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**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ORAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION  
AMONG SELECTED SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN  
SANTA ROSA CITY, LAGUNA, PHILIPPINES.**

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**Abstract**

This investigative study examined how oral communication apprehension (OCA) is evident among selected SHS students in English classrooms. It identified underlying factors, both internal and external, which contribute to the existence of oral speech anxiety. Using a mixed methods approach, the study is hinged on James McCroskey's Oral Communication Apprehension theory. Examined were the responses of selected SHS students in Santa Rosa City, Laguna with three methods of analysis: a) written interview through an open-ended questionnaire; b) McCroskey's PROCRA; and c) Duncan ANOVA to determine the significant differences. Findings showed that most of the SHS students were moderately apprehensive to use English when communicating during oral presentations, meetings, group discussions, and public speaking. Through factor analysis, the contributing factors were identified and labeled as personal expectations, and rejection, verbal fluency, regional and cultural reference, previous unpleasant experience, training and exposures, self-evaluation, socio-economic status, word pronunciation and content, personal competencies, audience, teacher evaluation and peer influence. The results also revealed that there were significant differences among nine identified factors when they were grouped according to their OCA level. However, there were no differences in the other four factors - audience, verbal fluency and pronunciation, socio-economic status, and word enunciation and content.

**Keywords:** Oral Communication Apprehension, Speaking Anxiety, English Language.

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**1. Introduction**

As English is increasingly becoming an important language, which is adopted as a communication medium between two or more people from different linguistic backgrounds, countries have shown interest in promoting English language proficiency in academic and professional contexts (Amogne & Yigsaw, 2013). The Philippines has English curricula in all levels of education that prepares Filipino students to cope with communication challenges in their future endeavors. However, this objective would not be achieved without addressing the problems faced by the students in their course of oral communication in English classrooms. In fact, a lack of comfort in communicating with others can be an unfortunate inhibitor to success. In most communicative activities, oral fluency is a pre-requisite in the success of communication as there are students who struggle conveying ideas clearly and accurately in speech. Hence, the need to address issues in oral communication is highly significant in order to make students competent and skilled in their endeavors.

It is considerably alarming that there are Filipino senior high school (SHS) students who are still struggling with a lot of issues in oral communication. Forinstance, there are SHS students who

feel uncomfortable to speak English during public speaking, group discussions, meetings, and other interpersonal conversations. This situation is described as oral communication apprehension (OCA), which is defined as “the predisposition to avoid communication, if possible, or suffer a variety-type feeling. It is an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1997). Several studies asserted that English OCA has stemmed from many sources, both external and internal, including the SHS students’ personality characteristics, communication context, nature of the audience, or situation. As such, their anxiety while communicating in English can be debilitating which, in effect, can ultimately influence the achievement of their educational goals. OCA has been found to be related to overall grade point average, standardized achievement scores, and grades earned in small classes in junior high and college (Huzaimah et al., 2013). While much was written about how foreign students viewed and experienced OCA, this phenomenon is still less investigated in the Filipino context. This assumption is supported by Del Villar (2010), in which she mentioned that there is still a dearth of research data on Filipinos considering oral communication anxiety’s overwhelming impact on speakers since Filipino teachers have been using western materials in designing their activities to overcome oral communication anxiety.

## **2. Research Problem**

The study determined the factors that contributed to communication apprehension among the selected SHS students in Santa Rosa City, Philippines. The study also uncovered the reasons of oral communication students ascribed to for their English oral communication apprehension. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Determine the types of activities that may contribute to OCA in relation to the following communication contexts: interpersonal conversation, meetings, public speaking, and discussion;
2. Explain the underlying factor structures of the reasons given for OCA among the SHS students;
3. Discuss the level of OCA of the SHS students using the Personal Report on the Oral Communication Apprehension adopted from McCroskey; and
4. Compare the significant differences between the OCA level of the SHS students and the perceived underlying factors that contribute to communication apprehension.

As there is a dearth of local researches conducted on OCA, the study is primarily informed by the Western studies and methodologies. The study aimed to contribute to the very few studies related to oral anxiety. This was also undertaken to provide more information about Filipinos’ oral communication anxiety and come up with activities that would minimize its effects.

## **3. Review of Related Literature and Studies**

Katz (2017) reported the reasons for students in experiencing communication apprehension in public speaking. These include worries to make mistake, to look stupid to other, or be judged unattractive. Some students said they get upset thinking about others looking at them or being the center of attention. This is supported by the De Guzman & Ocampo’ findings (2017), in which they found out that speaking in front of an audience or even the thought of an audience makes them uneasy or anxious. Moreover, Verderber & Sellnow (2010) stated that the predilection of communication apprehension is relatively stable across varying contexts, situations, and audiences. They highlighted that the fear of unfavorable evaluation by other and the upsetting or humiliating public speaking experience when they were in elementary or high school incite fear and anxiety to speak before an audience again.

Aside from public speaking, group discussion occurs in countless different situations- from a very informal conversation among a few friends to greatly organized and challenging discussion

integrated as a part of the selection procedure. Abdullah et al. (2012) reported that although students are encouraged to actively participate in group discussion, still, many of them are still reluctant to speak up. The primary reason for OCA in group discussion is that most students get anxious because they are afraid of looking foolish or stupid in front of many of their peers and important people.

Moreover, interpersonal conversation is an interactive process which requires constant listening, sharing, and asking questions and negotiations (Stone, Patton & Heen, 1999). In the same context, OCA has also existed. The probable reason for this scenario was students could save themselves from showing people their nervous tendencies when/if they do speak up. Lastly, meetings are formed to strengthen the decision power and highlight collaboration among students towards the achievement of affective objectives. Though it is sometimes an academic requirement, OCA in meetings is still evident in the classroom. To overcome OCA in meetings, Blume et al. (2010) suggested that one must know the composition of the audience, the materials, and the room where the meetings will be held.

Many Filipino students even at higher levels of study experience some level of fear and anxiety when asked to communicate using English as a medium. Students may be severely handicapped in small classes, because they do not ask questions, give feedback or participate in class discussions. Apprehensive students may learn less because they do not attempt to restructure the classroom presentation of information to meet their specific needs. Kim (2008) pointed out a direct correlation between academic achievement and communication apprehension. Similarly, Shameem Rafik-Galea and Siti Yasmin (2006), in their study, found out that more than half of their students were afraid of using English due to poor proficiency in the language. Their study also found that the students had high levels of communication apprehension when using the language to communicate. Tanveer (2007) suggested that students' feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities. He cited that "the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance." The results were directly linked to the study conducted by Park & Lee (2005), in which they examined the relationships between second language learners' anxiety, self-confidence, and speaking performance.

#### **4. Methodology**

##### ***Design***

This research undertaking used mixed methods as its approach in determining the factors that contribute to OCA. In the qualitative method of analysis, the study identified the reasons of SHS students in experiencing apprehension to speak English during different communicative situations. In the quantitative method, it looked at the significant differences between the perceived contributing factors and the SHS students' level of OCA, as measured by McCroskey's PROCRA. A written interview was conducted to find out the reasons that triggered speech anxiety. Their responses were subjected to manual reduction and factor analysis to yield 13 independent factors with the help of five language experts and statistician. This is an extended study of Del Villar (2010); Bippus & Daly (1999); and Proctor et al. (1994), Rafieyan (2016), and Bejtullahu (2017).

##### ***Data Collection***

Data were through the standardized instrument, survey questionnaire, and written interviews with the students. Frequency counts, weighted means, percentages, factor loadings, and Duncan Test ANOVA were utilized in the study. Prior to the conduct of the study, a request letter was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of Santa Rosa City asking for permission to study the SHS. Also requested were consent to take pictures, conduct FGD, observe activities, conduct a survey, and interview some Grade 11 students from the different strands. After the request was granted, a short discussion with the assigned teachers was set to discuss the research objectives and

procedures to be undertaken. It was agreed upon that the study would take place only for one week to avoid disruption of classes. The researcher had to attend English classes to examine the different situations and how the students respond to communicative encounters.

### 5. Data Analysis

Based on the research objectives, the following findings were presented. The results of the study revealed 13 factors model explaining 69.13% of the total variance in the data. The following factors that contributed to OCA were identified and labeled as internal factors include audience, personal expectations, and rejection, verbal fluency, regional and cultural reference, previous unpleasant experience, training and exposure, teacher evaluation, self-evaluation, socio-economic status, word pronunciation and content, and personal competencies. External factors comprise audience, teacher evaluation, and peer influence. These factors directly or indirectly affected the oral fluency of selected SHS students.

**Table 1. Factors Contributing to Oral Communication Apprehension**

<b>Factor 1. Audience</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>
I am easily distracted when the audience looks serious.	0.719
I am afraid of speaking to a large audience.	0.804
I worry that the audience is highly critical.	0.735
I am shy to speak to the unfamiliar audience.	0.811
I am easily disturbed when the audience looks uninterested in my message.	0.689
<b>Factor 2. Personal Expectation and Rejection</b>	
I worry about audience's negative reaction.	0.771
I worry about committing mistakes in front of people.	0.871
I fear what others might say.	0.796
I fear that I might have a mental block.	0.594
<b>Factor 3. Preparation and Readiness</b>	
I am not interested in the topic.	0.429
I lack relevant information and ideas about the topic.	0.777
I lack personal attachment and personal knowledge about the topic.	0.825
I lack thorough reading of books and journals related to the topic.	0.647
<b>Factor 4. Verbal Fluency</b>	
I worry to speak if I do not know the correct pronunciation.	0.600
I have a problem with pronouncing words appropriately.	0.640
I usually stammer when I notice unfamiliar words.	0.631
I unnecessarily pause at the sight of a difficult word for I intend to analyze its structure, origin, and meaning during a public speaking.	0.760
I am not good at verbalizing my ideas.	0.432



**Factor 5. Regional and Cultural Reference**

I feel insecure to speak because of my regional accent.	0.719
I use unfamiliar words with region's cultural reference which makes the conversation awkward.	0.759
I consistently use terms with a different meaning from other culture.	0.764
I feel embarrassed about my pronunciation associated with my cultural origin.	0.460

**Factor 6. Previous Unpleasant Experience**

I feel nervous when speaking due to my past experience	0.620
I felt humiliated when other people asked me to speak in public.	0.536
I easily cringe when a person calls me unexpectedly.	0.637
I feel uncomfortable to voice out my personal opinion and suggestions because I experienced to be neglected before.	0.778
I feel anxious to chip in on the conversation because I was vulgarly criticized by other people.	0.861

**Factor 7. Training and Exposure**

I lack practice before speaking to the public.	0.748
I lack exposure and relevant training related to speaking.	0.571

**Factor 8. Teacher Evaluation**

I am insecure when my teacher praises students who are good at speaking.	0.609
I received a bad evaluation from my teacher.	0.763
I am consistently interrupted by my teacher for not observing supra-segmental units when speaking.	0.684

**Factor 9. Self-Evaluation**

I feel insecure about my physical appearance.	0.632
I am so conscious of myself.	0.804
I worry that the audience would find me ridiculous.	0.629
I value my self-worth towards other people.	0.637
I always I feel that I am incompetent.	0.521

**Factor 10. Socio-Economic Status**

I have distracting thoughts due to my socio-economic status.	0.708
I am afraid of comparison with other speakers related to socio-economic status.	0.740
I am afraid that the audience has a different socio-economic background which makes hard for me to relate to them.	0.629

**Factor 11. Word Content and Grammar**

I felt embarrassed when other people shut me up during the conversation because of my grammar incompetence.	0.476
I feel humiliated when my teacher corrects my grammar	0.738
I am afraid to speak when my teacher intrusively looks into the wrong words I might say.	0.662

**Factor 12. Personal Competencies**

I lack self-assessment of my speaking performance.	0.688
I am not comfortable about talking with other people.	0.776
I am incompetent in public speaking.	0.420

**Factor 13. Peer Influence**

I feel humiliated when my peers scrutinize me for the way I talk.	0.805
I am easily distracted when my peers make fun of themselves.	0.562
I refrain from speaking when my peer influences me not to do such.	0.401

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## ***Internal Factors that Contribute to Oral Communication Apprehension in English***

**Factor 2: Personal Expectation and Rejection-**These were attributions that explained fears related to what students anticipated as the probable failure on their part as speakers. Some SHS students revealed that they worried about what others might say when they committed mistakes in speaking English which may have eventually resulted in mental block due to extreme nervousness and consequently, earned audience's negative reaction.

**Factor 3: Preparation and Readiness** – This was the factor that explained that SHS students should have interest in the topic so they could have the impetus to prepare for whatever oral activities they will do. SHS students encountered problems with the terms and ideas relevant to the topic, which only resulted in lack of personal attachment and relevant knowledge about the major topic.

**Factor 4: Verbal Fluency and Pronunciation- These** were attributions that explained some SHS students experienced speaking problems, including frequent stammering and stuttering while speaking, and sudden pausing when they have seen difficult English words.

**Factor 5: Regional Accent and Cultural Reference-**These were factors that explained some SHS students felt insecure to participate in speaking activities because of their regional accent which hinders them from correctly pronouncing English words.

**Factor 6: Previous Unpleasant Experiences-** This was a contributing factor that explained SHS students knew that their apprehension may have been rooted in the negative past experiences during their growing up years, particular in their grade school and junior high school years.

**Factor 7: Training and Exposure** – These were attributions that explained students must undergo training and skills development to sharpen their oral communication skills. SHS students with lack of practices and skills development in speaking English found it difficult to engage themselves in oral communicative activities.

**Factor 9: Self-Evaluation-** This factor explained that self-doubt is the byproduct of self-evaluation, which is highly dependent on the students' experiences, how they are viewed by others, and how they see themselves. Some SHS students admitted that they were incompetent and found themselves ridiculous when they used English in an oral presentation.

**Factor 10: Socio-economic Status-** This was another found factor that explained SHS students felt anxious to speak English if the audience was composed of elite people. This yielded two possible explanations as mentioned by the participants. First is the adjustment stage. Some SHS students revealed that it was difficult for them adjusting themselves to the level of their audience. Second is the self-comparison, in which other SHS students felt so much insecurity when compared themselves to the socio-economic status of their audience.

**Factor 11: Word Content and Grammar-** These were factors that had to do with SHS students who felt being embarrassed during the presentation and public speaking because of grammatical incompetence, and they felt being humiliated when the teachers directly corrected their word choice.

**Factor 12: Personal Competencies-** This factor explained that competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns, and the ability to use English and adapt that linguistic knowledge in various contexts. English language proficiency includes confidence, knowledge on guidelines, and eloquence and fluency on the use of the language. SHS students admitted that they were not acquainted with the guidelines and procedures to follow during the oral communication activities, specifically for public speaking, which made them uncomfortable and anxious.

## **External Factors that Contribute to Oral Communication Apprehension in English**

**Factor 1: Audience**-This was an external factor that discussed some SHS students usually refrained from speaking before a large component of the unfamiliar audience. They preferred to talk to an audience with whom they shared common characteristics. There were also SHS students who easily got distracted once the audience looked serious.

**Factor 8: Teacher Evaluation**- This was a factor that related to the SHS students who had insecurities when their teachers praised other students who were good at speaking English. They also felt unease when they succeeded students who had exemplary performance in oral communication activities.

**Factor 13: Peer Influence**-This was a factor that explained some SHS students valued peer input and evaluation more than suggestions of the teachers. However, in case of speaking distractions, SHS students usually tried to resist peers whenever they made fun of themselves.

**Table 2. SHS Students' Level of Oral Communication Apprehension**

<b>Level of Oral Communication Apprehension</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
High Level	103
Moderate Level	747
Low Level	82

SHS students who had a moderate level of OCA were generally able to communicate in the various contexts, and apprehension is more influenced by an audience, level of preparation, situation, and type of communication. Those SHS students who had a high level of OCA were usually unable to overcome the apprehension on their own. The apprehension often becomes a controlling force in communicating and can often interfere with personal and professional success. However, for those SHS students who had a low level of OCA, it may be a reflection of extreme comfort or lower levels of self-monitoring, which means that they may speak out at any time, no matter what the consequences.

### **Differences among the Identified Factors Contributing to Oral Communication Apprehension of High-, Moderate, and Low-Level Students**

To determine if the SHS students differed in their OCA level vis-a-vis the identified 13 factors, they were first classified into high, moderate, and low anxiety groups according to their scores in the Personal Report on Oral Communication Apprehension which is the standardized instrument formulated by McCroskey. Results showed that there were significant differences among the three groups in their perceptions of nine out of the 13 identified factors. There were differences in Factor 2 Personal Expectations and Rejection ( $p= 0.029$ ): Factor 3 Preparation and Readiness ( $p=0.002$ ): Factor 5 Regional and Cultural Reference ( $p=0.003$ ): Factor 6 Previous Unpleasant Experience ( $p=0.040$ ): Factor 7 Training and Exposure( $p= 0.031$ ): Factor 8 Teacher Evaluation ( $p=0.009$ ): Factor 9 Self-Evaluation ( $p=0.005$ ): Factor 12 Personal Competencies ( $p=0.002$ ): and Factor 13 Peer Influence ( $p=0.001$ ). There were no significant differences on how the groups viewed the other four factors: Factor 1 Audience ( $p=0.160$ ): Factor 4 Verbal Fluency and Pronunciation ( $p=0.046$ ): Factor 10- Socio-Economic Status ( $p=0.119$ ): and Factor 11 Word Enunciation and Content ( $p=0.64$ ).

## **Conclusion**

OCA is a phenomenon wherein students appear anxious, making them feel incompetent and unskilled to use English as a medium of communication. It is a barrier that discourages SHS students to engage themselves in varied oral communication activities. Using three methods of analysis, the study generated valid conclusions on the factors that contributed to OCA in English classrooms. Some SHS students were afraid of speaking to a wide group of unfamiliar people. They were easily distracted when the audience looked uninterested in their message which resulted in listeners' negative reactions. Through McCroskey's PROCRA, it is concluded that, generally, SHS students had a moderate OCA level in which they would be able to communicate in the various contexts and their apprehension was more influenced by an audience, level of preparation, situation, and type of communication. With regards to communication context, SHS students were afraid to perform public speaking, which also reflects the Filipinos' attitude towards looking at and speaking in front of large audience. This situation was also triggered by their fears of being evaluated and criticized by the audience which, in effect, resulted in the feeling of self-consciousness of their fluency, word choice, eloquence, and even their own personal competencies in speaking.

## **Recommendations**

It is hoped that Oral Communication teachers would try out speaking activities such as gallery walk technique, pronunciation drills and practice, and storytelling to enhance student's interaction leading to a non-threatening classroom environment that promotes learning. Written communication apprehension needs to be studied too since the corpus of this study was mainly the oral aspect of communication apprehension. Another aspect worth examining is the development of activities that minimize students' OCA through the lens of experimental research. This falls under the development of modules and training, in which only a few types of research have been done so far. Other methods of analysis such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics to support the results of the study can also be pursued.



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