Lived Experiences of College Students in an EFCOM (Effective Communication) Course

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Abstract: This study explored the lived experiences of Filipino college students in an Effective Communication course focusing particularly on their speaking performances. This phenomenological study employed Husserlian's bracketing and Colazzi's steps in data analysis. After a thorough analysis and reflection, four themes were made. These are the following: (coping strategies), nervousness and anxiousness, being prepared and composed, and the impact of speaking experiences and communication strategies. Also, it was found out that participants faced common challenges such as: speech preparation, memorization or familiarization, and spontaneity. Their public speaking anxiety came from varied sources like public speaking skills, English language skills, emotional predispositions, and the public speaking situation itself. They faced common challenges in every speaking activity; however, they had their ways or strategies in overcoming them. They chose to perform despite the feeling of nervousness. They described their whole experience as a step by step learning process to becoming good communicators or closer to it. Most participants were not into speaking before the crowd but the experiences served as gateways of improving their self-confidence and communication skills. Effective classroom activities that will enhance the students' speaking abilities can be created and utilized.

Keywords: public speaking, communication strategies, phenomenology, effective communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a daily activity that people engage into for different purposes. It is that important since every aspect in people's lives requires communication. [1] People can learn communication skill. As people progress in their lives, communication skills become more significant and other skills become less important. One spends so much time in verbal communication be it in school or workplace. Thus, good communication skills are necessary for an individual to acquire.. However, it is a fact that not all are born as good communicators. In universities, college students basically, have speech and effective communication courses which aim to develop their speaking skills. [2]Public speaking anxiety (*PSA*) is the fear experienced by a person when delivering (or preparing to deliver) a speech to an audience. Public speaking anxiety is sometimes referred to as stage fright or communication apprehension.

It has been a phenomenon that after studying English as a second language for a long time, a second language learner still cannot communicate using this language fluently in oral communication. It is unavoidable, then, that when students use English as a second language, they will sometimes not have the language they need to express themselves. In such instances, learners use varied communication strategies to help them get their message across. These strategies have been the focus of many researchers.

This study defined relevant terms to have a better understanding of the concepts. [3]The term 'communication strategies' is often limited to strategies resorted to when the second language learner has difficulty in communicating. So, communication strategy is used when things go wrong, it is "a spare tyre for emergencies". Further, compensatory strategy is a type a communication strategy that is used when the learners have linguistic shortcomings which make them impossible to communicate their intended meaning. Thus, to express their ideas successfully, compensatory strategies are used. [4] L2 learners used a variety of communication strategies to overcome communication difficulties.

There have been studies and observations with regard to the difficulty of the Filipino students in expressing and using English fluently. [5] It was found out in a study that students use their native language to reinforce concepts, skills, and information given to them in each lesson. It was also indicated by [6] Hosni (2014) that English as foreign language (EFL) learners, no matter how much they know about the English language, still face many speaking difficulties. It was concluded that students were not able to use the English language because they did not have enough vocabulary and skills in sentence structures which resorted them to use their first language. Moreover, students were afraid of making mistakes in front of the class, and would rather not speak than to be embarrassed.

[7]The results of the study of Macintyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) about the effects of confidence in oral performance showed that the students' confidence partly determined their willingness to communicate. Moreover, [8] Ur, (1996) pointed out problems that students faced when they get to talk in the classroom. These problems include: inhibition, use of mother tongue, absence of topical knowledge, and uneven participation.

The researcher has observed that students have limitations in oral communication. For example, when they are asked to explain, discuss, or ask questions in English, they frequently stop speaking because they hardly know how to say. Even some of those who perform well in the English classes still find themselves at a loss when interacting with others in English. Other instructors observed that students make faces when they cannot continue speaking. They tend to keep on repeating the same word or words. These problems do not only happen inside the classrooms during a formal discussion. When students approach a teacher or administrator in a particular office in school to talk or ask something usually they start in English since they are expected to and then they code switch just to finish the conversation.

In Philippine context, published studies about communication strategies are very few, and mostly quantitative research. But there are a number of researches about this topic outside the country. However, the researcher hasn't found yet a phenomenological study with regard to the impact of communication strategies especially in the lives of the college students.

2.   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aimed at describing the speaking experiences of Filipino college students in an Effective Communication course, and the impact of using communication strategies in conveying the message successfully. It focuses on each participant's experiences of the phenomenon.

Research Questions:

1. How do Filipino college students describe their speaking experiences inside the classroom?

2. What are the challenges and coping strategies they encounter before, during, and after their speaking performances?

3. What for them is the meaning of all these experiences?

Interview Questions

1. Kindly share your experiences in fulfilling your solo speaking task and/or group interactions.

2. How did you feel about doing the solo speaking/talk?

3. What are some challenges that you face? Tell us about your feelings (in facing the challenges)

4. How do you cope with these challenges?

5. What are some communication strategies that you use when you find it uneasy to express your ideas using the English language? Kindly provide at least two (2) experiences when you used those strategies.

6. How do you find these communication strategies in helping you convey your message?

7. What for you is the meaning of: (a) the speaking experiences and (b) using communication strategies?

3.   MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed Husserlian and Colazzi's phenomenological data analysis to describe the lived experiences of college students in an Effective Communication class. The research was conducted at University of San Jose-Recoletos, Cebu

City where the researcher is currently working. Basically, the researcher submitted to the DLL (Department of Languages and Literature) a transmittal letter, and the purpose of the research was elaborated by the researcher personally to the chairperson. Upon the approval, the researcher informed the prospective participants about the interview, and without second thoughts, they agreed. The interviews were set in any of the vacant classrooms at the university. The interview schedule of each participant was during his or her free time. There were a total of 20 students participated in this research. Most of them were third year level, and majority of them are from the colleges of arts and engineering who were taking up communication, journalism, psychology, or engineering. The profile is shown in Table 1 below.

Table1. Participants' Profile

Name (Alias)	Age	Year Level	Degree Program
Lee	19	3rd	BA Com
Mervin	23	3rd	AB PolSci
Clark	18	3rd	BA Journalism
Ruthie	18	3rd	BA Journalism
CJ	18	3rd	BA Journalism
Weny	19	3rd	BA Journalism
Sean	18	3rd	BA Journalism
Julie	19	4th	BS ComEng
Jeson	19	4th	BS ComEng
Chris	18	3rd	BS ComEng
Kia	19	4th	BS Civil Eng
Hades	19	3rd	BS ComEng
Sheryl	18	3rd	BA Com
Cara	19	3rd	BA Com
Gerald	18	2nd	BA Journalism
Angel	18	2nd	BA Com
Kresha	19	3rd	BA Com
Hende	22	2nd	ACT
Kath	28	5th	BS IE
Shy	18	3rd	BA Com

During the actual interview, the researcher introduced herself and carefully explained to them the purpose of the interview. Also, she educated them about the informed consent form for qualitative study. Further, she reminded them that their participation is voluntary, and if they were not comfortable to be part of the participants, they had the right to say no. Eventually, they signed the consent forms. To conceal the participants' personal identification, the researcher made use of aliases. Likewise, all other identifying information in the research discussion was removed to protect their identity and privacy.

Colazzi's process for phenomenological data analysis was chosen in coming up with themes and theme cluster. Transcription from the interviews was done manually with caution. [9] The following steps were followed: 1) reading and re-reading of the transcripts; 2) extracting significant statements; 3) formulating meanings; 4)generating themes; 5) clustering of themes 6) integrating the findings into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. 7) validating the findings through comparing the results with the participants' experiences.

Throughout the study the researcher utilized bracketing as a method to set aside her prior beliefs and knowledge about the phenomenon. The interviews were recorded through an audio recorder. Most of the participants used the English language during the interview so the researcher didn't find it hard translating their answers. There were 178 significant statements and formulated meanings. Then, 28 themes were created which were finally clustered into four themes.

To check the trustworthiness of the results, the researcher asked two colleagues (workmates) to review the data together with the significant statements, formulated meanings, themes, and theme cluster, and its results' discussion. Further, to check on the data analysis, the researcher presented the findings to the participants and who agreed to the themes generated from the study. Table 2 shows the theme cluster which was done by the researcher.

Table 2. Theme Cluster

Compensatory Strategies	Nervousness and Anxiousness	Being Prepared and Composed	Impact of Speaking Experiences and Communication Strategies
a. They often resort to adlibs when they are mental-blocked. b. They use non-verbal cues during speaking activities. c. They code-switch whenever it's hard for them to express an idea in English. d. They utilize getting help from the audience as a strategy. e. They use topic shifting and termination during the performances. f. Some of them use coinage as another strategy. g. They use fillers and ah expression when it's hard for them to express the idea in the English language.	a. They feel doubtful of their confidence to perform in front of people. b. They feel insecure with the performances of others. c. They feel uncomfortable when they face the crowd. d. They had this thinking that the audience are making judgements while they are performing the solo speaking task. e. They feel anxious about doing the solo speaking task. f. Most of them are not into public speaking. g. Doing a solo speaking task is a nerve wrecking. h. A few preferred group performances. i. They experience running out of words to say while performing the task. j. They felt nervous when doing a solo speaking task.	a. They believe that practice and preparations will lead to a successful performance. b. They relaxed themselves through a breathing exercise. c. They were able to cope with the challenges by facing them. d. they faced communication breakdown, they remained composed. e. Despite the challenges, they felt happy after doing the solo speaking task. f. It's a challenge for them to memorize their speech.	a. Solo Speaking task is easier and more comfortable. b. solo speaking task is challenging. c. strategies help convey their message to the audience. d. Speaking experiences for them help develop self-confidence. e. Communication strategies guide them in delivering the message successfully.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After a thorough analysis and reflection, four themes emerged. These are the following: 1) Compensatory Strategies:(**Co**inage, **Mo**ther Tongue, **No**nverbal Cues, **Ge**tting Help, **A**dlibs, **Fi**llers, and **T**opic **S**hifting); 2) nervousness and anxiousness; 3) being prepared and composed; and 4) value of speaking experiences and communication strategies.

Theme No. 1: Compensatory (Coping) Strategies

All participants utilized communication strategies during their solo speaking performances. Based from the findings, there were common strategies that they used. These are the following: coining words, switching to the mother tongue, using non-verbal cues, getting help from the audience, inserting adlibs, fillers, and topic shifting.

a. Coining Words

Coining words is simply creating a new term, which is not found in the dictionary, as a replacement of an appropriate word. Mostly the creation is quite closer to the right term. Some participants experienced using this strategy. When listeners hear the coined word, they would sometimes laugh and wonder if such word ever existed or acceptable. Nevertheless, the audience still understand the meaning since it is not that far from the correct term or word.

Jeson (alias): I coined a new word on the spot using the noun of the concept and adding a 'er' or '-ing'. This was not the best strategy to use but it helps get the point across.

b. Inserting Ad libs

Inserting adlib was another strategy that the participants utilized. This means that one adds something in his or her speech which is not part of the person's original speech, or something which is not planned. Participants admitted that they used ad libs when they were mental-blocked so as not to make it obvious to the audience.

Weny for instance said, *"In moments of mental block, I can always resort to doing adlibs."* Gerald also said, *"I try to adlib and improvise new lines on the spot to come back to the conversation as casually as possible."*

When they inserted ad libs, they tried to sound natural. Further, [10] good ad libs add texture and life to a talk. However, one should try to do it naturally. Humor is good if it makes the talk easy to listen to.

c. Using Nonverbal Cues

[11] Nonverbal cues include "all the communication between people that do not have a direct verbal translation." They are "body movements, body orientation, nuances of the voice, facial expressions, details of dress, and choice and movement of objects that communicate." In other words, nonverbal cues include all the ways you present and express yourself, apart from the actual words you speak." In speaking activities, speakers incorporate nonverbal communication while they are giving a speech. However, it could also serve as a strategy when speaker faces communication breakdown. Some participants revealed that they utilized nonverbal cues in their speaking performance.

For example, *Weny disclosed, "I unconsciously do non-verbal signals that would help me get the right words like scratching fingers and it does actually work."*

Sheryl said, "The moment I silenced and forgot the line, did not some non-verbal cues to make it meaningful.."

d. Switching to the Mother Tongue

Switching to the mother tongue is the use of a first language term for an English term. The switch may involve one word in the whole sentence or by saying the whole answer in the student's first language. [12] It was found out that it is an effective technique since it aids students' needs and facilitate interpersonal communication for both students and teachers. Also, it can be a useful communicative resource that helps overcome communication difficulties. In this study, a number of participants used this as a communication strategy. For example,

Sheryl: When I find it uneasy to express my ideas in English language, I usually say it in vernacular or change the word itself into its synonym.

Jeson: In a normal case, when I finish speaking the sentence in "bisaya", the English equivalent would eventually follow through.

CJ: I used mother tongue in some words that can fully explain the meaning of what I am talking.

[13] Code-switching among Filipinos happen for the purpose of communicative efficiency, which means "the fastest, easiest, and most effective way of saying something." Moreover, [14] code-switching may be valuable tool because there is usually purpose and logic in changing languages. It is using the full language resources that are available to a bilingual usually knowing that the listener fully understands the code-switches. Also, code-switching enables the students to cope with the communicative complexity of language use in society. [15] Hence, the practice of code-switching should not be considered as wrong or illegitimate because it somehow helps the learners become communicatively competent bilingual members in the society.

e. Getting Help from the Audience

Getting help means asking others of the meaning or the correct term. In this case, some participants used this strategy by suddenly addressing a question to the audience. For example,

Hades: I tend to ask the audience for their opinions or suggestions that they can add and I also tend to make some jokes until I figure out on what is the word that I want to say.

Kath: There was a point that I forgot the term or the proper word and I said what-cha-mah – call it?

This could imply that it is possible that the participants are comfortable in seeking help or assistance from others in attempting to cope with their limitations in oral discourses especially with the kind of learners that this generation has.

f. Fillers

A filler word is a meaningless word, phrase, or sound that marks a pause or hesitation in speech. It is also known as a *pause filler* or *hesitation form*. Some of the common filler words in English are *um, uh, er, ah, like, okay, right*, and *you know*.

Ruthie: I use fillers or hesitation devices. I'm used to saying "uh, um" whenever I find it hard to express my ideas in English.

g. Topic Shifting or Selecting the Topic

Topic shifting, as the name suggests, involves moving from one topic to another. In this study, there were participants who chose to discuss another topic instead. Based from the participant sharing below, the shift only started when she could no longer continue her talk with the assigned topic. This resulted from insufficient lexical resources in English language to express her ideas. In other words, it is where one part of a conversation ends and where another topic begins.

Shy*: When I had this solo speaking about the symbol of my life, it started smoothly but in the halfway of my speech I forgot this only one term and I can't think of any term to replace it. So I tried to shift the topic and move on.*

2. Nervousness and Anxiousness

None of the participants said that they never felt nervous and anxious every time there is a solo speaking task. Generally, individuals who feel worried when speaking in public tend to avoid situations where they have to present. So, when they are faced with such situations, they experience uneasiness just like what the participants revealed below:

Weny: At times of rehearsed speech or talk, I am greatly bothered by the density of my audience. I feel tensed and when I feel tensed, I get muscle cramps that are the time that I become fidget.

Angel: Honestly speaking, I felt nervous every time I stand in front of many and start talking. It is hard for me to gain enough confidence for myself.

Gerald: At first, I was nervous, but as time went on, I started to become calmer.

Cara: I feel worried because sometimes I can really say that I am not so good when it comes to public speaking.

Hades: In one speaking activity where no vernacular is allowed, I felt nervous. I can't speak clearly, and my sweat is pouring down like a waterfall. I'm not really into public speaking.

Out of 20 participants, only three revealed that they experienced participating speaking contests like oration and debate - but the feeling of nervousness was still there. Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening.

[16] Public speaking anxiety is very common among both college students and the general population. People with public speaking anxiety often avoid anxiety-producing social or performance situations, but when unavoidable, these situations are endured with feeling of intense anxiety and distress. [17] Also**,** *anticipatory anxiety* usually occurs as a person imagines the situation in advance of the actual experience (e.g., worrying every day about a presentation that will take place after a week or in a few days). Although individuals with these types of anxious responses often recognize that their fear is excessive and or unreasonable, they are unable, without assistance, to change their responses in these situations.[18] Public speaking anxiety may stem from numerous sources, such as public speaking skills, fluency in a foreign language, emotional predispositions towards public speaking, and characteristics of the public speaking situation itself.

The experience of Hades (participant) mentioned above are symptoms of this kind of anxiety. Individuals with public speaking anxiety most often experience a variety of symptoms in a public speaking situation, including palpitations, sweating, gastrointestinal discomfort, diarrhea, muscle tension, and confusion. Study shows that "Approximately 85 percent of the general population report experiencing some level of anxiety about speaking in public." [19] Public speaking or stage fright has been investigated and studied since the mid-1930's.

On the other hand, Gerald (participant) was able to overcome his nervousness in the middle of his presentation. Public speaking anxiety is a normal feeling especially during the first few seconds of an individual's speaking performance. Even experienced public speakers feel that a little nervousness before a performance or speaking engagement gives them the ability to perform at their best. However, for some people the anxiety becomes so intense that it interferes with the ability to perform at all. [20]In the case of students, this may lead to avoiding certain courses or even majors where oral presentations are required, never speaking in class, or deciding against certain careers because they would require occasional speaking before a group. Students who are very anxious about public speaking in class may sometimes also avoid other social interactions and situations they would like to attend or may not talk to classmates they would like to get to know.

3. Being Prepared and Composed

How the participants prepared before their speaking tasks had a great effect on the results of their performances. They revealed that familiarization, memorization, and focus helped them conquered their difficulties in speaking.

Kia: From time to time, I will practice my skill in *delivering in front so that I will also gain more knowledge and confidence on how to do it well.*

Gerald: I try to cope up with it by being extremely familiar with the lines, and also by being very observant in case I forget my lines.

Juliann: I should be always prepared in case that I forgot the lines or words that I'm about to say.

Lee: Focus and good memorization helped me out. I cope up with the challenges by simply memorizing my piece and look for speech strategies to make it easier.

Further, participants were able to manage to finish their speaking tasks. In the end, they gained self-confidence, and they learned how to be brave in front of the class. In the past, anxiety had been regarded as the enemy- that it impairs memory and lowers concentration. However, in this study, participants were able to gain energy from their anxiety. It motivated them to try their best to improve their performance. Stressful situation, such as speaking in public, was viewed positively which had better results.

The participants who labelled their emotions and accepted their public speaking anxiety were better able to achieve their goals to finish the speaking tasks. Participants were able to deliver or perform despite nervousness, anxiety, or communication breakdown. This is because they chose to embrace their anxiety, they chose to remain composed before the audience. They were glad that they were able to make it in the end. Also others believe that the more you are more familiar with the topic, the more you are confident to perform. Preparation, practice, and memorization would lead to a successful speaking performance.

Kath: Although it was nerve wrecking, it boosted my self-confidence and discovered that I can speak and share my thoughts. I'll make sure that I prepared myself well by practicing my piece either in front of the mirror or with my friends. With these action plans, it would increase my self- confidence because the more that you know your topic, the more you're confident.

Kath: leaving you with no choice sometimes would help you to be brave, LOL!

4. Impact of Speaking Experiences and Communication Strategies

Participants also revealed that both the speaking experiences and the use of communication strategies had positive impact in building self-confidence.

Sean: Speaking experiences help improve my speech strategies and fight my inner monster which is stage fright.

Clark: Speaking experiences are one of the factors that builds my confidence and communication skills. Communication strategies help me to cope up from the challenges I usually face in public speaking.

Participants, Sean and Clark, believed that the speaking tasks helped eliminate their stage fright and these experiences enhanced their level of self-confidence. Confidence level can be improved through training especially in public speaking. [21] It found out that exposure to virtual environment can facilitate student confidence and enables them to face audience regardless of the size. Hence, the more students perform speaking tasks, the more they get to develop their public

speaking skills, and the more they would become confident. It was further revealed that students who fear public speaking can perform well if they use certain strategies to fight their fears. Indeed, communication strategies are very helpful in the students' success in communication.

Kath: For me, speaking experiences are your struggles and strengths in delivering your piece/ message in front of the crowd. This enhances your communication skills and how you organize your thoughts. Not just that, it can widen your vocabulary and increase your self- confidence which is important in delivering your piece spontaneously. This could be your stepping stone for you to be a good public speaker in the future.

Clark: Communication strategies would be your friends that would catch you if you fall.

This would serve as well your emergency exit as long you properly use it.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study distilled the significance of the lived experiences of the students in performing speaking tasks inside the classroom. They faced common challenges in every speaking activity; however, they had their ways in overcoming communication difficulties. These communication strategies serve as their life vests to carry on and finish their presentations. They chose to perform despite fear and anxiety. Further, they described their whole experience as a step by step learning process to becoming good communicators or closer to it. Most participants were not into speaking before the crowd but the experiences served as gateways of increasing the level of their self-confidence and communication skills.

Thus, the study recommends that there is a need for educators who are handling oral communication courses to be oriented as to how the speaking activities should be properly facilitated, and come up with better teaching techniques that would lessen or ease the students' public speaking anxiety.

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