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Teacher-Led Counseling: A Key Approach to Enhancing Student Mental Health at Universities

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ABSTRACT

Language classrooms, where speaking, presenting, and interaction are central, can often heighten students' anxiety and stress. Communication-related stress, combined with broader academic pressures, can negatively affect both mental health and learning outcomes. In alignment with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) and Saudi Arabia's educational vision, which prioritizes student well-being alongside academic excellence, this study explores the role of teacher-led counselling—particularly by English language teachers and academic advisors—in supporting student mental health and emotional regulation. This mixed-method study was conducted at a Saudi university with 150 students aged 18–25. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires targeting both students and teachers, while qualitative insights were drawn from university documents, mental health policies, and students' narrative reflections. An experimental group of 21 students from English-speaking skills classes, who reported anxiety, stress, or depression, received teacher-advisor counselling interventions. A matched control group was retrospectively identified from the remaining participants who reported similar anxiety levels but did not receive counselling, allowing for quasi-experimental comparison. The analysis, grounded in narrative analysis and Interactional Sociolinguistics, examined how students narrated experiences of anxiety and positioned themselves emotionally in classroom interactions. Findings highlight that teacher-advisor counselling significantly supported emotional coping, reduced communication anxiety, and improved language performance. The study also identified challenges related to teacher readiness and institutional support for mental health initiatives. Emphasizing the intersection of language education, communication anxiety, and student

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well-being, the research proposes a communication-centred, advisor-integrated model for early mental health intervention in higher education.

Keywords: Communication Anxiety; Mental Health; Teacher-Advisor Role; Narrative Analysis; Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Among University students' mental health challenges are increasingly common worldwide. While this may be due to high demands of academic performance and personal growth and achievement; Stress, anxiety, and depression may also be due to a variety of other reasons mostly ignored. Saudi Vision 2030^[1] emphasizes holistic human development, including education and well-being, and has also been addressing student mental health as a national priority. This study investigates the role of teacher-led counselling in supporting the mental health and academic success of university students in Saudi Arabia. It aims to evaluate both the effectiveness of these advisory interactions and the challenges faced by faculty in fulfilling this dual academic and psychological role specifically in Language classroom.

One of the main problems in addressing this issue is the way people see professional services towards mental health. While professional counselling services exist, they are often underutilized due to stigma or limited accessibility^[2]. Hence, Teachers, particularly those involved in academic advising, are in a unique position to offer intervention and support through early detection of students who need it. It creates an opportunity for teacher-led counselling to serve as a first line of support. Teachers can spend time learning more about their students as the students remain with one teacher who is their advisor for a period of over a year and sometime for the full four years while they are in a particular program. As advisors they can trace their academic success and their psychological concerns early on and provide basic support and refer them to professional resources in case they feel they may be stepping beyond their current role.

In today's fast paced academic and emotionally demanding environment university students depend so much on the teachers. By focusing on the role of teacher-led counselling—especially among English language teachers who interact with students in high-stress, communication-based settings—this research addresses a critical gap in mental health support structures. Teachers can elaborate their role

by understanding how valuable it is for future generations by extend their advisory roles beyond academics to include basic emotional support. This can put in place a better system where first teachers as advisors then teachers as counselors can intervene students 'mental health. The uniqueness of this study stems from its timely linkage of prior mental health research in Saudi Arabia and other regions with current university realities—marked by increased performance pressure, communication anxiety, and stress. By proposing a holistic, communication-centred advisory model, this research contributes a fresh perspective that aligns with the evolving needs of modern higher education. Moreover, a sociolinguistics interactional approach used to understand communicative strategies and events has also added a fresh perspective to the study.

Unlike professional psychological services, teacher-advised counselling takes place within the framework of routine advisory sessions^[3] and offers a more accessible, informal, and proactive form of support^[4]. Researchers such as Kanwal are of the view that teachers have a vast role either as activists^[5] or as mentors and activists can act as first responders in recognizing signs of emotional distress, guiding students, and referring them to appropriate resources^[6]. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research analyzes the effectiveness of such sessions, investigates barriers faced by educators in implementing counselling practices, and gathers student feedback to assess the impact of these interventions^[7]. The study aims to propose a model where educational advising goes beyond academic concerns to include emotional and mental health support—aligning with the broader goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 for creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, focuses on creating a well-rounded, student-focused education system^[8]. Teacher led counselling is especially relevant in Mental health problems like stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem are affecting students' grades and well-being more and more. So, there is a need to include psychological support in regular advisory practices^[9,10]. Maybery et al. report that univer-

sity teachers can often spot early signs of emotional distress during their regular meetings with students^[11]. However, Cochran et al. noticed that many teachers still only offer academic advice, missing chances to help students in time^[12]. This study suggests that teachers should be the first to have realistic standards^[13] offer support, but they need proper training, support from the institution, and clear rules on trust and confidentiality^[14].

Accumulation of certain experience leads to an onset of events leading to risk and low performance^[15]. These events may seem very basic as stress, anxiety and even depression arising from fear of performance in any communication event. In language classrooms, students are often required to speak, present, and interact in activities that can cause significant anxiety or reveal deeper emotional struggles, especially among students who already feel vulnerable^[16]. Gregersen and MacIntyre noticed that many learners remain silent or disengaged due to fear of making mistakes or being judged, highlighting a key intersection between language learning and emotional well-being^[17]. Teacher-led counselling, particularly in English and communication-focused settings, can become a powerful tool for intervention and therefore, long-term academic and emotional success. English language teachers, who are not only instructors but also facilitators of communication and discourse^[18] are in a unique position to support students' mental health through specialized purposeful communication sessions. By creating a positive, empathetic, and safe communicative environment, teachers can help reduce anxiety, encourage expression, and build confidence—thereby contributing not only to language development but also to students' overall psychological resilience. Using narrative analysis and Interactional Sociolinguistics this study explores how students narrate mental health experiences in language classrooms and how teacher interaction supports emotional coping.

2. Literature Review

Mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression, which can adversely affect the academic performance and overall well-being of learners, are increasing day by day. Moreover, the stigma that is often associated with mental health is often the biggest obstacle to seeking help by students and supporting by staff, teachers and relevant

responsible people. The most common reasons leading to mental health problems in university students are academic stress, emotional and psychosocial challenges, unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, biological or health-related issues, and barriers to seeking help all contribute to mental health problems among university students^[19]. Despite growing awareness among faculty of these issues, psychological support and teacher-led counselling remain insufficiently integrated into academic practices. Addressing this gap is crucial for enhancing student success and resilience within higher education environments. In language classrooms, the pressure is often intensified due to the performative nature of speaking activities such as presentations, discussions, and oral assessments. These tasks require students to actively produce language in real time, often in front of peers, which can trigger anxiety and self-consciousness—especially for learners lacking confidence or fluency. The expectation to perform accurately and fluently under observation can create significant stress, impacting both participation and learning outcomes.

Although, the intersection of education and mental health has gained increasing attention in higher education studies yet, researchers such as Del Savio et al., and Hanan noticed that shows that students experiencing mental health challenges such as anxiety, stress, and depression are less likely to perform well academically and more likely to drop out or disengage from university life^[20,21]. Similarly, Beiter et al.^[22] also notices that in college students there is a relationship in performance excellence and mental health. Many other studies have also reported high levels of stress and anxiety among university students, often linked to academic competition, social expectations, and lack of accessible support systems^[23,24]. Likewise, Al-Yateem et al. noticed that mental health services are still developing in many universities, particularly in the Gulf region, integrating psychological support into academic advising may provide a timely and practical solution^[25].

Numerous studies highlighted the high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress across educational settings. For instance, Al-Fakeh et al.^[26] conducted a cross-sectional study of first-year university students in Jeddah reported that 76% experienced depression, 69.5% had anxiety, and 67.4% faced stress, with female students more severely affected. Similarly, research at Al-Jouf University by Abdel-Salam

et al. found elevated psychological distress among female undergraduates^[27], while students at King Khalid University showed a consistent pattern of anxiety and stress across disciplines. Likewise, Mirza et al. noticed in a comparative study between medical and non-medical students which revealed differences in mental health levels, with medical students facing more severe issues due to academic pressure^[28]. Even at the secondary level, studies show a significant number of female students reporting anxiety and depression linked to academic and social factors^[29]. These findings collectively emphasize that stress and mental health issues are widespread and often under-addressed within formal academic systems. Studies from other parts of the world show similar findings for instance recent studies conducted by Af-fan et al.^[30], Ahsan & Abualait^[31], Silva et al.^[32]. A study by Backhaus et al. from Asian countries reported similar results and reported that social support can lower the odds of mental health in undergraduate students^[33]. Reasons as low socio-economic factors, poor academic performance were found to be consistent risk factors leading to mental health issues^[34].

It is obvious from all these studies carried out over time that the issue requires a strong need for a more structured, accessible, and empathetic support systems within educational institutions—particularly in the form of holistic advisory models that integrate psychological well-being into everyday teacher-student interactions. Approaching a problem in everyday setting is less threatening for students and more helpful in knowing the problem and intervening on time. Although, the above studies highlight the scope of the problem, there remains a gap in exploring teacher-led mental health interventions, especially those embedded in communication-based subjects like English. English language classrooms often involve high-pressure activities like speaking, presentations, and group discussions, which can trigger or reveal anxiety and low self-esteem^[35]. When English teachers are trained to identify such signs and foster open, supportive discourse, they can serve as the first line of support, encouraging early help-seeking and reducing stigma. This justifies the present study's focus on enhancing advisory practices, particularly by equipping English teachers—who naturally engage in communicative interaction—with tools to support students' emotional health. The integration of teacher-advised counselling, supported by institutional refer-

ral systems and on-campus psychologists, is a way which serves as a proactive strategy for creating resilient, emotionally secure student communities.

Recent literature underscores the significance of emotional wellbeing in language education, particularly the role of teacher-student interaction in alleviating classroom anxiety and stress. Studies in applied linguistics and educational psychology highlight how supportive communication—such as empathetic feedback and inclusive language—can foster student resilience. However, limited research has examined how students linguistically construct and reflect on their mental health experiences. This study addresses that gap by applying Interactional Sociolinguistics to analyze narrative accounts, focusing on how meaning is co-created through features like turn-taking, politeness strategies, and evaluative language. Teachers and advisors have a great role in the life of students. Teachers often remain a step behind in providing psychological support as they believe their role is only academic and they may be overstepping their boundaries if they become considerate. This research however, aims to allow teachers to rethink their role and integrate teacher counselling more effectively into routine advisory sessions, overcoming barriers and improving early intervention efforts^[36,37]. These efforts are vital to fostering a comprehensive mental health support system within universities, contributing to the broader social and economic development goals^[38]. Teacher-led counselling, where educators play an active role in emotional mentoring, has been found to positively impact student satisfaction, trust, and academic engagement^[39]. Teachers are often the first point of contact for students in distress and can help normalize discussions around mental health by fostering open communication within advisory sessions^[40]. However, faculty often face challenges such as lack of training, time constraints, and uncertainty about boundaries when it comes to addressing students' psychological needs^[41]. In line with the above discussion, this study directs attention of capacity building and structural changes within the university setting to equip educators with tools to incorporate teacher led counselling into existing advisory structures to help bridge gap between academic and psychological support—especially in regions where access to mental health professionals is limited or is considered a social stigma.

3. Materials and Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how teacher-led counselling supported student mental health in university settings, specifically within language classrooms. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers achieved a comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers faced in addressing mental health concerns and the effectiveness of their advisory roles in promoting student well-being and academic success.

For the quantitative component, data were collected through two structured questionnaires—one for students and one for teachers. The student questionnaire gathered insights into students' experiences with mental health challenges, their interactions with academic advisors, and the perceived impact of teacher-led counselling on their academic performance and emotional well-being. A total of 150 students, aged 18 to 22, were randomly selected from various academic disciplines to ensure an unbiased data group. The teacher questionnaire was completed by faculty members from different departments, all of whom held dual roles as instructors and academic advisors. It explored their preparedness to address mental health concerns, their experiences during advisory sessions, and their perceptions of the counselling role. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to identify patterns and trends in both student and teacher responses.

The qualitative component involved a systematic review of institutional documents, including mental health policies, counselling center reports, and university guidelines. Moreover, the quantitative data were further enhanced by evaluating a group of students who were enrolled in English Learning Skills courses. Those who identified with some kind of mental health issue—such as anxiety, stress, or depression—were purposely selected to further examine how teacher–student interaction and adapted communication strategies by teachers impacted these learners' overall speaking outcomes. The intervention involved a structured set of communication practices designed to enhance emotional support and reduce language anxiety.

This part of the study employed qualitative narrative analysis within the framework of Emotionally Responsive Interaction in Language Pedagogy, using Interactional Sociolinguistics to examine students' ^[42] reflections on anxiety and stress in language classrooms. The analysis focused on linguistic features such as hedging, evaluative language, and

reported speech, alongside interactional framing, to understand how students narrated teacher responses and positioned themselves emotionally. For this purpose, 21 students were selected from two different classrooms based on a purposive sampling technique. This group participated in the questionnaire and was subsequently identified for detailed evaluation. Of the 21 students, seven reported mental health issues, while the others experienced some form of anxiety or stress. A matched control group of comparable size was retrospectively selected from the remaining participants who reported similar anxiety levels but did not receive counselling intervention. Teachers and academic advisors employed active listening, open-ended questioning, and positive reinforcement to create empathetic, student-centred interactions. Weekly advisory check-ins incorporated brief mood assessments and reflective dialogue, while confidentiality and help-seeking were explicitly encouraged to normalize mental health discussions.

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key institutional practices, gaps in support, and areas for policy and training improvement. Data collection was carried out over a period of three months. Through these methods, the researchers aimed to provide a robust analysis of how teacher/advisor-led counselling could function as an accessible, first-line intervention for mental health in university environments.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit university students who had experienced mental health challenges before or during their studies. The questionnaire included items on the nature of these experiences, coping strategies, and whether students viewed teachers as sources of emotional support. It also explored how teacher communication—particularly in speaking-focused language classes—impacted students' ability to manage anxiety and perform confidently. One part of the questionnaire required students to provide a detailed narrative of how teacher interactions supported emotional coping and engagement.

Ethical approval was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. Given the sensitive nature of mental health, confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing all names and identifying details. The research adhered to ethical standards for voluntary participation and psychological safety. However, this study relied on narrative analysis, which may not

have fully captured the diversity of student perspectives or emotional nuances.

4. Results

The questionnaire responses from 150 students revealed that approximately 61% had experienced mental health challenges during their time at university, including anxiety disorders, depression, and stress-related conditions. Among these students, 64% indicated that they felt more relaxed and guided after discussing their concerns with teachers, suggesting that open communication with faculty could positively impact mental well-being. When asked about their comfort levels in discussing mental health with teachers, the most common response was “somewhat comfortable,” selected by 38% of students, while 26% reported feeling somewhat or very uncomfortable, pointing to a need for more supportive and open environments. Additionally, 63% of students agreed or strongly agreed that teacher-led counselling positively influenced their mental health, recognizing the important role educators played in offering guidance, emotional support, and appropriate referrals.

Out of the 21 students who participated in the study, 16 (approximately 76%) demonstrated improved speaking performance following the implementation of revised teacher communication strategies designed to provide both linguistic and emotional support through enhanced teacher–student interaction. These strategies led to better speaking outcomes, particularly for students experiencing mental health-related challenges. Among this group, 7 students (around 33%) were identified as having mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or stress. While all showed some degree of progress, their improvement was more gradual, reflecting the severity and complexity of their conditions. The quasi-experimental analysis compared 21 students who received teacher-advisor counselling (experimental group) with a matched control group of similar size. Post-intervention, the experimental group showed a clear reduction in communication anxiety and improved speaking performance, whereas the control group exhibited minimal change. Narrative analysis supported these findings: experimental group students highlighted teachers’ supportive communication and empathetic responses as crucial for managing stress and boosting confidence. Control group students reported ongoing anxiety

and fewer coping strategies. These results indicate that integrating teacher-led counselling within language classrooms can effectively reduce communication-related anxiety and enhance both emotional well-being and language performance.

Qualitative feedback, collected through open-ended questions, revealed that a majority of students felt a stronger connection with their teacher, which fostered a sense of belonging and increased motivation—factors that served as critical elements in language learning environments. Notably, both the 7 students with mental health issues and the wider group experienced reduced anxiety related to speaking tasks, which was attributed to changes in teacher behavior such as positive reinforcement, open-ended questioning, and non-threatening feedback. These modifications helped create a more relaxed classroom environment, encouraging language risk-taking.

Overall, the findings highlighted that addressing emotional and psychological well-being was not merely supportive but essential for improving language outcomes, with 76% of the group showing noticeable gains in speaking confidence and participation as a direct result of empathetic and responsive teaching approaches. Following the teacher-led intervention, student performance showed a clear upward trend. Initially, many struggled to meet benchmarks, but post-intervention scores improved significantly. These results suggested that the intervention was effective in enhancing learning outcomes, with promising potential for continued academic growth. The results were also confirmed by questionnaire responses, in which students reported that they were better able to understand tasks and instructions and therefore performed better. They further noted that the teacher had helped them reduce anxiety and stress through her strategies.

From the teachers surveyed, 60% reported encountering students facing mental health challenges in their teaching or advisory roles. However, only 15% felt “very confident” in addressing these issues, while 50% felt only “somewhat confident,” highlighting varying levels of preparedness. The majority (mode) of responses showed that 85% of teachers had not received any formal training in mental health support. Despite this, 66% agreed or strongly agreed that teacher-led counselling contributed positively to students’ well-being and academic success. Teachers cited common challenges such as lack of training, limited time, and uncertainty about

their role, and expressed a clear need for institutional support and professional development to better assist students in need.

The analysis of university documents revealed a strong institutional emphasis on mental health, with numerous policies, strategic plans, and research projects highlighting its importance. Mental well-being was clearly prioritized at the policy level, demonstrating the university's recognition of its impact on student success and overall campus life. Although workshops and various events were held throughout the year to create awareness, there remained a noticeable gap between policy, practice, and outreach to the specific students in need. Despite the formal commitment to mental health, the university lacked on-campus counsellors and psychologists, limiting direct access to professional support for students. This disconnect suggested that while mental health was valued in theory, more tangible investment in accessible, on-site services was needed to fully support the student community.

5. Discussion

Effective communicative strategies by teachers play a vital role in fostering meaningful teacher-student interaction, especially in language classrooms. By using techniques such as open-ended questioning, active listening, and encouraging peer dialogue, teachers create a supportive environment that boosts student confidence and engagement. These strategies not only enhance language acquisition but also promote critical thinking and collaborative learning, leading to improved academic outcomes and stronger classroom rapport. Likewise, research clearly shows that there is a strong connection between student mental health and good academic performance. If students experience psychological distress they are bound to struggle academically, while those with better mental wellness tend to perform more successfully^[43]. Research also shows that timely psychological support improves academic outcomes and student retention^[44]. In order to intervene early educators are in a unique position to support students in distress^[45], but many lack the tools or training to respond effectively. Strunk^[46], Rollings^[47] found that when faculty is involved in collaborative mental health efforts—such as teacher-advised counselling or faculty-referral models—student well-being and

performance significantly improve.

Initially, the results revealed that many students in their response value the communications with their teachers or advisors over a variety of topics and value teacher advised counselling. They see the sessions as necessary for their survival in the campus, and are compassionate about them. They expressed that they felt more comfortable discussing emotional concerns with their academic advisors than with formal counselling staff, due to familiarity and trust. Students responded that even small actions as teachers listening without interrupting, encouraging self-reflection, and offering academic flexibility made a significant difference in their well-being. On the other hand, the study identifies several key barriers that educators face when attempting to support students' mental health. These include a lack of training in identifying signs of psychological distress, limited institutional support, and uncertainty about professional boundaries. Teachers reported feeling unprepared to deal with emotional disclosures and feared making the situation worse. Others cited time constraints and a lack of clear university guidelines on how to manage mental health issues in academic settings. These insights indicate that while the willingness among faculty exists, structural and policy-level support is necessary to make teacher-led counselling both effective and rewarding.

While cultural norms and stigma surrounding mental health continue to act as barriers and make students hesitant to express emotional difficulties due to fear of being labelled as weak or incapable^[48], the presence of supportive teachers who take an active role in students' well-being has shown to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviours. Another important finding from this study reveals that, in many cases, teachers treat advisory sessions as routine academic check-ins rather than opportunities to engage with students on a deeper, emotional level. Many educators remain hesitant or uncomfortable discussing mental health concerns, often avoiding topics such as stress, anxiety, or personal struggles unless directly addressed by the student. This reluctance may stem from a fear of overstepping professional boundaries, a lack of training, or simply the absence of institutional support structures. However, this gap in engagement can lead to missed opportunities for early intervention.

Simple guidelines for Enhancing Teacher-Advisory Sessions for Student Mental Health Support can involve

active listening, asking open-ended questions, and showing empathy. Confidential and safe dialogue allows students to share their concerns before they turn into serious health issues. A structured and empathetic communication strategy developed by teachers can turn everyday advisory sessions into health check-ins. Therefore, it is advised that advisory communication must evolve beyond academics to include mental health awareness. Studies such as Snyder et al. advocate for integrating mental health considerations into faculty-student interactions and communication practices^[49], highlighting the value of counsellor-educator collaboration in creating supportive academic environments. This shift helps students feel seen, supported, and more likely to seek help when needed.

The student's narrative responses were examined to explore how students linguistically construct emotional experiences in language classrooms. The focus was on three key linguistic features: evaluative language (e.g., "It was really stressful"), hedging (e.g., "I guess I was nervous"), and reported speech (e.g., "The teacher said 'don't worry'"). These were analysed alongside interactional framing, such as how students described teacher responses and positioned themselves emotionally—for example, one student wrote, "I felt encouraged when the teacher smiled and said I was improving," framing the interaction as supportive and confidence-building. Student narratives revealed that teacher communication strategies played a key role in easing anxiety during speaking classes. Many used hedging like "I guess I was nervous" and also "Maybe I wasn't ready yet," showing uncertainty and emotional vulnerability. Evaluative language appeared in phrases such as "It was overwhelming" and "I felt really supported when she smiled," reflecting both stress and reassurance. Reported speech included statements like "The teacher said 'take a moment, you're okay'" and "He told me 'You've practiced enough, just speak,'" which conveyed calming and motivational messages. In terms of interactional framing, one student described forgetting her topic entirely and said, "She gave me time to breathe and said we'd try again later," framing the teacher as empathetic and responsive. Another student noted, "When I paused, she didn't rush me—she waited," highlighting a supportive interaction that helped reduce performance pressure.

From a linguistics perspective, the analysis of the results highlights that changes in teacher/advisor communi-

cation strategies can have a significant impact on speaking outcomes in language classrooms. By adopting more empathetic, responsive, and student-centred communication practices—such as active listening, personalized feedback, and positive reinforcement—teachers created an environment that lowered learners' affective filters, a key concept in second language acquisition (SLA). This reduction in anxiety and stress facilitated greater willingness to communicate (WTC)^[50], allowing students to engage more confidently in spoken tasks. The intervention promoted increased oral fluency, improved turn-taking skills, and more spontaneous speech, as learners felt safer and more motivated to take linguistic risks. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questioning and dialogic interaction aligned with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, encouraging authentic language use and fostering pragmatic competence. Overall, the findings underscore the critical role of teacher-student interaction as both a linguistic input source and an affective support mechanism, demonstrating that emotionally attuned communication strategies can directly enhance speaking performance and overall language development in the classroom.

Important point is to normalize help seeking behaviour and consider it as a strength rather than as a problem or a weakness to reduce the stigma around mental health discussions. Moreover, advisors must clearly communicate to students at the start of each semester that advisory meetings are private, supportive spaces where personal concerns are treated with discretion. For this model to be successful teachers and advisors must equip themselves more on mental health and overall well being of students by attending workshops, trainings and referral procedures on mental health and add simple tools like mood scales or short questionnaires to assess students' emotional well-being. The workshops can be guide on schools of therapeutic thought such as Cognitive Behavioural therapy, Psychoanalytic and Person-centred therapies and studies conducted to know the most preferred methods of communication among university students^[51]. Likewise, maintaining a secure and confidential log of each student's concerns and follow-ups can help monitor progress and build continuity in the support process. Moreover, to support teachers, universities must implement a formal counselling referral system. Qualified mental health professionals should be available on campus to receive referrals from fac-

ulty via a confidential process. These professionals should also collaborate with academic departments to ensure that students' non-academic needs are recognized and addressed holistically. Promoting well-being through campus life is another crucial step. Institutions can organize regular stress-relief activities such as mindfulness sessions, sports events and health workshops. Advisory sessions can also serve as a platform to recommend extracurricular activities tailored to students' interests and personalities, helping to boost engagement and emotional balance. Finally, a comprehensive mental health pamphlet or digital guide should be developed and shared widely with both students and faculty. This resource should outline common signs of stress, offer coping strategies, list available support services, and provide guidance on when and how to seek help.

The findings of this study align closely with existing research that underscores the role of affective factors in second language acquisition (SLA), particularly the impact of anxiety, self-confidence, and emotional well-being on speaking outcomes. As demonstrated in prior studies, like the one by Dewaele and Al-Saraj, learners who experience high levels of anxiety often face barriers to active language production, especially in speaking tasks^[52]. In this context, the intervention—centred on modified teacher communication strategies—proved effective in reducing such affective barriers. The use of empathy, positive reinforcement, and active listening not only enhanced students' willingness to communicate (WTC), but also created a classroom environment conducive to spontaneous and confident language use, supporting earlier findings by Peng^[53] and MacIntyre^[54]. Importantly, the study highlights how emotionally attuned teacher-student interaction can serve as a practical and scalable intervention^[55] for students facing mental health challenges, a group often underserved in traditional SLA models. This reinforces calls for a shift toward more human-centred and holistic approaches to language education, where the psychological needs of learners are addressed alongside linguistic goals^[56,57]. Overall, the results demonstrate that integrating mental health considerations into language teaching is not only beneficial but essential for improving speaking performance and learner engagement in diverse classroom contexts. This study has several limitations. The quantitative survey instruments were not formally validated, which may affect the reliability of self-reported mental health data. Addi-

tionally, the quasi-experimental sample was small and drawn from a single university, which may limit generalizability.

Future research should employ validated instruments and larger, multi-site samples and further gauge real experiences of students who are suffering from mental health and reasons behind it. Likewise, how teachers, advisors and counsellors make sense of their responsibility towards solving this crisis can be studied in future. This research however highlighted the need to develop specialized mental health training programs for advisors and faculty. It also vies for the higher educational institutions to ensure availability of full-time available support for helping student as per culturally appropriate ways and providing trainings to staff. While this study examined how faculty and academic advisors perceive, manage, and make sense of mental health challenges on college campuses. This approach, in turn, will give tools to recognize mental health distress and foster a supportive environment that encourages open dialogue and timely referrals. These advanced skills will enable deeper and more meaningful connections with students^[58].

6. Conclusions

This study has highlighted the critical role of integrating teacher- and advisor-led counselling into university advisory practices, particularly within English language classrooms. This study makes a unique contribution to linguistics by integrating mental health awareness into second language acquisition. It demonstrates how teacher communication strategies, when adapted for emotional support, can significantly improve students' speaking outcomes. The research provides empirical evidence that lowering anxiety enhances oral language performance. It offers a practical, pedagogical model that bridges emotional well-being with linguistic development. Overall, it redefines language teaching as both a cognitive and affective process. The research explains how routine advisory sessions and classroom interactions can serve as effective entry points for addressing student mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These results are similar to the research by Raji et al., which focus on face-to-face interaction for counselling/psychological interventions to improve university students' mental health^[59]. Likewise, Xao's study supports my findings by highlighting how communicative strategies strengthen

teacher-student interaction, promote deeper classroom engagement, and contribute to a more anxiety-free learning environment^[60]. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of integrating language education with mental health support to advance SDG 3 and SDG 4, fostering holistic student development and well-being in higher education. English language teachers, in particular, are uniquely positioned to recognize signs of communication anxiety through activities like discussions, presentations, and group work—contexts where emotional distress often manifests. By fostering empathetic, supportive, and communicative environments, educators can help students feel safe to participate, make mistakes, and seek help. This communication-centred, mixed-methods study presents a scalable, low-cost model that bridges language education and mental health support. It calls for equipping both academic advisors and language instructors with basic counselling skills to enhance students' emotional resilience, linguistic confidence, and academic performance—contributing to more inclusive, student-centred higher education systems worldwide.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was approved by the Scientific Committee at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University as part of a project. Formal IRB approval was not required. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical guidelines were followed.

Informed Consent Statement

All the respondents in this study have provided informed consent. Ethical principles during reporting the results have been taken care of.

Data Availability Statement

The data are available upon request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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