

# EXPLORING SOCIO-AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES UTILISED BY ESL LEARNERS TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN SPEAKING CLASSES

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**Abstract:** *Socio-affective strategies (SAS) are a part of second language learning in terms of addressing learners' emotional resilience, social support, and motivation, which are all crucial for oral communication. While earlier studies in ESL environments have traditionally examined cognitive and metacognitive strategies, minimal research has focused on SAS, particularly in speaking-specific environments where anxiety and low confidence are likely to hinder fluency. This study bridges this gap by examining socio-affective strategies employed by ESL undergraduates at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun in enhancing their communication skills during formal speaking classes. Quantitatively oriented, the study surveyed 65 oral presentation class students via an online questionnaire based on Oxford's (1990) language learning strategy taxonomy. Descriptive statistics identified the most and least frequently used strategies for speaking motivation and fluency. Results show that students employed self-encouragement, emotional awareness, and lecturer feedback most to manage speaking anxiety, while activities such as keeping an English-speaking diary were least used. When it comes to speech fluency, applauding peers, self-evaluation, and using electronic resources (e.g., online videos) were the most used strategies, while systematic peer practice and planned group discussion were less used. These results refer to students' preference for active, socially interactive, and performance-based methods compared to reflective ones. The study contributes to ESL pedagogy by summoning culturally responsive interventions that balance active peer interaction, guided reflection, and technology affordances. Theoretically,*

*it reiterates SAS as the foundation of both motivation and fluency, expanding Oxford's model in the Malaysian tertiary ESL context.*

**Keywords:** *Socio-affective strategies, speaking motivation, speech fluency, ESL speaking, ESL tertiary level.*

## Introduction

In an increasingly globalised and technologically advanced world, the demand for English proficiency among ESL learners has grown significantly. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively in English is not only a valuable academic skill but also an essential requirement for professional and social interaction. Among the four language skills, speaking is often perceived as the most challenging because it requires more than just linguistic knowledge. Speaking is dynamic in nature, demanding not only accuracy in vocabulary and grammar but also the confidence, willingness, and ability to engage in diverse sociocultural contexts. At higher learning institutions such as Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun, strong emphasis is placed on developing students' oral communication skills, which are recognised as crucial assets for education, career advancement, and personal growth. In Malaysian higher education, speaking is regarded not only as an academic competency but also as a soft skill closely tied to graduate employability. As such, effective speaking instruction is vital, particularly in presentation-based courses where assessment involves both content and delivery.

Socio-affective strategies (SAS) have become increasingly important in supporting ESL learners to overcome barriers in oral communication. These strategies focus on the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of learning—areas that traditional instruction often overlooks. SAS foster mutual understanding between teachers and students, creating an atmosphere that enhances motivation and participation. Examples include self-encouragement, stress management, peer collaboration, and constructive feedback from lecturers. Such approaches help learners confront common challenges like anxiety, fear of making mistakes, or lack of fluency, all of which frequently hinder performance in speaking tasks. Beyond linguistic output, SAS develop emotional resilience, social confidence, and self-regulation, which are indispensable for effective, real-time communication.

Within the Malaysian ESL context, SAS are gaining recognition as complementary strategies to enhance oral proficiency, particularly in formal educational settings where communicative pressure is heightened. However, research remains heavily focused on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while affective and social domains receive comparatively less attention (Razawi & Mohamad, 2024; Kana & Hashim, 2023). Furthermore, most existing studies examine general language learning or writing skills, with limited focus on speaking-specific contexts (Shukri & Salam, 2024). Although topics such as speaking anxiety and motivation are widely discussed, little empirical work has investigated the role of SAS in promoting actual speech fluency (Zulkflee et al., 2023; Orang et al., 2024). This gap is particularly relevant in structured oral communication courses, where students are expected to move beyond managing fear and develop sustained fluency and confidence in spontaneous speech.

Another issue is the uncertain extent to which students effectively use available resources, such as peer support systems and learning materials, to meet their socio-affective needs in speaking English (Kana & Hashim, 2023). This highlights the need for research examining how SAS

influence learners' willingness to participate, their engagement in oral activities, and their performance in both classroom and blended learning environments. Addressing these gaps could contribute to more comprehensive and context-sensitive teaching practices.

Although the value of socio-affective strategies is widely recognised, limited research has examined how ESL learners apply them in specific institutional contexts. Understanding the strategies employed by students at UiTM Dungun is essential for designing targeted interventions that address their unique needs. Investigating the relationship between SAS use and outcomes such as speaking motivation and fluency can provide practical insights for educators aiming to create supportive and engaging learning environments. Such research is necessary to inform pedagogical models that reflect the linguistic, emotional, and social realities of Malaysian undergraduates.

This study focuses on the socio-affective strategies adopted by ESL students at UiTM Dungun to enhance their speaking abilities. By analysing how learners regulate emotions, collaborate with peers, and seek support, the study explores the effectiveness of these strategies in improving both motivation and fluency. The findings are expected to offer valuable implications for classroom practice, demonstrating how socio-affective strategies can be systematically integrated into teaching to help ESL learners develop greater confidence and competence in speaking English. Ultimately, the research seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by linking strategy use to observed outcomes in motivation and fluency, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of effective ESL pedagogy.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- 1) Identify the socio-affective strategies used by students to overcome speaking anxiety and improve their motivation to speak English.
- 2) Examine the socio-affective strategies utilized by students to improve their fluency in English speech delivery.

Through its response to these aims, this research adds to an expanding literature that attempts to humanise language teaching by incorporating social interaction, emotional resilience, and autonomy. It is anticipated that the results will inform teaching practices that enable learners not only to speak more proficiently but also to participate in meaningful spoken communication with increasing confidence and emotional regulation. In doing so, it requires a pedagogical approach where speaking ability is developed not only through practice exercises and drills, but also through empathy, facilitation, and emotional scaffolding.

## Literature Review

Speaking anxiety is a common challenge faced by language learners, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. This anxiety can significantly hinder students' motivation and fluency in speaking English. To address these challenges, socio-affective strategies have emerged as effective tools for enhancing students' speaking skills. This literature review aims to explore the socio-affective strategies used by students to overcome speaking anxiety, improve their motivation to speak English, enhance their fluency in speech delivery, and assess the relationship between these strategies and their perceived effectiveness.

### Socio-Affective Strategies and Speaking Anxiety

Romli (2018) discovers students use different socio-affective strategies such as seeking clarification, cooperating with others, and self-encouragement to reduce anxiety. These findings are aligned with Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of socio-affective strategies such as anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and cooperation with others. Research indicates students in cooperative learning environments report lower levels of anxiety. While such consistency between studies would signal a strong empirical basis for SAS in anxiety reduction, the emphasis has been placed more on overt classroom behaviours rather than more underlying psychological processes, which leads to questioning the degree to which such strategies are sustainable across proficiency levels or long-term learning environments.

For instance, Suleimenova's research (2013) indicated that students who talked in pairs or groups felt more relaxed and inclined to speak. The motivation caused by peer interaction is significant in alleviating the anxiety of speaking in public. Moreover, teachers who give positive feedback and make their classrooms comfortable places contribute towards reducing students' fear of speaking (Afidawati et al., 2024). However, these findings are at risk of overgeneralisation: while some students may benefit from positive reinforcement, others will need to have emotional regulation specifically trained rather than external reward. This nuance suggests SAS are not equally effective for all students in the same way and that their impact is mediated through variables such as personality, prior experience, and classroom perceived safety.

Speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among language learners, often stemming from fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, or previous negative experiences in language use. In their 2018 study, Wijirahayu and Dorand found that students' attitudes significantly influence their speaking performance. High levels of anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviours, which further exacerbate the problem. Therefore, understanding the nature of speaking anxiety is crucial for developing effective interventions. But recent research also tends to treat anxiety as a unitary construct; less researched is how specific socio-affective styles differentially influence cognitive (fear of error), affective (low confidence), and behavioural (avoidance) aspects of anxiety.

The influence of cultural expectations and communication norms must not be underestimated when evaluating learners' anxiety. ESL learners in collectivist cultures, such as Malaysia, may experience greater pressure to avoid public mistakes, contributing to heightened speaking anxiety. This has prompted researchers to suggest that socio-affective strategies need to be culturally appropriate and embedded within pedagogical practices that normalize the frequency of speaking mistakes as part of learning (Yunus et al., 2022). Yet, taking "cultural responsiveness" as a concept is often ill-defined, with a lack of clarity about how lecturers can make it functional in classroom pedagogy. Researchers distinguish between general and task-specific anxiety, with socio-affective strategies being more effective for the latter. For example, strategies like deep breathing, positive self-talk, and rehearsal have been shown to have immediate impacts on reducing anxiety prior to oral exams (Hadi & Yuliasari, 2024). These strategies are, however, underutilized by students who are not expressly trained to observe and regulate their emotional states during speaking tasks. This emphasizes the importance of explicit strategy instruction in ESL curricula, rather than assuming that students will pick up socio-affective coping strategies through exposure.

### **Socio-Affective Strategies Utilized by Students to Improve Fluency in English Speech Delivery**

Research carried out in a Malaysian public university by Razawi and Mohamad (2024) examined the use of socio-affective strategies among ESL students. The research identified that the students utilized various strategies, such as cooperation, seeking feedback, and managing emotional states, to enhance speaking motivation and fluency. Importantly, the research also identified variations in SAS use based on gender. However, in a different study, no gender differences were reported by Razawi and Mohamad (2023), which signifies a methodological contradiction among comparable studies. This suggests demographic variables such as gender may not be the straightforward predictors of SAS usage and that task or context-based variables can be more decisive. Sukying (2021) also demonstrated affective strategies to be most widely used for Thai EFL learners, confirming the prominence of emotional management in language learning. These studies, nonetheless, tend to report SAS as learner-driven without sufficiently addressing the pedagogical conditions that can encourage or constrain their adoption. The qualitative findings of Rahimi et al. (2023) also highlighted collaboration, with the addition that peer interaction encouraged relaxation and fluency enhancement.

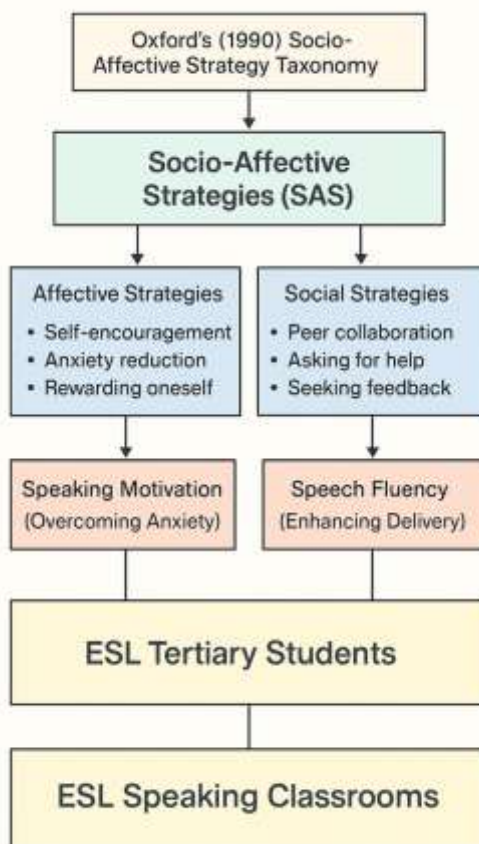
Similarly, Ebenezer et al. (2022) highlighted the role of social and emotional learning in reducing anxiety. While these studies validate the worth of socially supportive environments, the impact of institutional or cultural norms on students' willingness to engage in such peer-oriented activities is underexplored. In some classrooms, hierarchical teacher-student relationships may limit authentic peer support, which calls into question the degree to which SAS are equally effective in diverse contexts. Beyond collaboration, other studies demonstrate that fluency is affected not just by practice but by learners' confidence and emotional readiness.

Suzuki and Kormos (2020) linked comfort levels directly to comprehensibility and fluency, while Tong (2000) demonstrated that peer feedback and self-assessment improve development. These strategies rely on a classroom environment that ensures psychological safety, a factor often overlooked in research. As a result, SAS findings are less transferable when cultural and relational factors are overlooked. Collectively, literature prioritizes socio-affective approaches but also demonstrates range and depth shortages.

Most studies confirm SAS's positive correlation with fluency or motivation, yet few identify SAS as the main variable in fluency-specific metrics such as speech timing or vocal variety. Furthermore, while learner self-reports are revealing, they can neglect structural and pedagogical factors affecting SAS use. This means that research needs to move beyond surface description and investigate how SAS interact with classroom culture, institutional pressures, and cultural norms. Here, the present study aims to offer a more comprehensive examination of SAS among UiTM Dungun undergraduates, emphasizing both students' self-reported practice and the broader pedagogical context supporting their strategic use.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework used in this study, which is adapted from Oxford's (1990) Socio-Affective Strategy (SAS) Taxonomy.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

The framework categorises SAS into two main domains: affective strategies and social strategies. Affective strategies include self-encouragement, anxiety reduction, and rewarding oneself which target the learner's internal emotional state to manage speaking apprehension and sustain motivation. Social strategies, on the other hand, comprise peer collaboration, asking for help, and seeking feedback, which foster interaction and external support during speaking tasks. These strategies are posited to influence two core learning outcomes in ESL speaking: (1) speaking motivation - by helping students overcome anxiety, and (2) speech fluency - by enhancing speech delivery and confidence. The framework situates these relationships within the specific context of ESL tertiary students enrolled in structured speaking classrooms. By focusing on learners in formal academic settings, the model emphasises how socio-affective strategies interact with classroom dynamics to shape learner behaviour and oral performance.

This framework thus provides a theoretical and contextual foundation for investigating how ESL students apply socio-affective strategies in their academic speaking tasks, in line with the research objectives. It also serves as a guide for interpreting the types and frequencies of strategies that contribute to improved speaking motivation and speech fluency in speaking.

## Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research design to explore the socio-affective strategies employed by ESL learners at UiTM Dungun to enhance their communication skills in speaking classes. The sampling method applied is purposive sampling, targeting a specific group of learners who are enrolled in ESL speaking classes at UiTM Dungun. The sample comprises 65 students taking presentation in English for Business Communication and English for Informative

Speech. These students were selected based on their enrolment in an oral communication module that emphasizes structured speaking assessments such as individual and group presentations, making them suitable respondents for investigating the use of socio-affective strategies in academic speaking contexts.

An online questionnaire containing 25 questions was distributed to these students. Part A of the questionnaire consists of 3 questions addresses demographic information. Next, Part B consists of 12 questions which investigates the socio-affective strategies that students utilize to boost their motivation in ESL speaking classrooms, and Part C which consists of 10 questions examines the socio-affective strategies that help students improve their speech fluency in these classes. A link to the questionnaire was shared with the students through an online platform. This online format facilitates efficient and convenient data collection, allowing students to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience. The questionnaire items in Part B and Part C were adapted from existing socio-affective strategy inventories based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy and previous empirical studies on ESL learners. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A pilot test was also conducted with 30 UiTM students enrolled in a presentation class, which further confirmed the clarity of the items and the reliability of the questionnaire before its full administration. The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency in previous studies, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .89, indicating high reliability across socio-affective subscales.

The data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), with the analysis involving the calculation of means and standard deviations to provide an overview of the findings. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the most and least frequently used socio-affective strategies for each domain; speaking motivation and speech fluency as outlined in the research objectives. The analysis focused on interpreting the relative frequencies of each strategy to determine students' preferences and tendencies in using SAS for managing speaking anxiety and enhancing fluency in academic speaking contexts.

## Results

The study comprised a total of 65 students, of whom 50 were female and 15 were male, indicating a predominance of female respondents. The participants were drawn from diverse faculties, with the majority originating from the Faculty of Business and Management, while a smaller proportion represented faculties such as Hospitality and Tourism, as well as related disciplines. In terms of course enrolment, the students were registered in English courses which emphasise the development of speaking and presentation skills as core components of language learning.

Prior to addressing the research objectives, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both sections of the instrument. As shown in Table 1, the results demonstrated strong reliability for both constructs, with a Cronbach's alpha of .883 for socio-affective strategies related to speaking motivation and .926 for strategies related to speech fluency. These values exceed the minimum threshold of .70 as recommended by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), indicating that the items in each category consistently measure their respective constructs.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis of Questionnaire Sections**

| Section             | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Interpretation        |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Speaking Motivation | 12              | 0.883            | High Reliability      |
| Speech Fluency      | 10              | 0.926            | Excellent Reliability |

### **Socio-Affective Strategies Used to Enhance Speaking Motivation**

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for students' responses on socio-affective strategies used to overcome speaking anxiety and enhance motivation in ESL speaking classrooms. The results address Research Objective 1.

**Table 2: Students' Socio-Affective Strategies Used in Enhancing Speaking Motivation**

| SPEAKING MOTIVATION                                                                                    | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|----------------|
| I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of speaking English.                                             | 65 | 4.06 | .788           |
| I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.                         | 65 | 4.17 | .782           |
| I give myself a reward or treat when I speak well in English.                                          | 65 | 3.92 | 1.035          |
| I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am speaking English.                                          | 65 | 4.12 | .944           |
| I write down my feelings in an English-speaking diary.                                                 | 65 | 2.88 | 1.256          |
| I talk to my friend about how I feel when I am speaking English.                                       | 65 | 3.60 | 1.101          |
| I ask my lecturer to slow down or say it again if I do not understand when he/she is speaking English. | 65 | 3.78 | 1.068          |
| I ask my lecturer to correct me when I speak English.                                                  | 65 | 4.02 | .927           |
| I practice speaking English with other students.                                                       | 65 | 3.95 | .926           |
| I ask for help in speaking English from my lecturer.                                                   | 65 | 3.97 | .883           |
| I speak English when I ask questions.                                                                  | 65 | 3.78 | .875           |
| I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.                                                  | 65 | 4.06 | .899           |

The study examined different socio-affective strategies that students use to boost their motivation in speaking English. The findings, derived from a sample of 65 participants, revealed that students often practiced self-encouragement while speaking English (Mean = 4.17, SD = 0.782) and tried to recognize their nervousness or tension during conversations (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.944). Next, many students reported that they try to relax whenever they feel afraid of speaking English (M = 4.06, SD = 0.788, N = 65). Furthermore, they actively sought feedback from their lecturers (Mean = 4.02, SD = 0.927) and engaged in speaking practice with their peers (Mean = 3.95, SD = 0.926). These findings indicate that students are most likely to rely on immediate emotional regulation and interactive support strategies to manage their speaking anxiety and boost motivation. Moderately used strategies included rewarding oneself (Mean = 3.92), asking lecturers to clarify speech (Mean = 3.78), and speaking English when asking questions (Mean = 3.78), reflecting practical classroom habits.

On the other hand, the use of an English-speaking diary was significantly lower (Mean = 2.88, SD = 1.256), indicating that students may not see written self-reflection as an effective

motivational strategy. This may reflect students' preference for active, social, or verbal strategies over introspective written methods.

Overall, the top three most-used strategies were:

1. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake (M = 4.17)
2. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am speaking English (M = 4.12)
3. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of speaking English / I try to learn about the culture of English speakers (both M = 4.06)

### Socio-Affective Strategies Used to Improve Speech Fluency

Table 3 presents students' responses related to the use of socio-affective strategies aimed at enhancing speech fluency, fulfilling Research Objective 2.

**Table 3: Students' Socio-Affective Strategies Used in Enhancing Speech Fluency**

| SPEECH FLUENCY                                                                                  | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|----------------|
| I watch videos on the Internet to learn vocal variety in speech (rate, pitch, pauses & volume). | 65 | 4.26 | .853           |
| I rehearse my delivery of speech several times before the real speech assessment.               | 65 | 4.15 | .870           |
| I let my lecturer give feedback after every speaking practice.                                  | 65 | 4.17 | .911           |
| I do my speaking practices regularly with my friends.                                           | 65 | 3.86 | .966           |
| I sit in group to discuss the outline of my speech.                                             | 65 | 3.91 | .897           |
| I ask my lecturer if I do not know the correct pronunciation of words.                          | 65 | 4.06 | .899           |
| I ask my friends to give feedback on my non-verbal communication.                               | 65 | 4.08 | .853           |
| I tell my friends about how I feel when I am delivering my speech.                              | 65 | 4.02 | .992           |
| I weigh my strengths and weaknesses to improve my speech delivery.                              | 65 | 4.34 | .815           |
| I give applause to my friends after every speaking practice.                                    | 65 | 4.45 | .811           |

The strategy that received the highest rating for speech fluency was applauding peers after each speaking practice (Mean = 4.45, SD = 0.811), highlighting a strong culture of support among students. Self-assessment was also vital, with students noting that evaluating their strengths and weaknesses helped improve their delivery (Mean = 4.34, SD = 0.815). Students engaged with online videos to enhance their vocal variety (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.853) and frequently sought feedback from their lecturers (Mean = 4.17, SD = 0.911). They also practiced their speech delivery multiple times before assessments (Mean = 4.15, SD = 0.870) and looked for guidance on correct pronunciation (Mean = 4.06, SD = 0.899), both of which were highly rated.

On the other hand, group discussions about speech outlines (Mean = 3.91, SD = 0.897) and regular speaking practice with friends (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.966) received slightly lower ratings, suggesting that while these methods were utilized, they were not as prevalent as other strategies. This suggests that while learners value group interaction to some extent, individual and instructor-led strategies take precedence when preparing for fluency-based tasks.

The top three most frequently used fluency strategies were:

1. I give applause to my friends after every speaking practice (M = 4.45)
2. I weigh my strengths and weaknesses to improve my speech delivery (M = 4.34)
3. I watch videos on the Internet to learn vocal variety (M = 4.26)

In conclusion, the findings from this study demonstrate that ESL learners at UiTM Dungun actively employ a variety of socio-affective strategies to enhance both their motivation and fluency in speaking English. Strategies related to self-encouragement, emotional awareness, and lecturer feedback were among the most frequently practised for improving speaking motivation, whereas applauding peers, self-assessment, and the use of digital resources were dominant in improving speech fluency. These trends reflect learners' preference for practical, socially supportive, and performance-oriented approaches over introspective or reflective techniques. Overall, the descriptive results affirm the central role of socio-affective strategies in facilitating ESL oral communication, thereby fulfilling the objectives of this study and paving the way for deeper interpretation in the discussion that follows.

## Discussion

The findings emphasize the vital role of socio-affective strategies in enhancing students' motivation and fluency in speaking English. Overall, students actively employ self-regulation techniques, seek support from peers and lecturers, and participate in activities that build their confidence while alleviating anxiety. These findings reaffirm the premise that emotional and social dimensions are not peripheral, but rather central to effective ESL speaking instruction. This is consistent with Oxford's (1990) socio-affective taxonomy which emphasizes the need for learners to develop emotional control (affective strategies) and build interpersonal support networks (social strategies) to become more confident and autonomous language users.

### Students' Socio-Affective Strategies Used in Enhancing Speaking Motivation

While they reported extensive use of socio-affective strategies such as self-motivation, relaxation, and seeking lecturer or peer feedback, there were contradictions. For instance, while they sought outside confirmation actively, their minimal use of self-reward suggests a more reliance on others rather than internal motivational resources (Romli, 2018; Oxford, 1990). Similarly, while they acknowledged anxiety and attempted relaxation techniques which demonstrating high emotional sensitivity, they scarcely engaged in reflective exercises such as keeping an English-speaking diary. Contrary to the implication by Oxford (1990) of affective tools like diaries and checklists for long-term self-regulation, this agrees with Afidawati et al. (2024), who argue that learners prefer immediate, interactive techniques over individual reflection. Furthermore, students valued peer practice but made inadequate use of formalized collaborative activities, demonstrating bias in favour of informal networks of support over formalized peer learning (Lee & Heinz, 2016). These unexpected outcomes reveal that while learners value the worth of socio-affective strategies, they nonetheless place significance on short-term, interactional methods compared to long-term, reflective ones, and therefore highlight the necessity for teachers to model reflective practices and exchange external for internal motivational reinforcement.

On the other hand, the use of an English-speaking diary was notably less frequent, suggesting that students might not view written self-reflection as an effective motivational tool. This implies that learners favour interactive or verbal strategies over solitary reflection. Such tendencies may reflect cultural learning styles that value oral interaction and immediate

feedback over private introspection. Oxford's affective strategy of using emotional checklists or reflective tools appears underutilized in this context which suggests a need for scaffolding reflective practices more actively in the curriculum. Promoting structured reflective activities, such as tracking progress and setting speaking goals, could enhance motivation. These tasks, when implemented as part of classroom assessments or self-evaluation logs could help integrate Oxford's affective tools in a more engaging and culturally relevant way.

Sharing emotions with friends and rewarding oneself after successful speaking experiences were moderately utilized strategies. This indicates that while students recognize the value of emotional expression and self-reward, these methods are not the most prevalent. Yet, both strategies are still recognized by Oxford as part of essential emotional management. Encouraging students to consciously adopt such behaviours can contribute to improved long-term speaking confidence. Integrating more structured peer discussions and self-rewarding practices into language learning programs could further strengthen motivation. This highlights an important implication for lecturers to consider embedding socio-affective elements into lesson plans rather than treating them as optional or incidental skills.

### **Students' Socio-Affective Strategies Used in Enhancing Speech Fluency**

Peer encouragement emerged as one of the most valued strategies, with students often applauding their friends after speaking practice. This underscores the significance of a supportive learning environment, where positive reinforcement from peers fosters confidence and alleviates anxiety. Rahimi et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of collaboration, noting that students felt more comfortable and improved their fluency when practicing with peers. This mirrors Oxford's social strategy subcategory of cooperating with others, which highlights the value of peer-to-peer interaction in improving language outcomes.

Self-assessment also played a crucial role, as students actively reflected on their strengths and weaknesses to enhance their speech delivery. Although self-assessment is often viewed as a metacognitive strategy, it also aligns with Oxford's affective strategies, particularly in terms of raising emotional awareness and building learner autonomy. Engaging with online learning resources was another important strategy, with students watching videos to improve vocal variety, intonation, and pronunciation. This indicates that digital resources are vital for developing fluency, likely due to their accessibility and ability to demonstrate effective speech techniques. This presents practical implications for language curriculum designers to integrate digital speaking models as part of socio-affective instruction.

In contrast with the findings, Razawi and Mohamad (2024) in their research found that students used teamwork, feedback-seeking, and emotional management to improve speaking motivation and fluency. Lecturer feedback was a key factor, as students frequently sought corrections and guidance on pronunciation. This highlights the importance of instructor involvement in refining speech accuracy and delivery. Oxford's social strategies explicitly include asking questions for clarification and asking for correction, both of which were evident in the students' responses where they emphasised the lecturers' role in facilitating socially guided learning.

Interestingly, structured group discussions and regular speaking practice with friends were utilized less frequently than other strategies. While peer interactions are clearly valued, students may not participate in structured discussions or rehearsals as often. Encouraging more collaborative speech preparation activities, such as group rehearsals and peer-led discussions, could further enhance fluency development. This suggests an instructional gap where

spontaneous peer interaction is preferred over organised collaboration. Lecturers might explore classroom formats that blend informal and formal group practices to activate Oxford's social strategies more effectively.

Findings in this study collectively affirm the applicability of Oxford's (1990) socio-affective strategy taxonomy within the Malaysian ESL tertiary context. They suggest that students favour strategies that offer emotional regulation, confidence building, and meaningful interaction, all of which are critical to fostering speaking competence. At the same time, less frequently used strategies such as reflective journaling and structured collaboration highlight potential areas for pedagogical intervention. The results therefore support existing theoretical models and inform curriculum development by indicating which socio-affective strategies should be emphasised or scaffolded more intentionally in ESL speaking instruction.

### From Gaps to Contributions

This study enhances the body of knowledge on ESL speaking instruction by incorporating socio-affective strategies (SAS) in a Malaysian context within a socio-educational framework. While Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of socio-affective strategies serves as a starting point for classification, it appears as though most scholars have either concentrated on cognitive and metacognitive strategies or regarded the socio-affective elements as secondary. This study SAS in speaking motivation and speech fluency, thus responding to gaps such as the limited scholarship on SAS in speaking disciplines, the limited Oxford's taxonomy in Malaysian university context, and the lack of student voice in SAS research. The current study contributes to knowledge in three aspects. For one, it offers evidence for the applicability of Oxford's SAS framework relevant to ESL learners in a non-Western, multilingual, tertiary, and ESL environment where English is both a second language and a high-stakes academic medium. The study's findings confirmed that learners actively engaged both affective (self-encouragement, emotional awareness, reward systems) and social (peer feedback, lecturer praise, applause) strategies to overcome speaking challenges. This confirms the continuing applicability of Oxford's framework but also shows that some strategies, in this case, written reflection and structured peer planning, are rarely employed. This indicates that some level of cultural and contextual adjustment is needed for the model. Therefore, the research upholds Oxford's classification but also contributes a bounded adaptation by highlighting which SAS subcomponents are most and least relevant in the Malaysian ESL speaking classroom. The other aspect of the study's contribution is that it enriches the existing corpus of Malaysian ESL research by focusing on the learners' SAS-driven lived experiences, which is a relatively unexplored area of study.

Many local studies focus on general strategies for language learning or examine discrete skills such as reading and writing, whereas this study addresses the more specific aspect of speaking and offers foundational insights that can shape speaking curricula, classroom layouts, and instructional strategies. This contribution addresses the paucity of research that focuses on how Malaysian ESL students at the tertiary level perceive and use self-access resources to manage speaking difficulties. This study also makes a methodological contribution by incorporating self-access resource, SAS, into a quantitative SAS adapted for the context of speaking, which was developed for this research. The instrument showed high internal consistency and generated descriptive patterns that can inform future research, including mixed-methods or comparative studies by looking at different institutions, genders, or levels of proficiency. This methodological rigor enhances the credibility of SAS as a serious area of empirical investigation, inviting exploration of its role in diverse contexts of ESL speaking.

Compared to prior studies, the scope and emphasis of this research also differ. The prevailing studies of socio-affective strategies (SAS) in ESL and EFL contexts have positioned them as secondary support to cognitive or metacognitive strategies, where the main interest lies in how learners control comprehension, memory, or task completion (Oxford, 1990; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). More studies such as Lee and Heinz (2016) and Anjarsari and Febriani (2022), prioritize socio-affective elements like peer interaction and authentic assessment, but still position them as complementary supports rather than as principal drivers of speaking development. In contrast, the current study reconceptualizes SAS as core, not peripheral, psychological, and social tools that have a direct bearing on learners' ability to manage anxiety, stay motivated, and perform optimally in oral communication. Additionally, while earlier Asian studies (e.g., Romli, 2018; Afidawati et al., 2024) identified peer encouragement and self-encouragement, it was not inclined to be incorporated into Oxford's full taxonomy of affective strategies. This research advances the field by empirically mapping specific SAS practices such as relaxation, self-encouragement, and peer validation onto Oxford's framework. It also situates these strategies within the Asian ESL speaking context, a geographical area where the use of socio-affective strategies remains underexplored. Lastly, the study's contribution lies in shifting the discussion from the perception of SAS as supplementary to considering them at the centre of speaking skill development, thereby filling theoretical gaps and providing culturally aware pedagogical implications.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While this study has underscored the importance of socio-affective strategies (SAS) in ESL speaking classes, several avenues remain open for future investigation. First, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach to better understand why students choose strategies. While this study described usage patterns, qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups could provide richer insights into learners' emotional experiences, cultural influences, and personal motivations.

Second, the scope of this study was limited to a single institution, which restricts generalisability. Comparative research across multiple campuses, regions, proficiency levels, and academic disciplines could establish broader patterns of SAS use. Third, longitudinal studies are needed to explore how SAS evolve over time. Tracking learners across several semesters would shed light on their long-term effectiveness, particularly in relation to lecturer feedback, assessment types, and student engagement.

Fourth, future work should examine demographic factors such as proficiency and gender, as these may shape strategy use and influence oral performance. Fifth, intervention-based studies are recommended to evaluate the impact of explicitly designed SAS modules. Experimental approaches that incorporate peer support, reflective journaling, or structured emotional check-ins could determine which strategies most effectively improve fluency and motivation.

Finally, the growing role of digital and AI technologies presents an important research direction. Exploring tools such as speech practice applications, pronunciation feedback bots, and online learning communities could reveal new opportunities for SAS development. Collectively, these investigations would advance understanding of SAS, enrich ESL pedagogy, and support learners in diverse and increasingly digitalised contexts

## Conclusion

This research underscores the importance of the socio-affective aspects of strategies in motivating learners and developing fluency in English speaking skills. The results suggest that students utilize self-encouragement, feedback from the lecturer, and support from their peers to enhance self-efficacy and communicate skilfully. Self-assessment, viewing relevant online content, and praising colleagues aid fluency, while lecturer feedback and interactional speaking practice with peers enhance accuracy and fluency. These trends align with the learning theory of Oxford as socio-affective taxonomy and highlight the need to consider the emotional and social dimensions in teaching English as a second language.

On the other hand, the research also shows that students seem to be disinclined to document their reflections in log form. English diaries, other than casual journals, as well as structured group discussion formats are not popular. This points to the need for more guided reflection in speaking within the language learning curricula. These neglected strategies emphasize the need for culturally relevant tasks that enable students to reflect and collaborate in a structured way.

Through focused self-monitoring, peer collaboration, and the use of digital learning tools, practitioners can offer lectures that provide more effective support to learners. Active participation and regular, constructive feedback enhance motivation and speaking fluency. This reinforces the socio-educational approach to learning by embedding motivational techniques into lesson design, assessments, and instruction at all levels. Subsequent studies could assess the sustained effects of motivational strategies on speaking skills and look at other ways to help learners deal with anxiety and other barriers to speaking and expressing themselves. Such studies would deepen the SAS framework while enabling more culturally relevant ways to teach spoken English at the tertiary level in ESL contexts.

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