  and  $p = 0.001$ . The unstandardised regression coefficient for support and coping is  $-1.118$ , with  $t = -2.620$  and  $p = 0.013$ . Both coefficients are significant at the 5% significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussion

This study examined the relationships between peer comparison, support and coping, and English communication anxiety among first-semester students in an international class at a private university in Bali. Overall, the findings confirm that English communication anxiety is an important issue in this EMI context and that it is closely linked to how students compare themselves with their peers and to the support and coping resources they perceive. The study therefore supports the view that affective factors are central rather than peripheral in international-class learning environments. For first-semester students in particular, the emotional demands of speaking English appear to be intertwined with the academic and social demands of entering university. These results reinforce the argument that EMI policies must be considered not only in terms of access and curriculum, but also in terms of students' emotional experiences in the classroom.

The descriptive statistics indicate that students experienced a moderate level of English communication anxiety, with scores ranging from very low to quite high. Given that these students were in their first semester of an English-medium programme, this pattern is unsurprising because they were simultaneously adjusting to university life and to an English-dominant learning environment. This aligns with the FLCA literature, which consistently reports that speaking and performance in front of others are particularly anxiety provoking for learners in formal educational settings (Horwitz et al., 1986; Lizarte Simón et al., 2024; Shang & Ma, 2024). In EMI classes, where language and content demands coincide, such anxiety may be even more pronounced for students who do not see themselves as strong English users. The present findings therefore echo previous work suggesting that EMI has the potential to amplify existing anxieties rather than merely offering a neutral medium for learning content.

The first key finding is the significant positive correlation between peer comparison

and English communication anxiety, with peer comparison also emerging as a significant positive predictor in the regression model ( $r = 0.600$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $B = 0.868$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This suggests that students who frequently compare their English abilities with those of their classmates tend to report higher levels of anxiety. The result is consistent with Social Comparison Theory, which posits that upward comparison with similar or slightly superior peers can generate psychological pressure and negative self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954; Rijsman, 1974). It also supports studies in EMI and EFL contexts which show that peer-related evaluative concerns intensify foreign language anxiety and may reduce willingness to communicate (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Aizawa et al., 2023; Bae, 2024). Taken together, these findings indicate that peer comparison is not a neutral background process but a key process through which anxiety develops in the international-class setting.

In the present study, the international class brought together students with very different linguistic histories, including those with prior experience in international or bilingual schools and those whose exposure to English had been largely textbook based. Under such conditions, highly proficient and confident speakers may become an implicit benchmark for others even if teachers do not explicitly highlight them. For first-semester students who perceive themselves as “behind,” frequent upward comparison is likely to heighten fears of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, which in turn discourages them from speaking. This helps to explain why peer comparison showed a relatively strong association with anxiety and a moderate standardised regression coefficient. It also suggests that, if not carefully managed, the “international” character of the class may unintentionally widen rather than close gaps in participation and confidence.

The second key finding concerns support and coping, which showed a significant negative correlation with English communication anxiety and a significant negative regression coefficient ( $r = -0.493$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $B = -1.118$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ). Students who perceived higher levels of support and felt they had coping resources tended to report lower anxiety. This is in line with studies that highlight the protective role of teacher–student rapport, peer support, and positive classroom climate in reducing foreign language anxiety and promoting engagement (Li & Li, 2024; Zhang, 2023; Xu et al., 2025). In collectivist contexts such as Indonesia, where concerns about face and social harmony are prominent, feeling supported and understood by teachers and peers may be especially important in making it “safe” to take communicative risks in English. The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that emotional and social support are not optional additions but core components of effective EMI pedagogy.

The qualitative responses to the open-ended questions add more detail to these statistical patterns and show how students themselves experience anxiety, peer influence, and support in the international class. In relation to sources of anxiety, many students reported that they did not feel discouraged and even described the international class as motivating, although a smaller group mentioned feeling nervous or overwhelmed in the first weeks, especially when they struggled with vocabulary, grammar, or understanding course content in English. This combination of motivation and anxiety is also reported in previous studies on EMI and EFL learners, where students often describe English-medium settings as both challenging and encouraging at the same time (Dafouz & López-Serrano, 2025; Oraif & Alrashed, 2022). When asked what lecturers could do, students frequently suggested

speaking more slowly and clearly, using simpler language, creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere, giving more chances for speaking practice, and correcting mistakes gently rather than in a harsh or public way. These suggestions are in line with research that highlights teacher clarity, supportive feedback, and low-anxiety classroom climates as key conditions for reducing foreign language anxiety (Khatami et al., 2025; F. Wang et al., 2025).

Furthermore, their answers about classmates highlighted the importance of encouragement, not laughing at errors, not judging grammar or pronunciation, and using English more often inside and outside class while offering friendly correction when needed. This emphasis on peer behaviour echoes studies that show peers can act as both a source of anxiety and a source of emotional support in language learning (Chen et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025b; Myhre et al., 2023). Taken together, these themes show that students are very aware of the social dimension of anxiety and see both teachers and peers as key actors in making English communication feel either threatening or manageable, which supports previous findings on the social nature of language anxiety in classroom settings (An et al., 2024; Gu, 2023; Janesarvatan & Asoodar, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). They also illustrate that students are not only passive recipients of EMI policies but have clear views about the kinds of interaction and classroom practices that help them cope.

At the same time, the regression results indicate that support and coping, while significant, do not fully offset the impact of peer comparison. Both predictors together accounted for 46.5% of the variance in English communication anxiety, which is substantial but leaves more than half of the variance unexplained. This pattern is consistent with models of language anxiety that view it as the product of multiple interacting factors, including individual, classroom, and institutional influences (Gao, 2022; Liu et al., 2025a). It implies that other elements such as individual proficiency, personality traits like introversion or perfectionism, prior EMI experience, assessment practices, and broader institutional messages about “global standards” are also likely to shape students’ anxiety levels, as suggested in previous work on foreign language anxiety and EMI discourses (Althewini, 2025; Yu et al., 2024). From a pedagogical standpoint, this means that simply encouraging students or offering general emotional support is not sufficient. Previous studies likewise argue that lowering anxiety requires not only supportive attitudes but also changes to classroom practices and assessment norms (Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021; Y. Wang, 2024). Teachers and programme designers therefore need to address the structures and routines that reinforce unhelpful comparison, such as repeatedly spotlighting the same highly proficient students or implicitly equating fluency with academic worth, patterns that have been noted in other highly competitive language-learning environments.

These findings have several implications for the design of international classes in Indonesia. First, they suggest that explicit attention should be paid to how students talk about ability and progress in class. Classroom activities that acknowledge different learning paces, emphasise effort rather than fixed ability, and promote cooperation instead of competition may help guide peer comparison in a more constructive way. Second, teacher development in EMI programmes should include components on affective support, error-friendly feedback, and ways to distribute participation more evenly so that less confident students have structured opportunities to speak without feeling constantly evaluated. Third, institutions may wish to monitor how “international” branding is communicated to students,

ensuring that it does not inadvertently create unrealistic expectations that intensify anxiety among those who do not fit the imagined “global” profile. In combination, these strategies may help to create international classes that are not only linguistically rich but also emotionally sustainable for first-semester students.

Finally, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was relatively small and drawn from a single international class in one private university, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. The study was cross-sectional and relied on self-report measures, so causal interpretations should be made with caution and the possibility of reporting bias cannot be ruled out. In addition, only two predictor variables were included in the regression model, and the support and coping scale contained a limited number of items, which may have constrained the scope of the analysis. Future research could employ larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and richer qualitative data to capture changes in anxiety and comparison processes over time, and could examine additional factors such as actual proficiency, classroom interaction patterns, and institutional policies. Despite these limitations, the present study provides initial empirical evidence that peer comparison and perceived support and coping are important correlates of English communication anxiety among first-semester international class students in Indonesia, and it highlights the need to address both social comparison and classroom ecology when designing EMI learning environments.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored English communication anxiety among first-semester students in an international class at a private university in Bali, focusing on peer comparison and support and coping. The findings show that anxiety is a meaningful concern in this EMI context and is linked to how often students compare their English abilities with classmates and how much support and coping they perceive. Peer comparison was positively associated with anxiety, whereas support and coping were negatively associated, and the qualitative data showed that students feel both motivated and worried and value clear explanations, a relaxed atmosphere, encouragement, and gentle correction.

These results suggest that EMI programmes need to attend to the emotional and social sides of classroom life, not only to curriculum and language goals. Teachers and programme designers should look for ways to reduce harmful comparison and strengthen supportive practices so that first-semester students feel safer speaking English. The study is limited by its small, single-site sample, cross-sectional design, and narrow set of predictors, so the findings cannot be generalised widely. Future research with larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal or classroom-based data would help to clarify how peer comparison, support, and anxiety evolve over time in Indonesian international classes.

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