Research Article

Breaking the Language Barrier: Anxiety, Its Impacts, and Coping Mechanisms of Student Interpreters

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Abstract

Interpreting has long been viewed as a challenging task as it requires an augmented amount of cognitive and emotional effort in real-time, and anxiety often affects the interpreting performance. This study explored the factor of anxiety and its impacts on the interpreting skills of students who are prospective interpreters. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 English Department students at Universitas Serambi Mekkah who had finished their interpreting examination. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and four anxiety-inducing factors were identified: Fear of Making Mistakes (80%), Lack of Self-Confidence (66%), Time Pressure (66%), and Lack of Preparation (46.6%). The impacts included performance-related issues, cognitive impairment, physical symptoms, impaired active listening and attention. It was also found that the students developed their own mechanisms to cope with anxiety, including preparation-based approaches, practice and skill development, physical relaxation techniques, and social support systems. This research provides insights that, even though the students independently adopted their own coping mechanisms, interpreting trainers or instructors should also take part in reducing their anxiety, such as incorporating stress management techniques, regular simulation exercises, and confidence-building activities that give students a more realistic experience for future interpreting practice.

Keywords

interpreting; anxiety; student interpreters; coping mechanism; thematic analysis

Introduction

Interpreting is a highly challenging oral translation task that connects and reconciles the communications of people from different languages and cultural backgrounds (Muallim et al., 2023). Unlike translation, interpreting does not allow time for editing or corrections; thus, it requires fast and accurate rendering of spoken language in real time. This makes interpreting one of the most cognitively and affectively demanding language tasks (Seeber, 2011; Liang et al., 2017). In a typical interpreting encounter, interpreters must listen, process, recall, speak, and sustain the flow of the message with accuracy in a

very short time (Gile, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2022).

Gile's (2009) Effort Model illustrates that the cognitive rigors for interpreting require the use of four unique cognitive demands: listening, memory, production, and coordination, and these cognitive demands occur in a parallel fashion. When one of the cognitive demands becomes overloaded, the overall performance quality suffers and is typically represented as errors, omissions, or slow delivery of the final target language output. It has been demonstrated that interpreters have the cognitive capacity to manage this rigor by using strategies like note-taking, indicated latency adjustments, simplifying content, gestures and paralinguistic traits (Stachowiak-Szymczak, 2019; Wang, 2016; Zhu and Aryadoust, 2022). When employed strategically, each of these strategies can lessen the mental demands associated with interpreting, especially in settings that are high stakes or remote interpreting contexts where the use of technology may contribute to cognitive demands.

Interpreters, and especially trainees, face one of their greatest challenges in the form of anxiety. Performance anxiety in any interpreting context is both a psychological and cognitive burden as it often reduces fluency, working memory, and self-efficacy (Horwitz, 2017; Zhao, 2022; Wang and Hsieh, 2018). Research shows that anxiety can certainly hinder language performance due to the activation of cognitive worrying, emotional angst, and behavioral response of hesitation and avoidance (Sari and Lolita, 2023; Rajabi and Yousefi, 2022). In a practical sense, these scenarios can cause quick breakdowns in interpreting as performance hinges on fluid word retrieval and coherent output delivery (Zhao et al., 2023).

Anxiety can create cognitive overload during interpreting tasks that eliminate interpreters' ability to track listening, memory, and output simultaneously (Gile, 2009). Emotional reactions, such as fear of making a mistake, can drain cognitive resources, contributing to a deadly cycle, which is a poor performance increases anxiety when interpreting, which ultimately depletes cognitive capacity, not seeking to make a satisfactory interpretation (Eysenck and Calvo, 1992; Najmi et al., 2014). Even physiological symptoms, such as sweating, shaky hands, or a palpitating heart, may fuel anxiety, which interferes with interpreters' ability to concentrate and deliver verbal output (Stepanova, 2023).

This anxiety is often at its highest among university students learning to become interpreters like those at Universitas Serambi Mekkah. These students are being prepared to become professional interpreters in the future, which is a role that demands not only linguistic and cognitive skills but also the ability to perform confidently under pressure. Various contextual factors may contribute to interpreting anxiety, including limited vocabulary, lack of practical interpreting experience, reduced exposure to real-life interpreting situations, and low self-confidence in public speaking. Additionally, sociocultural expectations, language proficiency, and classroom dynamics may influence how students experience and cope with anxiety. Investigating these factors within the specific educational and cultural context of Universitas Serambi Mekkah is essential to support students' emotional resilience and to develop effective and contextually relevant pedagogical interventions for their readiness and professional development.

While language anxiety has been an area of considerable research in second language acquisition, it has received comparatively less attention in studies of interpreting students and particularly interpreting students in training (Horwitz, 2017). Most research on language anxiety has focused on either the specific professional tract of language interpreters or students who are on a professional interpreting tract. As an example, Pohan and Kusumawardany (2023) found that test anxiety is a challenging stressor, and college students experienced considerable anxiety related to test taking due to apprehensive sources related to fearing failure and nervousness—anxiety that is also present in assessing interpreting performance (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024).

In closing the gap, this study examined RL (receptive language comprehension) performance obstacles

due to anxiety sources between interpreting students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah, the impact of anxiety on their performance, and interpreting students' management strategies of their anxiety. In addition to understanding anxiety sources and impacts, the study's findings will capture interpreting students' experiences within a culturally appropriate educational context and enhance effective pedagogy and resilience-building strategies. Previous studies have indicated that the preparation and management of stress can help minimize anxiety. Well-prepared interpreters who know their material well, practice interpreting-related activities under pressure (e.g., interpreting for audiences), and integrate relaxation techniques find that their anxiety is not particularly debilitating (Gile, 2009; Seeber, 2011; Zhang and Liu, 2019). The building of self-confidence through positive reinforcement, peer support, and constructive student-instructor feedback has been found to mitigate anxiety (Lee, 2017; Pöchhacker, 2022).

Ultimately, the challenge of interpreting education must be a combined task addressing the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the endeavor. A comprehensive training program would address the skills required of individual interpreter students, along with psychological support that allows interpreters-in-training to be empowered in performing, even under challenging (or potentially emotionally anxious) conditions.

Many researchers have investigated language anxiety in relation to foreign language learning; however, little has been conducted in the area of anxiety in student interpreters, and most previous studies have targeted professional interpreters instead of university student interpreters (Horwitz, 2017). This study, therefore, aimed to address the gap by investigating what induces anxiety in the interpreting students at Universitas Serambi Mekkah, how anxiety affects them in the course of interpreting and their strategies to regulate anxiety. The study was designed to investigate the issues in order to gain a better understanding of the causes of anxiety and how it impacted interpreting. The study contributes to the field of research on language anxiety for interpreter training and provides contributions or insights for interpreter training programs and practical strategies for managing anxiety within the interpreting education context.

Method

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore the complexity of anxiety experienced by student interpreters. The study aimed to gain a rich, detailed understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to the sources and manifestations of interpreting anxiety. A qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in capturing the depth and nuance of human experiences in natural settings (Miles et al., 2014). Although the study is fundamentally qualitative, it also incorporates frequency counts of themes, such as the percentage of participants who reported specific causes of anxiety (e.g., lack of preparation, limited vocabulary, etc), only to show how dominant certain themes are, enhancing the clarity and salience of recurring themes. According to Sandelowski (2001), qualitative research can incorporate small quantification, such as frequency counts, to support clarity and transparency in presenting themes and patterns.

The participants in this study included 15 students, aged between 20 and 21 years old, from the English Department at Universitas Serambi Mekkah. All were fifth-semester students who had completed the mandatory interpreting course and examination. They were selected using total population sampling, as these 15 students represented the entire cohort enrolled in the interpreting course during that semester, and all of them reported experiencing anxiety during the interpreting examination. As such, the sample size was not arbitrarily chosen but reflected the full population relevant to the research scope, enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings.

All participants have an intermediate to upper-intermediate level of English proficiency (equivalent to

B1–B2 on the CEFR scale), as determined by their academic records and performance in speaking and interpreting courses. In terms of interpreting experience, these students had limited formal interpreting exposure, primarily gained through classroom simulations and the university's interpreting exam, with no prior professional interpreting experience.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were developed based on a review of relevant literature on interpreting anxiety, foreign language learning anxiety, and coping mechanisms (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; Gile, 2009). The questions were also reviewed by two interpreting instructors for relevance and clarity before being finalized. Interviews were conducted in person in English, each lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the depth of responses. An interview guide was used to maintain consistency while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions. Sample questions included: "How do you feel when taking an interpreting test?", "How does anxiety affect your focus and fluency during interpreting?", and "What do you usually do to reduce anxiety while interpreting?" Each interview was recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate analysis.

In addition to audio recordings, the researcher also took field notes during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, participant emotions, and contextual observations that might not be evident in the recordings. These notes were used to enrich the interpretation of data during the analysis stage. Observations were conducted during the interpreting examination. Field notes were taken on participants' behavior, such as signs of nervousness (e.g., stuttering, body language), responses to pressure, and interactions with peers and lecturers. These observations were later cross-checked with interview data for triangulation.

The qualitative data were transcribed using an application called Notta, then analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process began with familiarization, where the researcher thoroughly read and re-read the interview transcripts and observation notes to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial codes were then generated by systematically highlighting and labeling meaningful units of data related to participants' emotional responses, behavioral manifestations, and coping strategies. These codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected repeated ideas and experiences across the dataset. Themes were then reviewed and refined by examining their coherence and how well they captured the essence of the data in relation to the research questions. Each theme was clearly defined and named to ensure distinctiveness and analytical clarity. In the final stage, the themes were interpreted and presented in a narrative format, supported by illustrative quotes from participants, and linked to relevant literature to contextualize the findings. This method provided a flexible yet rigorous framework to explore the complexity of interpreting anxiety in depth. To complement the findings, small-scale quantification (e.g., percentages) was used to highlight the frequency of certain themes across participants, providing additional clarity on the extent of specific anxiety factors and coping mechanisms. Follow-up interviews were conducted with four participants for clarification and to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. To maintain confidentiality, participants' names were anonymized using initials.

Results
The results of the interviews and the researcher's observations revealed several key findings, as follows:

A. Anxiety-Inducing Factors among Student Interpreters
The interview findings uncovered that all participants experienced varying degrees of anxiety while interpreting, stemming from multiple underlying factors. These anxiety-inducing factors were summarized in the table below, illustrating the prevalence of each factor among the student interpreters, setting the stage for a deeper exploration through thematic analysis.

Table 1. Anxiety-Inducing Factors among Student Interpreters

Anxiety-inducing Factors	Percentage of Participants
Fear of Making Mistakes	80%
Lack of Self-Confidence	66%
Time Pressure	66%
Lack of Preparation	46.6%

As seen in Table 1, there are four underlying causes of anxiety and the proportion of student interpreters experiencing each of them. The factors emerged as key themes, which are described in the following subsections:

Theme 1: Fear of Making Mistakes – The Most Prominent Source of Anxiety

The fear of making mistakes during interpreting was the most frequently reported source of anxiety, identified by 80% of participants. Many students expressed concerns that errors they produced would negatively impact their evaluation, leading to self-doubt and hesitation during real-time interpreting.

Excerpt 1:
"I feel nervous before starting the interpreting session. The thought of misinterpreting words makes my hands shake." (RS)

This excerpt from RS highlights the anticipatory anxiety that arose before the interpreting session even began. The phrase *"I feel nervous before starting"* showed that RS's anxiety was not just reactive but preemptive, meaning she experienced distress at the mere thought of potential mistakes.

The mention of physical symptoms (*"my hands shake"*) underscores the somatic response to stress, while trembling hands suggests that the student perceived interpreting as a high-stakes, stressful event. Based on the researcher's observation, this physiological reaction had impacted her performance. For example, the shaking hands interfered with her note-taking, use of technology, and speech delivery.

Additionally, the phrase *"the thought of misinterpreting words"* indicates that the student had an internalized fear of failure tied to perfectionism. Rather than viewing interpreting as a skill to develop through trial and error, she saw mistakes as unacceptable, reinforcing a cycle of self-doubt and performance anxiety.

Another student, AA, admitted that anxiety was heightened in the presence of an audience, particularly an authority figure such as an instructor, as illustrated by the excerpt below:

Excerpt 2:
"Being watched and evaluated makes me anxious. Even though my instructor reassured me that minor mistakes are normal, I still couldn't concentrate well, and even, I wondered if my translation was correct." (AA)

This phrase, *"being watched and evaluated",* showed how much the instructor's evaluation impacted her. Despite receiving reassurance from the instructor (*"minor mistakes are normal"*) during the test, she still struggled with self-doubt and cognitive overload. The phrase *"I still couldn't concentrate well"* indicates that anxiety impaired her ability to focus. The researcher's observation confirmed this lapse in focus, as AA's delivery was notably hesitant and fragmented during her performance. Moreover, the phrase *"I wondered if my translation was correct"* suggests that the student was caught in a self-monitoring loop, continuously second-guessing their output rather than delivering it fluently.

Theme 2: Lack of Self-Confidence – A Key Barrier to Fluency

Closely related to the fear of failure, 66% of participants identified a lack of self-confidence as a significant contributor to their anxiety. They reported feeling insecure about their proficiency in the target language, particularly regarding grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This self-doubt often manifested as hesitation, slower delivery, and increased dependence on note-taking strategies, which

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disrupted the natural flow of interpretation, as shown by the excerpts below:

Excerpt 3:
"Even though I study English as the target language every day, I still feel like I'm not good enough. When I interpret, I get stuck trying to recall the perfect word, afraid that my vocabulary isn't advanced enough. This hesitation slows me down, and by the time I find the right word, I've already lost the rhythm of the conversation." (KP)

In excerpt 3, KP expressed her internal struggle over vocabulary retrieval difficulties, despite daily study. The phrase *"I still feel like I'm not good enough"* signals a perceived gap between effort and performance. The phrase *"by the time I find the right word, I've already lost the rhythm"* highlights how a single moment of uncertainty can create a cascading effect, resulting in incomplete or delayed interpretations. Observational data during KP's interpreting task confirmed these patterns. KP frequently paused mid-sentence, appeared to search for words, and relied heavily on her notes, which occasionally caused her to miss segments of the source message. This gap further affected the completeness and accuracy of her interpretation.

In a follow-up interview, KP elaborated:

Excerpt 4:
"Sometimes I know the meaning, but I'm scared it's not academic or professional enough. That doubt just freezes my thinking, like I can't move forward." (KP)

This remark further emphasized that performance anxiety rooted in linguistic insecurity has caused cognitive block in KP, hindering the ability to produce any output at all.

Another student, RF, expressed fear of mispronouncing words as the source of her anxiety, as seen in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 5:
"My biggest struggle is pronunciation. I worry that if I mispronounce a word, the audience will think I'm not competent. Because of this fear, I speak more slowly and rely heavily on my notes. But the more I hesitate, the harder it is to keep up with the speaker, which makes me even more anxious." (RF)

The fear of negative audience judgment, expressed through *"the audience will think I'm not competent,"* in excerpt 5, points to social evaluation anxiety. This concern triggered a pattern of slower delivery and over-dependence on notes in her and some other students, both of which hindered real-time responsiveness and spontaneity.

The researcher's observation of RF's interpreting session supported this account. Her delivery was consistently slow, and she frequently referred back to her notes even during short utterances. This slowed pace caused her to lag behind the speaker, leading to moments where she skipped or condensed segments of the message to catch up.

In a follow-up interview, RF commented:

Excerpt 6:
"Sometimes I spend too much time thinking about how a word should sound that I miss the next sentence completely. Then I panic and can't remember what I just heard." (RF)

This reflection reveals how anxiety rooted in pronunciation accuracy further affected articulation and consumed the student's cognitive resources needed for listening and processing, creating a feedback loop of anxiety, distraction, and missed input.

Theme 3: Time Pressure – The Cognitive Load of Real-Time Interpretation
Time pressure was another significant factor affecting 66% of participants. Interpreting is a time-sensitive task, requiring students to rapidly comprehend, process, and articulate speech. Many students

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expressed anxiety about falling behind the speaker or struggling to find the appropriate words quickly, which exacerbated their stress levels, as represented by the excerpts below:

Excerpt 7:
"When the instructor said '2 minutes left', I panicked. I couldn't think of the right words anymore." (MA)

MA's reaction to the time warning illustrates how the awareness of limited time can trigger a sudden spike in anxiety that disrupts cognitive processing. The word *"panicked"* suggests a loss of mental control, leading to lexical retrieval difficulties (*"couldn't think of the right words anymore"*). This is consistent with the researcher's observation during the session: when the time warning was given, MA appeared visibly tense, glanced repeatedly at the clock, and began to speak faster but with less coherence. Her final segments contained several hesitations and incomplete sentences, indicating breakdowns in formulation under pressure.

Excerpt 8:
"The pressure to be fast and accurate at the same time is overwhelming…" (TN)

In this statement, TN captures the dual cognitive burden of interpreting: maintaining both speed and accuracy. The use of the term *"overwhelming"* points to a situation where cognitive demands surpass her current capacity. During classroom observation, TN demonstrated good delivery at the beginning of her session. However, as the time limit approached, her speech rate increased noticeably while accuracy declined. She began skipping connectives and paraphrasing more broadly, likely as a strategy to stay on time, though at the cost of message fidelity. This performance pattern supports her claim that the time constraint hindered her ability to maintain balance between precision and speed.

Excerpt 9:
"It was so frustrating. I know I can do better, but the time pressure makes it hard to concentrate and perform well." (AO)

AO's reflection expresses a sense of cognitive interference. The statement *"I know I can do better"* suggests that the student's competence was higher than what was displayed during the timed performance. Her statement that *"time pressure makes it hard to concentrate",* however, suggests that she was stressed under time constraints, impairing her working memory and decision-making. Based on the researcher's observation, AO frequently looked at the timer and paused between segments, even when the source message was relatively simple. She later skipped one of the speaker's concluding remarks, possibly due to running out of time, and ended her interpretation abruptly. Overall, most students exposed to countdown warnings or time limits displayed physical signs of stress, such as fidgeting, rushing, or momentarily freezing.

Theme 4: Lack of Preparation – A Contributing Yet Less Dominant Factor
While preparation is often seen as essential for reducing uncertainty and building confidence, lack of preparation was reported by a smaller percentage of participants (46.6%). For instance, one student reflected on how better planning could have improved his performance:

Excerpt 10:
"I had little preparation, and I don't have the confidence to improvise. I think I'd perform better if I had better preparation." (TWF)

TWF's admission, *"I don't have the confidence to improvise"*, in the excerpt above shows that he experienced anxiousness during the test due to minimal preparation, which he seemed to regret.

B. Impacts of Anxiety on Student Interpreters
Based on the interview results and the researcher's observation on their behaviors, several impacts of anxiety on student interpreters were found, as illustrated in the following table, followed by thematic analysis:

Table 2. Categories of Anxiety Impacts on Student Interpreters

Impacts of Anxiety	Percentage of Participants
Performance-Related Issues	
● Decreased Accuracy	60%
● Loss of Fluency and Natural Flow	53%
● Slower response time	80%
Cognitive Impairments	
● Reduced cognitive function	40%
● Poor Memory Retention	46%
Physical Symptoms (e.g., trembling, dry mouth, sweating, or shortness of breath)	66%
Impaired Active Listening and Attention	40%

As shown in Table 2, there are four main categories of anxiety, along with the proportion of student interpreters experiencing specific signs under each category. The categories become the themes, which are illustrated in the following subsections:

Theme 1: Performance-Related Issues
Anxiety was found to significantly hinder the performance of student interpreters across several dimensions. A notable 60% of participants reported decreased accuracy, reflecting a diminished ability to produce precise and faithful interpretations. In addition, 53% indicated a loss of fluency and disruption to the natural flow of speech, suggesting that anxiety interferes with the rhythm and coherence essential for effective communication. However, the most frequently reported issue under this theme was slower response time, experienced by 80% of participants. This points to the detrimental effect of anxiety on both cognitive processing and verbal delivery, as students struggle to retrieve and articulate information in real time.

Excerpt 11:
"Sometimes, I know the correct translation, but anxiety makes me second-guess myself. As a result, I produce many 'errr' that make me not fluent…" (RF)

RF's statement revealed how anxiety undermined her confidence and led to over-monitoring, resulting in disfluencies such as hesitation markers ("errr"). Despite knowing the correct translation, the act of second-guessing interrupted her delivery and reduced the overall fluency of the interpretation. This aligned with the researcher's observation, where RF often paused mid-sentence and backtracked in her speech, indicating a breakdown in cognitive flow due to self-doubt.

Excerpt 12:
"I was so nervous. I have prepared myself at home but it takes time to remember and say the correct words or phrases…" (AO)

AO's reflection illustrates how anxiety interfered with her lexical retrieval, even after she prepared herself adequately. The phrase *"it takes time to remember"* showed delayed responses caused by her nervousness, which impaired her rapid recall needed during real-time interpreting. Observational data confirmed this; AO frequently hesitated before key terms and showed signs of searching for words while the source message continued, disrupting the timing and pacing of her interpretation.

Theme 2: Cognitive Impairments
Anxiety also interferes with cognitive functions critical for interpretation. Reduced cognitive function was reported by 40% of participants, pointing to difficulties in processing and organizing information, as illustrated by Excerpt 13. Similarly, poor memory retention, which affects the ability to recall and relay information accurately, was experienced by 46% of respondents, represented by Excerpt 14.

Excerpt 13:
"During the assessment, I struggle to organize the information quickly, and sometimes, I lose track of key details. Even though I try to concentrate, my brain just feels overloaded, making it harder to process what I'm hearing and form a clear interpretation." (RN)

Excerpt 14:
"I have learned all the vocabulary needed for this test, but none of it was out of my mouth…" (RV)

As seen in the above excerpts, both RN and RV experienced significant mental challenges that affected their cognitive function poorly during the high-pressure task.

Theme 3: Physical Symptoms
As shown in Table 2, the physiological effects of anxiety, with physical symptoms such as trembling, dry mouth, sweating, or shortness of breath, affected 66% of participants. These physiological responses were found not to be merely peripheral, but also key indicators of the participants' acute body stress responses, interfering with their task performance. In this study, the physiological responses were represented by the following excerpts:

Excerpt 15:
"When the examiner asked me to start interpreting, my hands were cold and began to shake…" (RV).

Excerpt 16:
"My mouth was suddenly dry when I was interpreting. I think I was too nervous…" (AO)

RV's experience of cold, trembling hands were found to disrupt her motor coordination, particularly when note-taking occurred. The observation notes confirmed that RV appeared visibly tense and struggled to maintain steady gestures during her performance. Similarly, AO's report of a dry mouth suggests that her anxiety affected vocal production. This was evident in her delivery, which at times lacked clarity and required repetition, further increasing her stress.

Theme 4: Listening and Attention
The findings also revealed that anxiety significantly disrupted participants' ability to engage in active listening and maintain sustained attention, both of which are essential for accurate interpretation. Forty percent of participants reported difficulty focusing on the speaker due to anxious thoughts that interfered with real-time comprehension and processing, as represented by the following excerpt:

Excerpt 17:
"I can't focus on what the speaker is saying because I keep thinking *'What if I fail?'* or *'What if I make mistakes?'* By the time I snap back to attention, I've already missed part of the message, which makes it even harder to deliver an accurate interpretation." (CAN)

Excerpt 17 illustrates how anxiety-induced intrusive thoughts diverted CAN's attention from the speaker's message. Her focus was consumed by fear of failure rather than the content being delivered, leading to missed segments of speech. Based on the researcher's observation, CAN often paused mid-interpretation and appeared unsure, likely due to these lapses in comprehension. The delay in regaining attention made it difficult for her to reconstruct the message cohesively, ultimately affecting the overall quality of her performance. This case highlights how internal cognitive distractions, fueled by anxiety, can impair even well-trained interpreters during high-pressure tasks.

C. Coping Strategies to Overcome Anxiety
The students were found to adopt several coping mechanisms to reduce anxiety, as presented in the table below:

Coping Mechanisms	Percentage of Participants
Studying the Materials Prior to Interpreting	75%
Practice Regularly	73%
Relaxation Technique (e.g., Deep Breathing)	60%
Peer Support	73%

In Table 3, we can see several coping mechanisms adopted by student interpreters to mitigate anxiety prior to interpreting performance, along with the percentage of participants who reported using each method. The coping mechanisms identified in the data are organized into thematic categories, which are discussed in the following subsections:

Theme 1: Preparation-Based Approaches

A prominent coping mechanism reported by participants was thorough preparation prior to interpreting tasks. Seventy-five percent of them explicitly identified preparation as a crucial strategy for reducing anxiety. Rather than relying solely on in-the-moment performance, these students invested time in reviewing materials, anticipating challenges, and equipping themselves with reference tools to boost their confidence and sense of control.

Excerpt 18:
"Before the interpreting exam, I reviewed all the materials thoroughly and went over key terms, background information, and possible challenges. I may not remember all the information, but I believe I'd be more anxious if I came without preparation at all...." (T)

Excerpt 19:
"I prepared a glossary of important terms and phrases before interpreting. My performance might not be perfect but my preparation helped to guide me through…" (IF)

Excerpt 18 shows that T approached the task by mentally rehearsing potential difficulties and contextualizing key information, which gave her a sense of preparedness even if recall was not perfect. During observation, T appeared calm and methodical in her delivery, with fewer pauses and a steady pace, suggesting that her preparation alleviated the cognitive burden during the task. In contrast, excerpt 19 shows how IF took a more targeted approach by preparing a personalized glossary. Though she acknowledged that her interpretation might not be flawless, the glossary served as a mental anchor, supporting her fluency and reducing the likelihood of blanking out. IF was observed consulting her notes discreetly and maintaining smoother transitions during her interpretation, which aligns with her reported strategy. These two cases illustrate how individualized preparation techniques can effectively mitigate anxiety and enhance performance stability in high-pressure interpreting settings.

Theme 2: Practice and Skill Development

Regular interpreting practice was identified by 73% of participants as a vital strategy for managing anxiety and improving fluency. Participants who integrated interpreting into their daily routines reported feeling more confident and less overwhelmed during live sessions, as reported by one of the participants below:

Excerpt 20:
"I make it a habit to practice interpreting regularly, even outside of class. The more I expose myself to different speaking styles and topics, the less intimidating the process feels. I also volunteered myself to practice in class to improve my confidence…" (AA)

In excerpt 20, we can see that AA's approach involved both self-initiated and in-class practice. She emphasized the importance of consistent exposure to diverse inputs, which helped her become more adaptable and less anxious. The researcher observed that AA volunteered frequently and handled spontaneous interpreting tasks with noticeable ease and composure, suggesting that her practice not only improved her skill but also her confidence under pressure.

Theme 3: Physical Relaxation Techniques
To manage physical symptoms of anxiety, 60% of participants reported using relaxation strategies such as deep breathing or positive self-talk to stay composed during high-pressure moments.

Excerpt 21:
"My hands were cold, but I tried to take a deep breath so I remained calm…." (MAR)

In this excerpt, MAR acknowledged experiencing physical discomfort, such as cold hands, right before interpreting. Rather than letting this interfere with his performance, he consciously applied deep breathing to stay calm. The researcher observed that MAR appeared more stable and focused during the latter part of his performance, which helped regulate his anxiety and maintained composure under stress.

Theme 4: Social Support Systems
Support from peers was another key anxiety-reducing factor, with 73% of participants crediting collaborative preparation and emotional encouragement from classmates as helpful.

Excerpt 22:
"Practicing with my classmates before the interpreting exam really helps. We share tips and encourage each other, and sometimes even practice together. I'm not alone, we're together in this process…" (SD)

SD's comment in excerpt 22 shows that she benefited emotionally from peer support. Her use of the phrase "*we're together in this process*" indicates how togetherness in the same challenging situation eased her stress. During the session, the researcher noted that SD appeared more relaxed and confident, likely due to the reassurance she received from group preparation and shared practice.

Discussion
Based on the interview analysis, the most prominently reported source of anxiety, namely fear of making mistakes, cited by 80% of participants, reflects the inherently high-stakes and public nature of interpreting. Unlike most other forms of language use, interpreting demands immediate accuracy and coherence under time pressure, often in front of an audience. This aligns with recent literature highlighting the role of *anticipatory anxiety* in performance degradation, especially in cognitively demanding contexts such as interpreting (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024). Mistakes are not only viewed as linguistic failures but as threats to identity and competence, particularly for novice interpreters who are still developing their professional self-concept.

Closely related is the lack of self-confidence, reported by 66% of participants. While this may appear to be a subjective emotional barrier, research shows it has concrete cognitive implications. According to Bandura's (1997) theory of *self-efficacy*, belief in one's ability to perform a task effectively is a key determinant of actual performance. In interpreting, where rapid decision-making and selective attention are critical, low self-confidence may inhibit risk-taking, delay responses, and increase susceptibility to distraction. Recent studies by Hermagustiana et al. (2021), Jiménez Ivars et al. (2014), and Bates (2016) also affirmed that students with higher self-efficacy demonstrate greater fluency, stronger problem-

solving abilities, and more persistence under stress, which are essential traits in interpreting contexts.

Time pressure, also cited by 66% of participants, was another significant source of anxiety. This supports Gile's (2009) Effort Model, which proposed that interpreting consists of concurrent efforts (listening and analysis, memory, and speech production) that compete for limited cognitive resources. When time constraints intensify, the cognitive system is overloaded, and performance deteriorates. This model helps explain why participants often reported experiencing "blank moments", hesitation, or an inability to keep pace, which are the symptoms of processing saturation.

Although lack of preparation was reported less frequently (46.6%), its role as a stressor cannot be overlooked. As Seeber (2011) and more recent scholars (Omolu et al., 2022; Zhang and Liu, 2019) argued, preparation is not merely logistical, it is cognitive priming. It reduces uncertainty, enhances recall, and frees up working memory for real-time linguistic processing (Seeber and Arbona, 2020). Interestingly, some participants may have underestimated the impact of preparation due to limited awareness of how background knowledge affects interpretation accuracy and fluency. This suggests a pedagogical gap in explicitly teaching the cognitive benefits of preparation.

In terms of performance impacts, the data revealed that anxiety manifests in both observable and internalized ways. Slower response times (80%) and loss of fluency (53%) were the most commonly reported issues. These outcomes are consistent with findings from Zhao (2022), who demonstrated that anxiety disrupts lexical access, slows down encoding, and increases the likelihood of disfluencies. Additionally, memory impairments (46%) and difficulty concentrating (40%) showed how anxiety compromises the working memory system, a critical component in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. These effects are especially detrimental because interpreting relies on accurate, short-term storage, and immediate retrieval of information. In real-world settings, such impairments could lead to omissions, misinterpretations, or breakdowns in communication.

Physical symptoms, such as trembling, shortness of breath, and cold hands (reported by 66%), underscore the embodied nature of interpreting anxiety. These physiological reactions not only reflect internal stress but actively interfere with the interpreter's ability to regulate voice quality, microphone handling, and non-verbal communication. According to psychophysiological models, heightened autonomic arousal draws cognitive attention away from the task at hand and redirects it toward the body, further reducing available processing capacity for interpreting tasks.

Despite these challenges, participants identified several coping mechanisms that helped manage their anxiety and improve performance. Preparation-based strategies were endorsed unanimously (100%), indicating a shared recognition of the value of rehearsal, content familiarization, and terminological readiness. These findings reinforce pedagogical recommendations from Zhang and Liu (2019) and Seeber (2011), who emphasized that well-prepared interpreters not only perform better but also experience lower stress levels.

Regular practice (73%) was another widely used coping strategy. This finding supports the concept of 'desensitization through repetition', a principle borrowed from performance psychology, which holds that frequent, structured exposure to anxiety-inducing tasks reduces their emotional intensity over time. Regular practice also supports the automation of certain sub-skills (e.g., chunking, reformulation), thereby lowering cognitive load during live interpretation (Ferdowsi and Razmi, 2024).

Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, were used by 60% of participants and proved effective

in regulating physiological arousal. While simple, these techniques align with affective neuroscience research showing that controlled breathing can shift the nervous system from sympathetic (fight-or-flight) to parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) dominance, helping restore attentional control and composure under pressure (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Finally, peer support (73%) emerged as a vital social coping mechanism. Collaborative practice sessions, emotional reassurance, and shared problem-solving helped reduce feelings of isolation and increased motivation. This confirms the growing body of evidence suggesting that learning is a deeply social process and that community support can enhance not only competence but also confidence (Vygotsky, 1978). The 'affective' benefits of peer collaboration extend beyond academic achievement; they help cultivate resilience, empathy, and a sense of professional belonging.

Research Implications for Training

The findings of this study underscore the need for interpreter training programs to adopt a more holistic and psychologically informed approach to preparing students for the demands of real-world interpreting. While technical skills such as terminology management, note-taking, and memory enhancement remain central to interpreter competence, they must be supported by strategies that address the emotional and cognitive stressors learners commonly face. This includes anxiety stemming from fear of mistakes, time pressure, and lack of confidence, which are the factors that, as shown in this study, can significantly impair interpreting performance.

One clear implication is the importance of integrating low-stakes, high-frequency simulations into training. These controlled, yet realistic exercises allow students to experience time constraints and performance pressure in a supportive environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures. Such practice helps reduce fear-based responses and fosters the development of emotional resilience. Moreover, repeated exposure to performance situations encourages the process of interpreting sub-skills, which can lighten the cognitive load during real assignments.

Another critical recommendation is the incorporation of relaxation and self-regulation techniques into the interpreter curriculum. As anxiety often manifests physiologically and cognitively, teaching students how to manage their bodily responses, through practices such as deep breathing, brief mindfulness exercises, or grounding techniques, can significantly enhance their ability to remain focused and composed under pressure. These strategies are simple to implement but have strong empirical support in performance psychology and language acquisition fields.

Equally important is the cultivation of a collaborative learning environment that fosters peer support and shared learning experiences. As the study revealed, peer interaction plays a crucial role in reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing self-confidence. Structured opportunities for group practice, peer feedback, and cooperative problem-solving not only improve interpreting performance but also contribute to a sense of professional solidarity among students, which may have long-term benefits for their motivation and emotional well-being.

In addition, interpreter educators should make space for explicit discussions on the psychological dimensions of interpreting. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their experiences with stress and anxiety, to recognize that these responses are common, and to develop personalized coping mechanisms. Embedding these reflective practices into coursework through journals, discussion forums, or guided debriefings can deepen learners' metacognitive awareness and improve their ability to self-regulate.

Ultimately, interpreter education must evolve to recognize that emotional preparedness is as vital as technical proficiency. By equipping students not only with the linguistic and cognitive skills required for interpreting but also with tools to manage the psychological challenges, they will inevitably encounter, training programs can better prepare future interpreters to perform with confidence, accuracy, and resilience in high-pressure professional contexts.

Conclusion

This study provides a rich and layered account of the complex interplay between anxiety, cognitive performance, and coping strategies among student interpreters. By examining both the internal and external stressors these learners face, the findings contribute meaningfully to a growing body of research that situates interpreter performance within the broader framework of psychological resilience, cognitive load theory, and second language acquisition.

It has explored the factors and impacts of anxiety on student interpreters, particularly those from Universitas Serambi Mekkah. The findings revealed that anxiety is a significant factor influencing the performance and confidence levels of novice interpreters. Various forms of anxiety, such as situational and anticipatory anxiety, hinder the cognitive and linguistic processes essential for effective interpretation. Despite the participants' strategies to mitigate anxiety, the emotional and psychological barriers often disrupt their overall interpreting efficacy, urging the interpreter trainers to take necessary measures to help reduce this anxiety among students and the problems it may create, such as providing sufficient amount of training, incorporating relaxation techniques for novice interpreters' well-being, creating a supportive and collaborative environment, and opening rooms for explicit discussions regarding the psychological dimensions of interpreting, as well as paying attention to the emotional preparedness of the novice student interpreters.

Several limitations were identified in this study. First, the study focused solely on novice interpreters from a specific institution, potentially narrowing the scope and applicability of the results to other settings or more experienced interpreters. Another limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of the research. Data were collected at a single point in time, capturing a snapshot of participants' experiences rather than the evolution of their anxiety and coping mechanisms over the course of their interpreter training. A longitudinal design would provide more robust insights into how students adapt over time and whether their coping strategies become more effective with increased exposure to interpreting tasks. Additionally, examining the role of training programs and coping mechanisms, such as mindfulness and stress management techniques, could yield actionable insights to better support student interpreters in overcoming anxiety. Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful foundation for future research and practice by highlighting the multifaceted nature of interpreting anxiety and the importance of supportive training environments.

Author Contribution and Competing Interests

The author solely conceived, designed, and conducted the study, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. All aspects of the research and writing were carried out independently by the author. The author declares no competing interests related to this research.

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