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Communication roadblocks of technical-vocational education students

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Abstract

This research dealt with the communication setbacks of the Technical-Vocational Education Students particularly on their communication apprehensions, preferred error correction, and the causes and strategies to overcome communication roadblocks. It specifically sought to determine the level of communication setbacks among industrial education students using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) by McCroskey, J. C. (1982) and how the respondents viewed their errors to be corrected. Based on the results of the study, it was found that the respondents have Average Communication Apprehension. It was also revealed that they want their teachers to identify the error and give the right answer. On the contrary, they least preferred that their teachers delay the correction of their errors. It is recommended that the teachers devise concrete classroom and/or school activities geared toward activating students' linguistic and communicative competence be it in a group, meeting, dyad, or public speaking. Further, error correction should be seen as an opportunity for students to develop their communication skills and not a threat to their educational growth. Technical and technology resources can be leveraged through digital platforms, accessible and flexible learning resources in support to traditional classroom instruction.

Keywords: Communication apprehension, error correction, technical-vocational education, quality education

Introduction

Embarking on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 specifically on the Quality of Education which targets to *Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for all*, this research dealt with the communication roadblocks of the Technical-Vocational Education Students particularly on their communication apprehensions and preferred error correction as many students are still trapped by their fears of speaking despite their being academically excellent. This is also attributed to their lack of exposure in and outside the classroom. Their interaction with other people from all walks of life and their exposure to expressing themselves inside the classroom contribute to the level of their communication setbacks. Likewise, their environment and the way their errors are corrected play significant ascription to their behavior towards speaking especially in front of many people. Understanding the students' preferences will help the teachers craft and provide mechanisms for addressing their communication setbacks. Hence, this research on communication setbacks of technical-vocational education students.

Generally, while the students at Benguet State University-Bokod Campus are equally proficient in the language, they still lack the knack to communicate with ease and confidence. Some of them cannot express themselves excellently which can be attributed to educational system limitations, socioeconomic factors, and the traditional emphasis on technical-vocational skills over soft skills. This further suggests that the technical-vocational students are excellent in hands-on technical competencies but they often struggle in presenting themselves confidently. This propels the urge to conduct this study to the technical-vocational education students. There are several studies on communication setbacks with interventions but no study is conducted to mitigate communication setbacks of industrial students at BSU Bokod Campus.

A 2025 study on employability trends in the Philippines found skills gap such as technical and soft skills which are required by employers and expected from graduates to possess. The study reported that many graduates lack technical skills, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities in their fields.

This research is confined on the communication roadblocks of technical-vocational education students at Benguet State University-Bokod Campus; however, its findings cut across global issues that need attention and immediate actions.

Literature Review

Communication apprehension is a result of negative experiences of students such as the method of error correction by the teacher, shyness, school environment, and differences in the way communications are encoded, transmitted, received, and understood. As a result, many students avoid classroom interactions.

Kumar, R. *et al.* (2011) ^[14] assert that for students to comprehend the intricacies of communication in the framework of a multicultural setting, teachers need to give them the experience of actual interaction with these communities. This will prepare them to understand and interact with different communities of different cultural backgrounds especially when they seek employment. Mehrabian's Communications Model, as discussed by Kumar *et al.* points out that it is particularly useful to exemplify the importance of conveying or interpreting the meaning of what is being presented. In like manner, Krashen (1982) ^[13] points out five (5) hypotheses for the acquisition of a second language. He labeled these as (a) Acquisition-learning hypothesis, (b) Natural order hypothesis, (c) Monitor hypothesis, (d) Input hypothesis, and (e) Affective filter hypothesis.

To Krashen, the affective filter hypothesis is a non-linguistic variable that affects acquisition, but not learning by facilitating or preventing the so-called comprehensible input. These non-linguistic variables include fear, nervousness, and boredom.

Krashen makes it clear that if the Affective Filter (AF) is high, confidence to use the language in communication and motivation to learn are low. This will therefore trigger the communication setbacks of the students especially if the students lack exposure and training in communicating with a group of people. Further, if affective variables are high, there is also a high tendency to commit errors in communication. Eventually, when those errors are corrected, students who have low self-confidence will feel reluctant to corrective feedback. On the contrary, if motivation and self-confidence are high, and anxiety is low, the use of language to communicate is also high. This principle brings us back to the importance of providing students with proper exposure and training to interact with people in a multicultural setting. How the teachers correct the errors of the students matters, too. Error correction can make or unmake a student. According to Brown (1984) ^[1], errors can activate the Communication Apprehension (CA) or Communicative Competence (CC) of the students. Similarly, Ruin (1996) ^[17] claims that correcting the errors of the students can help them realize the variations in their lingua franca or interlanguages and their second language.

Corder (1967) ^[8] exemplifies that it is indeed a learning experience when one commits errors and does self-correction. Errors, when regarded positively give requisite

learnings, awareness, or lessons. To Skinner (1957) ^[22], errors must be given immediate treatment or correction to avoid fossilization but Chomsky (1959) sees errors as opportunities to examine and internalize the process of rule formation. For Corder (1967) ^[8], error committed is an indispensable part of the learning journey of students as they progress, while Selinker (1972) ^[18] believes that errors are a natural process of learning the second or target language. Krashen and Terrell (1983) ^[12], however, junked error correction in the principle of the Natural Approach to learning a second or target language which should be similar to that of their first language.

The studies of Truscott and Sharwood (2006), Sheen *et al.* (2009), and Chen *et al.* (2011) ^[25, 19, 4] on error correction reveal that students who received various forms of feedback improved their level of motivation and language proficiency, particularly in their linguistic and communicative competence. According to Chomsky in his Syntactic Structures (1957) ^[5], and Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965) ^[7], Linguistic competence is an innate capacity of a human being to comprehend universal grammar that will lead him to acquire language. He further pointed out that linguistic competence is the ability to use the innate knowledge of language to generate grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. To Chomsky, linguistic competence is the ability to learn and use the rules and patterns of the language to communicate the intended meaning to the audience. Linguistic competence includes but not limited to grammatical, lexical, phonological, and discourse.

On the other hand, Dell Hymes (1971) ^[11] defines communicative competence as the ability to use language in a particular social context- how to use language accurately and appropriately. In other words, language use and language usage matter in all language communities in consideration of their geographical and cultural background, educational attainment, gender, and age to enumerate a few. Anchored on the principles of communicative competence by Dell Hymes, Canale and Swain (1980) ^[2] established a framework for communicative competence in language teaching. The framework is composed of four components: Linguistic Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, Pragmatic Competence, and Strategic Competence. They defined linguistic competence as the ability to use and produce grammatically correct utterances while sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use a language accurately and appropriately in any social context. Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, is the ability to use and produce utterances coherently and cohesively and handle communication effectively in a language community. Strategic competence is a strategy in language teaching like gestures that aids the resolution of difficulties in comprehending the lesson because of language limitations or barriers, cultural differences, and unmatched teaching-learning styles of the teachers and the students. Strategic competence allows the communicator to repair the flaws in the utterances or miscommunications during the interactions.

This research determined the communication roadblocks of the technical-vocational education students at Benguet State University-Bokod Campus. Specifically, it determined the level of communication apprehension among the technical-vocational education students using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). It also

underscored how the respondents, the Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) and Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED) students at Benguet State University-Bokod Campus wanted their errors to be corrected.

Materials and Methods

This study used a descriptive - survey method. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data that were relevant to the research questions. To determine the respondents' communication apprehension, it used Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) which consisted of 24 questions. The PRCA-24 by McCroskey, J. C. (1982)^[15] is the instrument that is most widely used to measure communication apprehension. A survey questionnaire on how the respondents want their errors to be corrected was also administered. Focus Group Discussion and individual interviews were likewise initiated to triangulate the result of the study. It similarly gathered first-hand information from the respondents including the grounds and strategems to overcome communication roadblocks.

The respondents of this research were the first - third year Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) and Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED) students enrolled at Benguet State University - Bokod Campus, school year 2021-2022.

In reference to research ethics and the authors' ethical obligations as researchers, the authors report that there are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to declare. The authors further declare that the research study passed through the university's review and registration and that respondents who were randomly interviewed during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were fully aware of the purpose of the research study as they were briefed and informed before the activity.

Results and Discussion

Level of communication apprehension among technical-vocational education students

Data gathered revealed that the respondents have low communication apprehension in the four (4) categories: Group Discussion, Interpersonal (Dyads), Meetings, and Public Speaking. Results show that the respondents recorded a mean score of 16.48 in Group Discussion, 18.44 in Interpersonal communication, 18.98 in Meetings, and 17.61 in Public Speaking. All scores fall below 51 representing people with very low communication apprehension. Overall, the result shows that the respondents have Average Communication Apprehension with a total mean score of 71.51 which is within 51-80 scores representing people with average Comprehension Apprehension (CA). The result further signals that respondents are aware of when they should talk and not talk. They are also apprehensive during important gatherings or discussions like job interviews, or class discussions but they feel little or no tension at all when talking to acquaintances.

While all the scores fall under very low communication apprehension, Meetings recorded the highest followed by Interpersonal communication and Public Speaking. Group Discussion is seen with the lowest communication apprehension which signifies that respondents are at ease when discussing in groups. It further means that they can easily express their thoughts when in a group. On the other hand, it also suggests that they have still reservations about

expressing their ideas when in meetings. This means that they are not confident enough to mingle with other people as they are afraid to commit mistakes. Meetings are similar to classroom settings where every member is encouraged to talk during class discussions.

Duarte, M. E., & L. Hernandez (2018) and Kim, J. & Y. Lee (2019)^[10] stated in their studies that respondents experience the fear of communicating because they are not exposed to talk individually especially in the presence of classmates as they think they will be laughed at when they commit mistakes. Their communication anxiety is likewise associated with their fear of failure, unfamiliarity with technical terms, and daunted by the instructors. To address the issues of communication apprehension, they suggest that the faculty members employ teaching strategies like lecture and discussion methods, performance, demonstrations, workshops, and group discussions. Other teaching strategies that may be used are brainstorming, interactive learning, creative/critical thinking, small group discussion, panel discussion, inquiry-based learning, group dynamics, dimensional questions approach, case study, individual or group reporting, concept mapping, and concept webbing.

Congruently, Dela Cruz (2019)^[9] mentioned in her study that fear of committing grammatical errors poses a significant negative effect on speaking. She asserted that students have high anxiety when speaking as their mother tongue may interfere with their use of the second or target language. With her findings, she suggests that teachers give more activities that will enhance the communication skills of the students without realizing that they are exposing themselves to a wider spectrum of communication.

The findings are also associated with the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen 1982)^[13] which according to Krashen, the affective filter hypothesis are non-linguistic variables that include fear, nervousness, and boredom that affect acquisition, but not learning by facilitating or preventing the so-called comprehensible input.

Krashen makes it clear that if the Affective Filter (AF) is high, confidence in using the language in communication and motivation to learn are low. This will therefore trigger the students' communication setbacks, especially if the students lack exposure and training in communicating with a group of people. Further, if affective variables are high, there is also a high tendency to commit errors in communication. Eventually, when these errors are corrected, students with low self-confidence will feel reluctant to corrective feedback. On the contrary, if motivation and self-confidence are high, and anxiety is low, the use of language to communicate is also high. This principle brings us back to the importance of giving students proper exposure and training to interact with people in a multicultural setting. How the teachers correct the errors of the students matters, too. Error correction can make or unmake a student. According to Brown (1984)^[11], errors can trigger the Communication Apprehension (CA) or activate the Communicative Competence (CC) of the students. Similarly, Ruin (1996)^[17] claims that correcting the errors of the students can help them realize the variations in their lingua franca or interlanguages and their second language.

Recent developments in language education, however, emphasize more on communicative competence not much on Linguistic Competence. The goal of language teaching and learning is communication - that is to let all learners express their ideas in any platform. In this way, they earn

self-confidence and mastery of the use and usage of the target language.

Preferred error correction by the respondents

Result of the study shows that the respondents prefer that the Teacher identifies the error and offers the correct form with a mean rank of 2.88 followed by the Teacher corrects the error immediately with a mean rank of 3.09 and the Teacher explains why the answer is incorrect with a mean rank of 3.27. Ranked fourth is the Teacher initiates discussion through context clues for students to identify the error and self-correct with a mean of 3.33 followed by the Teacher provides the correct form with a mean of 3.37. The least preferred means of correcting their errors is for the Teacher to correct the errors after class with a mean of 5.07. The respondents believe that they learn better if the teacher identifies the error and offers the correct form. This belief agrees with their communication fear or apprehension. They want the teacher to point out the correct answer rather than looking into the error so that they avoid committing mistakes. On the other hand, they do not like the teacher to delay the correction of their errors because they believe that errors that are not given attention might be fossilized which will be difficult to provide remediation or correction.

Interestingly, Catabay (2019) ^[3] also pointed out that every error committed has to be presented and discussed in class. This will allow the learners to actively participate in class discussions through the materials and strategies prepared by the teacher. Results further suggest that the way errors are treated may trigger communication apprehension or activate the communicative competence of students.

Similarly, the study of Siti Aimah *et al.* (2023) ^[20] concluded that feedback delivered by peers and the adviser makes preservice English teachers aware of what needs to be refined and improved in their teaching. It also provided further insight into delivering feedback to influence pre-service English teachers' psychological features in which those who are extroverts prefer immediate feedback rather than delayed feedback performance. Accordingly, feedback helps them avoid inappropriate teaching. They assert that a crucial factor in delivering feedback is influenced by knowledge, skill, and teaching experiences.

The way the teacher corrects the errors of the learners in Group Discussion, Interpersonal (Dyads), Meetings, and Public Speaking may facilitate or impede learning. It will facilitate learning if the correction of errors in the four categories involves varied strategies. It can also impede learning and may cause trauma to the learners if the teacher does otherwise. Students who are equally competent in written and other fields but lack exposure to express themselves need appropriate training and guidance. This also means that some students prefer their teachers to give corrections while working in groups because they tend to reflect on their errors and take action for improvement. They are encouraged to take control of their learning as they feel belongingness in their quest to develop confidence in their communication skills.

Remarkably, the study of Payam Rahmati *et al.* (2023) ^[16] indicates the importance of raising teachers' awareness about speech intelligibility to activate the learning needs of the students in communication and address their communication setbacks. They claimed that teachers' knowledge and skills in corrective feedback may increase the students' accuracy in the use and usage of L2. They

emphasize that various training workshops be conducted to highlight and address the construct of speech intelligibility by discussing its main constituents, and that correction should not only be focused on segmental errors but consider suprasegmentals as well.

Generally, students vary in their preferred error correction as they age. Their preference depends on their learning style and the teaching styles of the teacher, their personality, their experiences in the classroom or educational background, their level of proficiency, and how their errors are corrected. Some students prefer specific, timely, and personalized error correction. Others want their teachers to give feedback with guidance, recommendations with clear activities for improvement, and non-judgmental corrections.

Grounds of and Stratagems to overcome communication roadblocks

A deep dive into the study noted limitations in the educational system, student challenges, and socioeconomic and cultural barriers as the most causes of communication roadblocks. The study uncovers that technical-vocational curriculum is concentrated on the development of technical skills treating communication as secondary. This results to producing graduates who are technically proficient but professionally not prepared because they have limited communication skill development. Further, the study found that traditional teaching methods such as lecture-based instruction which provide limited opportunities for collaboration with other students are still evident in the educational system. In effect, this creates limitations for the students to develop their integrated soft skills, pedagogical know-how, and various presentation opportunities.

Technical-vocational students disclosed that they often face resistance to mingle with other people confidently because they have limited exposure to diverse communication techniques causing anxiety whenever they present and speak in public. Most often, their learning styles do not match with the teaching styles of the teachers. Their cultural expectations, language barriers, limited resources, and socioeconomic status are generally the culprit in their communication struggles.

Despite the communication setbacks, the study puts forward the importance of the integration of communication competencies in the technical-vocational coursework that capitalize on students to do more experiential teaching-learning collaboration, peer instruction, video documentation, simulations, and project-based learning within their technical contexts ensuring that they understand that technical and soft skills are both essential for success. Further, to catapult communication competencies among technical-vocational students, technical-vocational and technology resources can be leveraged through digital simulation platforms, accessible and flexible learning resources and micro-credentialing systems in support to traditional classroom instruction. This move will aid the students to overcome their communication anxiety thereby paving the way to communication-ready technical-vocational graduates.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the respondents have Average Communication Apprehension. It was also revealed that they want their teachers to identify the error

and offer the correct form. On the contrary, they least preferred that their teachers correct their errors after class. It is then recommended that teachers devise concrete classroom or school activities that activate the students' linguistic and communicative competence be it in a group, meeting, dyad, or public speaking. Teachers may need to encourage the students to interact with each other by providing more opportunities for them to use the language in various situations, and emphasize the importance of overcoming fear or any potential difficulties by actively participating in class activities. Further, error correction should be regarded as an opportunity for students to develop their communication skills and not a threat to their educational growth.

Declarations and Ethics Statements

In reference to research ethics and the authors' ethical obligations as researchers, the authors report that there are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to declare. The authors further declare that the research study passed through the university's review and registration and that respondents who were randomly interviewed during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were fully aware of the purpose of the research study as they were briefed and informed before the activity.

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