

## SILENT STRUGGLES: HOW ANXIETY SHAPES THE LIVES OF FILIPINO STUDENTS

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In every classroom, some struggles are visible, yet many remain hidden, quietly shaping the way students live and learn. For Maria and Gabby, two of my students, anxiety was a constant companion, influencing not only their performance but also their sense of self. Maria excelled at written tasks but froze during oral recitations, terrified of making mistakes in English. Gabby grasped lessons quickly but hesitated to raise his hand, convinced that his ideas were never good enough. Their experiences reflect a broader reality.

Studies show that anxiety among Filipino students ranges from twelve to eighty-three percent, which is at least twice the rate observed in the general population. Factors such as family expectations, financial difficulties, lack of social support, and challenges in learning English contribute to the intensity of this anxiety (Alibudbud 2025).

Addressing these struggles required more than traditional teaching. For Maria, participating in small group activities allowed her to contribute without feeling exposed. Gabby benefited from structured speaking exercises that helped him prepare and gain confidence. Encouraging reflection, providing consistent feedback, and creating a supportive classroom environment allowed both students to gradually confront their fears. As one study notes, effective strategies that reduce foreign language anxiety include classroom activities that are student-centered, clear instructions, a relaxing learning environment, and teacher awareness of students' psychological needs (Atifnigar 2024).

Over time, Maria began to raise her hand and share her insights, while Gabby confidently presented his work in group discussions. Their transformation was not instantaneous, yet each small success marked a step toward resilience. Research highlights that supporting the emotional well-being of students is as important as teaching academic content, as it directly influences performance and motivation (Ilustre, Catindig, and Cruz 2022). Teachers who integrate empathy and emotional intelligence into their practice foster environments where students can thrive intellectually and emotionally (Borres 2025).

The stories of Maria and Gabby underscore a crucial lesson: addressing student anxiety is not solely about interventions in the classroom. It involves a holistic approach that recognizes personal, social, and cultural factors, and equips students with coping strategies such as positive thinking, mindfulness, and structured preparation (Alibudbud 2025). When students feel supported, they begin to channel their anxiety into focus and motivation, turning what once hindered them into a source of strength.

Watching Maria volunteer to read aloud and seeing Gabby share his project with confidence were moments of quiet triumph. These achievements reflect more than academic success; they show the power of patience, understanding, and guidance. Classrooms that attend to both intellectual and emotional growth become spaces of transformation, where students gain not only knowledge but also the courage to face challenges. Through empathy and structured support, silent struggles can become stories of growth and resilience, inspiring both students and educators to reach for their full potential.

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