

SPEECH APPREHENSION OF FIRST YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN THE PANDEMIC ERA: BASIS FOR AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the problems of First Year Engineering Students on Speech Apprehension in the virtual classroom during pandemic. The study was conducted using quantitative non-experimental with descriptive survey method. Results revealed that the problems in speaking performance have garnered a mean of 3.10 (moderate) as descriptive equivalent and it was found out that the prevailing problem is anxiety with a mean of 3.84, interpreted as high. Thus, an intervention program is designed to address the problems in speaking performance of the respondents. This program is divided into two: Overcoming Speaking Anxiety Seminar Workshop and Speaking Enhancement Activities.

KEYWORDS: *Anxiety, Communication, Oral Speaking, Pandemic Era, Speech Apprehension*

INTRODUCTION

The goal of classroom English instruction is to educate students how to use the English language effectively for communication in any scenario. It is identified by presenting various teaching tactics and speaking activities to encourage students to participate more actively in conversations. Teachers of English language initiate the conversation or choose an activity that requires them to speak their ideas to the class in a variety of ways.[1]

There is a lot of evidence that speech apprehension exists in the communication classroom, particularly in classes that focus on public speaking and/or presentations. In face-to-face, hybrid, and online communication courses, much work has been done over the years on intentional approaches to equip students to effectively manage their speech anxiety. These findings have resulted in best practices and strong pedagogical techniques that generate a supportive classroom culture and engaged learning. Then came COVID-19, and everything changed. Everyone went online in an effort to keep campuses safe and rescue the spring semester. [2]

Many teachers and students were getting their first taste of online learning, and their nervousness was naturally high. Our stress levels rose as a result of the unknown implications of a global pandemic, the uncharted territory of a midterm pivot to totally online schooling, and the unknown effects of the crisis on our educational institution. With Zoom sessions and cameras, public speaking and presentations took on a whole new meaning, and our speech anxiety skyrocketed. We will compile a list of best practices to prepare kids to effectively manage their speech anxiety with agency, ability, and confidence, based on previous scholarship, an appreciation of our current circumstances, and a look toward the future (Gersham, 2020). [5]

The coronavirus pandemic arrived in the United States in early spring 2020, necessitating an extraordinary mid-term pivot. In a matter of days, classes went from face-to-face instruction to online platforms. Teachers who had never taught online were learning as they went along, juggling an extra workload while trying to stay in touch with worried and frequently overwhelmed students. There were concerns about online learning, the economics, and mental health, in addition to the virus's public and personal health problems. The silver side was that in many classes, relationships had already been made before to the pivot, allowing teachers and students to interact with familiar faces in new ways. Although the scenario was not ideal, there was a sense that we were all in this together (Burke, 2021). [4]

English Language Teachers (ELTs) in the Philippines acknowledge the aforementioned problem. Indeed, Mukoroli (2011) [6] conducted a study on Effective Teaching Strategies for Academic Purposes, emphasizing the importance of providing English Language Learners (ELLs) with extensive exposure to speaking activities inside the classroom in order for them to become proficient in speaking English over time. When ELLs have a solid comprehension of and foundation in particular speaking skills learnt in the classroom, they will be able to switch between registers as needed.

In Panabo, Region XI, Orbeta and San Jose (2013) [7] conducted a study on Language Learning Anxiety and Oral Performance in English at the University of Mindanao, Panabo Campus, and found that most respondents felt shy towards their peers and teachers, which directly affected their speaking performance; additionally, they discovered that the respondents' insecurity when speaking English creates language anxiety, which blocks their ability to communicate.

As per my observations in a virtual classroom, first-year engineering students struggle to communicate well in front of the class. Stuttering, trembling, and needless motions are common among students. Furthermore, whenever they are required to speak in front of a group, they frequently employ mother-tongue and code-switch. They are unable to participate as a result of these factors. Thus, the researcher believes that the study is necessary because the speech apprehension has been observed to be prevalent in the virtual classroom. This issue must be addressed in order to accomplish the objective and significance of English language instruction (ELT).

With this, the study is to determine the speech apprehension of First-year Engineering students in the pandemic. The following objectives were considered for a thorough discussion specifically,

1. To determine the level of speech apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of:
 - 1.1. Anxiety;
 - 1.2. Lack of Topical Knowledge;
 - 1.3. Low Participation; and
 - 1.4. Mother-Tongue use.
2. To know the dominant/prevaling problem in speech apprehension affecting students speaking performance.
3. To give possible intervention/s to address the problems in speech apprehension of First-year Engineering students.

Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned on Ur's (1996) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also known as the Communicative Approach, which emphasizes the significance of learning a second language in order to be able to speak in it. As a result, teachers encourage students to speak in the target language throughout the classroom. The use of CLT in language schools has limitations, according to Ur, because of the following issues in speaking performance: anxiety, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and mother-tongue use. With these issues, he claims that the theoretical concept of Communicative Language Teaching will be useless in an English language class. As a result, these issues should be treated seriously in order to achieve the primary goal of English language instruction, which is the ability to communicate successfully in English.

Affective filter, according to Krashen's Affective filter hypothesis in the theory of Second Language Acquisition (1985), is a screen that is impacted by emotional variables and can inhibit learning. Many factors, such as worry, self-confidence, motivation, and stress, impede students' language acquisition. As a result, students' speaking abilities will be severely harmed, as they will be unable to communicate effectively in English. In order to fight this, the instructor must provide a safe, inviting environment in which pupils can study.

Piaget's cognitive theory (1936) also stresses exposure treatment, which focuses on psychological components of learning. This assists pupils in confronting their anxieties by providing a safe setting in which they can be exposed to the things they are afraid of. Fear is reduced and avoidance is reduced when feared items, activities, or events are exposed in a safe atmosphere. As a result, when a student's worry is alleviated, his or her confidence rises. Then, through speaking successfully in an English class and engaging in various speaking exercises, students will be willing to communicate their ideas and thoughts.

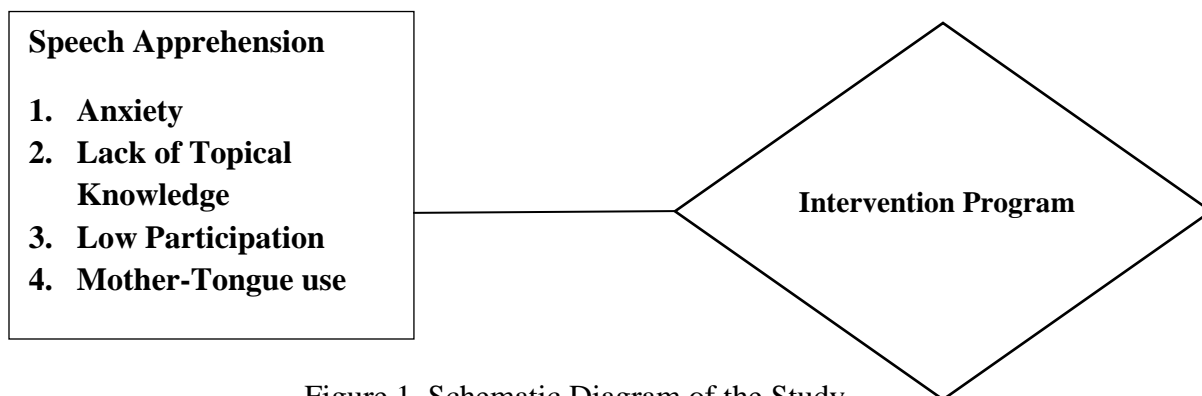


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Method

A quantitative non-experimental design with descriptive survey method is employed in this research. This research involves gathering of data in order to answer questions pertaining to the current issue of the research problem.

The respondents of the study involved 120 students of third-year Engineering students in University of Mindanao Tagum College taking a GE 2 – Purposive Communication with Interactive Learning subject (40 students from 8:00-9:00; 40 from 11:00-12:00 and 40 from

1:30-2:30 class). This study used the total enumeration technique in determining the overall number of respondents as a whole.

This study utilized adapted and modified questionnaire. The questionnaire is composed of the four indicators of the study – anxiety, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and mother-tongue used. Further, this questionnaire is done through the process of validation to make the instrument reliable and ready to administer to the respondents.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Anxiety

Anxiety. Table 1.1 specifies the speech apprehension in terms of anxiety. Results show that the most dominant sub-indicator is *I worry about making mistakes in speaking English* with a mean of 3.94 interpreted as high. This is followed by the sub-indicators: *I keep thinking that my classmates are better English speakers than I am*; *I am not confident when I participate orally in class*; and *I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English* with the means of 3.88, 3.88, and 3.87 respectively which also describe as high. This indicates that students fear and anxious to use and speak English in communicating and expressing their feelings and ideas whether they thought that his/her classmates are better than him/her or they will laugh at him/her when he/she will make mistakes in speaking English in front of the virtual class and in virtual classroom discussions and activities.

TABLE 1.1 SPEECH ANXIETY OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TERMS OF ANXIETY

ANXIETY	N	Mean	Description
I worry about making mistakes in speaking English.	120	3.94	High
I keep thinking that my classmates are better English speakers than I am.	120	3.88	High
I am not confident when I participate orally in class.	120	3.88	High
I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English.	120	3.87	High
I tremble whenever I speak without preparation in our English class.	120	3.69	High
Overall	120	3.85	High

This is supported by the affective filter hypothesis in the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) of Krashen (1985) that people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input 'in'. The affective filter hypothesis discusses variables that can work out as a filter that obstruct language acquisition. In his theory, affect includes motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence.

Affective factors are believed to play an important part in acquiring a second language. Comprehensible input might not be used by L2 learners if a “mental block” is in place, which inhibits them from getting the language. The affective filter works like a barrier to language acquisition when the learner is not motivated, not having confidence, or thinking about failure, and the filter is low when the learner is not anxious or is trying to get involved in the language (Du, 2009).

Lastly, the sub-indicator *I tremble whenever I speak without preparation in our English class* is considered to be the least determined with a mean of 3.69. This also entails a high level of problems in speaking performance in terms of anxiety. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean to be neglected and to not put emphasis too. The result implies that students feel nervous when he is not prepared to speak English in class.

The above-mentioned statement is supported by the theory of Thorndike (1898), the “Connectionism Theory” under the law of readiness which refers to a preparatory set on the part of the organism to learn. It points out that one speaks only when he is physically and mentally ready for it. In other words, preparatory set on the part of the organism is an important condition when a student wants to speak.

Nonetheless, the total calculated mean is 3.85 and described as high. It is interpreted that the problems in speaking performance in terms of anxiety is manifested in about 7 to 8 out of 10 occasions. This means that the respondents have high level of problems on anxiety in speaking performance.

In conclusion, the respondents find anxiety as a threat in speaking performance. All these indicate the importance for teachers to help students reduce those feelings to maximize their learning to speak in English.

The teachers' efforts should be focused on developing students' ability to speak since learning to speak is considered as the greatest challenge for all language learners (Pinter, 2006). In this sense, teachers have to give more opportunities to their students to express themselves by providing them with speaking activities that enable them to speak English (Brown, 2001).

Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Lack of Topical Knowledge

Lack of Topical Knowledge. Table 1.2 specifies the Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Lack of Topical Knowledge. Using the given results, it can be elucidated that among the sub-indicators that have been measured, respondents have the high problems in speaking performance in the sub-indicator *I find it difficult to speak because my teacher's chosen topic is not relevant for me* with a mean of 2.66 described as moderate. The result simply means that the topic plays an important role for the students to participate and speak English in class. Thus, teacher's chosen topic is a factor that should be relevant and can arouse the interest of the learners.

In support to the above-statement, Baker & Westrup (2003) professed those learners have nothing to express mainly because the teacher had chosen a topic which is not suitable for him. Thus, it would be difficult for the students to respond when the teachers ask them to say

something in an English language since they do not have interest on it, or they do not find it relevant and related to their lives.

TABLE 1.2 SPEECH APPREHENSION OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TERMS OF LACK OF TOPICAL KNOWLEDGE

LACK OF TOPICAL KNOWLEDGE	N	Mean	Description
I hesitate to speak when I know a little about our topic.	120	2.46	Low
I do not speak often because I lack vocabulary to express my ideas to class.	120	2.34	Low
I find it difficult to speak because my teacher's chosen topic is not relevant for me.	120	2.66	Moderate
I cannot think of anything to say because I have no motivation to express myself.	120	2.45	Low
I cannot comprehend and reason well if the question does not stimulate my past experiences and knowledge.	120	2.24	Low
Overall	120	2.43	Low

On the other hand, the above-mentioned sub-indicator is followed by the sub-indicators: *I hesitate to speak when I know a little about our topic*; *I cannot think of anything to say because I have no motivation to express myself*; and *I do not speak often because I lack vocabulary to express my ideas to class* with the means of 2.46, 2.45, and 2.34 respectively which described as low. The result shows that the respondents are not hesitant to speak when they know little about the topic or even, they have no motivation to express their selves.

The results of the study were supported by Peng (2016) that vocabulary knowledge or grammar knowledge and lack of motivation is not the leading factor to achieve willingness to communicate in the classroom discussion. Thus, familiar topics that are related to their daily lives stimulate higher willingness to communicate.

On the contrary, Zefeng (2007) exposes that lack of motivation, and grammar knowledge were frequently reported to have caused unwillingness to communicate in a classroom discussion. Learners often complain that they cannot explain or express their selves due to have no motivation about the topic. And most of all, it would be problematic for the learners to communicate when the teacher asked them to answer in a foreign language because they could have little ideas about what to say, which vocabulary to use, or how to use grammar correctly.

On the other hand, the sub-indicator *I cannot comprehend and reason well if the question does not stimulate my past experiences and knowledge* is considered to be the least determined with a mean of 2.24 which is also described as low. This indicates that the respondents can comprehend and reason well even if the question posted by the teacher does not motivate his/her past experiences and knowledge.

Jobs (1996) explain that experience and knowledge are the secret to being able to speak and express their thoughts and to make connections so readily that is because they were able to connect experiences and prior knowledge they've had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they've had more experiences in that particular topic. With that, even if the students can comprehend and reason out well to the question, it is much better to have past experiences and knowledge about the topic for them to achieve optimal performance in a classroom setting.

However, it has been rejected by the idea of Bialystok (1990) in Communicative Strategies under the Theory of Second Language Acquisition that learners will frequently encounter communication problems caused by a lack of linguistic resources, but they will use strategies (*paraphrasing, coining new words, substitution, asking clarification, etc.*) to overcome those problems in order to convey their intended meaning. Communicative strategies not only play an important role in communication, but they also contribute to second language acquisition. It can help to keep the communication channel open, encourage hypothesis formation and automatization. Thus, even without motivation or past experiences they can communicate and express their selves using their CS.

Additionally, it was supported by the approach to Communicative Competence (CC) under Strategic Competence of Canale & Swain (1980) which stresses to a person's ability to keep communication going on when there is a communication breakdown or to enhance the effectiveness of the communication. This ability is especially important to lower-level English language learners.

To sum up, the total calculated mean of the five (5) sub-indicators in lack of topical knowledge is 2.43 which described as low. It is interpreted that the Problems in Speaking Performance in terms of lack of topical knowledge is manifested in about 3 to 4 out of 10 occasions. This denotes that the respondents have low level of problems in speaking performance in lack of topical knowledge.

In conclusion, based on the results of the study, the respondents find lack of topical knowledge as the least determined problem in speech apprehension. Therefore, they can achieve his or her optimal performance without the knowledge of the topic.

Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Low Participation

Low Participation. The level of problems on Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of low participation is specified in Table 1.3. Using the data gathered, results show that among the five (5) sub-indicators of low participation, the sub-indicator *I do not engage in oral participation because I see my teacher as strict, and authoritarian* ranks the highest with a mean of 3.80 which labelled as high. This exemplifies that the respondents do not want to join and involve in oral participation because their teacher is strict and authoritarian. Thus, they rather stay silent and remain aloof in their seats.

The result of the study is supported by Weaver and Qi (2005) noted that students may feel intimidated or inadequate in front of their professors. Thus, they choose not to participate.

Wright, Sanders, & Horn (1997) added and supported the findings of the study that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Effective teachers appear to be

effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms. If the teacher is not effective, students under that teacher's tutelage will achieve inadequate progress academically, regardless of how similar or different they are regarding their academic achievement. And if the teacher is strict and authoritarian, students tend not to participate in a classroom discussion but instead they will just listen and remain silent until the time period is over.

TABLE 1.3 SPEECH APPREHENSION OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TERMS OF LOW PARTICIPATION

LOW PARTICIPATION	N	Mean	Description
I am not interested in participating orally using the English language.	120	3.67	High
I cannot participate in the classroom because my teacher does not give me opportunities to speak.	120	3.56	High
I choose not to participate because I am not capable of speaking English fluently.	120	3.72	High
I do not engage in oral participation because I see my teacher as strict and authoritarian.	120	3.80	High
I am discouraged to participate in front of the class because I observe that I do not belong in the group.	120	3.72	High
Overall	120	3.69	High

Similarly, Hyde and Ruth (2002) also found out that students were more likely to participate if they considered the climate to be supportive and noted that the professor should work to create this type of environment by providing positive feedback and handling controversial topics with grace.

With that notion, teacher should balance being strict and being kind. Effective teachers are the one who is passionate and responsible enough to help students gain academic achievement. And most of all encourage students to take part in class freely – give free hand to students to response and actively interact in the classroom. They should be ensured that it is their time to speak now and minimize their fear of being wrong.

On the other hand, the sub-indicators *I am discouraged to participate in front of the class because I observe that I do not belong in the group*, *I choose not to participate because I am not capable of speaking English fluently*, and *I am not interested in participating orally using the English language* ranks 2nd, 3rd and 4th with the mean of 3.72, 3.72, and 3.67 respectively which also labelled as high. This indicates that the respondents experienced the said sub-indicators.

The results were supported by (Crombie et al., 2003) that a climate where students and the instructor respect each other, where the students respect one another, and where the instructor cares about the students, is conducive to class participation. A type of classroom climate that he/she is comfortable and can feel the belongingness in the group and that works to increase

student confidence, and comfort in participation is the key to achieve good academic performance.

In addition, Tatar (2005) stressed that students who did not speak English as their first language were less likely to participate. Students are not interested to be part of the discussion because they are not comfortable, and they feel incapable in speaking English language fluently. Thus, speaking performance capability of the learners deteriorates.

Lastly, the sub-indicator *I cannot participate in the classroom because my teacher does not give me opportunities to speak* is considered to be the least determined among the sub-indicators with a mean of 3.56 which labelled also as high. This does not mean that it should be ignored and left it behind but instead give emphasis too. The result denotes those respondents wanted to participate in the classroom, but the teacher did not give an opportunity for them to speak.

Additionally, Fassinger (2000) stated that teacher should give everyone an opportunity to speak in class and not be biased in calling a student even if students' answer is wrong. Higher participation classes were more supportive, cooperative, and student-centered.

The above-mentioned was supported by Campbell (2007) that teachers should not only be the one to speak in class but also give the students an opportunity to express their selves no matter wrong or right the answer is. She noted that a caring environment will encourage participation among students and between students and teachers.

Ultimately, the total calculated mean of low participation is 3.69 which described as high. It is interpreted that the Problems in Speaking Performance in terms of low participation is manifested in about 7 to 8 out of 10 occasions. This denotes that the respondents have high level of problems in speech apprehension in low participation.

With this, based on the result of the study, the researchers find low participation as one of the leading in speech apprehension. Hence, low participation is a threat to achieve optimal performance of the students.

In conclusion, student's confidence, and the instructor him/herself all have a significant impact on student participation. A supportive classroom climate is critical to higher levels of participation.

Furthermore, teachers, certainly contributes to students' levels of participation, and those students believe that their teachers influence their participation based on the ways in which the teachers communicate with them. The actions of the teacher are indeed most crucial in promoting classroom interaction and that a primary reason student do not participate may be because of the instructor. Specifically, they are less likely to participate if their teachers do not pay attention to them, make fun of them, put them down, or are overly critical of them. Thus, for the students to participate to the discussion, a healthy and friendly environment is a must. A student-centered rather than teacher-centered classroom is more likely to have students with higher levels of participation.

Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Mother-tongue use

Mother-tongue Use. Table 1.4 shows the Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Mother-tongue use. Among the five sub-indicators of mother-tongue use, *I dislike using English whenever I speak in front of the class* got the highest rank with a mean of

3.36 described as moderate. This result shows that learners use their mother-tongue comfortably than the target language. Hence, the students are difficult to be drawn into using the English language effectively to communicate.

In support to the above-findings, Oluwole's study (2008) revealed that frequent use of mother-tongue influences students' low speaking performance in English Language. This however may cause drastic decline in the standard of education.

Moreover, Atetwe's study (2013) [3] on public day secondary schools of Gatundu District, with students' and teachers' dominant use of mother-tongue inside the virtual classroom, lead to a conclusion that the prevalent use of mother-tongue has negative effects on students' performance in English. Both teachers and students have even observed the factual scenario.

Next to the first-mentioned sub-indicator are the following: *I am not comfortable to speak to my classmates in English; I refrain answering my teacher's question using English; and I cannot convey information properly to my classmates using English.* These sub-indicators have a mean of 2.84, 2.78, and 2.74 respectively which are described as moderate. The result shows that students have experienced difficulties with regard to the use of English during virtual classroom conversations and switch to the use of their mother-tongue.

TABLE 1.4 SPEECH APPREHENSION OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TERMS OF MOTHER-TONGUE USE

MOTHER-TONGUE USE	N	Mean	Description
I dislike using English whenever I speak in front of the class.	120	3.36	Moderate
I refrain answering my teacher's question using English.	120	2.78	Moderate
I cannot convey information properly to my classmates using English.	120	2.74	Moderate
I do not prefer using English language alone in our English class.	120	2.69	Moderate
I am not comfortable to speak to my classmates in English.	120	2.84	Moderate
Overall	120	2.88	Moderate

In support to these results, Harmer (1991) stresses that students find it easier to express their ideas in their mother-tongue because they are familiar with the language. When the students are asked to have a discussion about a topic that they are incapable of, if they want to say anything about the topic, they will use their own language.

The least determined problem among all the sub-indicators of mother-tongue use, *I do not prefer using English language alone in our English class*, with a mean of 2.69 and is described as moderate. The result suggests that students, though aware with the medium of instruction in

English class should be the English language, they still chose to use their mother-tongue for communication. This however seemed a natural case because the learners use a certain language in their society for communication other than the language that is taught in class. As defined by UNESCO (2010), mother-tongue is the language that a learner knows best and is mostly used.

Above all, the five sub-indicators of the problem on the use of mother-tongue in speaking performance scored a mean of 2.88 and described as moderate. It is interpreted that the Problems in Speech Apprehension in terms of mother-tongue use is manifested in about 5 to 6 out of 10 occasions. This denotes that the respondents have moderate level of problems in speech apprehension in mother-tongue use.

With this, Community Language Learning developed by Curran (1970) emphasizes the practice of bilingual education, particularly the set of using mother tongue and the target language procedures referred to as code switching in which the teacher continues to promote the use of both languages in giving instruction to an English class. Thus, allows learners to talk about whatever they want to be by saying it first in their own language and then repeating after the teacher in the target language. In other words, learners create their own materials in speaking.

Summary of the Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students

Table 1.5 presents the summary of the Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in the pandemic era.

Speech Apprehension. The level of Speech Apprehension of First-year Engineering students in terms of Anxiety, Lack of Topical Knowledge, Low Participation, and Mother-Tongue Used is indicated in Table 3.1. Results show in Table 1.5 a moderate level of speaking performance as indicated in the mean of score of each indicator. The highest among the problems in speech apprehension is *Anxiety*, with 3.85 (high), followed by *Low Participation*, with 3.69 (high), then *Mother-tongue use*, with 2.88 (moderate) and, the lowest is *Lack of topical knowledge* with 2.43 which is equivalent to moderate level. All in all, the overall mean of score is 3.21 which is described as moderate. Result further implies that the speech apprehension is rarely manifested about 5-6 out of 10 occasions.

Apparently, the results show that the prevailing problem in speech apprehension is the anxiety, followed by low participation, mother-tongue used and lack of topical knowledge. The proceeding section tackles the results of the tabulation with corresponding supports about the four indicators of problems raised.

Anxiety. The results revealed that among the indicators of the problems in speech apprehension, anxiety ranks the highest with a mean score of 3.85 (high). This indicates that the selected statement indicators in the variable are always experienced about 7-8 out of 10 occasions. Thus, this simply means that anxiety is the leading problem why students are facing difficulty in speaking in an English language class.

TABLE 1.5 PROBLEMS IN SPEECH APPREHENSION OF FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Speech Apprehension	N	Mean	Description
Anxiety	120	3.85	High
Lack of Topical Knowledge	120	2.43	Low
Low Participation	120	3.69	High
Mother-tongue Use	120	2.88	Moderate
	Overall	3.21	Moderate

The same results revealed by the study of Fitriani, Apriliaswati and Wardah (2015) on A Study on Student's English-Speaking Problems in Speaking Performance that the most dominant problem in students' speaking performance is the psychological problems which pertain to the students' problems regarding their lack of self-confidence and anxiety in speaking the language. They were confronted with feelings such as lack of confidence, shyness, anxiousness, nervousness, and worry. This emphasized that anxiety plays an important role to ones' speaking performance, whether they have so many ideas in their minds and they seem to be ready to deliver it, if they feel anxious, they cannot deliver their ideas and opinion as flawless and as natural as they want.

Besides, it is further confirmed by Burns and Thornbury (2005) that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes are the factors that hinder students from speaking. With this, students tend to be silent in their seats while a classroom discussion or activity is going on.

Likewise, Lim (2002) also indicated that students have a fear of making mistakes when speaking English. Thus, students tend not to speak much in class, appear reserved, rarely ask questions, and do not express opinions since they may have low English language proficiency and self-efficacy. With this, students tend to be quiet and just wait for the knowledge from the teacher to be transmitted to them.

Students who experience anxiety in the classroom often base their fear on an inaccurate assessment of its causes. They imagine danger where it does not necessarily exist and do not have an effective plan of action to cope with their anxiety. Over time and in different learning situations people develop expectations concerning the likely outcomes of various behaviors within and across situations, but when they engage in communicative behaviors that seem to work, they develop positive expectations for those behaviors, and these can become a regular part of learners' communicative repertoire (Dayhoff, 2000).

Park & Lee (2005) also noted that learners' anxiety level was positively related to their oral performance. The higher *anxious* the students were about speaking English, the lower scores they gained on their speaking oral performance.

Additionally, Tanveer (2007) [8] also stated that the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance. As a result, the students' feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities.

However, if experiences are negative, language anxiety begins to develop and if these negatively perceived experiences continue, foreign language anxiety may become a regular occurrence and the learner begins to routinely expect to be nervous and perform poorly. Anxiety can be associated with a variety of physiological and emotional states, embodied in feelings of tension even in situations where the immediate cause of such tension is not readily apparent. MacIntyre (1995) concludes that language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students. Anxious students are focused on both the task and their reactions to it. Thus, anxiety is related to self-focused, negative, and anxious cognition during interaction. Highly anxious students often have relatively negative self-concepts, underestimating the quality of their speaking ability when compared with others.

In conclusion, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), describing language anxiety emphasized that the anxious student may be characterized as an individual who perceives the L2 as an uncomfortable experience. This is in addition to: withdrawing from voluntary participation, feeling social pressures not to make mistakes and who is less willing to try uncertain or novel linguistic forms.

Low Participation. As the table reveals, the respondents' problems in speech apprehension in terms of low participation ranks second with a mean score of 3.69 (high). This also indicates that the selected statement indicators in the variable are always experienced about 7-8 out of 10 occasions. This implies that the students got low oral performance due to the fact that they did not, or they are not willing to participate in a classroom discussion.

It is further supported by Gan (2012) that one of the factors why students did not perform well in speaking English it is because they are not given sufficient opportunities to speak English in lectures and tutorials, and also an input-poor environment for spoken communication in English outside class. Apparently, it contributed to a range of problems that closely related to the socio-cultural, institutional, and interpersonal contexts in which individual ESL students found themselves difficult to deal with.

In the context of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EF/SL) teaching and learning, students' verbal participation or engagement is essentially important in the classrooms. This claim complies with the conceptualization of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach of teaching English, which sees language being taught as a system for expressing meaning (Nunan, 1999). It is believed that when students engage in the classrooms with their teachers or among peers, they are compelled to be involved in the 'negotiation of meaning', that is to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, and opinions

Generally speaking, with teachers' encouragement and efforts, students are always expected to be able to fully contribute to the classroom discourse. Nonetheless, the EF/SL classroom may be a frustrating place when most students remain silent in class, and only a small proportion of them actually participate. Despite the students being aware of the importance of spoken English, and knowing the fact that participation is encouraged, many teachers still experience a great deal of quietness in the EF/SL classroom. The students are said to remain non-participatory, quiet or

behave passively. In the field of second language acquisition, this is a situation typically termed as 'reticence'. For EF/SL instructors, this is a kind of uncomfortable feeling as it reflects negatively on their instructional practice (Fritschner, 2000).

The importance of learner participation is also stressed by Jackson (2002) who contends that participation provides the setting in which students can construct and shape identities as members of the classroom. Moreover, students' participation in classroom activities is important in order for effective learning to take place.

Similarly, the linkage between classroom participation and students' academic achievement is undeniable. A study by Liu (2005) finds that students who participate actively tend to have better academic achievement compared to students who do not participate. Students' oral participation can help students fill the gap between what they want to say and whether they are able to say it. Furthermore, it is a common belief that participation in verbal interaction offers language learners the opportunity to follow up on new words and structures to which they have been exposed during language lessons and to practice them in context.

Mother-tongue Use. The table shows that mother-tongue used ranks third with a mean score of 2.88 (moderate). This denotes that the selected statement indicators in the variable are always experienced about 5-6 out of 10 occasions.

This indicates that students often used mother-tongue because it is easier for them to express their thoughts and it is natural thing to do to use their own language. This statement is noted and supported by Hoang Tuan & Ngoc Mai (2015) [10] that using mother-tongue to explain something to another is a natural and easy way process of expressing their thoughts and that student feel comfortable to do speaking activities. But if there is no encouragement from the teachers and if the teachers frequently use the students' language, the students will feel comfortable to do it.

According to Manara (2007), mother-tongue is a resource for the learners' linguistic schemata. The mother-tongue is a resource for the learners to draw their existing knowledge from and perceive the new language. Second Language Learners refer to their knowledge of L1 in order to help them learn the L2. And that their L1 is the resource in understanding the target language.

In contrast, in the Philippines as what Quijano (2010) noted that the English proficiency has been affected due to the learners' lack of exposure to English. And since many educational materials available in schools and libraries are written in English, there is a decline in language aptitude, comprehension problems, discouragement, and demoralization.

Also, it is further supported by Oluwole (2008) that the mother-tongue use influences the student's poor performance in English language. And that the oral performance of the students in English language is poor and if the discovered factors are not tackled on time, it will cause a drastic decline in the standard of education.

Furthermore, Atkinson (2001) cautioned the danger of the overuse of the mother-tongue in the English language classroom. He suggested that the mother-tongue should be used to make meaningful communication and should also be used as a technique to encourage learners to be able to find a way of expressing their meaning in the target language.

Lack of Topical Knowledge. The results show that the lack of topical knowledge ranks the lowest among the indicators of the speech apprehension with a mean score of 2.43 (low). This indicates that the selected statement indicators in the variable are always experienced about 3-4 out of 10 occasions. As the table reveals, it is left behind for it does not necessarily being an issue in the oral performance for it is the least problem among the indicators presented in the study. This denotes that even though students may know little or have lack of knowledge about the topic, it doesn't mean that they are not capable of expending ideas.

According to He (2010), topical knowledge is a fundamental schema to elicit a speaker's performance. Without such knowledge, and ESL speaker, even with a high English proficiency, cannot achieve his or her optimal performance.

Besides, Vidal (2011) supported the idea of He (2010) that those with schema on the subject are better speakers of English in the classroom compared to those without such knowledge. Thus, it should be addressed in order to help those students who performed poorly to expand their speaking performance in the classroom setting.

In addition, Tuan & Mai (2015) [10] stated that topical knowledge was found to be the leading problem that affects students speaking performance. It was based on their study, "Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Performance at Le Thanh Hien High School". Result stated that 81% of the students chose topical knowledge as the most affecting factor in their speaking performance.

Nonetheless, in contrast to the above statement, the result of this study clearly confirmed that lack of topical knowledge is least problem in speaking performance. Therefore, the study of the researchers clearly debunks the idea and the result of the above-mentioned for the most occurring problem nowadays based on the result of this study is *anxiety*.

All in all, the overall mean of score of the four indicators is 3.21 which is described as moderate. Result further implies that the problem in speech apprehension is rarely manifested about 5-6 out of 10 occasions. This indicates that the four indicators presented in this study were experienced by the respondents in an English language class and it doesn't mean that it should be neglected and to be taken for granted but instead those problems are still occurring and need to be remediated and actions should be taken.

Speaking seems to be the most important skills of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language. Thus, the speaker needs communicative competence which includes not only linguistic competence but also a range of other sociolinguistic and conversational skills which help him/her know how to say what to whom and when. Second language students need communicative competence to participate in and learn from their classroom experience (Ur, 1996).

With that, Tuan & Mai (2015) [10] suggested that teachers should be a guide to the students who are learning the language. Teachers should first improve the performance conditions by giving their students time to prepare for a speaking task, teaching the students how to use mind map to generate ideas and giving students enough time to perform their tasks.

In addition, Kumaravadivelu (2006) proposed that teachers should help their students overcome those problems in speaking by having friendly, helpful, and cooperative behaviors to make

students feel comfortable when speaking in the class; reminding students not to worry about making mistakes and giving them clear instructions and sufficient guidance. They should also personalize and simplify the topics in the textbook to make them easier, more interesting, and relevant to their lives. Moreover, speaking skills should be included in tests and exams because the students will be more motivated to learn speaking skills because they are tested.

Another thing is teachers should give students more opportunities to speak English in class by using some speaking activities that require students to speak. Furthermore, the teachers should decide carefully when and how to correct the students' mistakes so that the students are not fearful of making mistakes and the flow of the students' conversation is not destroyed. In addition, the teacher should encourage students to participate in speaking activities. And most of all, teachers should create an English-speaking environment by encouraging the students to use English in the classroom to make it a habit, letting them watch films or videos in English and the teachers should also use English in the classroom frequently so that the students have more exposure to the language (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

As for the students, Nation & Newton, (2009) suggested that they should first understand the importance of speaking skills. Secondly, they should practice speaking English outside the classroom more often by doing the speaking tasks in the textbook at home with their classmates, joining speaking club where they can use English to communicate and speaking on their own in front of a mirror. Finally, they should use English in the class instead of their L1 to make it a habit.

Most students want and expect their teachers to give them feedback on their performance. But, however, all speaking production should not be dealt with in the same way. The decisions that the teachers make about how to react to students' performance will depend upon the stages of the lesson, the activities, the types of mistakes made and the particular student who is making that mistake. If the teachers correct whenever there is a problem, the conversational flow as well as the purpose of the speaking activity will be destroyed. If the students are corrected all the time, they can find this very demotivating and become afraid to speak. Therefore, teachers should always correct the students' mistakes positively and with encouragement (Harmer, 1991). As what Davies & Pearse (1998) said, the major goal of all English language teaching should be to give learners the ability to use English effectively and use it meaningfully in communication.

INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The First-year Engineering students at University of Mindanao Tagum College have a prevailing problem in speech apprehension which is anxiety. To assist the students and teachers, the researchers planned and proposed the following actions and undertakings. This intervention program is divided into two: Seminar-Workshop for Teachers and Speaking Enhancement Activities for Students.

These activities will help teachers in delivering the lesson to the students to encourage and support the ability of how the students learn. The said undertakings are to be done by the English instructors with the engagement of the students. More so, this implies that the students will be equipped in speaking the language through applying the proposed speaking enhancement activities designed by the researcher.

Summary

This study was conducted to determine the speech apprehension of First-year Engineering Students in the pandemic era. It utilized the descriptive survey method. Additionally, this study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire to identify the prevailing speech apprehension of the respondents in terms of anxiety, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and mother-tongue use. The respondents of this study were chosen based on total enumeration sampling. Particularly, the result was determined:

1. The speech apprehension in terms of anxiety has a mean of 3.84 with the highest rank in the descriptive equivalent among the four indicators. The prevailing sub-indicator is *I worry about making mistakes in speaking English* with a mean of 3.93 (high). This is followed by the sub-indicators: *I keep thinking that my classmates are better English speakers than I am* and *I am not confident when I participate orally in class* both with a mean of 3.89; *I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English* with a mean of 3.86; and *I tremble whenever I speak without preparation in our English class* with a mean of 3.64. Thus, all sub-indicators of anxiety was interpreted as high. Additionally, it was followed by low participation with a mean of 3.69 and has reached a high descriptive equivalent. On the other hand, mother-tongue use with a mean of 2.87 has moderate descriptive equivalent while lack of topical knowledge with a mean of 2.42 has low descriptive equivalent. In totality, the speech apprehension of the respondents has obtained 3.20 with a moderate descriptive equivalent. Furthermore, this result means that the respondents experienced the indicators in about 5-6 out of 10 occasions.

CONCLUSIONS

Below are the findings of the study:

- a. The speech apprehension of First-year Engineering students as indicated by anxiety, lack of topical knowledge, low participation and mother-tongue use is moderate.
- b. The dominant/prevailing problem in speech apprehension of the respondents is anxiety.
- c. The proposed designed intervention programs by the researchers are Seminar- Workshop for teachers and Speaking Enhancement Activities for students.

Recommendations

The result of this study shows that the overall problem speech apprehension is moderate. Hence, the following recommendations are offered to address the respondents' problem in this study.

School. The school must integrate in the curriculum a designed intervention program. It will heighten and develop the speaking performance of First-year Engineering students during their synchronous class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Moreover, these intervention activities can be conducted one hour per week, allotted for the students to engage in the designed program.

Teachers. The teachers need to attend seminar workshops on how to effectively facilitate the communicative activities that will measure the speaking performance of the students. They may also conduct consultations together with the students every after the communicative activities to

inform them of their problems in speech apprehension. In addition, they must also assess the students for further improvements.

Students. The students must actively engage themselves in the communicative activities designed for them to enhance their speaking performance because they are using the English Language in the class. They are also encouraged to use English language in other subject areas.

Future Researchers. The future researchers are encouraged to further conduct additional research in speaking performance and speech apprehension of the students in the different year levels of the institution as well as to design other possible activities and interventions that will cater the problems regarding this study.

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