The Post-Pandemic Challenges of College Students on the Use of English Language in Oral Reporting: A Qualitative Inquiry

Louie Jay R. Caloc[1] and Danilo G. Baradillo[2], PhD

[1] College Professor / St. John Paul II College of Davao / louiejay.rosariocaloc@gmail.com
[2] Program Coordinator, Graduate School, University of the Immaculate Conception
dbaradillo@uic.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This qualitative inquiry aimed to unveil the lived experiences, coping mechanisms for the challenges, and insights of first-year college students on the use of the English language in oral reporting in a certain private tertiary academic institution in Davao City. Participants were selected through purposive sampling considering the set of inclusion criteria. With the utilization of the expert-validated researcher-made interview guide questions, themes were culled in understanding the phenomenon. The findings revealed the themes of the challenges of first-year college students: fear of making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, inability to speak the English language with confidence, lack of oral reporting preparation, and lack of encouragement from teachers. For their coping mechanisms, the following themes surfaced: preparing an outline or script for moral reporting, employing personal strategies in using the English language, utilizing instructional materials in oral reporting, and staying optimistic amidst difficulties in oral reporting. Finally, on the insights drawn from the challenges, the following themes have emerged: giving importance to English language learning strategies, professing the right attitude in improving oral reporting skills, supporting student-centered initiatives, and considering oral reporting as a future advantage.

KEYWORDS: Education, first-year college students, oral reporting, college, qualitative, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

In the global setting, according to Xie (2020), 68.1% of students identified poor vocabulary and grammar understanding, a lack of speaking confidence, and poor pronunciation as their key barriers to oral reporting skills. In the same manner, Escudero et al. (2020) that students have expressed complaints about oral reporting's disadvantages due to the lack of vocabulary for English language command, lack of confidence, and afraid of being criticized. In the Philippine setting, Amilda et al. (2020) claimed that students who struggle with oral reporting typically lack confidence. This lack of confidence becomes the main problem for the students, which negatively impacts their academic performance because English is not utilized when it is not essential and because it is poorly used in the country, especially in their homes and at school. Additionally, Espino et al. (2021) found that when students present oral reports, they lack spontaneity and confidence because they are not accustomed to speaking in front of large crowds on a regular basis. In the local setting, Torrevillas (2021) revealed that some of the students' struggles in oral reporting include weaknesses in question analysis, problems with thinking organization and stage fright, a lack of vocabulary, inadequate terminology, problems with word pronunciation, problems with sentence construction, and problems with subject-verb agreement norms as well. In a similar manner, Lukman (2021) asserted that low oral recitation, poor communication, and lack of confidence are also some of the current issues that students confront.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the challenges that first-year college students in the post-pandemic era have when reporting orally using the English language. I ensured the privacy and safety of the first-year college students so that I could learn new things that would be useful in the classroom and have practical applications. To understand the post-pandemic challenges of college students on the use of the English language in oral reporting, this study focuses on the following research questions: what are the post-pandemic challenges of first-year college students using the English language in oral reporting; what coping mechanisms do these students adopt to navigate their oral reporting experiences in the post-pandemic; and, what are the insights of the first-year college students as regards their experiences using the English language in oral reporting in post-pandemic.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is seen through the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety by Horwitz et al. (1986) which describes the trepidation, fear, and self-doubt that oral reporters feel when presenting to others. Foreign language anxiety can affect learners' performance and overall experience when it comes to oral reporting. Fear of making mistakes, worries about receiving a poor grade, and self-consciousness about one's linguistic ability are some of the causes of this anxiety. In connection with this study, the FLA of Horwitz et al. (1986) gives a deep understanding of the challenges faced by first-year college students in oral reporting. This study is also founded on the sociolinguistics-based Speaking Model developed by Hymes (2004) which offers a thorough lens for analyzing oral presentations. The paradigm places a strong emphasis on the performative, interactive, and contextual components of communication. Hymes' framework's elements—setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction, and genres—offer helpful insights into how speakers adjust their language use, interact with the audience, and use particular strategies to accomplish their communicative goals during oral presentations. In line with that, the Speaking Framework of Hymes (2004) provides coping mechanism ideas for students to overcome challenges. To support the theories above, the Communication Accommodation Theory by Gallois et al. (2005) looks at how oral reporters modify their behavior and communication patterns to either converge or diverge with their interlocutors.

Research Design

A qualitative research design employing a descriptive phenomenological methodology was used in this investigation. Its goals are to comprehend the social environment and the reasons why things are the way they are, and to describe a lived experience of a phenomenon. As cited by Byrne (2001), people's personal experiences can reveal the truth and a deeper comprehension of existence. In order to examine and comprehend the complexity of a phenomenon or area of interest, this study used a purely descriptive phenomenological approach. Further, following the idea of Creswell and Poth (2016), I used this design to understand the meanings that college students attributed to their challenges in oral reporting. At the same time, as explicated by Patton (2023), this design was used to describe how they made sense of their world as first-year college students. Following this process, the transcripts of the participants' stories and textual data were studied, and the oral narratives of their experiences were analyzed. A rich textual description was created from the participants' life tales and then interpreted for significance.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in a private academic institution that offers Senior High School Program and Baccalaureate Degree Programs in Davao City. The participants of this study are 17 first-year college students who are bona fide students of the private academic institution in Davao City. The

selection of participants for the in-depth interview (IDI) and the focus group discussion (FGD) was primarily based on the major inclusion criteria which are: within the age range of 18 to 30 years old, either male or female, experienced, and knowledgeable about the research topic or the phenomenon of interest. The exclusion and withdrawal criteria for the selection of participants were observed as well. Potential participants with speaking disabilities, age below or higher than the age range required, and students under the influence of alcoholic drinks during the conduct of the interview were not included. As the researcher, I employed purposive sampling, considered by Yin (2011) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants. With that said, the participants for the in-depth interview were 10 first-year college students from each department and seven participants for the focus group discussion, each was currently enrolled under each college as their fields are expected to make use of the English language in terms of productive-speaking skills, specifically oral reporting. The following are the colleges present in this institution: College of Teacher Education, College of Nursing, College of Business Administration, College of Engineering, College of Criminal Justice Education, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Information and Communications Technology, and College of Human Kinetics. In consideration, students from each college who fit the inclusion criteria were invited to participate. Consequently, there were a total of seventeen (17) participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis and interpretation in this study were carried out by starting with the classification of ideas, followed by the isolation of participants' significant experiences, then the association of their meanings, and lastly, the generalization of the combined themes. This flow was in accordance with Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Approach which has four stages: epoche/bracketing, wherein the researcher does not enter the investigation with any preconceived notions, prejudices, and preconceived notions based on prior knowledge about the issue under research; phenomenological reduction/textural description, wherein the researcher uses iterative close reading techniques to isolate significant statements that relate to the experiences of the participants then group these claims into meaning units or organize the horizons and ideas into a cogent textual framework; imaginative variation/structural description, wherein through the use of the researcher's imagination, new approaches to the phenomenon, or shifting frames of reference, researchers try to deduce potential meanings; and synthesis/composite description of the phenomenon, wherein the researcher explains the core and significance of the perception of the phenomena as a whole by instinctively combining the basic textural and structural descriptions into a cohesive, composite statement.

Trustworthiness

To demonstrate the reliability of this qualitative content analysis, using concepts like credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability—adopted from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model, which provides four criteria—was used. The goal of credibility is to bolster the claim that the investigation's results are important enough to pay attention to.

RESULTS

Post-Pandemic Challenges of the Students

Fear of Making Mistakes in Pronunciation and Grammar. The participants experienced the fear of making mistakes when it comes to pronunciation and grammar whenever they do oral reporting. Such challenge is attested by Hermes who says:

> I feel awkward speaking in English because I feel that I will be laughed at by my classmates when I do not know how to pronounce the words.

Being challenged by stage fright is experienced by Hephaestus. He mentioned:

> Well, in my case, I find it hard to use the English language in oral reporting because I am not used to having many people before me. It is like…I am afraid that I cannot meet their expectations.

Inability to Speak the English Language with Confidence. The inability to make use of the English language with confidence is much felt by the participants as they express their challenges. Artemis expressly uttered that she always experiences difficulty in speaking in front of the class. She said:

> I struggle a lot about my confidence because I easily lose the drive to do reporting. So, if I commit mistake once, it is hard for me to go back.

Additionally, Andromeda shared her experience when she ran out of words when a student asked her a question about the topic. She said:

> I felt like I was mute that time when my classmate asked a question about my topic but I was not able to prepare for it. I was so pale because I really do not know what I was supposed to say.

Lack of Oral Reporting Preparation. Gaea, in particular, described her experience of explaining her ideas to her classmates. She said:

> I am not able to properly express my ideas when speaking the English language. So, if I already stutter, I do code-switch to Tagalog or Bisaya in order for them to understand me directly.

Just as other participants feel pressured when speaking the English language, Persephone finds it challenging to be spontaneous in the use of the English language and be conscious at the same time of correct pronunciation. She uttered:

> If I do oral reporting, I feel challenged when I speak the English language because I have to be conscious about my pronunciation all the time to avoid being judged by my classmates. There are times that the word is already at the tip of my tongue but I cannot recall it because I did not have enough time to read.

Lack of Encouragement from Teachers. It was stressed by Ares that he felt he only uses the English language because the teacher required them when he stated:

> All of us in the class use the English language in oral reporting so our points will not be deducted if we use our vernacular. It is like we only speak the language as a requirement, we do not almost say something if we were not asked.

Unlike any other oral reporters, Hera feels unmotivated due to the complexity of their topics but she cannot picture out the benefit of using the language in oral reporting. She explicitly highlighted the experience when she said:

> I cannot find the connection as to why we need to speak English in oral reporting. We are already facing challenges understanding the topic, then reporting like that would only give us stress and trauma.

Coping Mechanisms of the Students

Preparing an Outline or Script for Oral Reporting. The participants shared that for them to be able to deal with their oral reporting challenges, they need to follow steps to efficiently deliver the topic. It was unanimously agreed by Aphrodite, Artemis, and Zeus when they stated:

> For me, I read books related to my topic so I can share more knowledge when I report. (Aphrodite)

> So far, summarizing the content is effective for me to internalize my discussion. (Artemis)

> My strategy for that is to create an outline of keywords. From there, I study the keywords so I will be able to use my own words during the report. (Zeus)

Employing Personal Strategies in Using the English Language. They make it a hobby to practice using the language in rehearsing the discussion in advance. Andromeda, particularly, expressed her thoughts about how constant practice helped her ameliorate her oral reporting skills when she said:

> I constantly practice speaking the English language so that I will get used to it. If I am already exposed on the language, it would be easier for me to communicate my ideas in English.

It is also mentioned that self-talking as a practice is an effective technique in communicating ideas to the class. In fact, Athena revealed that this is what they do when they stated:

> I set my schedule first so that I would really spend time rehearsing my report in front of the mirror because it is effective on my part.

Utilizing Instructional Materials in Oral Reporting. One of the participants, Zeus, shared his technique which involves multimedia integration on how to effectively cope with the challenges in oral reporting. He said:

> In order for my classmates to easily understand me, I explain the topic deductively. I start with the general ideas down to the specific ones. Of course, everything is arranged in chronological order in my PowerPoint presentation so they will be guided as well.

In connection with the above-mentioned scheme, another participant under the pseudonym of Apollo also shared his way of using multimedia in his oral reporting. He specifically pointed out the use of presentations features when he said:

> I use animations in my PowerPoint presentations because they add an impact on my confidence while reporting. That is because I can feel that my classmates are amazed by them so they listen.

Staying Optimistic Amidst Difficulties in Oral Reporting. It can be surmised that the participants strive to overcome their struggles by believing in themselves. In particular, Hera mentioned that ignoring her classmates' questions intended to annoy her helps her in staying focused on the discussion. She uttered:

> If I feel that my classmates would just throw some unnecessary questions at me, I would just ignore them and keep my focus on the discussion instead.

Similarly, one participant expressed how avoiding distractions in the presence of his classmates had helped him continue with his oral reporting. Hades, as a goal-oriented student, specifically uttered:

> In our class, we are all close friends which is why they tease me when I report sometimes. They would give insensible comments on my examples so I disregard them to keep my focus. Then, I would read the keywords on the slides again until I am able to formulate ideas even if it is hard for me.

Insights of the Participants

Giving Importance to English Language Learning Strategies. To support this idea, it was substantiated by Aphrodite that more practice in using the English language is needed by undergoing training to become confident in oral reporting. She stated:

> Maybe we just have to get used to speaking the English language to achieve spontaneity… to void stuttering in the future.

Zeus also added:

> As a college student, I realized that it is essential to be exposed to the use of the English language during our younger years. Because if we will only be exposed now, we will have a hard time adjusting since our mother tongue is somehow developed.

Professing the Right Attitude in Improving Oral Reporting Skills. Poseidon, as an Engineering student, pointed out the necessity of building confidence in speaking the language. He said:

> The culture that we have is different. If you report without confidence and with a non-modulated voice, my classmates will not listen to you. Almost all of them are perfectionists so if I report, I have to be confident.

Similarly, Artemis thinks that it is necessary to address the oral reporting barriers by peer learning. She uttered:

> In our class in Purposive Communication, there are a lot of activities including public speaking. I have classmates who really struggle. So, our teacher had us in pair (peer tutoring) to help those struggling ones. You will feel happy once you see they improve. I think it is effective.

Supporting Student-Centered Initiatives. To specify a student-centered initiative, Ares shared his insight about having a club or organization since he thinks that it is helpful for students to have an avenue to experience literary events. He uttered:

> For me, if we talk about student-centered activities, maybe our English club only applies to Education students. I am not sure with the other departments. It is nice because if it is my vacant time, I can just go to our LRC. There are other members who can help you with your concern about the four macro skills. I can say that it is helpful since you are able ask many people.

As far as Persephone is concerned, literary week celebration is a good thing to have in supporting student-centered initiatives. She noted:

> Last semester, there was a celebration of Education Day. We were able to experience literary events like extemporaneous speaking, jazz chant, storytelling, and debate. It was a nice experience since it is an eye-opener where you could say "so that is how it is done" or that is so nice, they are so great". But this is only experienced by Education students, no other departments involved.

Considering Oral Reporting as Future Advantage. The participants mentioned that being used to speaking the language is a perk in their careers as the global standard increases. Gaea, as a BSIT student, mentioned:

> There are a lot of opportunities for BSIT graduates now. Others have really good income because clients are international. That is why it is really a must to be accustomed to speaking the English language to easily get hired for work.

The aforementioned insight was agreed upon by Aphrodite, a BPE student, and a dancer. She highlighted her realization when she said:

> We usually dance in other places, sir. So, it is normal that we meet many foreigners there. There was one time that a foreigner came and talked to me and I find it hard to respond because I am not used to speaking the English language. I also find it difficult to comprehend his statements because of his accent *laughs*. I felt like a dumb person that time. Because of that, sir, I realized that it is important that we improve our speaking skill using the English language and one of the ways to achieve that is through oral reporting.

DISCUSSION

The finding with the core idea *afraid of disappointing others* supports the claim of Xing and Bolden (2019) that for fear of disappointing them, the participants hid from their professors the language deficit problems they encountered. Although successful and fluent oral reporting is one of the ultimate aims of EFL learners, very little is done to actually help students learn to orally report in English as they are afraid to show their struggles to other people.

The finding of the study with the core idea *committing grammatical lapses in communication* coincides with the extrapolation of Kamlasi (2019) when he mentioned that despite the different classifications of teaching strategies employed, the students still commit grammatical lapses in terms of spoken English. As discussed in his findings, some of the errors are: misuse of verb tenses, pronouns, conjunction and articles, as well as the word order in adjectives.

The emerging theme with the core idea *lacks confidence in public speaking* confirms the assertion of Shabana and Syed (2020) that the majority of students feel anxious when reporting orally in English. The study's findings showed that a lack of active participation, peer hesitancy, peer dread, fear of assessment and correction, teachers' reluctance, and a lack of cooperation are among the main factors that raise students' lack of self-confidence.

In addition, the result with the core idea *overthinking discrimination from classmates* confirms the claims of Amir et al. (2022) that students do not feel apprehensive about presenting in front of an audience because they are afraid that their message will not get conveyed and they will be misunderstood which may trigger discrimination inside the classroom.

The theme that emerged with the core idea *doing code-switching to be understood* also supports the claim of Al-Nofaie (2010) that students are not exposed to adequate English because they start learning it in the last year of primary school. Further, Leung and Valdes (2019) claimed that new discoveries like code-switching, as a way to cope with the scenario, are sometimes referred to as

"translanguaging" in the study of multilingualism because it was noted that students tend to code-switch to their vernacular once they have a hard time expressing their ideas using the English language.

The theme with the core idea *pressured by questions asked* furthers the research of Oflaz (2019) and Riasati (2019), who found that oral reporting fear is a result of English language school exercises that involve classmates asking reporters questions which has been connected to students' hesitation to utilize English. This occurs while they are still fully learning a foreign language. Additionally, if the students are pressured, it will impede the development of their language abilities.

The emerging theme with the core idea *less exposure on the use of English language* supports Tahmasbi et al.'s (2019) assertion that current English teaching practices in Iranian schools are structural in character because earlier attempts to engage students and promote involvement in class activities failed. As a result, textbooks frequently ignore the demands of students and are structurally focused; an undue emphasis is placed on learning grammar and vocabulary.

The theme with the core idea *using the English language only as a requirement* also parallels the claim of Yadav et al. (2019) who looked at whether regular exposure to oral reporting tasks in a virtual setting could reduce public speaking anxiety (PSA). The results revealed significant improvements in both self-reported and physiological measures if the students are required for exposure. In this sense, the role of the students' professors played a salient role in their English-speaking development.

The theme with the core idea *reading some books* corroborates the idea of Al Zoubi (2018) that reading books to summarize the topic can be a very useful strategy for students as an initial step to enhancing oral reporting skills. Planning the report can greatly benefit from the knowledge, suggestions, and viewpoints that can be found in books. Students can learn more about the subject, find real-world examples, and examine various writing styles by immersing themselves in pertinent literature.

The theme with the core idea *making outlines for lessons* also fits the idea of Kelsen and Liang (2018) that people who have done their homework are better able to plan their presentations, organize their thoughts, and foresee difficulties. It offers a strong framework for conveying a message that is coherent and unambiguous. Effective preparation involves doing extensive research on the subject, acquiring pertinent data, and comprehending the requirements and preferences of the audience.

The theme that emerged with the core idea *practice speaking in advance* conforms to the claim of Rao (2018) that through persistent practice, careful planning, and helpful criticism, confidence can be developed. Regular practice helps speakers improve their fluency and familiarity with the language, which boosts their confidence in verbal communication.

The theme with the core idea *exercise by self-talking in front of the mirror* also supports the findings of Bailey et al. (2021) that self-talk can be a very useful strategy for learning a subject in advance of oral reporting. Speaking out loud helps people to explain their own thinking, strengthen their understanding of the issue at hand, and spot any knowledge gaps that need to be filled.

The emerging theme with the core idea *following presentation templates provided* also vouches for the statement of Houlden and Veletsianos (2020) that it can be beneficial to use presentation templates to make oral reporting simple. Using templates ensures a logical flow and cogent structure throughout the presentation and facilitates the structuring of ideas.

The finding with the core idea *making use of presentation animations* validates the claim of Culala (2022) that templates can remind people to include crucial components including an introduction, primary ideas, supporting evidence, and a conclusion, making sure that nothing crucial is missed with the help of animations and transitions.

The emerging theme with the core idea *keeping focused on the discussion or presentation* coincides with the idea of Mauranen (2018) that for oral reporting to be precise, succinct, and compelling, the presenter must maintain attention. People might use a variety of techniques to stay focused. Additionally, reducing distractions like overly animated hand gestures or pointless movements enables people to focus on their message.

The finding of the study with the core idea *avoids being distracted by the comments of classmates* confirms the statement of Singh and Kaur (2019) that for oral reporting obstacles to be overcome and presentations to be delivered successfully, distractions must be avoided. People can overcome the difficulties of oral reporting by deliberately reducing internal and external distractions, resulting in a focused, interesting, and powerful presentation.

The emerging theme with the core idea *needing more exposure to the English language* coincides with the viewpoints of Yadav et al. (2019) that the development of oral reporting skills requires more exposure to the English language. Exposure to various linguistic situations is a key to developing language ability.

The theme that emerged with the core idea *practicing and mastering the foundations of the English language* also confirms the notion of Boetje and van-Ginkel (2020) that when it comes to oral reporting, the value of practice cannot be understated in terms of acquiring the language's fundamentals. Additionally, practice enables people to improve their sense of rhythm, tempo, and intonation, which improves the impact and engagement of their delivery.

The theme that emerged with the core idea *practicing speaking the English language even outside the school* also substantiates the extrapolation of Diehl et al. (2019) that for students to learn how to use the English language, they must be required to speak it. Regular speaking exercises give students beneficial chances to express themselves, improve their fluency, and develop their confidence in speaking English. This includes speaking the language with family and friends.

The result with the core idea *initiating English Only Policy in classrooms* also corroborates the claim of Clement and Murugavel (2018) that their participants stressed the significance of English training through requiring students to use the English language to enhance the abilities needed to carry out their tasks.

The emerging theme with the core idea *creating organizations to facilitate helpful activities* affirms the explication of Elnadeef and Abdala (2019) that by fostering a supportive atmosphere for practice, criticism, and skill improvement, English clubs and organizations offer invaluable assistance for oral reporting. These organizations give students a venue to participate in debates, discussions, and public speaking exercises, allowing them to improve their oral communication abilities in a motivating and encouraging environment.

The theme that emerged with the core idea *promoting the use of English language by institutionalizing literary week celebration across departments* coincides with the decipherment of Hussein and Albakri (2019) that an institution-wide literary celebration can significantly improve oral reporting abilities by giving students a bright and encouraging platform to share their talents and practice public speaking.

The theme with the core idea *learning the English language to be prepared for the future* supports the claim of Gewertz (2018) that only 41% of employers surveyed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities think that recent college graduates are competent oral reporters, despite the fact that oral reporting is regularly listed as a highly wanted skill.

The theme with the core idea *being used to speaking the language is a perk in the career* also corroborates the inference of Smith (2022) that oral reporting proficiency has become more significant in academics as a marker of a student's achievement not only in college but also after graduation.

Implications for Educational Practice

While many institutions have transitioned to face-to-face instruction the moment it was allowed, most of the students have struggled to adapt to the environment in the post-pandemic setting. Thereby, revealing their challenges in the previous parts of this study. It was discussed that students felt frightened when they perform oral reporting in front of the class. As their coping mechanisms for the encountered challenges, they make outlines for the lessons to aid them in their performance to be confident. Based on their first-hand experiences, they expressed their realizations that they need more exposure to the English language to boost their confidence in speaking the language. In consideration, the academic council of the higher education institution may design instructional programs through

differentiated activities such as regular oral presentations, debates, or even oral recitations where students are given opportunities to express their ideas orally in English. Additionally, individualized strategies may be encouraged such as the exploration of diverse perspectives to promote a student-centered environment. Finally, this may entail giving students regular oral report assignments that necessitate them to summarize, evaluate, and interpret the details based on their unique perceptions.

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