*Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*

**University of Tabriz**

**2026, 18, 37**

# Exploring Xenoglossophobia Components and (Mal)Adaptive Coping Strategies from Iranian EFL Learners' Perspectives

**Nazanin Ghiasi Esfahani**

*Ph.D. Candidate of English Department, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.*

ghiasi1@gmail.com

**Azizeh Chalak** (Corresponding Author)

*Professor of English Department, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.*

azichalak@gmail.com

**Ehsan Rezvani**

*Assistant Professor of English Department, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.*

e.rezvani@khuisf.ac.ir

**ARTICLE INFO:**

**Received date:**
**2025.11.05**
**Accepted date:**
**2026.01.08**

**Print ISSN: 2251-7995**
**Online ISSN: 2676-6876**

## Keywords:

Adaptive Behaviors, Foreign Language Anxiety, Glossophobia, Maladaptive Behaviors, Xenoglossophobia.

**Abstract**

EFL teachers have encountered learners with xenoglossophobia for many years. This establishes the urge to shed light on the components of this complication. This study elucidated the constituents of this language related anxiety and the subsequent (mal)adaptive coping strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners. A comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted, incorporating 1119 qualitative and quantitative studies to identify the components contributing to this phobia. Subsequently, a series of focus group interviews were conducted with 96 Iranian EFL learners to gain insights into their (mal)adaptive xenoglossophobia regulating strategies. The components were validated through Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling (ESEM) using the developed scale for 349 available Iranian EFL learners. Also, the interviews were thematically analyzed. The findings indicated cognitive, emotional, behavioral, environmental, cultural, technological, and learning variables as significant contributors to this complication. Moreover, adaptive coping strategies included mindfulness, cognitive reframing, seeking support, and using Artificial Intelligence, 'AI-driven chatbots'. Furthermore, maladaptive coping strategies were self-criticism, procrastination, absence or withdrawal, and disruptive classroom behavior. This study provides the key components of xenoglossophobia which may benefit EFL community members and educational psychologists. It is also beneficial to the formulation of targeted interventions aimed at advancing therapeutic approaches and counseling programs in clinical psychology.

**Citation**: Ghiasi Esfahani, N.; Chalak, A. & Rezvani, E. (2026). Exploring Xenoglossophobia Components and (Mal)Adaptive Coping Strategies from Iranian EFL Learners' Perspectives. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 18 (37), 193-212. DOI: 10.22034/elt.2026.70079.2833

## Introduction

Xenoglossophobia, a multifaceted phenomenon, refers to the apprehension and unease experienced by individuals when learning or utilizing a secondary or foreign language (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020). This term originates from the Greek words "xeno" meaning foreign, "glosso" meaning language, and "phobia" meaning fear. The multifaceted nature of xenoglossophobia stems from a complex interplay of contextual and individual factors that vary significantly across different settings (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). One key determinant is the learner's prior experiences within the language learning environment, which can include adverse incidents such as being ridiculed for making errors. The learner's inherent personality traits, such as perfectionism or a profound fear of public speaking, also play a pivotal role in determining how xenoglossophobia is manifested. The perceived difficulty of the target language and the associated learning context can significantly influence the learner's anxiety levels. The age of the language learner is another crucial factor in the expression of this condition. Furthermore, the specific situations and contexts in which the language is used can also influence the intensity of this phobia.

Given this phenomenon's complex and multifaceted nature, considering various English learners and contexts, a one-size-fits-all approach to identifying its aspects and effects is not beneficial. The factors contributing to this anxiety are highly variable and context-dependent, requiring a nuanced and individualized approach to understanding and addressing it in each setting. The context-dependent nature of xenoglossophobia has been the subject of scientific investigation. While various solutions have been proposed to empower language learners facing this challenge, the efficacy of these coping strategies is not uniform. Therefore, examining the adaptive and maladaptive strategies employed by language learners with comparable backgrounds is necessary to provide targeted and beneficial specialized guidance (Lamber, 2023). Adaptive coping strategies are characterized by their capacity to effectively manage stress and adversity by addressing the root causes of problems and promoting well-being (Rose, 1994). These strategies are predicated on the notion that individuals can actively engage with their environment to mitigate the negative impacts of stressors.

In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies provide temporary relief but exacerbate problems or lead to negative consequences (Rose, 1994). These strategies are characterized by their inability to address the root causes of stress and often involve avoidance, aggression, and learned helplessness. Considering the dynamic nature of phenomenon, a significant number of studies relied on using the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) to measure xenoglossophbia, which is considered outdated and not context-specific. This instrument exhibits several notable limitations that warrant consideration (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Park, 2014). A primary concern surrounding the FLCAS is the inconsistent factor structures examining its underlying dimensions. Disparate factor solutions have been identified, with some items failing to load on selected factors. This variability may stem from differences in target languages, proficiency levels, and analytical approaches employed by researchers.

Many FLCAS items have been discarded due to their failure to load on any factors. This phenomenon raises questions about the coherence and validity of the scale's item composition.

Despite extensive research, no factor structure has been consistently and reliably identified as the underlying framework of the full 33-item FLCAS. This lack of a clear factor structure poses challenges for using the scale, particularly in multivariate analyses that require well-defined factor structures. When the FLCAS is employed without modification in diverse contexts, it may fail to capture anxiety-provoking experiences that are specific to the learning environment. Despite development of a 12-item short-form version (S-FLCAS) with a clear unidimensional structure, the full FLCAS has not found a satisfactory unidimensional solution. Subsequently, the present study sought to examine the underlying components of xenoglossophobia using the nuanced approach of Exploratory Structural Equation Modelling (ESEM) in the Iranian EFL context. The outcomes led to the developing of a comprehensive model and a valid and reliable scale. The researchers also meticulously examined the types of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners. The overarching objective was to propose effective and empirically grounded solutions that could be applied and generalized across the Iranian EFL context.

## Literature Review

A series of interrelated factors were identified to contribute to the complex xenoglossophobia construct. For example, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which play a crucial role in language acquisition, can have a considerable effect on the severity of this complication. (Clément et al., 1994). Also, an individual's self-confidence in their language abilities and the cohesion and supportiveness of the learning group can significantly affect foreign language anxiety (Clément et al., 1994). Moreover, as students transition from single-gender to mixed-gender classes, their anxieties can shift from academic concerns to peer interaction worries, especially for female students (Pappamihiel, 2001), highlighting the social variables contributing to the phenomenon. Extended overseas experience and cultural immersion can positively impact self-confidence in speaking a foreign language, highlighting the importance of providing opportunities for cultural exposure (Matsuda et al., 2004). Thus, addressing cross-cultural issues is necessary when exploring the constitutes of xenoglossophobia, particularly among EFL learners compared to ESL ones. Challenges and difficulties in the language learning process can contribute to increased anxiety levels. So, identifying and addressing learning difficulties is crucial (Chen et al., 2004).

The classroom environment and teaching approaches educators employ can either exacerbate or alleviate xenoglossophobia (Mak, 2011). Thus, pedagogical and environmental factors also play considerable roles in the perceived levels of this anxiety. Individual differences in personality traits, such as behavioral and emotional variables, can also influence it (Dewaele et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2013). Types of activities in class, such as speaking activities in a foreign language, can be particularly anxiety-provoking (Suleimenova, 2013). The General Feeling of Anxiety (GFA) experienced by EFL learners was not only a standalone factor but also played a role in exacerbating their experience, which suggests that the underlying anxiety and apprehension felt by these learners in various aspects of their lives can contribute to and amplify their specific fears and anxieties related to foreign language use. (Malik et al., 2020). Furthermore, technology-related factors, such as technophobia, can significantly exacerbate perceived foreign language anxiety. As technology becomes

increasingly integrated into language learning, students uncomfortable with or fearing technology may experience additional stress and anxiety in the classroom.

In the following, the outcomes of the studies focused on adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviors among EFL learners are synthesized. Existing research has identified several adaptive coping mechanisms commonly utilized by EFL students experiencing high levels of xenoglossophobia. One such adaptive approach is the practice of positive self-talk, where learners engage in encouraging internal dialogue and reframe their anxiety as excitement, which is associated with lower levels of FLA and communication apprehension (Shi et al., 2015). Also, positive self-talk may help maintain the learners' motivation and resilience. Another adaptive coping mechanism is seeking social support, wherein EFL students reach out to their peers, teachers, or family members for encouragement and assistance that provide a buffer against the detrimental effects of anxiety, leading to reduced xenoglossophobia levels and greater willingness to communicate (Kalsoom et al., 2020). Enhancing mindfulness likewise serves as an effective adaptive strategy for managing this condition, as higher degrees of mindful awareness have been found to correspond with lower levels of anxiety among EFL learners (Fallah, 2017).

In an effort to address the challenge of xenoglossophobia among English learners, researchers have explored the potential of technological solutions as adaptive coping strategies. One such approach is the utilization of AI-powered chatbots (El Shazly, 2021). These conversational agents are beneficial in empowering EFL learners who experience this language-related anxiety. Additionally, the integration of AI-driven assistants, such as Google Assistant, has also been investigated to support English language learners (Tai & Chen, 2023). These AI-powered tools have the potential to provide personalized language learning experiences, thereby addressing the specific needs and concerns of individuals struggling with this phobia. While some individuals may benefit from employing adaptive coping strategies to manage this anxiety, a substantial proportion of EFL learners may find that maladaptive coping strategies prove more effective in their particular circumstances. The unproductive coping strategies differ from one learner to the next and from one context to another.

For instance, EFL learners suffering from this condition, often engage in harsh self-evaluation and negative self-talk (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). They may berate themselves for perceived failures or shortcomings in language learning, doubting their abilities and intelligence. This self-critical mindset can further undermine their self-confidence and motivation, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates their anxiety and fear. To avoid the anxiety-provoking experience of language learning, EFL learners may resort to putting off or delaying engagement with language tasks, assignments, and practice, leading to a widening gap in their language skills, which fuels more anxiety and further procrastination (Yurtseven & Akpur, 2018). Some EFL learners with this complication may cope by physically or emotionally withdrawing from language-learning situations due to a lack of motivation. This issue can manifest as skipping classes, missing assignments, or disengaging entirely from language-related activities. By avoiding the source of their fear, they temporarily alleviate their anxiety, but this strategy ultimately hinders their language acquisition and progress.

As a defensive mechanism, some EFL learners who experience this fear response, may act out or disrupt the class as a way to shift the focus away from their language difficulties and avoid participation. This issue can be talking over the teacher, making disruptive noises, or engaging in other disruptive behaviors (Jati et al., 2019). This strategy allows them to avoid anxiety-provoking situations, but it also damages their relationships with teachers and peers, further isolating them (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). This study delved into the construct of xenoglossophobia within the context of Iranian EFL education. The primary objectives are threefold: (a) to provide a comprehensive and reliable model of this psychological condition; (b) to investigate the potential adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies employed by EFL learners to mitigate the adverse effects of anxiety in learning and using English. With the aim of achieving these aims, the following research questions were posited:

1. What are the components of xenoglossophobia in the Iranian EFL setting?

2. What are the adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners to manage their xenoglossophobia?

## Method

### Design of The Study

This investigation employed an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2021) to effectively address the research questions and ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. The study was conducted in two distinct phases. The initial quantitative phase involved the development of a valid, reliable, and robust model of xenoglossophobia components. This objective was achieved by implementing a Quantitative Systematic Review (QSR), which synthesized the empirical evidence to establish the critical components of the phenomenon. Subsequently, the study's qualitative phase entailed conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a randomly selected sample of Iranian EFL learners. The purpose of this phase was to explore the adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies employed by these individuals in managing their xenoglossophobia. The rationale for adopting this mixed-methods approach was twofold. Firstly, the nature of the research questions necessitated the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Secondly, the qualitative phase was designed to alternatively confirm the components of the xenoglossophobia model developed during the initial quantitative phase by examining how the adaptive and maladaptive strategies used by the Iranian EFL learners aligned with the model's structure.

### Participants

In the quantitative phase of the research, 349 available Iranian EFL learners, comprising both genders, were selected. The participants' proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to advanced, with an 8-year age range, from 19 to 27 years old. The rationale for selecting intermediate to advanced learners was to ensure the minimum level of language proficiency necessary for completing the questionnaire accurately and without biases arising from linguistic limitations. Owing to certain constraints, the researchers assessed participants' proficiency based on their prior English coursework rather than through additional testing procedures. They were requested to complete the developed Likert-scale-based questionnaire

named xenoglossophboia Scale (XenS) based on the theoretical model to validate its components. The qualitative phase of the study involved in-depth focus-group interviews with 96 participants from the quantitative phase. They were divided into twelve groups and interviewed in eight sessions to gain a better understanding of their adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviors employed in managing this disorder. The necessary ethical standards, including protecting the privacy of the individuals involved in the study, were followed.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of the Participants*

| Phase | Purpose for selection | EFL Teachers (F) | Age range | EFL Learners (F) | Age range | Sample selection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QUAL Phase | IPA | 46 | 24<br>31 | 93 | 17<br>28 | Convenience |
| | Validating scale | - | - | 128 | 16<br>33 | Convenience |
| Quan Phase | Quasi-experimental multiple-group study | - | - | 72 | 19<br>25 | Purposive |
| | Structured audio interviews | - | - | 12 | 19<br>25 | Random |

## Materials and Instruments

### *Apache Xerces*

Apache Xerces, an open software available on GitHub for free, offers a powerful solution for parsing Extensible Markup Language (XML) documents. This capability can be strategically leveraged in the context of systematic literature reviews to efficiently identify studies containing specific keywords within their topical focus. The process begins with parsing XML metadata files from digital libraries and databases. These files typically contain a wealth of bibliographic information, including titles, abstracts, keywords, authors, and other relevant details about research papers. By harnessing the search capabilities of Apache Xerces, researchers can scour the parsed XML data for occurrences of specific keywords. These keywords are carefully selected based on their relevance to the systematic review's topic, ensuring a targeted and comprehensive approach. Upon identifying papers that contain the target keywords in their title, abstract, or keywords list, Apache Xerces facilitates the extraction of their bibliographic details. This process streamlines the compilation of a dataset for further screening and inclusion in the systematic review. The XML parsing capabilities of Apache Xerces make it an ideal tool for automating the process of extracting and searching bibliographic metadata across multiple databases.

### *Xenoglossophobia Scale (XenS)*

This study developed a valid and reliable xenoglossophboia Scale (XenS) grounded in the theoretical model conceptualized through the Quantitative Systematic Literature Review (QSLR) and meta-integration phases of the present research (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Dekkers, Carey, & Langhorne, 2022). Initially, the questionnaire was structured around seven primary constructs derived from the qualitative phase of the study and consisted of 22 items. A pilot study involving 112 randomly selected English learners from various language institutes in Isfahan was conducted to refine the questionnaire based on computing and analyzing values of

Cronbahc's Alpha for internal consistency. The instrument was further validated through feedback from experts in TEFL, educational psychology, and psycholinguistics. The final version consisted of 22 5-point Likert scales based on which the anchors included strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Individuals with a low score (22-44) on the Xen S are unlikely to exhibit significant or considerable anxiety related to learning a foreign language, which suggests that their English language acquisition is not substantially hindered by anxiety. Learners with a mild score (45–66) may exhibit some xenoglossophobia, which can potentially hinder their English language learning. Individuals with a moderate score (67–88) are likely to experience a more pronounced form of this condition, exerting a considerable influence on their language acquisition process. Finally, those with a high score (89–110) may display an intense manifestation of the disorder, which can have a severe and debilitating impact on their overall learning performance.

### *Focus-group Interview*

Focus group interviews, a qualitative research method, offer a unique opportunity to gather insights from a diverse community of individuals who share common characteristics and experiences. These interviews are conducted in both face-to-face and virtual settings, allowing participants to engage in meaningful discussions and share their perspectives on a specific phenomenon (Flick, 2021). In this study, the researchers conducted twelve focus-group interview sessions, each with eight participants randomly selected from the quantitative phase. The primary objective was to investigate the coping strategies, both adaptive and maladaptive, employed by these individuals in managing their xenoglossophobia. Through a rigorous thematic analysis of the focus-group interview transcripts, the researchers identified a range of coping strategies employed by the participants. To ensure the reliability of the focus group interviews, an observer was present in two randomly selected interview sessions. The observer closely examined the process of asking questions and coding the responses provided by the participants. This measure helped to verify the consistency and accuracy of the interview procedures, ensuring that the data collection process was carried out in a standardized manner. A series of complementary methods were employed to address the validity of the gathered data. The data collected from the focus group interviews was cross-validated through observation cards and recorded audio, enabling the researchers to revisit and re-examine the data as needed and ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information gathered.

## Procedure

The first step involved a QSLR of existing literature to identify the components of xenoglossophobia among associated studies conducted from 2003-2023. The researchers used Apache Xerces to find similar studies focusing on relevant keywords from reputable, non-predatory journals published since 2003. After developing a model of xenoglossophobia, its components were validated using a reliable questionnaire (XenS) developed in this study for 349 Iranian EFL learners who were selected through convenience sampling from various English language institutes in Isfahan. These EFL learners were selected from various English language institutes in Isfahan under the supervision and confirmation of the responsible staff based on their actual pass/fail scores in the last courses they participated. Jotform, an AI-driven online platform, was used to carry out the XenS for participants who reached the scale by

scanning a QR code or receiving a direct link in one of the local social networking applications. Finally, with the aim of exploring adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, 96 randomly selected Iranian EFL learners were selected from the larger sample in the previous phase of the study. They were interviewed in 12 focus-group interview sessions; each included eight individuals who were asked to respond verbally to two items focusing on pinpointing coping strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive. After developing a model of xenoglossophobia, its components were validated using a reliable questionnaire (XenS) developed in this study for 349 Iranian EFL learners who were selected through convenience sampling from various English language institutes in Isfahan.

## Data Analysis

The Lavaan package in R statistical computing software version 4.4.1 was used in the quantitative phase. For the analysis of the meta-integration in the QSLR, the Failsafe-N (FSN) test and Ad-hoc rule were utilized for the meta-analysis to evaluate the data. At the same time, descriptive statistics, particularly the frequency index, were employed in the meta-synthesis. Concerning the validation of xenoglossophobia model's components, ESEM was followed after open, axial, and selective codings. In regard to the adequacy of the sample size, the minimum number of participants required for the ESEM was calculated to be 270 using the CDF-based lower-bound formula. Previous recommendations (Kline, 2021; MacCallum et al., 1999) suggest that a sample size between 200 and 300 is generally sufficient to ensure stable factor loadings and robust model estimation. Consequently, the total sample of 349 participants in the present study exceeds the required threshold, thereby confirming the adequacy and stability of the model's factor structure.A series of statistical assumptions were examined before computing ESEM, such as Common-Method Variance (CMV), multivariate normality, homoscedasticity, normality, sample size adequacy, and positive definiteness. Also, discriminate validity, composite reliability, and fitness indexes were calculated in the final step of validating components of the Xenolgossophoia model. The findings of the focus group sessions were thematically analyzed.

## Results

A comprehensive examination of the QSLR yielded 1714 studies, of which 349 were published in potentially predatory journals, and 246 did not align with the study's focus. Furthermore, the aggregated studies consisted of 148 qualitative and 971 quantitative investigations. A meta-integration was conducted, comprising both meta-analysis and meta-synthesis, to ensure the validity of the selected studies and mitigate potential biases in the selection process. In regard to conducting the meta-integration, Finfgeld-Connett's (2018) protocol was employed, which entailed the parallel and inter-related execution of meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. In contrast to fixed-model approaches that assume homogeneous participants regarding their characteristics and conditions across all studies, the random-effects model used in this study accounted for the heterogeneity among the studies by incorporating the calculation of the Fail-Safe N test and the test of combined significance. The Fail-Safe N test is a statistical method used to assess the robustness of significant results in meta-analyses by estimating the number of additional studies with null findings required to alter the overall conclusion from statistically significant to non-significant.

The present meta-analysis synthesized the results of 971 primary studies to estimate the overall effect size. Rosenthal's fail-safe N was calculated to assess the vulnerability of the combined effect to publication bias. This statistic represents the number of additional studies with null results that would be required to reduce the meta-analytic finding to a negligible level. The fail-safe N for this meta-analysis was determined to be 6,790. This value indicates that 6,790 additional studies with non-significant findings would need to exist to diminish the pooled effect to statistical insignificance. According to Rosenthal's heuristic, when the fail-safe N exceeds the threshold of 5k + 10(m) where k denotes the number of studies and m represents the number of effect sizes, it is regarded as sufficiently large, indicating that the results are unlikely to be affected by publication bias. Given the substantial number of studies included (970) and the exceptionally high fail-safe N, it is highly improbable that the observed effect is a consequence of publication bias. The extremely high fail-safe N indicates that the observed effect is a reliable estimate of the actual population effect size.

**Table 2.** *Components and Sub-components of Xenolgossophobia*

| No. | Components | Sub-components |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Cognitive (COG) | Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) |
| | | Self-efficacy |
| | | Cognitive load |
| | | LG learning strategies |
| 2 | Emotional (EMO) | Emotional Intelligence (EI) |
| | | Motivation |
| | | Emotional support |
| 3 | Behavioral (BEH) | Avoidance |
| | | Communication strategies |
| | | Communication frequency |
| | | Classroom behavior |
| 4 | Environmental (ENV) | Classroom environment |
| | | Teacher-led support |
| | | Peer-led support |
| | | Curriculum and instruction |
| 5 | Cultural (CUL) | Cultural identity |
| | | Societal expectation |
| | | LG attitudes |
| | | Cultural competence |
| 6 | Technology (TEC) | Digital anxiety |
| 7 | Learning (LEA) | LG learning experiences |
| | | LG learning goals |

A meta-synthesis was conducted on 148 qualitative studies utilizing Inductive Content Analysis (ICA) to facilitate a comprehensive examination of xenoglossophobia. The ICA process in meta-synthesis involves an iterative and data-driven approach to coding, categorizing, and abstracting the findings from the included studies. This rigorous methodology identified seven distinct constructs that collectively contribute to the phenomenon. Six primary components were selected based on the meta-analysis findings and the initial phase of ICA. Following the meta-synthesis, the primary components were reclassified, and a new one was added, resulting in a provisional model comprising seven primary components. The results of the open-coding in grounded theory-based analysis led to the development of a tentative theorized model of xenoglossophobia consisting of seven major components, including cognitive components (COG), emotional components (EMO), behavioral components (BEH), environmental components (ENV), cultural components (CUL), technology components (TEC), and learning components (LEA). Table 1 shows the xenoglossophobia components and sub-components. A visual figure also illustrates the whole model (see Appendix).

In regard to ensuring the validity of ESEM analysis, several statistical assumptions were examined. The first was CMV, a spurious variance arising from the measurement method rather than the measured constructs. Both ex-ante and ex-post remedies were explored to mitigate the potential impact of CMV. The ex-ante remedy involved specific systematic guidelines for developing the XenS scale and its item anchors, ensuring that the measurement instrument was designed to capture the intended constructs accurately. In contrast, the ex-post remedy entailed the application of Harman's single-factor test to identify any potential CMV. This test was conducted using the Principal Axis Factor (PAF) model without rotation, which allowed for the examination of the underlying factor structure of the data. The analysis revealed that only one extracted factor accounted for 12.69% of the total variance. This outcome significantly deviates from the expected 50% threshold, thereby supporting the rejection of the possibility of CMB in the data.

Second, the assumption of multivariate normality, which necessitates that continuous variables conform to a multivariate normal distribution, was examined. The Mahalanobis distance D2 was employed to verify this assumption due to its superior accuracy and sensitivity to outliers compared to the Euclidean distance. Unlike the Euclidean distance, which assumes a Gaussian distribution in an isotropic manner, this metric takes into account the correlation among variables based on an anisotropic Gaussian distribution. The residuals' statistics of the Mahalanobis distance revealed a minimum value of 18.62 and a maximum value of 59.63, which fall within the acceptable range of 0 to 100.

The Cumulative Distance Function (CDF) of the chi-square distribution was employed to assess the Mahalanobis values for each participant. Specifically, the CDF was used to compare these values against the critical value of 0.001, thereby facilitating the identification of any outliers or anomalies within the dataset. The results of the preliminary analysis indicated that the respondents with the highest value were 48, 62, 11, 66, and 4, with values of 0.996, 0.967, 0.961, 0.953, and 0.944, respectively. Conversely, the respondents with the lowest distances were 53, 13, 69, 83, and 92, with values of 0.016, 0.018, 0.022, 0.029, and 0.031, respectively.

Notably, none of these values were lower than the critical value of 0.001, thereby suggesting no violation of the assumption of multivariate normality.

In regard to assessing the presence of multicollinearity in the multiple regression model, collinearity statistics were employed to examine the tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. Multicollinearity arises when one predictor variable can be accurately predicted from the others, compromising the model's stability and interpretability. The VIF, a ratio that quantifies multicollinearity, measures the degree to which the presence of other predictor variables inflates the variance of each coefficient. The results showed that the tolerance values ranged from 0.847 to 0.978, indicating that most components exhibit moderate to high independence from other variables. The VIF values ranged from 1.063 to 1.179, suggesting that some components may be moderately to highly correlated with other variables. Overall, the results indicate that while there may be some moderate multicollinearity issues, the components generally exhibit a reasonable degree of independence, thereby ensuring the stability and interpretability of the model.

The homoscedasticity assumption stipulates that the error variance is identical across different samples, even if these samples originate from distinct populations. In regard to checking this assumption, a scatterplot was constructed to visualize the relationship between standardized predicted values and standardized residuals. Notably, a surrogate dependent variable, specifically the number of participants, was employed to generate the Loess line, which facilitates the identification of patterns in the data. The visual inspection of the scatterplot revealed that the Loess line exhibited a smooth, continuous pattern devoid of any abrupt changes in slope, thereby indicating a high degree of linearity. This observation is consistent with the assumption of homoscedasticity, as it suggests that the variance of residuals remains relatively constant across the range of predicted values.

The normality assumption was checked by calculating skewness and kurtosis values, followed by complementary approaches such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, which were employed to validate the normality assumption further. The skewness and kurtosis ratios fell within the range of -1.96 to +1.96, suggesting that the distribution of values was normally dispersed. Furthermore, the variance values did not exhibit significant disparities, with none exceeding ten times the value of any other variance, supporting the conclusion that the data dispersion was normal. In addition, the significance indices for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test uniformly exceeded the critical value of 0.05. This observation is corroborated by the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, where the significance indices consistently surpassed the critical value of 0.5. Consequently, it was established that the principle of normality was satisfied for the data.

With the aim of checking the sample size assumption, a specific formula was used to determine the appropriate number of participants for the theorized model in SEM. This formula incorporates an error function, the lower bound sample size for ESEM, a normal distribution, and the Cumulative Distribution Function (CDF). The CDF is a fundamental concept in probability theory that describes the probability of a random variable assuming values less than or equal to a specified value X. The requisite sample size for detecting the effect in this study was 278, while the recommended minimum sample size was 270. Consequently, this study's

total sample size of 349 participants was sufficient for conducting ESEM. Furthermore, supplementary analyses were conducted using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO assesses the suitability of the data for factor analysis by evaluating the sampling adequacy for each variable and the overall model. On the other hand, Bartlett's sphericity test compares the observed correlation matrix to the identity matrix, thereby identifying potential redundancy between variables that a few factors can summarize.

The calculated KMO value of 0.890 falls within the meritorious range (KMO > 0.8), indicating that the sampling adequacy is suitable for factor analysis. Furthermore, the critical value in Bartlett's Test (.000) is significantly lower than the threshold of .005, thereby ruling out the presence of an identity matrix supporting the applicability of factor analysis with the collected data. EFA was conducted in the model specification phase to determine the number of constructs. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and varimax with Kaiser Normalization (KN) were the extraction and rotation methods employed. The results are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 3.** *EFA (Rotated Component Matrix of the Model)*

| **Component** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **Component** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| COG1 | .959 | | | | | ENV1 | | | | .997 | |
| COG2 | .949 | | | | | ENV2 | | | | .986 | |
| COG3 | .922 | | | | | ENV3 | | | | .939 | |
| COG4 | .967 | | | | | ENV4 | | | | .922 | |
| EMO1 | | .993 | | | | CUL1 | | | | | .941 |
| EMO2 | | .948 | | | | CUL2 | | | | | .939 |
| EMO3 | | .963 | | | | CUL3 | | | | | .968 |
| BEH1 | | | .951 | | | CUL4 | | | | | .920 |
| BEH2 | | | .967 | | | TEC1 | .956 | | | | |
| BEH3 | | | .984 | | | LEA1 | | .964 | | | |
| BEH4 | | . | .965 | | | LEA2 | | .971 | | | |
| Determinant | | | | | | | | | 1.68 | | |

According to the results presented in Table 2, the PCA revealed that a minimum five-component solution was optimal and appropriate for grouping the items in the questionnaire and the proposed model. Furthermore, the determinant value of 1.68 was not zero, indicating that the variables are not perfectly multicollinear, which confirms the appropriacy of the factor analysis. The number of variances was added to the regression coefficients and covariances to ensure the complexity of the model specification. The degree of freedom (df), the difference between the number of observations and parameters, was calculated to be 590. This value suggests that the tentative theorized model is perfectly over-identified in nature.

**Table 4.** *CFA (Model's Fitness Statistics)*

| | Absolute | | Incremental | | | Parsimonious | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | GFI | RMSEA | NFI | CFI | TLI | PNFI | PGFI |
| COG | .976 | .041 | .986 | .967 | .977 | .648 | .657 |
| EMO | .991 | .039 | .955 | .955 | .965 | .789 | .796 |
| BEH | .968 | .035 | .978 | .956 | .958 | .587 | .745 |
| ENV | .974 | .044 | .967 | .978 | .957 | .697 | .712 |
| CUL | .991 | .016 | .961 | .988 | .964 | .663 | .695 |
| TEC | .969 | .025 | .977 | .963 | .991 | .699 | .739 |
| LEA | .976 | .023 | .958 | .992 | .989 | .687 | .756 |
| The whole model | .959 | .37 | .969 | .990 | .976 | .712 | .792 |
| Recommended | ≥.95 | ≤.05 | ≥.95 | ≥.95 | ≥.95 | ≥.5 | ≥.5 |

A comprehensive set of CFA fit statistics was calculated, encompassing absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit indices to assess the fitness of the proposed model. The absolute fit indices included the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). These measures assess the overall model fit, evaluating how well the specified model reproduces the observed covariance matrix. The incremental fit indices, on the other hand, consisted of the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) or Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI). These indices compare the proposed model to a baseline model, typically the null model, to determine the extent of improvement in fit. Finally, the parsimonious fit indices were calculated, such as the Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI) and the Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI). These measures consider the model's complexity, assessing the model's fit relative to the number of estimated parameters. The results of these CFA fit statistics are presented in Table 3, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed model's fitness.

The fit indices presented in Table 4.3 indicate that all the indices fall within the recommended range, suggesting that the developed model fits the collected data well and supports the model. To ensure the validity and reliability of the final version of the developed model, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability were calculated. Convergent validity was assessed by calculating the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) using the formula Σ (Sum of the square of standardized loadings)/No. of indicators. The results showed that all AVE values exceed 0.5, indicating that convergent validity is established across each main component in the model. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that all subcomponents significantly influenced their subsequent primary components, providing evidence of the model's validity and reliability.

The square root of AVE and correlation values were calculated to assess the discriminant validity of the model. The results indicated that the square root of AVE values exceeded the correlation values between primary components, thereby establishing discriminant validity across each component. Composite reliability, which measures the shared variance among observed variables of a latent construct, was also evaluated by using the formula $(\Sigma standardizedloadings)^2 / [(\Sigma standardizedloadings)^2 + \Sigma(ME)]$. The findings revealed that all composite reliability values exceeded 0.7, indicating that the model enjoys composite reliability across its components and sub-components.

The thematic analysis of the focus group interviews revealed a range of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used to manage xenoglossophobia. Mindfulness, a practice involving focused attention on the present moment with a non-judgmental attitude, emerged as an effective adaptive strategy for EFL learners in regulating this condition. Cognitive reframing, a cognitive-behavioral technique that encourages individuals to reinterpret situations in order to lessen negative emotions and foster more constructive responses, was also found to be beneficial for those coping with this form of anxiety. Moreover, seeking support from peers, teachers, and language learning communities proved to be a valuable adaptive mechanism for mitigating the adverse emotional effects associated with this phenomenon. Finally, integrating AI-driven chatbots into language learning has shown promise as an adaptive coping strategy for EFL learners, reducing this anxiety and increasing self-confidence.

Self-criticism involves harshly judging one's performance and abilities, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. For EFL learners suffering this complication, self-criticism as a maladaptive coping strategy was particularly detrimental, as it reinforced negative beliefs about their language learning abilities and perpetuated a cycle of anxiety and avoidance. Procrastination, the act of delaying or postponing tasks, was another maladaptive coping strategy commonly observed among EFL learners with this disorder. Absence or withdrawal from language learning activities was a maladaptive coping strategy that involved physically or mentally disengaging from the learning process. Some EFL learners mentioned choosing to skip classes, avoid participating in group discussions, or disengage mentally during lessons as a way to cope with their anxiety. Finally, disruptive classroom behavior, such as excessive talking, clowning around, or deliberately distracting others, can be a maladaptive coping strategy employed by EFL learners with xenoglossophobia.

## Discussion

This study was designed to accomplish two primary objectives: first, to investigate the components of xenoglossophobia within the Iranian EFL context (RQ1); and second, to examine the (mal)adaptive coping strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners in managing this condition. The results related to RQ1 indicated that the construct encompasses cognitive, emotional, behavioral, environmental, cultural, technological, and learning dimensions. These findings are consistent with those of Clément et al. (1994), who emphasized the vital role of emotional and cognitive factors particularly motivation and self-confidence in shaping English learners' experiences of this anxiety phenomenon. This congruency can be attributed to the notion that by promoting intrinsic motivation and cultivating a supportive educational atmosphere, educators can help alleviate the fears associated with language learning (Luo et al., 2020). This approach enhances learners' engagement with the language and contributes to their overall proficiency and positive learning experiences. Additionally, learners with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to approach language learning with a positive mindset, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as threats (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022).

The RQ1 findings are also consistent with those of Matsuda et al. (2004), which identified cultural and identity-associated factors as contributors to the xenoglossophobia experienced by EFL learners. For instance, in some cultures, foreign languages may be viewed with skepticism

or as unnecessary, leading to anxiety when learners feel pressured to master a language they do not value. Cultures that prioritize their native language over others may instill a fear of inadequacy in learners, making them anxious about speaking a foreign language. Conversely, in cultures where proficiency in English is highly valued, learners may fear judgment from peers if they struggle with the language, leading to increased anxiety. Cultural expectations regarding education and success can heighten stress for learners, particularly if they feel they must excel in English to meet familial or societal standards. Learners may fear that speaking English could dilute their cultural identity or lead to a loss of connection with their heritage, causing anxiety about engaging with the language. Additionally, negative stereotypes about non-native speakers can create a fear of being judged or ridiculed, which can deter learners from practicing their English skills.

The outcomes of RQ1 also align with those of Suleimenova (2013), which suggest that instructional methodology, the cognitive load imposed by tasks, and the strategies used for learning a foreign language significantly influence the levels of xenoglossophobia among learners, particularly those in EFL contexts. Teaching approaches that emphasize interaction and communication can help alleviate the apprehension associated with speaking a foreign language. For instance, methodologies that promote collaboration and peer engagement foster a supportive learning atmosphere, thereby reducing the intensity of this anxiety phenomenon. Moreover, when the cognitive load becomes excessively high, it may overwhelm learners, leading to elevated anxiety levels and negative emotional responses that further exacerbate this condition. Moreover, the implementation of effective learning strategies is vital for managing cognitive load and enhancing language learning. Strategies that promote active engagement such as self-regulation, goal setting, and reflective practices can empower learners to take charge of their educational journey.

Regarding the outcomes of the second research question, adaptive coping strategies included mindfulness, cognitive reframing, seeking support, and using AI-driven chatbots. Maladaptive coping strategies were self-criticism, procrastination, absence or withdrawal, and disruptive classroom behavior. This study may benefit EFL community members and educational psychologists in developing needs-oriented therapeutic pedagogies. The results are consistent with those of Shi et al. (2015), who found that mindfulness and positive self-talk helped English learners manage their xenoglossophobia while learning and using English. By fostering a non-judgmental awareness of thoughts and feelings, mindfulness allows learners to confront their fears of speaking a foreign language without the pressure of self-criticism or negative expectations. This can lead to a more positive learning environment, where students feel safe to practice their language skills without the fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, the findings are congruent with those of some studies (e.g., El Shazly, 2021; Kalsoom et al., 2020), suggesting that receiving support from peers or AI-driven learning solutions such as chatbots considerably diminished xenoglossophobia by avoiding the experience of fear of negative evaluation and potential threats from teachers and peers considering identity and self-confidence. Engaging with peers in a supportive environment encourages learners to practice speaking without the fear of judgment. This interaction helps build confidence and reduces feelings of isolation, which are common among those

experiencing this phobia. Additionally, peer support fosters a collaborative learning atmosphere where students can share experiences and strategies to overcome anxiety. This communal approach can lead to shared understanding and motivation, making the learning process less daunting. Furthermore, AI chatbots provide a non-threatening space for learners to practice speaking. They can simulate conversations without the pressure of real-life interactions, allowing learners to experiment with language and gain confidence.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of xenoglossophobia among Iranian EFL learners and the coping strategies they employ to manage this condition. The findings underscore its multifaceted nature, encompassing cognitive, emotional, behavioral, environmental, cultural, technological, and learning dimensions. The study further identifies both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms that Iranian EFL learners use to address their fear of foreign language use. Gaining insight into the intricacies of this phenomenon not only facilitates the identification of the specific anxieties and challenges that learners encounter in language learning contexts but also sheds light on the diverse strategies they adopt to overcome them. This comprehensive understanding enables educators, curriculum developers, and mental health professionals to tailor their approaches, ensuring that they address the unique psychological barriers that hinder language acquisition. Furthermore, by fostering an environment that acknowledges and mitigates these fears, stakeholders can significantly enhance the educational experience for EFL learners. Such initiatives may include the development of targeted workshops, counseling services, and classroom strategies that promote a more supportive and less intimidating atmosphere for language learning. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of integrating psychological insights into language education, thereby facilitating a more holistic approach to overcoming the barriers posed by xenoglossophobia and empowering students to thrive in their language learning endeavors.

Although the present study provided valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of this language related phobia and the coping strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners, there remain several promising directions for future research. One worthwhile extension would be to examine the proposed model across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to evaluate its broader applicability and cultural sensitivity. Longitudinal investigations could also deepen our understanding of how xenoglossophobia fluctuates over time and how learners' adaptive and maladaptive behaviors evolve with continued language exposure. Another important avenue involves exploring the influence of digital learning platforms and AI-assisted communication tools, which are becoming increasingly integrated into contemporary EFL classrooms. In addition, intervention-based studies that employ mindfulness training, cognitive reframing, or peer-support mechanisms could further substantiate the therapeutic relevance of the present findings. Finally, it would be beneficial to replicate and validate the xenoglossophobia Scale (XenS) in diverse contexts and proficiency levels to strengthen its psychometric robustness and ensure its wider applicability within the field of applied linguistics.

## Acknowledgments (Required)

I am deeply grateful to all participants, professionals, and colleagues for their invaluable guidance and support throughout the whole project. My great gratitude goes to the unknown reviewers for providing their priceless commentary.

## References

Bensalem, E., & Thompson, A. S. (2022). Multilingual effects on EFL learning: A comparison of foreign language anxiety and self-confidence experienced by bilingual and multilingual tertiary students. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *25*(7), 2653-2667. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1943306

Böttger, H., & Költzsch, D. (2020). The fear factor: Xenoglossophobia or how to overcome the anxiety of speaking foreign languages. *Training, Language and Culture, 4*(2), 43-55. https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442x-2020-4-2-43-55

Chen, T. Y., & Chang, G. B. (2004). The relationship between foreign language anxiety and learning difficulties. *Foreign Language Annals, 37*(2), 279-289. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2004.tb02200.x

Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language Learning, 44*(3), 417-448. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01113.x

Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Sage.

Debreli, E., & Ishanova, I. (2019). Foreign language classroom management: Types of student misbehaviour and strategies adapted by the teachers in handling disruptive behaviour. *Cogent Education, 6*(1), 164-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2019.1648629

Dekkers, R., Carey, L., & Langhorne, P. (2022). *Making literature reviews work: A multidisciplinary guide to systematic approaches*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-90025-0

Dewaele, J. M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2016). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety. The right and left feet of the language learner. *Positive psychology in SLA, 15*(8), 215-236. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.30945667.12

Dewaele, J. M., Witney, J., Saito, K., & Dewaele, L. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(6), 676-697. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817692161

El Shazly, R. (2021). Effects of artificial intelligence on English speaking anxiety and speaking performance: A case study. *Expert Systems*, *38*(3), 66-76.

Fallah, N. (2017). Mindfulness, coping self-efficacy and foreign language anxiety: A mediation analysis. *Educational Psychology*, *37*(6), 745-756. https://doi.org/10.1111/exsy.12667

Finfgeld-Connett, D. (2018). *A guide to qualitative meta-synthesis*. Routledge.

Flick, U. (2021). *Doing focus groups* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Flick, U. (2022). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design.* Sage.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *70*(2), 125-132. https://doi.org/10.2307/327317

Jati, A. F., Fauziati, E., & Wijayanto, A. (2019). Why do the students do disruptive behavior in English classroom? A case study on senior high school students in one of the small town in Indonesia. *International Journal of Language Teaching and Education*, *3*(2), 130-141. https://doi.org/10.22437/ijolte.v3i2.7701

Kalsoom, A., Soomro, N. H., & Pathan, Z. H. (2020). How social support and foreign language anxiety impact willingness to communicate in English in an EFL classroom. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *10*(2), 80-91. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n2p80

Lambert, D. (2023). *Student anxiety in the foreign language classroom: A qualitative phenomenological study*. Liberty University.

Luo, Z., Subramaniam, G., & Osteen, B. (2020). Will anxiety boost motivation? The relationship between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, *17*(1), 25-39.

Mak, B. (2011). An exploration of speaking-in-class anxiety with Chinese ESL learners. *System, 39*(2), 202-214. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.04.002

Malik, S., Qin, H., Asif, M., & Muhammad Khan, S. (2020). An investigation of Xenoglossophobia among Chinese postgraduates. *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences, 9*(1), pp-104.

Matsuda, S., & Gobel, P. (2004). Anxiety and predictors of performance in the foreign language classroom. *System, 32*(1), 21-36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2003.08.002

Pappamihiel, N. E. (2001). Moving from the ESL classroom into the mainstream: An investigation of English language anxiety in Mexican girls. *Bilingual Research Journal, 25*(2), 31-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2001.10162783

Papi, M., & Khajavy, H. (2023). Second language anxiety: Construct, effects, and sources. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 43*(1), 127-139. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190523000028

Park, G. P. (2014). Factor analysis of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale in Korean learners of English. *Psychological Reports, 115*(1), 261-275. https://doi.org/10.2466/28.11.pr0.115c10z2

Rose, A. H. (1994). *Human stress and the environment.* CRC Press.

Shi, X., Brinthaupt, T. M., & McCree, M. (2015). The relationship of self-talk frequency to communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety. *Personality and Individual Differences, 75*(1), 125-129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.11.023

Suleimenova, Z. (2013). Speaking anxiety in a foreign language classroom in Kazakhstan. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 93*(1), 1860-1868. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.131

Tai, T. Y., & Chen, H. H. J. (2023). The impact of Google Assistant on adolescent EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *31*(3), 1485-1502. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1841801

Thompson, A. S., & Lee, J. (2013). Anxiety and EFL: Does multilingualism matter? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 16*(6), 730-749. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.713322

Toyama, M., & Yamazaki, Y. (2021). Classroom interventions and foreign language anxiety: A systematic review with narrative approach. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*(1), 614-623. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.614184

Yurtseven, N., & Akpur, U. (2018). Perfectionism, anxiety and procrastination as predictors of EFL academic achievement: a mixed methods study. *Research on Youth and Language, 12*(2), 96-115.

## Appendix

*Developed Model of Xenoglossophobia Components and Sub-components*