RESEARCH ARTICLE

Levels of Oral Communication Skills and Speaking Anxiety of Educators in a Polytechnic College in the Philippines

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Abstract

Regardless of the profession, everyone should possess good communication skills in different contexts. Although scholars have contributed studies showing the communication anxieties and proficiencies of speakers to different languages, there are limited studies that deal with the educators' context. To add contribution to this field, the researcher utilized a correlational research design to determine the relationship between the educators' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety. The study used the frameworks of Pontillas (2020) and McCroskey (1977). The researcher chose Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges as the locale of the study and utilized 25 teacher-participants from the different departments of the College. The participants underwent an impromptu speaking activity to determine their oral communication skills' level. They filled out the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) test developed by McCroskey (1970) to assess their perceived speaking anxiety. The two variables' results were correlated using Pearson's Moment of Correlation and found a significant correlation between the two variables. Environmental factors, personal experiences, and exposure were factors determined by the researcher affecting their speaking skills and anxiety. The researchers recommend that the institution should implement intervention programs for educators to improve their oral communication skills. Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions offering Education undergraduate programs should add additional communication courses to the curriculum.

KEYWORDS:

Correlational Study, Educators, Oral Communication Skills, Polytechnic College, Speaking Anxiety

1 | INTRODUCTION

The communication skills of a teacher are vital in the academic success of their students (Khan et al., 2017). Successful transmission of a message from the teacher to students involves a shared understanding of the contexts to where communication takes place (Saunders Mills, 2009). Indeed, educators' communication skills should continuously develop to attain the desired learning outcomes in the academic context (McCarthy Carter, 2001).

Communication skills are defined differently across various contexts. In engineering, engineering communication skills constitute different core elements such as fluency in English and other visual communication aspects (Riemer, 2002). In medicine, communication skills are measured based on how patients are satisfied with doctors' and nurses' empathy, care, and ability to

listen to their concerns (Tongue et al., 2005). In the business sector, effective communication skills are determined based on accomplishing tasks assigned by the bosses, reporting back the progress, identifying problems and implementing solutions, and the meaningful exchange of ideas (Cenere et al., 2015).

Amidst the biggest aim of different sectors to achieve a high level of communication skills, some challenges hinder achieving it. In medicine, the study of Ba et al. (2002) suggests that professionals should adopt communication strategies to address miscommunication and other social barriers affecting the patient-doctor relationship. In the corporate world, it is noted that improvements in levels of communication, confidence in business presentations, and variation of communication used are needed (Andersen Rasmussen, 2004). Some fresh graduates also find difficulty in being hired to their desired institutions/companies due to low self-esteem and poor communication skills manifested during job interviews (Haltgren Cameron, 2010).

With the reported decline of applicants' employability rate, schools need to revisit their curriculum and integrate additional communication courses to improve the communication skills of these graduates (Donnell et al., 2011). In Pontillas (2020) study, engineering students have low English communication skills due to their past experiences in elementary and secondary years. Some have reported that their language teachers do not give enough drills and oral communication exercises, lead to low proficiency in the language. Besides, some experienced traumatic experiences with their teachers during recitation and other oral presentation assessments. Hence, there is a need to strengthen the different Higher Education Institutions' different programs to address this problem.

Several studies have examined oral communication skills and speaking anxiety of learners in the English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language context (Woodrow, 2006; Pontillas, 2020; Akkakoson, 2016; Cagatay, 2015; Basic, 2011; Saputra, 2018). Some studies have found a significant relationship between these two variables, while some studies find that these variables are not significantly correlated. To add a contribution to the existing literature, this study aims to examine the relationship between oral communication skills and speaking anxiety, but this time, in the educators' context. Despite educators' exposure to different types of people in an everyday situation, it is interesting to find out their oral communication skills and if they still experience speaking anxiety when addressing a crowd. Since there are no studies yet explored the educators' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety levels, this study attempts to fill this research gap.

The researcher, a state college faculty member, utilized his affiliated institution as the study's locale. The study took place in Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges (CSPC), Nabua, Camarines Sur. CSPC is one of the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines and the only polytechnic college in the Bicol Region. Currently, the College has one extension campus in Buhi, Camarines Sur. The academic institution is known as Polytechnic State University of Bicol (PSUB) once complying with the Commission of Higher Education's requirements. Currently, it has more than 200 regular faculty members and offers 20 undergraduate and graduate programs.

This study is anchored to the framework of McCroskey (1977). His theory titled Communication Apprehension Theory states that communication problems, especially in oral production, are due to the different factors that affect the speaker, including difficulty with speaking, personality traits of an individual, and other environmental factors. These factors could hinder an individual's oral communication skills and be addressed in different interventions, depending on the context where a person is situated. The researcher explores these factors in the current study to understand the findings of the study further.

Also, since there are many definitions of oral communication and speaking anxieties, the researcher anchored Pontillas (2020) theoretical underpinning to provide a clear direction to the study. This study focuses on three aspects of oral communication: organization, content, and delivery. The organization deals with the speaker's clarity of the speech, highlighting his/her ability to accentuate the speech's essential points. On the other hand, the content is the substance and relevance of the speech to the topic. This also shows the sensitivity of the speaker concerning his/her audience. Lastly, the delivery. This deals with the speakers' proficiency along with voice production, gesture, posture, grammaticality of sentences, and even the speaking rate. These three indicators were also used by the researcher in assessing the oral communication skills of the participants. Concerning speaking anxiety, the researcher categorizes the participants' perceived anxiety: High, Moderate, and Low. These anxieties include assessing their experiences when speaking in front of a crowd, anxiousness in coming up with a speech, confidence of the speaker, and other significant experiences. Because of this, this study investigates the significant relationship between educators' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety in a higher education institution. Also, this study aims to explore the factors affecting the relationship between these two variables.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 | Research Design

This study utilized quantitative research methods. It is used to quantify the problem by generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population (Watson, 2015; Sukamolson, 2007).

Specifically, this study adopted a correlational type of research. Correlational research is a non-experimental research method in which a researcher measures two variables, understands and assesses the statistical relationship between them with no influence from any extraneous variable. Correlational research aims to identify variables that have some relationship to the extent that a change in one creates some change in the other (Curtis et al., 2016). Since this study's variables examine their significant relationship, this research method is the most applicable research method to utilize.

2.2 | Participants of the Study

The study participants are faculty members of Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges who are in the regular-permanent status. 25 participants took part in the study. They came from the different departments of the College, fields of specialization, educational qualifications, and academic ranks. These number of teacher-participants are the only ones who agreed to take part in the study. Some of the faculty declined the invitation of the researcher for some reasons.

2.3 | Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling is a nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population meet specific practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate in the study (Trottier, 2010). Since this study only needs a small number of participants and for the researcher's convenience to easily find participants of this study, this sampling technique is appropriate in this paper.

2.4 | Data Gathering Technique

The researcher submitted a letter of consent to the College President to administer the said study. Upon the approval, the researcher secured the ethical clearance to the participants. One week is the duration of the data gathering of the study. To gauge the oral communication skills of the participants, they underwent an impromptu speaking activity. Each participant randomly picked a topic to expound. He/she has a maximum of three minutes to deliver the topic. The researcher sought another interrater to assess the participants' speaking skills and to limit the study's biases. The interrater is also a language department faculty invited to different communication arts festival competitions in different schools.

Three criteria were assessed by the raters, which include the delivery, content, and organization. To ensure the same understanding of the rubric, the researcher conducted an orientation with the interrater via Google Meet and discussed the three criteria set in the rubric. The scores of the interpreters were averaged to determine the level of oral communication skills of the participant. Also, the researcher used Cohen's Kappa Statistic to determine the two raters' agreement. The results showed a .597 value, which shows a moderate agreement between the two raters.

After the impromptu speaking activity, participants were asked to answer a standardized questionnaire developed by McCroskey (1970) to determine their Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) level. A research assistant was tasked to administer the said test to the participants. After analyzing the participants' speaking anxiety and oral communication skills, the researcher conducted a focus group discussion with the participants to determine the significant experiences affecting the study results. The participants' responses served as the secondary data in this paper to triangulate this study's results properly.

2.5 | Statistical Tools

The researcher used the SPSS software, v.20, to analyze the results of the study. To answer the research objectives, descriptive statistics were used since the researcher will only present the respondents' level of oral communication skills and speaking anxiety. Also, Pearson's correlation coefficient correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between the two variables highlighted in the study.

2.6 | Thematic Analysis

The participants' responses regarding the factors affecting their oral communication skills and speaking anxiety were thematically analyzed by the researcher together with the other two interceders. The researcher used coding to come up with the necessary themes. The other two intercoder have published papers in a refereed journal and have conducted qualitative scholarly articles.

3 | RESULTS

Table 1 shows the assessed level of oral communication of the participants. Three indicators are assessed by the interraters, which include the delivery, content, and organization.

Level of Skills	Mean Score	N	%	SD
Advanced	24.01-30.00	6	24	1.24
Proficient	18.01-24.00	15	50	1.57
Approaching Proficiency	12.01-18.00	4	16	0.75
Developing	6.01-12.00	-	-	-
Beginning	1.00-6.00	-	-	-
Total		25	100	

TABLE 1 Oral Communication Skills of the Respondents

The majority of the teacher-participants are assessed as proficient in their oral communication skills (Mdn = 22.5, SD = 3.31). This was assessed using an Oral Communication Skills Rubric. During the interview with the participants, the researcher disclosed the results to each participant regarding their scores. When asked whether the participants agree to their assessed communication skills, one participant was surprised that her level is assessed as proficient.

"I did not expect this result. I thought my level is only between beginning or developing. Well, I am thankful and surprised with the result, and I still want to improve my communication skills, anyway. Maybe, my 15 years of teaching experience helped me develop my oral communication skills. I feel so honored and flattered. (Teacher D, 37, Assistant Professor II).

Teacher D posited that her academic exposure as an educator for more than 15 years helped her improve her oral communication skills. Experience and exposure are two of the contributory factors in helping improve one's communication skills. Looking at the comment of one rater to Teacher's D overall performance, it was noted that:

"Although the participant has ungrammatical sentences and fillers in the delivery, the thoughts were clear and concise."

One of the participants' levels of oral communication skills is assessed as advanced. When asked regarding his assessment, he was also surprised. He also pointed out that experience is a great factor in developing one's communication skills.

"During my first five years of teaching way back a long time ago, my students laugh at me because I have /b/ /v/ /p/ and /f/ lapses. I considered myself before as a bad communicator. In my student's evaluation, this is one of the areas I always fail. My dean sent me to different English skills training even if I am handling science courses. Maybe, that helped me so much. I noticed that communication skills are one of the areas I am now good at based on my student's evaluation. Training helps me a lot." (Teacher X, 45, Associate Professor III).

On the other hand, one participant evaluated Approaching Proficiency, already expected this kind of assessment.

"I know I screwed up during my impromptu speaking. I have many things to say; however, I cannot express them orally. It seems that something is hindering me from speaking. I am just three years in the academe, and I still have many things to learn yet, especially with the senior faculty. I admit I need to improve my speaking skills." (Teacher H, 26, Instructor 1)

When the researcher looked at the rater's comment, it was noted that Teacher H needs to improve his delivery manner. He has to reduce his verbal fillers such as /uhmms/ /ano/, and /kuwan/ to organize his thoughts well.

3.1 | Speaking Anxiety of the Participants

Table 2 shows the perceived speaking anxiety of the participants. Each participant might be evaluated as low, moderate, or high anxiety.

Level of Skills	Score	N	%	SD
High	>131	8	32	6.55
High Moderate	98-131	14	56	9.74
Low	<98	3	12	4.16
Total		25	100	

TABLE 2 Public Speaking Anxiety of Respondents

The majority of the teacher-participants who took the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) have moderate public speaking anxiety levels (Mdn = 126, SD = 20.63). During the interview with the participants and disclosed this result, they have already expected this assessment.

"Yes, I admit, I have very high speaking anxiety. Though I have been teaching for six years already, I am only good at speaking with my students. But during occasions where I have to stand in front of the crowd, I almost pass out because of nervousness." (Teacher J, 32, Instructor 1).

One of the participants who assessed himself with moderate speaking anxiety confessed that his waterloo is public speaking. He sweats and manifests unnecessary mannerisms that affect his speaking performance. Upon verifying his impromptu speaking performance, the said participant manifests these overt behaviors during the speaking activity.

Another interesting finding is when one participant who has low speaking anxiety disclosed his reason for finding speaking activities a normal activity for him.

"As someone who does research every year, I was exposed to different research colloquiums — both in national and international fora. Every year is always a worthy experience. I face different types of crowd, kinds of panel examiners, and audiences from different races. These things helped me reduce my speaking anxiety." (Teacher K, 42, Associate Professor V)

3.2 | Relationship between Oral Communication Skills and Speaking Anxiety

Table 3 shows the significant relationship between the two variables: the participants' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety.

		Speaking Anxiety	Oral Communication Skills
	Pearson Correlation	1	805**
Speaking Anxiety	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25
Oral Communication Skills	Pearson Correlation	805**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	25	25

TABLE 3 Relationship between Public Speaking Anxiety and Oral Communication Skills†

[†]Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Overall, through Pearson's Moment Correlation, it was found out that oral communication skills and public speaking anxiety are significantly correlated (r = -.805, p < 0.01). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Most likely, people who have good oral communication skills manifest lower speaking anxiety. The researcher looked for participants with a high level of oral communication skills and low speaking anxiety to validate this result.

"Even though I am not an English major, communication has been one of my considered strengths. When I was in college, I participated in different oratorical and debate competitions at my University. I was also awarded as the Outstanding Student Teacher in my batch." (Teacher I, 26, Instructor 1)

Besides the number of years of experience in the teaching profession, Teacher I attested that good communication skills can also be developed if the teacher is exposed to different undergraduate program's communication activities. The participants' exposure to debates, oratorical competitions, and the like helped her develop her confidence and oral communication skills.

On the other hand, one participant with high speaking anxiety and low oral communication skills posited that her high anxiety affects her overall performance during speaking activities. She could recall her traumatic experience in college when she experienced a mental block in her speech class. It was frustrating because it took her more than two weeks to memorize the piece and prepare for the said activity. Now that she is already a College Instructor, still, her heart beats so fast during speaking engagements from other schools.

3.3 | Factors Affecting the Oral Communication Skills and Speaking Anxiety of the Participants

The researcher coded the participants' responses and validated them by two other intercoder to generate themes and to identify the factors affecting the participants' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Factors Affecting the Oral Communication Skills and Public Speaking Anxiety of the Respondents†

Themes	Frequency*	Rank
Limited Communication Skills Training	16	1
Using English as a Medium of Communication	15	2
Traumatic Past Experience	12	3

[†]Multiple Responses

Among the three themes, limited communication skills training ranked first. One of the participants said that even though she is already an Associate Professor of the College, she noticed that this is one of the neglected topics organized by the Human Resources Department during in-service training. She admits that even she is knowledgeable in her field of specialization, she sometimes observes that some of her students do not pay attention much because of her soft-spoken voice. If there is one aspect about oral communication she wants to improve, it is the techniques to voice modulation.

Another experience of one of the participants, although he has been employed in the College for more than ten years now, his English vocabulary is limited enough. That is why he opts to speak in Filipino languages when explaining to his students about Engineering concepts. He is more comfortable speaking the said language rather than using English as his medium of instruction. Lastly, some of the participants were traumatized in college, resulting in their low confidence, high speaking anxiety, and low oral communication skills.

"I remember when our professor asked us to do a demonstration teaching when I was in the third year. I prepared enough of my materials, lesson plan and practiced my manner of delivery. During my presentation, there was one question of my professor that I could not answer. He cursed me in front of the class and humiliated me. From that day on, I always feel inferior every time I speak." (Teacher O, 38, Assistant Professor I)

4 | DISCUSSION

Educators, exposed to different classroom communicative activities, admitted that they always have room to improve their oral communication skills. Several factors affect the proficiency of educators. Some of them need senior faculty's supervision to emulate their best practices, while some need further training to enhance the said skills. The number of teaching experiences is also a significant factor in improving the educators to master their communication skills. This result agrees with Morgan's (1989) findings, who posited that teachers should have sufficient grounding of the language to develop mastery and high competence. This could be achieved through skills training and professional development programs. The length of teaching experience also matters since it gives teachers an avenue to reflect on things they need to improve every year. New teachers attested that active involvement in different curricular and co-curricular activities to school while still studying is good preparatory for those who envision becoming educators someday. Kennedy (2007) suggested debate as a form of activity that can stimulate oral communication skills, high confidence, and critical thinking skills.

Since speaking anxieties are always evident in different contexts. Educators, whose daily routine is to talk every day, still experience the said anxiety. Different covert and overt behaviors manifest their speaking anxiety. Because of nervousness, the organization and content of their speech are compromised. Verbal fillers, which are common to people, are highly evident, especially when they cannot utter the exact statement they would like to say. Some, because of the language barrier, cannot express enough, which affects their speech presentation. These anxieties are because of their not-so-good experience from the past and lack of communication skills training that the academic institution needs to address. These results are similar to the findings of Beatty (2009), Daly et al. (1989), and Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), which discussed the factors affecting speaking anxiety in the academic setting. However, exposure to different speaking engagements like presenting papers in national and international colloquiums could help educators overcome their fear of speaking in front of a crowd. Being asked by audiences and a panel of experts from different races and cultures could help overcome public speaking fear. Engagement in different forms of speaking, like public speaking, could help reduce the said anxiety (Menzell Carrell, 2009).

Lastly, the results show a positive correlation between the educators' oral communication skills and speaking anxiety. It can be gleaned from this finding that educators who have good communication skills have low speaking anxiety. Participants attested that those who have low speaking anxiety could concentrate on the given topic, could give an impressive speech since their low anxiety does not affect their overall performance. Therefore, if people want to be a good speaker, they should first reduce their speaking anxieties. The manifestations of the said anxiety might destroy the overall impact of one's speech presentation. This finding is contrary to Pontillas (2020) results that show no significant relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking skills. In the said researcher's study, college students who have moderate to high anxieties are the best speakers in the class. They use their anxieties as a motivation to excel in different speaking activities.

5 | CONCLUSION

Since the researcher used Pontillas (2020) framework in delimiting the context of oral communication and speaking anxieties, the researcher was able to find out the significant factors affecting the challenges experienced by the participants in oral communication through McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory (1977). Overall, aside from the significant relationship that was found out between the two variables of the study, it is interesting to note that educators who are exposed to different communicative activities in their field have not-so-good experiences in their personal and professional lives. Thus, they need to be trained and retrained to enhance their competence in this field further. This study's pedagogical implication is to call out the different institutions' attention to consider giving intervention programs to address the educators' communication skills. Also, Higher Education Institutions that are offering Bachelor's degrees in Education should consider giving additional communication courses to the said program. Through this, the problems raised in this study could be solved. Since the study encompasses the participants' overall speaking skills and speaking anxiety, future researchers could investigate more specific variables that affect the educators' communication skills.

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