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COPING MECHANISMS OF BIABAS TRADE HIGH SCHOOL GRADE 7 STUDENTS IN DEALING WITH ENGLISH COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences, communication challenges, and coping mechanisms of Grade 7 students confronting English language barriers at Biabas Trade High School during the school year 2026–2027. Anchored in Tarone's Conscious Communication Strategies Theory, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the investigation

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utilized purposive sampling to select fifteen (15) transitioning junior high school participants. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed three core themes: (1) Employing Strategic Communication Devices and Social Scaffolding, characterized by code-switching (English, Tagalog, and Bisaya), non-verbal gestures, word simplification, and immediate peer-translation networks during graded recitations; (2) Navigating Affective Apprehension and Transitional Stress, driven by glossophobia, fear of peer ridicule and teacher correction, vocabulary deficits, and the abrupt shift from mother-tongue primary instruction to an English-dominant secondary curriculum; and (3) Recognizing the Value of Peer Support, Intentional Practice, and Affective Resilience, highlighting students' self-directed habit formation, independent vocabulary building, and cognitive reframing of language errors as natural developmental stages. The study concludes that overcoming communication distress requires moving beyond individual adaptation toward low-anxiety classroom environments and institutional support systems. Grounded in DepEd learning recovery and child protection mandates, actionable recommendations include establishing collaborative peer-scaffolding circles, utilizing low-stakes interactive speaking tasks, enhancing teacher professional development on affective filters, and developing localized instructional modules tailored to vocational and rural secondary schools.

Keywords: *English Communication Difficulties, Coping Mechanisms, Lived Experiences, Affective Filter, Code-Switching, Peer Scaffolding, Secondary Education, Biabas Trade High School*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language barriers and communication difficulties play a major role in the academic struggles and personal development of secondary students, and these experiences are heavily influenced by students' specific knowledge, attitudes, and daily lived experiences (Mariñas et al., 2024; Barcelo et al., 2024). Effective English communication skills are consciously utilized to excel in academic environments, build positive peer interactions, and minimize classroom anxieties at the foundational junior high school level. Effective language acquisition is the ability of students to manage their own learning challenges, overcome grammatical or vocabulary deficiencies, and build consistent habits in practicing verbal, written, listening, and reading skills. It also promotes active classroom participation and personal responsibility in mastering academic fluency. By understanding these experiences, local educators, school administrators, and language teachers can better support learners in developing effective and practical ways of managing daily linguistic challenges.

The value of identifying and understanding communication coping mechanisms lies in their ability to improve academic performance and student confidence. Though many students are aware of basic grammar rules, some still encounter deep challenges in mastering proper English communication within their classrooms. While effective language use leads to better comprehension and higher academic achievement, the lack of conversational practice or deep vocabulary exposure may result in limited academic development. Some learners may rely too much on passive silence or become discouraged when classroom recitation expectations are demanding, which negatively affects their participation. Furthermore, in secondary institutions like Biabas Trade High School (BTHS), this issue is heavily influenced by students' specific prior knowledge, linguistic backgrounds, and daily lived experiences.

Previous studies have reported that language exposure and instructional support heavily affect communication behavior (Treyes et al., 2023), that inadequate vocabulary awareness leads to reduced academic efficiency (Nafiz et al., 2023), and that persistent communication difficulties contribute to severe classroom anxiety (Shah, 2022). However, these studies mainly focused on socio-behavioral assessments or quantitative metrics, leaving a distinct research gap regarding the qualitative, personal, and lived coping experiences of Grade 7 students in technical-vocational high school communities.

The primary goal of this study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of BTHS Grade 7 students regarding their English communication difficulties. It aimed to determine how daily classroom routines, personal attitudes, and localized challenges contribute to their academic behavior, and to identify specific areas that need urgent pedagogical improvement. Through this research, school stakeholders and language educators may discover practical, school-based solutions and insights that can enhance English language program implementation and strengthen student confidence within the school setting.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily on frameworks that emphasize psychological stress adaptation, affective variables, social scaffolding, and strategic communication. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) and Carver et al.'s Multidimensional Coping Theory (1989) highlight the role of cognitive appraisal and of active versus avoidant behavioral dimensions as critical for managing classroom linguistic threats. This is complemented by Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which stresses the importance of emotional variables, such as low anxiety and self-confidence, for successful output generation, alongside Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), which guides how students approach language blocks. Furthermore, Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) details how collaborative scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development helps bridge language gaps, while Elaine Tarone's Conscious Communication Strategies Theory (1980) informs the practical study of observable devices, such as approximation and non-verbal gestures, used to navigate vocabulary limitations.

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Legal and Regulatory Context and the Sustainable Development Goals

The legal and instructional context for secondary-level language instruction and learner welfare in the Philippines is established through several key policies. The 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article XIV, Section 7) mandates the use of English as an official language of instruction, creating the foundational structural requirement that necessitates secondary language competence. This is reinforced by Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), which outlines the linguistic transition from primary mother-tongue schooling into an English-dominant secondary curriculum, and by the Education Act of 1982 (Batas Pambansa Blg. 232), which guarantees students' rights to quality instruction that supports their full intellectual growth. While DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 (Child Protection Policy) safeguards learners from emotional harshness or discrimination related to speaking performance, recent post-pandemic mandates under the DepEd National Learning Recovery Plan (DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2023) and the Global Competency Framework (DepEd Memo No. 042, s. 2021) explicitly require public secondary institutions to track, support, and remedy student learning gaps and communication anxieties.

Beyond national mandates, this instructional and protective environment directly operationalizes international human capital commitments articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, it advances SDG 4 (Quality Education) by targeting Target 4.1 (free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant learning outcomes) and Target 4. a (building inclusive, safe, and learner-centered school environments) (United Nations, 2015). Addressing communicative distress and language learning gaps also intersects with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), specifically Target 3.4 regarding mental health and psychological welfare, by mitigating classroom-induced language anxiety and socio-emotional isolation in language-learning spaces. Together, these frameworks situate Filipino secondary language education at the intersection of constitutional mandates, institutional welfare guarantees, and sustainable global developmental standards.

Related Literature and Studies

The review of related literature and studies provides strong empirical support and context, particularly within the shifting dynamics of secondary basic education. Contemporary studies by El Zahra and Ciptaningrum (2025) and Raja Yacob and Razak (2025) affirm the importance of self-regulation and intentional preparation among young language learners, linking proactive coping mechanisms directly to diminished communication apprehension.

The research also shows that adaptive strategy choice is highly contextual (Licaros et al., 2024; Pabro-Maquidato, 2025), with effective strategies including social methods such as peer translation circles (Compomayor et al., 2024), vocabulary tools (Reyes et al., 2022), and active teacher encouragement (Ca-as & Escandallo, 2024). Specifically, localized data on secondary language anxiety (Bordios et al., 2024; Grapa & Libago, 2024) validate that when public school classrooms move away from rigid, punitive correction toward task-based interaction, students' affective filters drop, allowing them to utilize communicative strategies that build long-term fluency and confidence.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the coping mechanisms of Grade 7 students in dealing with English communication difficulties at BTHS during the school year 2026–2027. The participants of this study were the Grade 7 students of BTHS, whose experiences and perspectives were examined to gain a deeper understanding of language barriers and to provide insights for improving freshman language adaptation and instructional support programs.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do BTHS Grade 7 students describe their lived experiences regarding coping mechanisms used in facing English communication difficulties?
2. What challenges contribute to the English communication difficulties encountered by BTHS Grade 7 students?

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3. What realizations have BTHS Grade 7 students gained from their experiences in deploying coping mechanisms against English communication difficulties?
4. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance support programs and language interventions for Grade 7 students at BTHS?

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of BTHS Grade 7 students in dealing with English communication difficulties. Specifically, it sought to:

1. explore the daily lived experiences of Grade 7 students concerning English communication difficulties at BTHS;
2. identify the specific linguistic, academic, psychological, and social challenges that Grade 7 students encounter when dealing with English communication difficulties in their school environment;
3. understand the realizations, cognitive reflections, and shifts in perspective that Grade 7 students have gained from their experiences with coping mechanisms for English communication difficulties; and
4. gather and analyze the localized coping strategies and recommendations proposed by Grade 7 students to overcome language barriers and foster effective communication skills at BTHS.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders by uncovering the active behavioral, psychological, and social adjustments made by transitioning freshman students. The findings are expected to benefit the following groups:

Department of Education (DepEd). The findings may provide qualitative data to guide the enrichment of secondary language recovery roadmaps, helping curriculum developers design speaking modules that align with students' natural coping techniques.

Biabas Trade High School (BTHS) Administrators. This study can serve as a diagnostic baseline for school heads to create speech clubs, peer-scaffolding circles, or updated orientation handbooks that help freshmen settle into an English-medium environment.

School Administrators (Principal). The results can guide the principal in allocating institutional resources for modern vocabulary tools, audio-visual reading aids, and targeted teacher-training seminars centered on reducing classroom language stress.

Teachers. The research will provide educators with deep insights into why students resort to silence or code-switching, enabling them to design low-stress questioning strategies, adopt flexible speech rules, and form empathetic classroom environments.

Students. By recognizing their peers' shared challenges, Grade 7 students can reduce self-stigma regarding language errors, discover practical communication devices, and build self-efficacy during graded class recitations.

Parents. This study can help parents realize the psychological hurdles their children face when shifting to high school English, prompting them to provide positive reinforcement and home-based practice opportunities without harsh judgment.

Academic Researchers. The execution of this research adds localized qualitative evidence to the fields of psycholinguistics and early adolescent adaptation, enhancing the research team's conceptual mastery of thematic analysis and data organization.

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Future Researchers. This paper will serve as a valuable reference and structural template for scholars investigating English as a second language (ESL) anxieties or student coping mechanisms in rural, vocational, or trade-centric public schools.

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METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. This approach was chosen to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of students' personal experiences and perspectives on their learning strategies. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to capture rich, descriptive data on how translation, code-switching, and collaborative peer dialogues affect students' language ability, which would be difficult to quantify through other methods.

Research Environment

The research was conducted at Biabas Trade High School, a public secondary vocational school in Ubay, Bohol. This environment was the specific context for the study, and all data collection activities were carried out on the school premises. This ensured that the study was directly relevant to the experiences of the students within their own school environment.

Participants of the Study

The participants were a group of fifteen (15) Grade 7 students from BTHS. They were chosen using a purposive sampling method to ensure that every participant had first-hand experience of communication blocks, vocabulary limits, and speaking anxiety in English. This technique helped to target key behavioral adaptations and provided an objective representation of language coping styles within the freshman student body.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool for this research was a semi-structured interview guide. The questions in the guide were carefully crafted to delve into the students' experiences with three key learning strategies: code-switching, peer collaboration, and strategic gestures. The flexible nature of this instrument allowed the researchers to ask follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of each student's unique experience with language learning and stress management.

Data-Gathering Procedure

The research followed a systematic process to ensure ethical standards and data validity.

Phase 1. Securing Approval and Identifying Participants. First, a formal letter was sent to the principal of BTHS to obtain official permission to conduct the study. After approval was received, the researchers coordinated with the Grade 7 English teachers to identify the fifteen (15) student participants through purposive selection.

Phase 2. Informed Consent and Interviews. Once the participants were selected, they were provided with an informed consent form for their parents or guardians to sign, alongside a student assent form since the participants were minors. Individual, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were then scheduled at a convenient time and private location within the school premises, such as the guidance center. Each interview was audio-recorded with the explicit permission of the student and guardian. The researchers followed the interview guide to ensure consistency while also allowing for spontaneous questions to gain a more thorough understanding of the participants' experiences with language learning.

Phase 3. Transcription. Following the completion of all interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and key insights related to the research questions. The findings from this analysis were used to draw qualitative conclusions and to make recommendations based on the students' direct experiences with managing English language difficulties.

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Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards throughout the data-gathering process. Official permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal, and the informed consent and student assent forms clearly explained the purpose of the study, guaranteed the absolute confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' responses through the use of pseudonyms, and confirmed that participation was completely voluntary. Interviews were audio-recorded only with the explicit permission of the student and guardian.

Operational Definition of Terms

To ensure a clear, accurate, and common understanding of the key concepts, variables, and contextual terms used throughout this study, the following operational and conceptual definitions are provided. These terms are defined specifically in relation to how they are investigated, analyzed, and interpreted within the scope of this qualitative phenomenological research at Biabas Trade High School.

Biabas Trade High School (BTHS). The public secondary vocational school in Ubay, Bohol, which serves as the physical, social, and academic setting for data gathering.

Challenges. The linguistic, psychological, social, and structural obstacles encountered by the Grade 7 students of BTHS that hinder them from practicing proper English communication. This includes specific issues mentioned in their accounts, such as limited vocabulary, fear of committing grammatical errors, fear of public speaking (glossophobia), lack of conversational confidence, and peer pressure or fear of teasing.

Coping Mechanisms. The conscious behavioral adjustments, social actions, and mental tricks, such as code-switching, peer consultation, and utilizing context gestures, used by students to lower their language anxiety.

English Communication Difficulties. The expressive and receptive obstacles, such as limited vocabulary, sentence construction issues, and public-speaking apprehension, experienced by freshmen during class activities.

Grade 7 Students. The newly transitioned junior high school learners officially enrolled at BTHS who serve as the primary informants of the study.

Realizations. The insights, cognitive shifts, and linguistic or academic awareness that the students have gained over time as a result of experiencing or observing communication breakdowns in the classroom. This includes their understanding of the direct consequences of poor language proficiency, such as academic struggles, difficulty in expressing ideas clearly, feelings of inadequacy, and the importance of active practice.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, analysis, and interpretation of the qualitative data gathered from the participants regarding the coping mechanisms of BTHS Grade 7 students in dealing with English communication difficulties. Thematic analysis was utilized to organize, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns, core meanings, and insights from the participants' responses. The presentation is structured around the Statement of the Problem, examining the lived experiences of Grade 7 students as they deploy adaptive communication strategies, the cognitive, affective, and structural challenges that trigger language anxiety, and their realizations regarding peer collaboration, personal resilience, and continuous language practice. Through a thorough examination of the interview transcripts, three major themes emerged that capture the adaptive language behaviors of transitioning high school learners.

Theme 1. Employing Strategic Communication Devices and Social Scaffolding

The first theme highlights how Grade 7 students at BTHS actively utilize tactical coping mechanisms to bridge vocabulary and expressive gaps during English-instructional activities. Participants described a reliance on strategic communication devices, particularly code-switching between English, Tagalog, and Bisaya, utilizing non-verbal cues (such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language), and simplifying their word choices to convey basic meaning. Furthermore, students leverage social scaffolding by seeking immediate translation assistance from peers or asking teachers for clarification when faced with complex English prompts.

Dimensions of the Theme

Three strands run through the first theme. The first is the use of code-switching, in which students mix Bisaya or Tagalog words into their English when vocabulary runs short. The second is the use of non-verbal cues and simplified word choices to convey basic meaning. The third is social scaffolding, in which students turn to peers for immediate translation or ask teachers for clarification. The excerpts below illustrate these strands.

Several participants detailed their immediate behavioral responses when encountering language blocks during classroom interactions. One participant shared:

> **P1:** "When I run out of English words during recitation, I mix Bisaya or Tagalog words so I can still finish explaining my answer to the teacher. Switching to my native language keeps me from freezing in front of the class."

Another participant emphasized how non-verbal cues and peer assistance serve as operational buffers during recitations:

> **P2:** "Whenever I don't understand the English question, I immediately whisper to my seatmate for a quick translation or use hand gestures to express myself. Having a classmate help translate the question helps me respond correctly."

The responses indicate that Grade 7 students do not remain entirely passive when encountering language hurdles; instead, they deploy compensatory strategies to sustain communication. Code-switching and non-verbal gestures allow learners to maintain conversational flow and demonstrate subject comprehension despite limited English vocabulary. Peer collaboration acts as an immediate safety net, lowering affective distress and enabling students to participate in classroom discourse.

The participants' accounts strongly support the theme because they consistently describe deliberate strategic devices, reliance on native language resources, and peer-assisted problem-solving during English activities. Their reflections illustrate how transitioning secondary students manage expressional limitations.

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Discussion

These findings align with Elaine Tarone's Conscious Communication Strategies Theory (1980), which posits that learners use approximation, circumlocution, language-switching, and non-verbal signals to bridge gaps between communicative intent and linguistic capability. Furthermore, the results support Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), as peer translation and teacher clarification demonstrate how social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) scaffolds language performance. Regionally, these empirical findings mirror those of Licaros et al. (2024), Compomayor et al. (2024), and Pabro-Maquidato (2025), who observed that Filipino secondary students frequently rely on code-switching and peer support networks to manage English communication demands.

Overall, this theme reveals that employing strategic communication devices and social scaffolding is an essential coping mechanism for Grade 7 students. By utilizing native language resources and peer assistance, learners navigate expressive boundaries and maintain active engagement in the English classroom.

In relation to the first research question, the theme shows that Grade 7 students describe their coping as active and resourceful. They do not simply fall silent when English fails them; they switch languages, gesture, simplify, and lean on classmates and teachers. These strategies keep them in the lesson, although, as the second theme shows, they are often adopted under emotional pressure.

Theme 2. Navigating Affective Apprehension and Transitional Stress

The second theme centers on the affective, cognitive, and structural challenges that trigger communication difficulties among Grade 7 students. Participants revealed that the primary source of language anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation, specifically apprehension regarding peer ridicule, teacher correction, and social embarrassment during public speaking or oral recitations. Participants also cited cognitive hurdles, such as limited English vocabulary, weak grammatical mastery, and pronunciation uncertainty. Furthermore, the abrupt transition from a mother-tongue-oriented primary curriculum to an English-dominant secondary curriculum creates structural stress, leading to self-doubt, hesitation, and occasional silence.

Dimensions of the Theme

The second theme also has three dimensions, which the participants experienced together rather than separately. The first is affective: the fear of negative evaluation, including peer ridicule, teacher correction, and embarrassment during recitation. The second is cognitive: limited vocabulary, weak grammatical mastery, and uncertainty in pronunciation. The third is structural: the abrupt move from a mother-tongue-oriented primary curriculum to an English-dominant secondary curriculum. The excerpts below show how these dimensions appear in the participants' own words.

Participants detailed the psychological toll and fear of judgment experienced during English lessons:

> **P3:** "I feel very nervous during unexpected oral recitations because I worry about making grammar mistakes or mispronouncing words in front of my classmates. My mind goes blank when everyone looks at me."

> **P4:** "During group work, I hesitate to share my ideas in English because some classmates make face expressions or laugh when someone speaks broken English. That makes me prefer to stay quiet."

Another participant highlighted the transitional burden experienced upon entering secondary school:

> **P5:** "The transition from our elementary language rules to high school English expectations gives me fear that my peers will laugh if I speak wrong English. High school feels much stricter, which increases my worry about making mistakes."

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These statements illustrate the impact of affective barriers on language output. High levels of language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation create an emotional block that prevents students from converting receptive knowledge into spoken or written communication. When classrooms lack a supportive atmosphere, students resort to avoidant coping mechanisms, such as withholding answers, refusing to raise their hands, or isolating themselves during group tasks.

The quotations strongly support the theme as they repeatedly detail speech apprehension, fear of peer judgment, vocabulary deficits, and transitional anxiety. The participants' experiences demonstrate that emotional and environmental factors significantly influence students' willingness to communicate in English.

Discussion

The findings are supported by Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which asserts that high anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of failure raise an emotional barrier that inhibits language acquisition and production. Additionally, the results reflect Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) and Carver et al.'s Multidimensional Coping Theory (1989) regarding how threats to social esteem trigger avoidant coping behaviors. Nationally, these findings align with studies by Bordios et al. (2024), Grapa and Libago (2024), and Ca-as and Escandallo (2024), which documented that fear of negative evaluation and transitional language shock remain primary causes of communication apprehension among public high school freshmen in the Philippines.

Overall, this theme demonstrates that affective apprehension, linguistic gaps, and transitional stress present notable hurdles to English communication. Addressing these challenges requires creating low-anxiety classroom environments, implementing positive reinforcement, and providing structured language transition support.

In relation to the second research question, the theme shows that the challenges behind English communication difficulties are not only linguistic. Vocabulary and grammar gaps matter, but they are amplified by fear of judgment and by the structural shock of moving to an English-dominant curriculum. This is why the students' difficulties cannot be explained by a lack of intellectual capability alone, and why remedies that address vocabulary without addressing classroom climate are likely to fall short.

Theme 3. Recognizing the Value of Peer Support, Intentional Practice, and Affective Resilience

The third theme emphasizes the realizations, mindset shifts, and long-term coping strategies developed by Grade 7 students as they adapt to the English communication demands of secondary education. Participants reflected on how navigating language difficulties heightened their awareness of the importance of peer support, realizing that collaborative, non-judgmental study groups reduce speech apprehension. Furthermore, students recognized that developing communication confidence requires intentional self-practice outside school hours, such as reading English books, watching educational videos, practicing pronunciation privately, and building vocabulary lists. Crucially, learners developed affective resilience, coming to view language errors not as personal failures, but as natural steps in mastering a second language.

Dimensions of the Theme

The third theme likewise has three dimensions. The first is the recognition that supportive, non-judgmental peers make speaking easier. The second is the realization that confidence grows through intentional practice outside school hours, such as reading, vocabulary building, and private pronunciation practice. The third is affective resilience, in which students come to view mistakes as a natural part of learning a second language. The excerpts below illustrate these dimensions.

Participants shared key insights regarding their personal growth and evolved study habits:

> **P6:** "I realized that peer support is essential; having helpful classmates who correct my English without judgment gives me the courage to speak more. Working with supportive friends makes English less intimidating."

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> **P7:** "To become a better speaker, I realized I need to change my study habits by practicing English at home. Reading books and listing unfamiliar vocabulary words helped me improve my confidence in class."

Another participant articulated their shift toward affective resilience and self-acceptance:

> **P8:** "Language anxiety drops when you practice reading and speaking at home; making mistakes is just part of learning how to become a confident speaker. I learned not to let fear of mistakes stop me from trying."

The responses indicate that Grade 7 students at BTHS undergo meaningful cognitive and emotional development throughout their freshman year. By reframing language mistakes as learning opportunities, engaging in self-directed vocabulary building, and relying on peer encouragement, students cultivate academic self-efficacy. They transition from avoidant behaviors toward active, self-regulated coping strategies that foster long-term language growth.

The participants' statements firmly support the theme by illustrating appreciation for peer collaboration, commitment to self-directed practice, habit modification, and the development of affective resilience. Their reflections provide insights into how transitioning secondary students overcome language anxiety.

Discussion

These findings align with Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), which explains how mastery experiences, vicarious peer modeling, and reduced emotional arousal build an individual's belief in their capability to execute target behaviors. Legally and instructionally, these outcomes reflect the core objectives of Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), the DepEd National Learning Recovery Plan (DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2023), and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, which mandate that public secondary schools foster supportive, child-friendly learning environments that reduce learning anxiety and enhance student communicative competence.

Overall, this theme reveals that Grade 7 students develop strategic resilience and self-directed coping mechanisms over time. By leveraging peer support, committing to independent language practice, and cultivating emotional resilience, transitioning learners build the confidence required to navigate English communication challenges in high school.

In relation to the third research question, the theme shows that the students have drawn constructive lessons from their difficulties. They value supportive peers, commit to practice outside school, and reframe errors as normal. These realizations mark a shift from avoidant toward self-regulated coping.

Integrated Discussion of the Themes in Relation to the Research Objectives

Taken together, the three themes address the research objectives of the study. Table 2 summarizes how each theme relates to the objectives and to the principal theoretical anchor used in its interpretation.

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Table 2. Relationship of the Themes to the Research Objectives

Theme	Research Objective Addressed	Core Meaning	Principal Theoretical Anchor
Theme 1. Employing Strategic Communication Devices and Social Scaffolding	Objective 1: daily lived experiences of coping with English communication difficulties	Students deploy code-switching, non-verbal cues, word simplification, and peer or teacher assistance to keep communicating	Tarone (1980); Vygotsky (1978)
Theme 2. Navigating Affective Apprehension and Transitional Stress	Objective 2: linguistic, academic, psychological, and social challenges	Fear of negative evaluation, vocabulary and grammar gaps, and the shift to an English-dominant curriculum produce hesitation and silence	Krashen (1982); Lazarus & Folkman (1984); Carver et al. (1989)
Theme 3. Recognizing the Value of Peer Support, Intentional Practice, and Affective Resilience	Objective 3: realizations, cognitive reflections, and shifts in perspective	Students value supportive peers, practice independently, and reframe errors as natural steps in learning	Bandura (1997)

Read together, the themes show that the same classroom circumstances produce both difficulty and growth. The strategies in Theme 1 are partly a response to the pressures in Theme 2, and the realizations in Theme 3 describe what students learn from living through both. Objective 4, which concerns the coping strategies and recommendations proposed by the students, draws on all three themes and is taken up in the recommendations.

Two tensions run through the themes. The first is between adaptive and avoidant coping. Code-switching, gestures, and peer translation keep students engaged, whereas silence and withdrawal protect them from embarrassment but limit practice. The second is between individual effort and institutional support. Students rely on personal determination and peer help, yet the study concludes that overcoming communication distress requires moving beyond individual adaptation toward low-anxiety classroom environments and institutional support systems.

The theories reviewed illuminate different parts of this picture. Tarone's (1980) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories explain the strategies and supports in the first theme. Krashen's (1982) hypothesis and the stress and coping models of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Carver et al. (1989) explain the barriers and avoidant responses in the second. Bandura's (1997) theory explains the growth in confidence in the third. The legal and policy frameworks reviewed earlier, particularly Republic Act No. 10533 and the DepEd child protection and learning recovery mandates, supply the institutional context in which these experiences take place.

Implications of the Findings

For Grade 7 students, the findings suggest that the strategies they already use, such as code-switching, gestures, and peer consultation, are legitimate and effective ways of coping, and that practice outside school and reframing mistakes can strengthen their confidence. Recognizing that peers share these challenges may also reduce self-stigma about language errors.

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For teachers, the findings highlight the importance of classroom climate. Low-stress questioning, flexible speech rules, and supportive correction can lower students' affective filters and make it easier for them to use the strategies they already have.

For school administrators, including the principal, the findings point to resources and structures that support language growth: speech clubs, peer-scaffolding circles, vocabulary tools, reading corners, and teacher training on reducing classroom language stress.

For the Department of Education, the findings offer qualitative evidence that can inform language recovery plans and the design of speaking modules that build on students' natural coping techniques, consistent with the child protection and learning recovery mandates reviewed earlier.

For parents, the findings show the psychological hurdles that children face when shifting to high school English, and the value of positive reinforcement and home-based practice without harsh judgment.

For future researchers, the findings provide a qualitative baseline and a thematic framework that can be tested, refined, or contrasted in other schools and districts.

Directions for Future Research

This study examined the experiences of fifteen Grade 7 students in a single school, using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. As in other qualitative phenomenological work, the aim was depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization, so the findings should be read as an account of these students' experiences in this setting. Future studies may examine students in other schools, districts, and grade levels to compare coping mechanisms and identify common challenges, as also recommended below. Mixed-method or other qualitative designs may provide broader perspectives on language acquisition barriers, and studies that evaluate specific classroom interventions and language programs over time may show which supports are most effective.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Based on the responses of the participants, the following findings are drawn:

Encountering Language Barriers and Communication Pressures in Daily Classrooms. The findings revealed that Grade 7 students of BTHS commonly experience hesitation, grammatical mistakes, and difficulty expressing their thoughts in English during class discussions due to limited vocabulary and lack of conversational practice. Although many students try to translate thoughts from their native language before speaking, sudden recitation or strict classroom rules often force them to remain silent or shift to vernacular languages to maintain confidence and avoid embarrassment. The participants' responses indicate that their communication performance is strongly influenced by the fear of peer judgment and the classroom environment. These experiences demonstrate that English communication difficulties are not solely caused by a lack of intellectual capability but are also affected by psychological hurdles and social pressure within the school setting. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for supportive teaching approaches and encouraging classroom infrastructure to assist students in overcoming their English communication struggles.

Navigating Linguistic Pressures, Academic Anxiety, and Social Hesitance. The findings showed that students encounter various linguistic, psychological, and social barriers that hinder proper English communication practices. Participants reported challenges such as limited vocabulary for complex expression, fear of committing grammar errors, public speaking anxiety (glossophobia), fear of negative evaluation by peers, and a lack of confidence during recitation. These obstacles discourage students from consistently practicing English communication despite their awareness of its importance. The findings further indicate that strict grading pressures and intimidating classroom environments contribute to the continuation of communication avoidance

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practices. Overall, the study highlights that addressing both psychological and academic barriers is essential to improve language proficiency and student participation in school.

Cultivating Resilience, Academic Motivation, and Self-Correction Realizations. The findings revealed that students developed a stronger awareness of the importance of English communication proficiency after experiencing academic struggles and communication breakdowns. Participants recognized that overcoming language barriers requires personal determination, active practice, peer support, and constructive guidance from teachers. They also emphasized the importance of interactive speaking activities, supportive teacher feedback, and confidence-building exercises to encourage long-term behavioral and academic change. These realizations reflect the students' understanding that effective communication development depends on both individual effort and a nurturing classroom environment. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening student support groups and creative teaching strategies can promote more effective and confident English communication practices among Grade 7 students at BTHS.

The three findings are closely related. The first describes how students experience English communication in daily classrooms, the second describes the pressures and barriers behind that experience, and the third describes the resilience, motivation, and self-correction that students develop in response. Together they correspond to the first three research questions and form the basis for the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the coping mechanisms employed by Grade 7 students at BTHS in dealing with English communication difficulties are shaped by the combined influence of individual approaches, classroom dynamics, and external environmental factors. Although students recognize the importance of English proficiency for their academic success and future development, limitations such as vocabulary gaps, anxiety, grammar insecurities, and a lack of conversational practice continue to hinder their fluent communication. The findings further reveal that these challenges have encouraged students to rely on personal determination, peer support, and resourcefulness to navigate their language barriers. The emergence of these strategies demonstrates that overcoming communication difficulties cannot be resolved through individual effort alone, but requires supportive classroom environments, encouraging teacher guidance, and active peer cooperation.

Overall, the study affirms that enhancing students' English communication skills and coping strategies depends on strengthening interactive classroom activities, building learners' self-confidence, and fostering a supportive atmosphere within the school. These findings provide valuable insights that can guide English teachers, school administrators, and curriculum planners in designing responsive and effective language support programs for Grade 7 students at BTHS and similar educational institutions.

Specifically, the following conclusions are drawn from the findings:

1. Grade 7 students at BTHS are not passive in the face of English communication difficulties; they actively use code-switching, non-verbal gestures, word simplification, and peer or teacher assistance to keep communicating.
2. Their difficulties are linguistic and affective at once, arising from limited vocabulary, grammar insecurity, fear of peer ridicule and teacher correction, and the abrupt shift from mother-tongue instruction to an English-dominant curriculum, and are not caused by a lack of intellectual capability.
3. Experiencing and coping with these difficulties leads students to value supportive peers, to practice independently, and to reframe language errors as natural steps in learning.
4. Strengthening low-anxiety classroom environments, interactive speaking activities, and school-level support systems is necessary to complement students' individual efforts.

Conclusions 1 to 3 correspond to Objectives 1 to 3 of the study, while Conclusion 4 corresponds to Objective 4 and provides the basis for the recommendations.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study, the recommendations are the following:

1. **Department of Education (DepEd), School Division and Regional Offices.** DepEd officials should strengthen English language literacy and communication support programs that emphasize effective vocabulary building, grammar mastery, and confidence-building strategies for junior high school students. They should also improve the monitoring of English proficiency programs across secondary schools and provide technical assistance and instructional resources to English teachers in implementing interactive language learning approaches effectively. Regular evaluation of language intervention programs should be conducted to identify areas that require immediate improvement.
2. **School Principal and Administration.** The school principal should allocate sufficient funds for improving English learning facilities, language laboratory equipment, reading materials, and multimedia instructional infrastructure. Greater coordination among school departments and English language coordinators should be encouraged to ensure efficient implementation of school-wide communication enhancement programs. Strategic planning should also prioritize sustainable solutions that address the linguistic and psychological challenges experienced by Grade 7 students.
3. **English Teachers of Biabas Trade High School.** English teachers should implement consistent monitoring and guidance of student participation in speaking and writing activities within the classroom. They should organize regular interactive speaking workshops, peer mentoring sessions, and encouragement programs to reduce language anxiety. Establishing or strengthening a functional English Club and providing accessible reading corners or speech laboratories can further improve language proficiency and compliance among students.
4. **Grade 7 Students and Parents.** Students should consistently practice speaking and writing in English and actively participate in school-based language activities and communication tasks. They should cooperate with teachers' guidance and encourage their peers and classmates to adopt supportive habits that minimize fear of negative evaluation. Developing a shared sense of confidence will help students build a more supportive, encouraging, and academically engaging learning environment.
5. **Language Educators and Curriculum Developers.** Language educators and curriculum developers should use the findings of this study to develop localized instructional materials, context-specific learning modules, and student-centered English communication programs. They are encouraged to conduct extension activities and school programs that promote language awareness and confidence in rural secondary schools. Integrating these findings into the English curriculum can strengthen public and institutional understanding of student coping strategies and linguistic challenges.
6. **Future Researchers.** Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies in other secondary schools or educational districts to compare students' coping mechanisms in dealing with English communication difficulties and identify common challenges. They may also employ different qualitative or mixed-method research designs to gain broader perspectives on language acquisition barriers. Further research may focus on evaluating the effectiveness of specific classroom interventions and language programs in improving students' English communication skills over time.

Taken together, the recommendations respond to the three themes of the study and are addressed to the people and institutions best placed to act on them.

Rationale for the Recommendations

The recommendations follow from the themes of the study. The recommendations to the Department of Education and to the school principal and administration respond mainly to the structural dimension of the second theme, in which the abrupt transition to an English-dominant curriculum and the lack of institutional support add to students' stress. Monitoring, technical assistance, and adequate facilities help ensure that students receive the instructional support that the policies reviewed earlier require.

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The recommendation to English teachers responds to the first and second themes. Speaking workshops, peer mentoring, and a functional English Club give students structured, low-stakes opportunities to use the strategies they already rely on and reduce the fear of negative evaluation that drives silence.

The recommendation to Grade 7 students and parents responds to the third theme, in which students recognized the value of peer support and intentional practice. Consistent practice, supportive habits among classmates, and positive reinforcement at home help sustain the resilience that the students described.

The recommendations to language educators and curriculum developers and to future researchers respond to the need for localized materials and for further evidence. Context-specific modules suited to rural and vocational secondary schools address the research gap identified in the Introduction, and further studies in other settings can test whether the themes found here hold elsewhere.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The authors of this manuscript certify that the substance of this research is free of conflicts of interest. We attest that this investigation was carried out impartially, devoid of any financial or personal ties that may have influenced how the findings were presented or how the results were interpreted. We promise to disclose promptly any conflicts of interest that may arise in the future.

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