

Delineating Students' Speaking Anxieties and Assessment Gaps in Online Speech Performances

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Abstract—Speech anxiety is innumerable in any traditional communication classes especially for ESL students. The speech anxiety intensifies when communication skills assessments have taken its toll in an online mode of learning due to the perils of the COVID-19 virus. Teachers and students have experienced vast ambiguity on how to realize a still effective way to teach and learn various speaking skills amidst the pandemic. This mixed method study determined the factors that affected the public speaking skills of students in online performances, delineated the assessment gaps in assessing speaking skills in an online setup, and recommended ways to address students' speech anxieties. Using convergent parallel design, quantitative data were gathered by examining the desired learning competencies of the English course including a review of the teacher's class record to analyze how students' performances reflected a significantly high level of anxiety in online speech delivery. Focus group discussion was also conducted for qualitative data describing students' public speaking anxiety and assessment gaps. Results showed a significantly high level of students' speech anxiety affected by time constraints, use of technology, lack of audience response, being conscious of making mistakes, and the use of English as a second language. The study presented recommendations to redesign curricular assessments of English teachers and to have a robust diagnosis of students' speaking anxiety to better cater to the needs of learners in attempt to bridge any gaps in cultivating public speaking skills of students as educational institutions segue from the pandemic to the post-pandemic milieu.

Keywords—Blended learning, communication skills assessment, online speech delivery, public speaking anxiety, speech anxiety.

I. INTRODUCTION

I N the first quarter of 2020, the global pandemic caused by the deadly COVID-19 virus led to the startling transition of educational institutions to shift from face-to-face instruction to online platforms and/or other remote modalities of learning [1]. Regardless of modalities, the sudden stoppages of conducting face-to-face classes caused substantial learning challenges and strains even in the learning and acquiring of English skills especially for speaking. Speaking is considered an important productive macro skill to be developed by learners because it is one of the global skills needed to communicate effectively in any workplace or industry. Hence, it is essential to identify any possible learning gaps in the acquisition of the learners' English communication skills during the pandemic to acknowledge these learning gaps and potentially do some interventions and/or improvements moving forward to a post-pandemic educational set-up.

The Philippine Science High School System (PSHSS)

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harnessed the Curriculum Under Remote and Blended Learning (CRBL) [2] at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 showing educational resiliency despite the challenges of online teaching and remote learning instructions. However, looking at the roster of assessments in the English 6 curriculum for grade 12 students, which was focused on oral communication skills, it was observed that there were very limited or no assessments designed to allow students to acknowledge, process, and address their public speaking apprehensions. For the past two school years in the pandemic, students enrolled in the English 6 course expressed their apprehensions in performing speeches in their online classes. It was in this contention that the proponent of this research probed on students' speaking anxieties and how these speech apprehensions were addressed or not in the CRBL [2] by looking intensively at the formative and alternative assessments implemented by the English teacher.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Learning Theories for Online Education

One of the well-known models for online learning environments is the "Community of Inquiry" (CoI) model established by Garrison et al. [3] illustrating that online teaching should always have the tripartite concept of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence for the online learning experience to be effective and profound. The CoI model promotes that online and blended learnings should still be in the context of "active learning environments or communities dependent on instructors and students sharing ideas, information, and opinions" [4]. When CoI model is to be applied in an online English communication class, the highlight of every online encounter of learners should still be centered in the social interaction and sharing of ideas, opinions, and experiences between and amongst students and teachers. During the pandemic, it was generally observed that in a communication class, the teacher tends to have a teacher-dominated discussion online and limit social interactions and communication connections between and amongst students which was totally the opposite of what the context of CoI upholds.

Theorized by Linda Harasim [5], online collaborative learning (OCL) is another learning theory for online education that emphasizes the use of the Internet to enhance collaborative and knowledge sharing learning environment. Analogous to CoI, OCL learning presents a multilateral phases of knowledge

construction through group discussions which is a crucial component that plays a vital role to hone learners' communication skills.

However, the focus on discourse is hampered during online learning according to Hernandez and Florez [6] who said that learners have inadequate chance to be involved in peer interactions in a speaking class and that the time to practice their speaking skills is scarce. Teachers may have employed various activities that might be both engaging and enjoyable but encouraging the learners to speak in class is a struggle during online mode of learning. Adedoyin and Soykan [7] supported this concept in their study highlighting that learners were always faced with the predicament of learning the English language and communication skills on their own during the COVID-19 pandemic resulting to a possible failure to fully comprehend English language concepts and to potentially overcome the challenges in acquiring globally competitive communication skills.

B. Speech Anxiety in the Pandemic Pedagogy

In a journal article of Suzy Prentiss [8], she acknowledged that the presence of speech anxiety between and amongst students in any communication class was a veracity and was supported by a tremendous amount of scholarly literature. She mentioned that glossophobia [9] or the fear of public speaking is usual and may impact as much as 75% of student population.

In 2021, Naser and Isa [10] analyzed the public speaking anxiety of Malaysian students in an oral presentation class at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. Through the use of Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) questionnaire which was established by Yaikhong and Usaha [11], they were able to measure and analyze the speech anxiety of students in oral presentations through online platforms as well as their English speaking classroom performance during the time that Malaysia was under a strict lockdown. The findings of Naser and Isa showed that "majority of students encountered a medium level of anxiety" and that "the reason for moderate level of speaking anxiety among students was due to low proficiency in speaking English" [10]. Naser and Isa [10] encouraged teachers to craft more effective learning strategies in diagnosing and addressing students' speech anxiety level and inspiring students to develop their self-confidence and overcome possible glossophobic tendencies by creating an appropriate communication class learning environment.

As a comprehensive synthesis, it was posited that there was a need to look intently at how the remote and blended learning modalities have transpired in the English communication classes by realizing this research. It was also equally relevant to not just investigate on the proper implementation of the English CRBL, but also to know any significant manifestations of public speaking anxieties of students and to determine any hypothetical increase or decrease in public apprehensions of students as they prepare and deliver their speeches online. Likewise, it was important to determine how the formative and alternative assessments in the English curriculum have essentially addressed students' speech anxieties yielding a much robust-data driven information if the desired learning

competencies were achieved or not.

C. Assessments and Students' Speaking Apprehension

The case study of Wortwein et al. [12] aided the proponent of this research in establishing behavioral characteristics of highly anxious students in a speech performance before an audience in a virtual platform. In the same manner, the case study of Westwick et al. in 2019 [13] investigated the public speaking performance of students in honors section by examining the effectiveness of teachers' formative assessment. The study showed significant "higher levels of public speaking anxiety among honors students than among non-honors students and had therefore been identified as a population at risk for high public speaking anxiety" [13]. The participants in this study were homologous to the participants in the case study of Westwick et al. [13], having an above-averaged intelligence quotient. Being concentrated on identifying and analyzing the public speaking anxiety of high-achieving students, this research aimed to describe the level of public speaking anxieties of academically-gifted students.

D. Conceptual Framework

A mixed method approach was used in this study to reconcile both qualitative and quantitative data using the convergent parallel design. Aiming to analyze how the formative and alternative assessments in the English curriculum cultivated the speaking skills of students and how such teaching tools addressed and affected speech anxieties of students, the following research questions were framed:

1. What are the formative and alternative assessments in the English curriculum that are focused on cultivating the students' public speaking skills?
2. How do the actual public speaking performances of students manifest evidence of speech anxiety?
3. What are the factors affecting the students' speech anxiety?
4. Based on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study, what integrative approach to assessment can be designed to address students' public speaking anxieties as a segue from online to onsite instruction?

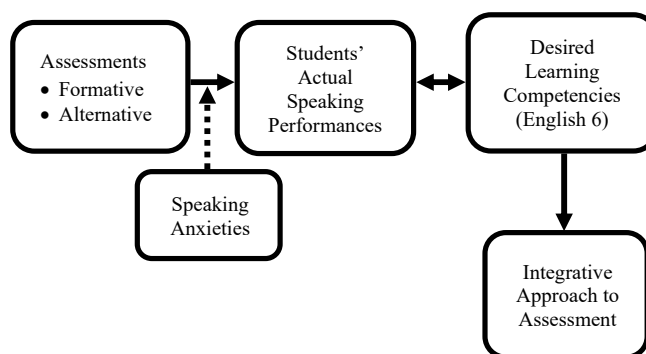


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of the study were all 91 grade 12 students

enrolled in English 6 course under the CRBL [2] of the PSHSS. The speech performances of the 91 students were analyzed to determine manifestations of speech anxieties of students. On the other hand, a purposive sampling was used to employ ten participants in the focus group discussion. The study was conducted during the academic year 2021-2022 specifically during the third and fourth quarter periods, from February to May 2022. The last two periods were chosen because it was in the last semester of the school year that the focused of the curricular content was on public speaking.

B. Instruments

There were three main instruments used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data:

- 1) A document review of the formative and alternative assessments of the course was employed during the third and fourth quarters of the English 6 course and how such assessments evidently addressed public speaking anxieties of students or not was assessed.
- 2) A document review of the actual speaking performances of all grade 12 students was used to describe the four speaking tasks done by the students namely: impromptu speech, extemporaneous speech, memorized speech, and speech with manuscript.
- 3) A focus group discussion was used to gather in-depth the factors that affect students' speech anxieties.

C. Procedure

Applying the convergent parallel design, the four phases of the procedure for data gathering, data analysis, data merging, and data interpretation were done as illustrated in Fig. 2.

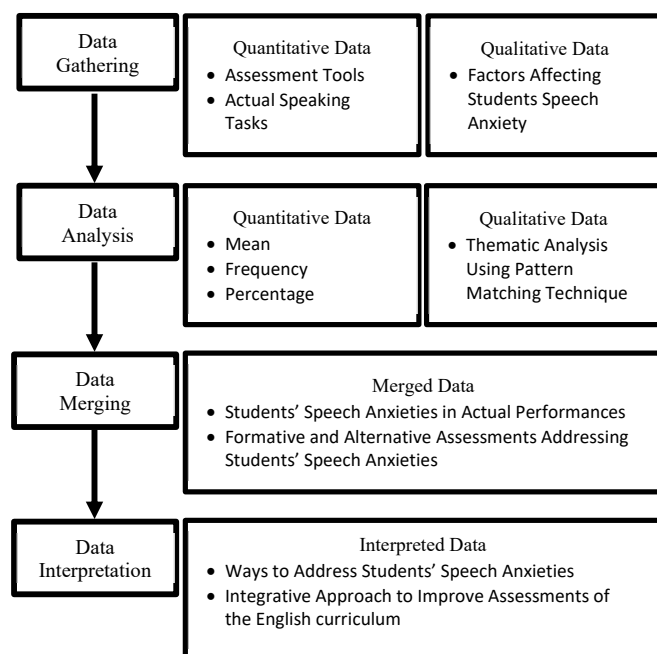


Fig. 2 Convergent Parallel Design

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the aspiration of the proponent to determine the

speaking anxieties of students and the possible assessment gaps, the formative and alternative assessment tools under the PSHS System CRBL [2] were identified as independent variables including the desired learning competencies which were all stipulated in the English curriculum. On the other hand, the perceived speech anxieties of student in an online public speaking class during the pandemic were considered mediating variables that affect the actual speaking performances of the students which were identified as dependent variables. The interrelated influences between and among the independent, dependent, and mediating variables led to the configuration of students' actual learning competencies in comparison to the desired learning competencies of the CRBL [2].

The first research question (RQ1) on what formative and alternative assessments in the English curriculum were focused on cultivating the students' public speaking skills, Table I showed that out of the 13 formative and alternative assessment competencies, eight competencies of the CRBL [2] did not evidently address the public speaking anxiety of students. Five out of 13 competencies showed evidence of cultivating the speaking skills of students and somehow addressed students' speech anxiety.

TABLE I
FORMATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT COMPETENCIES

Competencies	Evident	Not Evident
Employ the characteristics of good speech deliver	100.00	0.00
Analyze the conventions of delivering speech	0.00	100.00
Distinguish the various types of speech delivery	0.00	100.00
Deliver an impromptu and extemporaneous speeches	100.00	0.00
Accomplish a self-assessment sheet of speech delivery	0.00	100.00
Demonstrate appropriate personality during speech delivery	100.00	0.00
Deliver a well-organized manuscript speech and memorized speech	100.00	0.00
Accomplish peer-assessment sheet on speech delivery	0.00	100.00
Be familiar with the elements and nature of academic forum	0.00	100.00
Differentiate the various types of academic fora	0.00	100.00
Conduct some types of academic fora	100.00	0.00
Be familiar of the requirements of the academic forum	0.00	100.00
Apply the guides in organizing an academic forum	0.00	100.00

In efforts to address the second research question (RQ2) on how do the actual public speaking performances of students manifest evidence of speech anxiety, Fig. 3 showed that out of the 364 speech performances of the 91 grade 12 students in impromptu speech, memorized speech, extemporaneous speech, and speech with manuscript, the percentage reflected the actual speech performances of students: good speech performances was 63.74%, speech performances with dysfluencies was 21.15%, repeated speech performances was 4.12%, re-scheduled speech performances was 5.77%, and the percentage of no speech performances was 5.22%. Looking at the percentages, the speech performances that indicated a significantly high level of speech anxiety of students was at 36.26%. An alarming 15.11% was also significant because it indicated not just manifestations of speech anxiety but also

probable indications of social anxiety disorder which was described by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994 as “characterized by the fear and/or avoidance of public exposure and performance, in attempt to avoid possible humiliation,

shame or embarrassment” [14]. According to APA, one of the most recurrently feared and avoided circumstances included speaking and “being at the center of attention and/or target of criticism” [14].

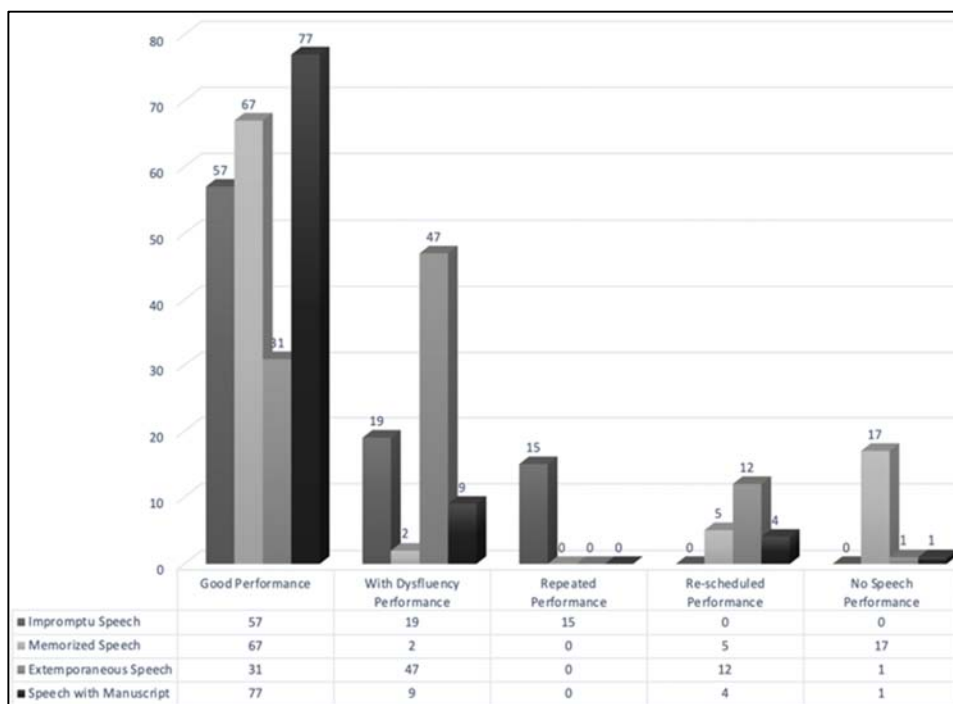


Fig. 3 Students' Actual Speaking Performance

The third research question (RQ3) on what are the factors affecting the students' speech anxiety was answered by the data results shown in Fig. 4 which itemized some causes of public speaking anxiety amongst grade 12 students which were the use of technology, the use of English as a second language (ESL), time constraints in speech, the lack of audience responses, and being conscious of making mistakes. These factors were analyzed thematically from the responses given by the students during the focus group discussion.

The two most recurrent reasons why students were having speech anxieties in an online speech delivery were the idea of not having a responsive audience and time constraints in speech delivery. Both factors obtained a percentage of 26.67%. Lack of audience responses was perceived by the students as scary because all of their classmates' microphones were muted and all cameras were off leaving the student-speaker at the center of attention. This kind of situation gave a feeling of fear and tension for not knowing if the audience agreed or disagreed to the contention of the student-speaker.

Similarly, time constraint was also considered as a number one factor why students had speech anxieties. Having a very limited time and having to be conscious of the time while delivering a speech caused some students to perceive on making mistakes, running on blank upon seeing the time limit, or exceeding the time limit which might result to a deduction in score.

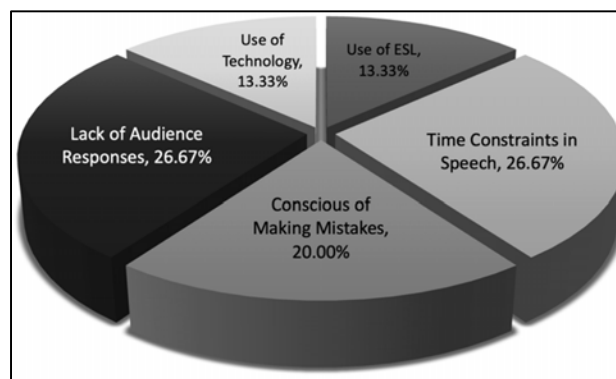


Fig. 4 Factors Causing Students' Speech Anxiety

Additionally, being conscious of making mistakes had a percentage of 20.00% which was affected by pre-conceived notions of students about their ability to speak effectively or not in public. The fear of being criticized was evident which would support the consolidated 15.11% of repeated, re-scheduled or no speech performance at all.

Finally, the use of technology and having English as a second language placed third most frequent reasons why student experienced speech anxiety. Because the platform for speech delivery was online, a good knowledge of technology was a requirement for every student-speaker, especially when there was a need to present images, videos or presentation. Use of technology also included the assurance of having a stable

Internet connection and good power connection during the speech delivery. These were an enormous cause of anxiety for students if during their speech delivery, there would be an unstable Internet connection or power outage.

Having English as a second language was also a factor of students' speaking apprehensions. Not having mastery and fluency in speaking the English language would trigger anxiety to students.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study led to the following conclusions:

- 1) The formative and alternative assessments in the CRBL [2] of the PSHSS indicated that most of its learning competencies focused more on understanding of concepts and not on addressing the public speaking apprehension of students;
- 2) The formative and alternative assessments were more concentrated in the production or performance of the speaking skills but not on the evaluation of the students' process of developing their public speaking skills;
- 3) The English teacher was confined to following the content of the CRBL [2] during the pandemic even with the knowledge that students had speech anxieties manifested to a large percentage of speech dysfluencies, repeated speech performances, re-scheduled speech performances, and no speech performances where students would decide not to do the speaking task at all;
- 4) The use of self-assessment and peer-assessment of speech performances were not done in the virtual classroom even if such assessments were indicated in the CRBL [2]; and,
- 5) There is a necessity to further consider and evaluate if aside from having a significantly high level of public speaking anxieties of students, there was also the presence of other social anxiety disorder that needs to be addressed.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions derived, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) The English teacher may ponder on redesigning the formative and alternative assessments in the CRBL [2] in order to properly address students' speech anxieties;
- 2) The English teacher may consider giving diagnostic tests to identify and address students' speech anxieties as well as students' probable social anxiety disorder by adopting standardized tests on anxieties;
- 3) The English teachers may be given a chance to meet with other English teachers in PSHS System so that they may have a unified assessment tools and practices;
- 4) The school administrators of the PSHS System may examine the curriculum content of the English subject and revisit the desired learning competencies as well as the suggested assessment tools and strategies to help students overcome their speech anxieties; and,
- 5) Future researchers may consider exploring the behavioral characteristics of highly gifted or above-average IQ students to have a better psychological understanding of

students' communication apprehensions.

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