Innovations

Understanding Speech Anxiety among Grade 11 Learners: Exploring Manifestations and Levels of Oral Communication

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Abstract

This research study aimed to examine the impact of speech anxiety on grade 11 learners at Baguio Central University. Specifically, the study investigated the level of oral communication among these learners and the extent to which speech anxiety manifested. The findings revealed that grade 11 learners occasionally exhibited symptoms of speech anxiety, suggesting the presence of anxiety-related challenges in public speaking situations. Furthermore, the level of oral communication among the participants fell within the intermediate range, indicating room for improvement. These results shed light on the prevalence of speech anxiety and highlight the need for interventions to support grade 11 learners in enhancing their oral communication skills and managing their anxiety effectively. Moreover, it was concluded that oral communication plays a crucial role in enabling learners to express themselves effectively in various academic and professional settings. By developing strong oral communication skills, learners can enhance their confidence, articulate their ideas with clarity, and prepare themselves for future employment opportunities. These conclusions emphasize the importance of addressing speech anxieties and promoting oral communication skills as vital components of educational curricula, aiming to empower learners to overcome their anxieties and thrive in their academic and professional endeavors.

Key words: *Speech Anxiety, manifestations, level of oral communication, symptoms of speech anxiety, impact of speech anxiety.*

Introduction

In the context of globalization, it has become increasingly important for university graduates to possess strong oral communication skills to succeed in both academic and professional environments. According to Allen's (2002) findings, possessing confidence in oral communication can enhance graduates' adaptability in various aspects of their lives, including personal, academic, professional, and civic domains. In today's highly interconnected world, English has emerged as the most sought-after language due to its ability to facilitate effective communication across diverse cultures and geographies. The acquisition of English as a second or foreign language incurs significant financial costs, with billions of dollars being spent annually.

Additionally, the publishing industry produces a vast number of books each year to aid in language learning. According to Horwitz (1986), individuals who attempt to acquire and utilize English as a second or foreign language often encounter a degree of apprehension and report experiencing a "mental block" while engaging in verbal communication. The impact of mental block or anxiety on the communicative competence of language learners has been investigated by researchers. In recent years, there has been a growing demand in the international market for a proficient workforce with strong oral communication skills in English. However, studies conducted by researchers such as Devi (2008) have revealed that a significant number of language learners experience anxiety that negatively impacts their confidence levels during speech. The phenomenon of experiencing fear or nervousness when communicating through language is commonly referred to as speech anxiety. The negative impact of anxiety on the oral

performance of language learners in the target language is a well-documented phenomenon. Specifically, anxiety has been found to significantly undermine learners' confidence, leading to a decrease in their ability to perform effectively in oral communication.

Furthermore, the acquisition of spoken communication skills is typically initiated at home, while the school environment plays a crucial role in facilitating children's development of social communication abilities with peers and educators. The quality of communication among students is believed to have a significant impact on their professional communication skills. Effective communication plays a crucial role in enhancing students' learning experience by enabling them to ask relevant questions and engage in discussions to clarify their doubts. The act of engaging in verbal communication has been shown to have a positive impact on the formation of new social connections and the acquisition of knowledge. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between communication and career growth. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how effective communication can contribute to the advancement of individuals in their respective careers. The clarity of thought and expression demonstrated by a student during an interview is a crucial factor in determining their success in securing a job that aligns with their qualifications and aspirations. The development of communication skills is crucial for students as it enables them to acquire professionalism in speech, self-expression, and relationships (Lucanos, 2017).

There are several significant studies that have tackled the issue of speech anxiety among senior high school students. Effective communication of one's thoughts, ideas, and emotions are crucial not only in academic situations such as class conversations and demonstrations, but also in social and interpersonal contexts (Bodie, G. D., 2010). It is in this context that the researcher would like to investigate the impact of speech anxiety to grade 11 senior high school students enrolled in the subject, Oral Communication in Context. In particular, the researcher wanted to put in the foreground the following research queries:

1. What is the level of oral communication of grade 11 senior high school learners?
2. What is the extent of manifestation of speech anxiety among grade 11 learners?

Theoretical Framework

Speech Anxiety

The phenomenon of speech anxiety, also referred to as glossophobia, is characterized by a strong sense of fear and unease that is commonly associated with the act of public speaking (Bodie, 2010). According to Lucas (2012), speech anxiety can impede an individual's capacity to proficiently communicate information, ideas, and emotions to an audience through oral communication. According to McCroskey's research in 1977, public speaking can result in physiological symptoms like shaking and increased heart rate, cognitive disruptions, and negative emotional responses that can have a detrimental effect on the speaker's confidence and clarity.

Communication Apprehension Theory and Its Relationship to Speech anxiety

According to McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory, which was formulated in the late 1970s, individuals experience a natural level of anxiety when they are required to communicate with others (McCroskey, 1977). Communication apprehension, a type of anxiety, can be elicited by various forms of communication, including oral communication, and may fluctuate depending on the individuals and the context involved. As per the theoretical perspective, communication apprehension can exhibit trait-like properties, indicating that it is a persistent personality characteristic that induces anxiety in individuals during communication, irrespective of the situation. The anxiety can be categorized as state-like, which suggests that it emerges from circumstances, such as delivering a speech in front of an audience (McCroskey, 1984). Communication Apprehension Theory posits that an individual's inherent apprehension about communication can manifest as speech anxiety in the context of oral communication. This occurs when the individual is required to speak in public. As per Beatty's study in 1988, individuals experience an escalation in their overall communication apprehension when confronted with a situation of public speaking.

The theory suggests that interventions aimed at mitigating speech anxiety must consider both trait-like and state-like anxieties. Interventions could comprise of both general and specific strategies for managing anxiety, such as techniques for preparing and delivering public speeches.

Communication Apprehension Theory in Speech anxiety

The comprehension of speech anxiety can be facilitated by the Communication Apprehension Theory. According to McCroskey's theory, individuals may experience anxiety or fear when they are expected to engage in communicative activities, such as public speaking. The theory was formulated by James McCroskey in 1977. Communication apprehension, which refers to the fear or anxiety experienced during communication, can manifest in a variety of contexts and may be either pervasive or situation specific. Communication Apprehension Theory posits that an individual's underlying fear of communication is intensified when the communication involves public speaking, as it pertains to speech anxiety. The study suggests that individuals who have a general fear of communication tend to experience heightened levels of anxiety when required to deliver a speech in front of an audience (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). The present theory posits two primary categories of communication apprehension, namely trait-like and state-like. The term "trait-like communication apprehension" pertains to an enduring, personality-based attribute that causes an individual to experience anxiety about communication in general, regardless of the specific circumstances. In contrast, communication apprehension that resembles a state is more context-dependent, manifesting as anxiety when tasked with presenting a speech in front of an audience (McCroskey, 1984).

Accordingly, understanding and addressing speech anxiety requires acknowledging both these aspects. Interventions might necessitate strategies for managing overall communication anxiety (trait-like apprehension) as well as techniques specifically tailored for managing the anxiety related to public speaking scenarios (state-like apprehension).

Self-Presentation Theory in Speech Anxiety

The framework of Self-Presentation Theory is considered useful in comprehending the phenomenon of speech anxiety. The theory proposed by Mark Leary and colleagues suggests that individuals experience anxiety related to public speaking due to their concern about creating a negative impression and how they will present themselves to others (Schlenker& Leary, 1982). The anxiety experienced by individuals is often attributed to the apprehension of being perceived negatively, failing, or experiencing social disapproval or rejection (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 1995). Self-Presentation Theory suggests that individuals may experience heightened levels of anxiety when speaking in public due to their concern for how their performance will be evaluated by the audience, particularly in the context of speech anxiety. Individuals may experience apprehension regarding their perceived lack of competence, intelligence, or preparation, which can result in substantial anxiety and potentially hinder their performance (Ayres, Hopf, & Peterson, 2000).Therefore, interventions to address speech anxiety may need to include strategies to help individuals manage their fears of negative evaluation and improve their confidence in their ability to present themselves positively in public speaking situations.

Methodology

Research design

The present research employed a descriptive methodology to assess the impact of speech anxiety on oral communication among senior high school students. Calderon (2008) as cited by Alberto et al (2011) defines the descriptive method as a type of statistical research that aims to describe data and characteristics of the population or phenomenon under investigation. The research methodology employed involves the utilization of statistical calculations such as frequencies, percentages, and others. A survey investigation is commonly considered as a suitable preliminary step to descriptive research writing. The method employed involves collecting data to test hypotheses or address questions pertaining to the current state of the subject under investigation. In addition, the study utilizes the descriptive-survey research method to analyze and interpret the obtained results. According to Costales and Zulueta

(2003), it is deemed appropriate to explicate the essence of the phenomenon by relying on the perceived condition and status of certain basic observable situations.

Population and Locale
The research was carried out at Baguio Central University, Senior High School. The participants of the research were Grade 11 Senior High School students from the school. The sample size of the study was restricted to 40 senior high school students in grade 11. The research utilized the method of observation, which involves gathering data by means of direct observation. The method of collecting observation data is categorized as a participatory study, as the researcher is required to engage herself in the environment where her participants are located, while documenting her observations through notetaking or recording. The study's sample is restricted to grade 11 students who are enrolled in the Oral Communication in Context course, specifically those in the academic and technical vocational strands.

Instrumentation
The study's data collection process comprised of conducting observations and interviews with the participants. A semi-structured interview was conducted to ascertain the factors contributing to the manifestation of speech anxiety among the students. The questionnaire utilized in this study was developed based on the observed manifestations of speech anxiety among grade 11 learners.
The study comprised three components: Part I encompassed personal details of the participants, including their name and gender; Part II focused on the indications of speech anxiety that were observed while the students delivered a speech in front of their peers; and Part III involved a set of interview questions that were posed to the participants to further explore the observed indications of speech anxiety.

Data Collection Procedure
Prior to conducting personal observations of grade 11 students performing a task, the researcher sought permission from the teachers of the oral communication subject. Subsequently, the participants were prompted with follow-up inquiries to elucidate the rationale behind their exhibited behavior.
The task was assigned to multiple sections in order to enhance the dependability of the task and the interview inquiries. Forty grade 11 students from various sections were observed by the researchers. The manifestation of speech anxiety in the learners was observed.

Data Analysis
The interview responses and observational results were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Results
Table 1
Level of Oral Communication of Grade 11 Learners
Table 1 presents the level of oral communication of grade 11 senior high school students.

Domains	Level of Oral Communication			Mean	Descriptive Equivalence
	AR 3	IR 2	NR 1		
Functions	18	40	4	2.06	Intermediate Range
Contexts/ Content	30	36	2	2.27	Intermediate Range
Text Type	60	16	2	2.6	Advanced Range

Language Control	15	30	10	1.83	Intermediate Range
Vocabulary	9	40	7	1.87	Intermediate Range
Communication Strategies	15	26	12	1.77	Intermediate Range
Overall				**2.06**	**Intermediate Range**

With an overall weighted mean of 2.06, the grade 11 learners have an intermediate range of oral communication level. To be specific, the oral communication of students is contingent upon various domains as outlined in Table 1. The mean score for contexts/content was 2.27, indicating an intermediate level of oral communication. The domain text type received a mean score of 2.6, indicating an advanced level, while functions received a mean score of 2.06, indicating an intermediate level. The vocabulary was found to be intermediate, while the language control was also intermediate, with a mean score of 1.87. Similarly, the language control level was found to be intermediate, with a mean score of 1.83. Finally, the Communication Strategies category exhibits a mean score of 1.77, indicating an intermediate level of oral communication.

Table 2
Manifestation of Speech Anxiety of Grade 11 Learners
Table 2 presents the manifestation of speech Anxiety of Grade 11 Learners in their Oral Communication

	Extent of Manifestation				
Manifestation of Speech Anxiety	**AM 3**	**SM 2**	**RM 1**	**WM**	**Descriptive Equivalence**
Smiles Often	33	30	4	2.24	Sometimes Manifested
Poor eye contact	27	34	4	2.17	Sometimes Manifested
Fidgeting and extra movements	12	36	8	1.87	Sometimes Manifested
Mannerisms (always touching the nose)	9	26	14	1.63	Sometimes Manifested
Talks too fast	3	34	12	1.63	Sometimes Manifested
Hands are always inside their pockets	15	26	12	1.77	Sometimes Manifested
Deep breathing	9	34	10	1.77	Sometimes Manifested
Fillers (i.e. "ahm", "uuhh")	15	30	10	1.83	Sometimes Manifested
Shaky hands	18	18	15	1.70	Sometimes Manifested
Licking the lips	3	28	15	1.53	Rarely Manifested
Overall				**1.81**	Sometimes Manifested

The study found that grade 11 learners exhibited speech anxiety during their oral communication, as evidenced by an overall weighted mean of 1.81. The subject exhibits a tendency to smile frequently (2.24) in situations where they lack confidence in their speech and displays suboptimal eye contact (2.17) when experiencing anxiety during classroom presentations. The participants exhibited fidgeting and extra movement (1.87) as well as the use of filler words (1.83) during instances of anxiety in their speech activity. The participant's behavior was observed to include consistent hand placement in their pockets (1.77) and occasional instances of prolonged, deep breathing (1.77) while delivering a class presentation. The study observed that the presence of shaky hands (1.70) and mannerisms (1.63) were noticeable in some instances, particularly when individuals spoke too fast (1.63). Finally, it has been observed that learners exhibit the behavior of licking their lips (1.53) during speech.

Discussion

Level of Oral Communication of Grade 11 Learners

The level of oral communication varies from one student to another. The level of oral communication of grade 11 learners is not only based on how good they are in speaking but other domains should be taken for consideration such as the functions, contexts/ content, text types, language control, vocabulary, and communication strategies.

It was noted that among the domains presented, text type has taken prominence with a weighted mean of 2.6. The number of students show that when it comes to communication, they can better explain or express themselves in written communication. The data also manifest the level of students when it comes to communication as one student said:

> Student 1: we can better express ourselves when we write it on a piece of paper because we will not feel nervous doing so.

Also, when asked why they think text type rank first, majority of the students said:

> Students: When it comes to writing, we do not think of the audience looking at us or even judging our grammar. At least in writing, only the teacher can read our written works.

This is supported by a study by (McCroskey, 1977; Smith &Frymier, 2006), this phenomenon is commonly observed among high school students. According to previous studies (Carnegie, 2010; Denman, 1993), a considerable number of students tend to favor written communication over oral communication to mitigate their feelings of nervousness.Similarly, a study conducted by Carnegie (2010) found that high school students tend to prefer written communication. According to the research, students' perception of writing as a less anxiety-inducing form of communication was attributed to its asynchronous nature, which allowed them to plan, review, and revise their messages before sharing them.

The results suggest that students exhibit a preference for written communication, which may imply a requirement for specific interventions aimed at addressing speech anxiety and enhancing oral communication abilities. According to Morreale, Osborn, and Pearson (2000), improving the oral communication abilities of students not only decreases their fear of speaking but also equips them for upcoming academic and professional prospects that necessitate efficient oral communication.

Context or content ranked as second in the study conducted with a weighted mean of 2.27. When ask about their opinion on why content rank as second, some students defend their answer:

> Student 3: If the topic can be related to our experiences or what we observe, we can easily say something because we can relate it to our life experiences.

This means that students can create messages in contexts relevant to oneself and others, and one's immediate environment. The research conducted by Clark and Clark (2013) highlights the importance of context in communication. According to the research, students who possess knowledge of their immediate surroundings and relevant contexts are more capable of producing impactful messages. The comprehension of situational context, which includes social, cultural, and physical aspects of the communication scenario, enables students to customize their messages accordingly. This, in turn, enhances their communicative effectiveness.

According to the findings of Mortensen (2010), there is a higher probability of students producing persuasive and well-structured messages when they can establish a connection between the content and

their personal experiences, interests, and aspirations. The incorporation of personal relevance in the communication process can enhance student engagement and increase the relatability of the message for the recipients.

The domain Function rank as third with a total weighted mean of 2.06. When asked the students about their opinion about the result, majority of the students stated that:

> Students: We can talk easily when the topic is familiar to us and when we know something about the topic.

This perspective is supported by the findings of McCroskey, Richmond, and Bennett's (2006) research. The study revealed that providing high school students with the chance to articulate their opinions on familiar subjects resulted in increased self-assurance in their communication abilities and enhanced cognitive comprehension of the subject matter. Moreover, Nunan (1989) conducted a study which revealed that students' communicative competence can be enhanced when they are prompted to share personal preferences and information on familiar topics. The incorporation of personal experiences in language learning enhances its relevance and significance, resulting in increased motivation and engagement.

Lastly, the results indicate that communication strategies have the lowest ranking, with an average weighted mean of 1.77. As one of the students said that:

> Student 7: Maybe because our teachers usually give us group activities or less oral communication activity individually.

This suggests that students may lack effective communication strategies for verbal communication or speech-related tasks. Given that most teacher-led activities involve group work, it would have been beneficial for these students to utilize these opportunities to enhance their communication abilities. Long and Porter (1989) stated that group work has the potential to enhance language practice opportunities, improve the quality of student discourse, personalize instruction, foster a positive affective environment in the classroom, and boost student motivation.

Manifestation of Speech Anxiety of Grade 11 Learners
Table 2 shows that out of the 10 manifestations of speech anxiety among grade 11 learners, smiling often ranked as the most observed manifestation of speech anxiety followed by poor eye contact and fidgeting and extra movements. The researcher conducted an interview to further understand why they are always smiling whenever they feel nervous while speaking in front or during recitation. Majority of the respondents said:

> Student 3: So, we can lessen our nervousness.
> Student 5: To give a vibe to our audience that we are not nervous but deep inside we do.

This is supported by Abel and Kruger (2010) who conducted a study on public speaking anxiety among high school students. The study found that intentionally smiling during speeches was associated with lower levels of anxiety, as reported by the students themselves. The study revealed that the audience's perception of speakers who smiled was positively correlated with their perceived confidence and competence. The audience's positive feedback can potentially contribute to a decrease in the speaker's anxiety. Similarly, Lee and Nass (2016) conducted a study that demonstrated the potential of positive facial expressions, such as smiling, to reduce anxiety in communication situations. The study's results indicate that intentionally smiling during speaking tasks may be a useful technique for reducing speech anxiety among high school students.

Poor eye contact is the second mostly manifested in speech anxiety which is common to all speakers if they are not prepared, or they don't want to be easily distracted. When asked why they cannot make eye contact, most of their answers were:

> Student 9: I am easily distracted if I make eye contact.
> Student 11: I want to concentrate and focus on my speech, so I don't make eye contact.
> Student 5: I am scared that I might laugh and forget my speech.

The present study's results are consistent with Ayres et al.'s (1998) research, which revealed a negative correlation between speech anxiety and eye contact among high school students giving presentations. The

research emphasizes that individuals with elevated levels of anxiety tend to view eye contact as a form of direct engagement that may pose a threat, leading to avoidance. This is particularly evident among students. In a similar note, Kelly and Johnston (1999) findings of their study imply that students who maintained consistent eye contact were perceived as more confident and competent by their peers. This indicates that poor eye contact may not only be a symptom of speech anxiety but also reinforce negative perceptions and judgments from the audience, which could potentially exacerbate the anxiety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the observations done and the interviews conducted, the study revealed a definitive presence of speech anxiety among Grade 11 learners. Various manifestations of this anxiety, from poor eye contact to behavioral changes, have been identifiedand these manifestations are crucial to understanding the experiences of these students, as they offer insight into the multifaceted nature of speech anxiety and its impact on student learning and communication. While these manifestations are sometimes observed, their intermittent nature underscores the complex and fluctuating nature of speech anxiety. It also suggests that students' responses may vary based on a multitude of factors such as personal resilience, the perceived relevance of the speaking situation, and the presence or absence of coping mechanisms (Riggio & Friedman, 1986; Kelly & Johnston, 1999).

The significance of oral communication in the academic growth of learners lies in its ability to offer a medium for self-expression during classroom recitations and speeches. The approach enables learners to proficiently express their ideas, emotions, and opinions, while also promoting analytical thinking and improving their language and auditory abilities. As individuals progress through the stages of verbal communication, their level of confidence and engagement increases, resulting in a dynamic learning environment within the classroom. The inclusion of oral communication exercises and strategies in the educational curriculum is crucial for the development of well-rounded learners who possess not only knowledge but also the ability to express their ideas effectively. This approach facilitates academic and personal growth.

These findings highlight a notable issue that impacts their academic performance and overall educational engagement. Previous studies have shown that classroom recitations and speeches can improve oral communication skills, which in turn can help reduce anxiety related to public speaking. The implementation of this approach is believed to have a positive impact on students' self-expression, self-confidence, and interpersonal communication skills. As a result, it is expected to create a more conducive and safer learning environment in the classroom, promoting better learning outcomes and interactions among students. Therefore, the results suggest that teachers are encouraged to be vigilant in identifying the speech anxieties of the learners so appropriate activities will be applied like mini-debate, impromptu speeches, group activities or storytelling and teachers are encouraged to fully developed the oral communication domains of the learners especially in communication strategies and language control.

This study bears some limitations, so the following future directions are recommended. First, researchers can contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions that empower grade 11 learners to effectively manage their speech anxiety and enhance their public speaking abilities. Second, explore the potential benefits of incorporating mindfulness-based interventions, such as breathing exercises and guided relaxation techniques, could offer valuable insights into reducing anxiety levels and improving public speaking skills. Fourth, examine the role of peer support networks and the use of group therapy interventions could provide valuable knowledge in fostering a supportive and encouraging environment for learners to overcome their speech anxiety. Finally, focus on developing and implementing innovative strategies to effectively address speech anxiety among grade 11 learners.

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