

# THE STORY OF STRUGGLES AMONG LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN ORAL COMMUNICATION IN RAMON MAGSAYSAY MEMORIAL COLLEGES INTEGRATED SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study described the story of struggles in oral communication of the language learners of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges Integrated School. The study used a self-structured interview guide to gather data from six purposively chosen participants. As the results of this study implied, the participants were struggling because of their emotional adversities, fluency disorders, and inferiority. Because of these struggles, the participants built negative outlooks and even tend to have undesirable outcomes in their oral activities. However, there were also some of them who thought positively amidst challenges. Hence, they took those struggles as an opportunity to do better in their next performances.

**Keywords:** Education, struggles, language learners, oral communication, Philippines.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Students have difficulty expressing themselves orally, especially in using the English language. They preferred getting low scores in recitations and other performances than standing, asking their queries, or participating in the oral tasks, which became the teachers' teaching struggle.

Based on the researcher's experience in handling oral communication subjects, students had difficulty expressing themselves orally; even those performing students whose general average ranges from 90 to 97 percent manifested the same problem. Students were observed as good in other activities but not when it comes to oral speaking. Others can only do one to two sentences; they struggle themselves from talking and expressing their thoughts. Others made some excuses and even skipped classes. It is believed that struggles they felt were factors in increasing the level of their anxiety to do the speaking activity.

Self-consciousness in front of large groups is considered as the most frequently named reason for speaking anxiety (Genard, 2016). They are conscious of the words that would come out of their mouth, how they would deliver and even utter the sentences, and what others might think about them during and after the speech. Struggling speakers can converse in a small group, but they feel anxious in a crowd of people (Smith & Robinson, 2021). So, every time they are put in a situation, they start to mumble, erode their peace of mind, undermine their confidence, and keep their voice from being heard. These might hold them back from doing their best (Tridinanti, 2018).

On the other hand, struggles in public speaking might deal in response to a potentially threatening stimulus with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Tsaousides, 2017). This arousal leads us to feel the threatening fear. It hampers our ability to perform with ease in front of many people until it already prevents us from engaging in oral communication. Also, because of this emotional experience, we are more likely to lose our confidence until it hampers us from developing positive attitudes toward pursuing speeches (Tsaousides, 2015; Ackerman, 2018).

Another author claimed that many of us, because of fear, do not want to engage in speaking and do not realize how it might delimit career opportunities. Sometimes we are perceived as competent and intelligent depending on how we deliver our speech. If we can speak very well, the people around see us as somebody. On the other hand, if the speaking level is not satisfying, we are easily judged as nobody. This biased notion leads us to unseen opportunities (Smedley, 2017).

As an English teacher teaching oral communication subjects, studying the story of struggles among language learners in verbal communication was an opportunity. It was a valuable contribution in helping other researchers and those who have the same teaching experience to understand more deeply the struggles being faced by the students. They could also come up with new effective teaching strategies that would help the students handle their speaking anxiety.

Thus, the struggles experienced by the Grade 7 students of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges Integrated School caught the researcher's interest in understanding how they described these struggles, how they were affected by these struggles, and how they managed to endure the struggles in oral communication activities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Students' difficulty in oral communication is one of the main problems faced by the teachers. If not taken into consideration, no matter how good the learners are in other macro skills, it may still affect their academic performance and eventually become a problem in their future endeavors. Despite having a 90-97 percent general average in English, the students still showed poor performance in oral communication like public speaking, oral questioning, reporting, and oral interviews based on the observations made by the teachers in that particular group. These might be because of some factors affecting them, which we will be learning in the latter part of this study. The transferees were selected since they were the most numbered Grade 7 students compared to those old students enrolled in the RMMC IS during 2021-2022. This interpretative analysis focused on the participants' struggles categorized according to their age and sex.

### **Research Questions**

1. How are the struggles in oral communication of Grade 7 students of RMMC IS be described according to:
  - 1.1. age; and
  - 1.2. sex?
2. How do struggles in oral communication affect the Grade 7 students of RMMC IS?
3. How do Grade 7 students of RMMC IS overcome their struggles in oral communication?

### **Theoretical Lens**

The school, as a multilingual school, provides a positive learning environment for language learners. Therefore, within such a supportive environment learners are encouraged to interact with the language optimally (Yi, 2007). Many researchers believe that interaction can promote second language learning in many ways. Mackey' study (1999, cited in Mitchel et al, 2013)

suggests that "taking part in interaction can facilitate second language development". Mackey and Goo (2007, cited in Mitchel et al, 2013) also suggested that engagement in second language interaction impacts positively on second language learning. The reason for this is due to learners can get feedback from interacting, in the form of negotiation of meaning, with their teachers and peers (Hadi, 2014).

Despite these benefits, we need to consider the quality of the interaction in the sense that we need to vary the activities, expose learners more to the target language and to and have clear and specific objectives in every language interaction.

During oral interaction, learners have the opportunities to gain input (listen to the target language) and produce output or use the language productively. When producing the target language, learners may encounter problems leading them to recognize what they do not know or partially know (Bot et al, 2006). Swain (1993 cited in Bot et al, 2006) suggests one of

the output functions, that is to push the learners to move from the semantic processing to the syntactic processing. Simply put, producing output allows the learners to move their focus from comprehension to the language production.

Furthermore, it is also worth considering the use of negative evidence (correction). Long's (cited in Mitchel et al, 2013) interaction hypothesis reveals that negative evidence to the structure of the target language contributes to second language learning. Long believes such a correction can promote "noticing" or learner awareness about the mismatch between features of their own interlanguage productions and the target language form, in the course of communicative interaction including meaning negotiation and repair. Therefore, correction to language features will be done either implicitly or explicitly to learners.

Regarding the linguistic factor, Hossain (2018) asserted that most students are very weak in English grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills. They do not know how or what to say in English. The Foreign language learning process can be compared to the learning process of the first language. Children develop strategies such as repetition, imitation, formulaic speech, and incorporation that help them acquire their mother tongue. Students go through the same process of learning a foreign language, like English.

To develop learners' fluency in speaking and listening, Nation and Newton (2000) criteria of fluency development strand will be taken into account. These criteria include such things as: all input/output must be familiar, focus on either sending or receiving a message, motivating learners to work faster and providing them with lots of input or output. Varying the learning activities is important to make learning interesting and engaging. Nation and Newton also suggested some activities for fluency development which include: speed reading, skimming and scanning, repeated reading, etc. Furthermore, as communication becomes the main objective the learners, employing task based learning will be necessary as communicative methodology interpretation is found in it (Goh and Burns, 2012)

### **Significance of the Study**

Various studies were conducted about students' struggles in oral communication yet most of them did not focus on the first-hand experiences which became the root cause of their struggles. The researcher would like to find out the genuine stories of junior high school students in oral communication activities, how they became affected and how they overcame their struggles in the said activities.

This narrative qualitative research would be of great help group of people. This study would be beneficial to the students as it would help them be able to be more aware of the struggle they are facing in oral communication. Find their way to cope with those struggles to become more competent individuals. It will also help them understand the importance of being skillful in oral communication as one of the needed skills in their future endeavors.

This study would help the teachers too to understand the struggles faced by the students, and pave the way to do appropriate strategies in addressing the issue. This study would also help the School Officials to aid them in knowing the struggles of the students in oral communication, a part of the macro skills needed to master by the students. It will also enable them to craft additional seminars for teachers about the appropriate techniques and strategies to help the students in their struggles.

Finally, other researchers may use the information gathered from this study and help them think of some other variables to investigate related to the experiences of students in writing research paper.

## **2. METHOD**

This study was qualitative narrative research of life's stories, an interpretative interpretation. Qualitative research is a method used to interpret facts from data, where the details depend on the qualities that people actively use in gaining experiences of the phenomena (Weinberg, 2002; Hammarberg, 2016). Also, this methodology is an activity that puts the researcher in the real world. It includes a set of interpretive practices that changed the world into a series of representations, like field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stickler & Hampel, 2016).

Thus, it was also an interpretative approach based on reality constructed by the individuals where multiple realities exist that need to be reported faithfully, relying on the voices and interpretations of the informants. It uses an inductive methodology. Categories that emerged from informants or participants were context-bound information leading to patterns or theories that explain the phenomenon. It is an inquiry that is value-laden and biased with the situation that the research is controlled by time and space. Most often, it did not assume universal application but based on the applicability of resulting discovery that occurs in a specific time and context (Quantz, 1992; Hartas, 2016).

Additionally, qualitative research is described as a market research method that focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication. Its focus is not only on “what” people think but also on “why” they think so. Qualitative research is designed to help reveal the behavior and perception of a target audience concerning a particular topic (Bhat, 2019; Corte & Asper, 2019; Crossman, 2021).

Furthermore, qualitative research has been discovered to overcome the limitations of quantitative analysis (Almeida, 2017). Despite the popularity and advantages of a quantitative approach, it does not apply to all types of studies because not all studies can yield numerical data. Thus, a qualitative approach is used to conduct these studies that are not associated with numbers on numerical measures. It finds its widespread application in many studies, including social science, educational and academic research, and many other fields of study (Erickson, 2011; Rahman, 2016).

Also, qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of the perception of people from a social perspective using various qualitative data collection tools, including interviews, queries, polls, or surveys. This research tends to be mainly descriptive (Glesne, 2015; Crossman, 2021).

In explaining a phenomenon of the problem, this study used the qualitative approach, which was relevant to address the research questions in an exploratory level of understanding the event of how students struggle if asked to do oral communication.

It used narrative research design because it described the lives of individuals, collected and told stories about people’s lives, and wrote narratives of individual experiences. In the conduct of the study, researchers established a close bond with the participants. It helped reduce a commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that the researcher is distinct from practice and has little direct application (Reissman, 2008; Creswell, 2017). Additionally, for participants in the study, sharing their stories made them feel that their stories were important and heard. When they tell a story, it helps them understand what they need to process (McEwan & Egan, 1995; Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, this research was a design of inquiry in which the researcher dug into the respondents’ lives and asked one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information was then retold or restudied by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Also, this approach typically focused on the lives of individuals and considered “real world measures” that were appropriate when “real-life problems” were investigated. It was also wherein researchers wrote narratives about experiences of individuals, described life experiences, and discussed the meaning of the experience. They became the interpreter of the individual’s stories (Reichling, et. al., 2018).

In this study, the inclusion criteria in the selection of participants were those who had final grades of 90 to 97 in their English subject during Grade 6. However, they still showed struggles in oral communication as observed by their Grade 7 teachers. Also, those who were transferees enrolled as Grade 7 students, whose age ranges from 11-13 years-, of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges Integrated School for the school year 2021-2022.

The sampling method used to identify the six participants of the study was the Purposive Homogeneous sampling technique. This method is a non-probability sampling technique based on the researcher’s knowledge. The researcher chose three female and three male transferees. The first pair of female and male was 11 years old; the second pair of male and female was 12 years old; the third pair of male and female was 13 years old. All of them were observed as struggling students based on their grades in their performance tasks such as public speaking, oral questioning, reporting, and oral interviews. They were also selected based on their teachers’ classroom observation during the said activities. That is why the researcher asked the help from the teachers in choosing the participants, for they know better who the best were fit to participate in the research study.

The researcher used the said sampling method because she wanted to access a particular subset of people she thoroughly thought fit the said profile. This sampling also enabled the researcher to squeeze much information from the collected data. The six participants were from a single site.

And to gather the needed data for this study, the following procedures were observed to gain access to the research site and permission to conduct the study.

First, the researcher wrote a letter addressing the gatekeeper, for his approval to conduct the study and gain access to the research site. Then, the exact copy of the written communication was sent to the principal. Upon the approval, the communication was sent by the researcher to the English teachers. At the same time, she also asked the Grade 7 teachers to help her identify the study participants. The other one was sent to the advisers of the identified participants. Upon granted,

the researcher communicated the purposes of the research sufficiently to the participants' parents and let them sign the Informed Assent Form as proof that they allowed their children to participate voluntarily.

Since the country is still in a pandemic due to the Corona Virus, the national government disallowed face-to-face meetings, especially for those who are 18 years old and below. Therefore, upon the approval to conduct the study, the researcher immediately prepared the logistical requirements. These include the venue for a virtual meeting, audio/voice and video recorder, and zoom meeting link, used during the virtual interview with the participants.

Before conducting the virtual interview, the researcher went to the participants' houses to meet their parents or guardians. The researcher followed the health protocols like wearing a face mask and face shield, washing hands with soap and alcohol, and observing two meters distance from one another. The researcher also gave the parents a copy of the assent form. The assent forms contained the objectives of the study, the methodology, confidentiality, and benefits, including the contact number of the researcher, after which, with no more questions or clarifications, the Assent Form was retrieved. It was followed by a Participant Agreement Form. This form indicated the agreement between the participants' parents and the researcher to conduct the interview and transcription process.

Lastly, it was followed by a virtual one-on-one interview with the participants. However, the researcher was given a chance to personally conduct the discussion with one of the participants with the parent's consent. Nevertheless, the researcher and the interviewee strictly followed the health protocols for safety purposes. The interview procedure consists of two parts. The first part merely solicited information that served as the basis for the background of the participants. The second part was the interview proper, which consisted of questions about the story of struggles in oral communication.

Moreover, the process was conducted with the participants at an agreed time at their convenience. A digital recorder was utilized to record the interview. Their answers were transcribed after the interview process.

In data gathering analysis, the researcher used a constant comparison method. Accordingly, responses were not grouped according to pre-defined categories in analyzing data generated in the format. Instead, the salient categories of meaning and relationships between categories through inductive reasoning were derived from the data itself. The constant comparative method integrates a model that seeks to explain the social functions in the study. It offers the means by which the researcher may access and analyze these articulated perspectives (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Kolb, 2012). The researcher simultaneously codes and analyzes data to develop concepts in the constant comparison method and refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent explanatory model by continually comparing specific incidents in the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Kolb, 2012).

Constant comparison is a technique for analyzing qualitative data to develop a theory of deep, and this technique is considered synonymous with the grounded theory approach used by most scientists. This theory is supported by Boeije (2002) and Olson, et. al. (2016), which stated that this technique is also the dominant principle in analyzing Qualitative Research. Also, Glaser & Strauss (1967) also suggested that using the method to generate a continuous analysis of this theory can apply to various sizes in a social unit. Furthermore, this technique allowed the researchers to think and compare the investigation of different levels and angles so that the similarities and differences in data acquisition, such as interviews and field notes, can establish a pattern. This technique includes all types of aid, such as writing a memo, a meeting reading and re-reading, encoding, and displaying of diagrams. It supports the comparison principle to ensure that all data collected will be analyzed and not overlooked (Fram, 2013).

### **3. RESULTS**

Research Question No 1: What are the struggles you have experienced in oral communication activities?

To facilitate the generation of comprehensive discussion for the above research problem, the following questions were asked during the in-depth interviews: 1. When was the first time you experienced struggle in oral communication? Can you tell what happened on that moment?

2. Was the same struggle happened again when you were given the same task? When did this happen? Please narrate the whole incident.

3. Do you believe that your younger/ older classmates are better than you in terms of oral communication? Why or why not?

4. Do you believe that your male/female classmates are better than you in terms of oral communication? Why or why not?

5. Do you think your age and your gender affects your struggles in oral communication? Why do you say so?

From the data collected on the experiences of the study participants, six major themes emerged as presented in Table 1. These themes presented the experiences of the participants. The emergent themes are described as (1) Emotional adversity (2) Speech barriers (3) Being Unprepared (4) Incompetent (5) Non-participative Peers, and (6) Gender Inferiority

Research Question No. 2: How do struggles in oral communication affect the Grade 7 students of RMMC IS?

The following questions were asked during the in-depth to find out the effects of struggles in oral communication:

1. How was your performance during the oral communication activity? Are you satisfied with your performance?
2. Have you completed or finished the oral task given even though you are struggling in oral communication? If not, what did you do? How did you feel about it?
3. What was your teacher's feedback after you had performed? How did the teacher's feedback affect you in doing another oral performance tasks?
4. How did you describe the struggles you have experienced in oral communication as a whole?
5. Did these struggles affect you? In what ways?

From the data collected on the insights of the study participants, three major themes emerged as presented in Table 2. These themes present the effects of the struggles in the participants. The emergent themes are described as (1) Positive Outlook, (2) Negative Outlook and (3) Undesirable Outcomes.

Research Question No. 3: How do you overcome these struggles in oral communication?

The following questions were asked during the in-depth to find out the coping strategies used by the participants:

1. What are the strategies you have employed in overcoming the struggles? Please tell me in details.
2. What was the result of your performance upon employing the strategies?
3. How was the feeling after overcoming the struggles?
4. Are you still willing to use the same strategy in your future oral performance tasks? Why or why not?
5. Did you seek the help of other people like your parents, peers, or teachers in overcoming your struggles? What other factors help you in overcoming your struggles in oral communication?

From the data collected on the insights of the study participants, four major themes emerged as presented in Table 3. These themes present the coping strategies used by the participants. The emergent themes are described as (1) Self Motivation, (2) Being Optimistic, (3) Social Support, and (4) Good Habits.

Based on the responses of both the in-depth interview informants the following data were gathered:

On the experiences of the participants six themes emerged to describe the struggles encountered by the students in oral communication. These themes are namely, (a) Emotional adversity (b) Speech barriers (c) Being Unprepared (d) Incompetent (e) Non-participative Peers, and (f) Gender Inferiority. In relation to the Emotional adversities, the negative thoughts, intimidations, uncomfortable feelings and unpleasant experiences were highlighted by the participants as the cause of their struggles in oral communication tasks. The emotional adversities shared among the three ages lead them to lose their self-esteem, build unlikeable consciousness, and be intimidated by the perception that the other classmates are performing better than them.

Reflected also in the table that the participants whose ages are eleven and thirteen manifested problems in speaking. The difficulties in fluency held them from expressing their thoughts even though they knew what to say. Also, being unprepared and incompetent in the subject matter became factors affecting their performances, like they have difficulties answering impromptu questions and expressing their thoughts in the English language. Filipino learners feel more vulnerable in speaking activities because they fear that their weaknesses in a foreign language will be known to their teachers and classmates. It would cause them to lose their self-esteem (Tridinanti, 2018 & Jugo, 2020). Students usually do not want to be criticized in front of the whole class, so the fear of error corrections or negative evaluation was the most significant cause of their struggles (Metcalf, 2017 & Jugo, 2020).

Also, non-participative group peers as one of the struggles mentioned by the participants whose ages are twelve years old are considered factors affecting their lack of motivation to do the oral group activity. Teamwork teaches essential communication skills, such as effective speaking (Akindele, 2012 & Brill, 2019). How students speak to other group members demonstrates their level of understanding. It encourages them to do the oral tasks confidently. However, without teamwork, jobs will be uneasy, and if so, challenges may occur in doing oral activities (Brill, 2019).

In the effects of struggles in oral communication to the participants; three significant themes emerged from it, (a) Undesirable Outcomes, (b) Negative Outlook and (c) Positive Outlook.

Most participants described the feeling as stressful, making them feel sad and discouraged. The said feelings hindered them from doing what was expected from them and even turned them to have poor grades, unsatisfied and unfinished activities, and negative feedback from the teachers.

Due to their limited knowledge of the foreign language, students who exhibit communication apprehension do not feel comfortable in front of others, especially concerning speaking and listening. It is believed that communication apprehension is related to lack of practice and lack of proficiency in oral and speaking (Sham & Azmi, 2018).

However, struggles experienced in oral communication activities for others urged them to be better in the next task. Students used it as an intrinsic motivation challenging themselves to do more than to be left frustrated. Thus, making themselves positive thinkers, drove them to continue making progress toward a goal even when it feels challenging (Dorado, 2022).

In terms of the overcoming strategies used by the participants, four significant themes emerged from it, (1) Self Motivation, (2) Being Optimistic, (3) Social Support, and (4) Good Habits.

It was revealed that being self-motivated and optimistic helped the participants to overcome their struggles experienced in oral communication. Self-encouragement through increasing self-confidence is one way to surpass them from the verbal tasks given by the teachers (Liang & Kelsen, 2018). Also, getting support from family members and peers reduced their stress levels and anxiety in life (Pruthi, 2020). That is why communication from parents, siblings, and friends was one of the ways they can overcome their struggles, even in a non-visible and indirect way.

Also, the table shows that good habits such as constant practicing, studying in advance, preparing, and reviewing eased the students' nervousness and anxieties in doing oral performance activities. Cuncic (2019) suggested that constant practice will help us be comfortable with speaking. Also, rehearsing oneself with the speech and creating a routine for managing anxiety on the day of an address or presentation will give confidence.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This qualitative research reveals that the participants encountered different struggles in oral communication activities like public speaking, oral questioning, reporting, oral interviews, and others. These difficulties are possible because they are affected by their intrinsic perceptions and lack of self-motivation to do the tasks. Additionally, the participants were afraid to be judged or embarrassed in front of their classmates, especially those they assumed performed better than they were. Those who were a little younger, though not intimidated, believed that their classmates who were older than them were more likely to excel in language class. The same thing on how they perceived their opposite sex as more cooperative and participative in the oral communication activities compared to them.

Furthermore, oral fluency became a problem, specifically when stammering or stuttering was uncontrollably disturbed in the utterance of the words. This speech barrier affected them. They became too shy and nervous, having a feeling of being unsupported.

Because of these challenges in oral speaking, the participants could not do their best because they were hindered by their negative thoughts. They advanced themselves with hesitations, and because of that, they owned the feelings of being stressed, discouraged, and sad. The level of their confidence slowly decreased, resulted in settling for less and building a "Sila lang, kay sila man bright" principle. These feelings even lead them to poor academic performance. In contrast, the said struggles brought positive outlooks to others. Instead of being discouraged, they became motivated to do more in the next activity. With optimism, they see their failures as opportunities to be better not only in oral speaking activities but in all other academic areas, most probably, because they have seen the importance of the skills.

Nevertheless, despite the many struggles the students experienced, they became responsible instead of finding ways to cope with the challenges. Some of these coping strategies were being well-prepared such as making enough effort, rehearsing or

practicing speeches regularly, and having a positive outlook. In addition, the support rendered by their family and peers played essential roles in developing self-trust and confidence.

### **Comparison of Findings with Existing Studies**

Speaking is an active and productive macro skill that each must develop. Many of us believe that speaking is a way to express our thoughts and feelings. This skill is essential because it helps us to understand and to be understood, to appreciate and to be appreciated, and to inspire and to be inspired. Oral Communication is sharing or conversing with people or individuals for various purposes.

### **Struggles in Oral Communication**

The participants' struggles significantly hampered them from being better communicators, and worse, it made them anxious to express themselves, which resulted in their pressure. According to the findings of Chapman University reported by Ingraham (2016), a fear of public speaking became the biggest phobia among students. Because of this, oral communication activities can be one of those reasons that students dislike school. In a classroom setting, higher thinking skills may be required such as oral skills in presentations, debates, role-playing, and formal speeches. Mostly, verbal skill is not taught. Some students perform poorly the said skills in the classroom. This situation may cause them to become more apprehensive about their perceived communication skills and less likely to speak up in class or even ask or answer questions (Voss, et. al., 2012; Bauman, 2016).

The students' satisfying performance in the classroom is seriously impeded by the oral communication apprehension, not only in their English subject but also in whole academic performance, including other core subjects in which using the English language was crucial for learning specifically Mathematics and Science. Many language learners find it complex to convey their thoughts verbally in the target language (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). They can pass the given examinations but find it challenging to converse using English. In classroom interactions, students exhibit their communication apprehensions whenever they are asked to answer the questions, and most of them respond negatively. When they are asked to talk or deliver a speech, they manifest communication apprehensions as they show their unwillingness and inhibitions. Most of the time, they become passive learners because they prefer to be quiet during classroom discussions. This apprehension results in poor academic performance (Cristobal & Lasaten, 2018).

Likewise, considering themselves incompetent in terms of their linguistic skills gave them a feeling of desperation. The participants usually compared their fluency with their classmates' and they realized that their progress was slower than them. They started to think negatively. Negative self-talk is a kind of cognitive anxiety (Wignall, 2018 & Kim, et. al., 2021). The participants generated negative thoughts about themselves, which affected their performance during oral presentations. Although some students revealed that they were confident in their linguistic competence, negative statements about them interfered with their oral production (Lopez & Tun, 2017).

Moreover, the language learners revealed their fear of making mistakes due to the opinions and reactions of their classmates. Their motivation to speak lessened further because of the way teachers provided corrective feedback when they made mistakes. Some of the learners stated that there were times when they felt corrective feedback was a personal judgment, and their teachers' attitudes when providing corrective feedback made them feel that their purpose was for their teachers and classmates to tease them. It did not matter whether other classmates made more mistakes, as the impolite corrective feedback was thought to be focused on their weaknesses most of the time, during which they were constantly teased and laughed at (Lopez & Tun, 2017).

Similarly, the participant of this study revealed that the unpleasant experiences from the past teachers who gave unfair comparisons with other classmates made the specific participant unmotivated to participate in oral activities. Thus, shy disposition and uncomfortable feelings added to the emotional adversities. So, the teachers need to recognize learners' real emotions and how they will motivate them to speak in English language class. The participants felt motivated to say once they had realized that the teachers were neutrally providing feedback.

Furthermore, the non-participative classmates or group mates in oral activities were also identified as problems. According to Lopez & Tun (2017), Intermediate learners feel confident when interacting with classmates. If there was no competence, there was probably a strong sense of cooperation and support in the group. The learners did not demonstrate annoyance when there was no impolite attitude in their classmates. In contrast, if they will not show any support, the group presenter can feel emotional pressure and anxiety.



The factors mentioned above are also perceived as the cause of the respondents' struggles in oral communication.

### **Struggles in Oral Communication According to Age**

Al Hosni (2014) exclaimed that because young EFL learners are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, and feel shy, they tend to have difficulty speaking. It was supported by Elmenfi & Gaibaini (2016), who implied that age significantly influences public speaking anxiety. In other words, there is a negative correlation between two variables. Students of lower ages have more anxiety than higher ages when speaking in public. For this purpose, the study hypotheses stated that age differences have a significant effect on public speaking anxiety. Those who have lower ages were significantly associated with higher anxiety in speaking compared to those who were older. In contrast, Sadiq (2017) concluded that in terms of students' age, it was found that older students had higher language anxiety than younger students.

Communication changes are commonly reported also by older people. Due to typical aging, the changes in physical health, depression, and cognitive decline would be manifested. Thus, communication skills may change subtly, at least in part. Aging also is responsible for physiologic changes in hearing, voice, and speech processes. A person's age can be predicted to have fair accuracy by speech characteristics, including voice tremor, pitch, speaking rate, loudness, and fluency. Some language skills remain intact, whereas others tend to decline (Yorkston, 2011).

### **Struggles in Oral Communication According to Sex**

Many people perceive that males and females are distinct regarding the level of competence in oral communication. McLean & Anderson (2009), considered by Rafek, et. al. (2016), also indicate that females have greater fear and have a high possibility of developing anxiety compared to men. Hosseini & Khazali (2013) found that naturally, females feel more anxious than males. Under certain circumstances, females tend to feel easily vulnerable leading them to the feelings of anxiety and worry. At the same time, males obtain more self-control and the ability to detach themselves from unpleasant thoughts. Similarly, a study conducted by Safranji (2018) examined 296 engineering students who attended the English language class anxiety based on gender differences. Findings reflected that female learners are more anxious than their male counterparts.

In contrast, Yih, et. al. (2017), in their research on the role of gender in the English Language, found that male students tend to be more worried than female students. It also shows that male students are more apprehensive in speaking as they recognize their speech as less proficient than females. In comparison, Brantmeier (2003), in his analysis of the data in his study to investigate gender differences, which had also been considered by Edwards (2018), girls gained higher mean scores in all three tests. The mean percentage differences on all the tests were quite significant: vocabulary, 8.0%; syntax, 14.4%; and oral communication, 9.8%. The higher verbal ability of the girls is observed during the oral communication test as their high level of confidence is seen, and they engaged in longer and more detailed discussions. T-tests indicated that results for the said tests were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results agreed with the other studies that have established a clear female advantage in verbal ability.

### **The Effect of Struggles in Oral Communication**

The anxiety in public can negatively affect students' academic performance and interpersonal relationships as it leads to a possibility of withdrawing from communication situations (Swenson, 2016). Participants making their oral participation abysmal presented an intense of getting a low grade on future exams due to their performance in class. Students took too long to answer the teacher's questions because they would make great efforts to produce correct utterances. Consequently, participants did not speak unless asked or somewhat deviated themselves in answering the questions. The students talk at a low volume and sometimes stutter, feeling dissatisfied with their performance in speaking activities (Lopez & Tun, 2017). The desire to try protecting their grades and not appearing to the teacher or other students as unintelligent would lead to them to stress (Bauman, 2016).

Lopez & Tun (2017) supported that most students find foreign language learning particularly stressful. The students' fear of being less competent than other students added to their negative evaluation. They compared themselves with classmates and felt uncomfortable because they thought their classmates were criticizing their performance when they were in front. Research on language anxiety concluded that 'on the spot' and 'in front of the class' speaking performances produce the most anxiety from the students' perspective. Similarly, the participants in this study were worried. They thought that it was easier for their classmates to recognize their mistakes during oral presentations or class participation. They described the feeling as comfortable when being unnoticed during class, and avoiding as much as possible activities or situations that would bring them to center stage. Also, it was noted that the students lessened their motivation to speak because of their

fear of their classmates' opinions and reactions when they make mistakes. Further, the way teachers provided corrective feedback when making mistakes feared them the most (Sepehrinia et al., 2020). On the contrary, the participants felt motivated to participate in the English class once they realized that their teachers were providing feedback in a neutral way (Lopez & Tun, 2017).

### **Strategies for Overcoming Struggles**

Most of the students have difficulties in oral speaking and look for their remedies to cope with these struggles. Meanwhile, a few positive strategies are reported by the participants of this study. Being self-motivated and optimistic, supported from others, and good habits are typical examples of strategies that helped the learners to overcome their struggles.

In the survey conducted by Alotumi (2021), it was concluded that Yemeni EFL-college junior and senior students use self-regulated motivation to improve their EFL speaking. Its findings revealed that all students employed a range of self-regulatory motivational strategies in improving their EFL speaking. As a result, their overall SRMIS-EFL level ranged from medium to high. The same study was conducted by Dincer (2017) about the self-determination theory perspective. The mean scores of the subscales indicated that intrinsic motivation is higher than the other regulatory styles. This result means that students' engagement in English-speaking courses is generally derived from inner motivations.

On the other hand, positive thinking and optimism can be practical stress management tools (Holland, 2020). Having a more positive outlook on life can benefit, including being good at oral communication tasks. Changing an unhealthy mindset into more positive thinking reduced self-doubts concerning public speaking. Optimism can make a big difference to communication success because of gaining more confidence (Dowding, 2020). Thus, restructuring negative thoughts is a fundamental activity for one to succeed in speaking. Spoiling success by creating a negative reality will reinforce the belief that one does badly through self-criticism (Genard, 2016). Furthermore, positive thinking can make a huge difference to the success of communication.

Parents' advice and supports also help learners reduce their speech anxiety. If they knew someone who believed in them, they became encouraged to perform well (Cuncic, 2019). Children should know that they can overcome challenges and accomplish goals through their positive actions. They could feel competent and more able to deal with stress positively if they have achieved academic success and developed individual talents and interests. Social competency is also essential. One should enhance mental wellness by having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones (Bethesda, 2017). Recent research about speech success reviewed by Asayag (2021) highlighted trust as one of the factors why learners became good influential speakers. Being trusted by someone who plays an essential role in their life pursued him to be a goal-oriented person.

Moreover, the research proved that fear of public speaking is a learned skill and can be overcome by practicing and rehearsing before presentations or speeches. People who experience public speaking anxiety can perform well as those who have a good command of public speaking (Raja, 2017). An article about rehearsing highlighted that rehearsal involves praxis, putting theoretical knowledge into practice. Rehearsing is essential because it helps one understand public speaking to test what works and learn from the experiences. It is essential because it allows practicing different parts before the actual speech delivery. It also allows practical details back together to create a total discourse and practice before having it in front of the actual audience. Practice sessions will enable adjustments of note cards to make them more effective in supporting the contact with the audience. Therefore, practice is not just a strategy for beginners but also for those with extensive experience in public speaking. The good habits of practicing will provide the best opportunities to manage performance anxiety. It builds confidence in speaking extemporaneously, develops vocal skills, and becomes adept at self-presentation (Lucas, 2019). Actively practicing communication skills and receiving professional feedback will improve overall (Harris, 2017).

Many anxious students provoke their anxiety by setting unreasonable standards for their performance. Teachers can help students simply by identifying perfectionist tendencies that keep them from recognizing their language learning successes (Abrams, 2010). English teachers might organize the discussion of anxieties to help learners realize that their anxiety is unproductive. Proper classroom evaluation helps anxious learners reduce their sense of incompetence (Genard, 2016). One of the ways of evaluating in the classroom may be to ask learners to evaluate themselves and their group members and to assess their contribution to the group. Frequently little success is the best way to build a sense of competence. If learners succeed in their classes and participate in their class activities, they will begin believing that competence is possible. Let learners know that making mistakes is an inevitable part of learning (Gao, 2016).

### Implications for Future Research

Since the findings in this study cannot be generalized due to having only six participants, future studies may be conducted in different settings.

The results of this research may be used as a readily available reference for any interested parties who desire to investigate and explore the struggles in oral communication of the students from different schools. Furthermore, the methodology used in the study will serve as a basis for researchers interested in pursuing qualitative research in the future.

Future research may conduct in different schools of varying levels to explore broader issues in the classroom atmosphere for further insights. Also, to help students with the hope that they will become more inclined to learn how to overcome the struggles they are experiencing in oral communication activities.

### Concluding Remarks

This study unlocked the varied experiences of Grade 7 students in oral performance tasks. According to their responses, they encountered challenges in speaking in front because of the different factors such as having shy disposition, fluency disorders, lack of knowledge and confidence to perform, feeling of intimidation, negative thoughts and etc. The public speaking anxiety of the learners resulted negative experiences to them.

The investigation on the experiences of students in oral communication highlighted the significance and importance of the study. This study provides the narrative experiences of students showing how they were affected by their struggles and how they overcame those challenges. The struggles mentioned by the language learners hindered them to do their best. It lowers their self-motivation and added their anxiety and stress. As result, they have poor performances, they even unfinished their tasks and receive negative feedbacks from their teachers. However, there were also some of them who became challenge to do more in their next performance tasks.

They also employed coping strategies to surpass the difficulties they experienced in oral activities. They discovered that constant practice, advance study, watching helpful videos helped them with their struggles. Furthermore, the help from others contributed a lot in their success.

Most importantly, students who experienced the same struggles realized the significance of oral communication activities in their future endeavors. These participants were able to appreciate the learning task given to them with understanding the sole reason why they need to experience all the hurdles just to learn the skill. As a researcher, teaching speaking is not easy. It needs time, effort and effective strategies in order to be successful in teaching the skill. Learners cannot be the best version of themselves in one snap. Everything comes in a process of hard work and patience.

The contribution of this study lies in the availability of the students' experiences in oral communication using the English language and concepts derived from the results. Finally, it also opens chances for future researchers to study areas in varying levels which have not been explored yet.

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