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Research Article

Public Speaking Skill Development Among College Students In Cotabato: A Narrative Inquiry For Grassroots Instructional Design

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Abstract

This study examines how college students and faculty in North Cotabato, Philippines, understand and experience the teaching and learning of public speaking, with the goal of informing the development of localized, student-centered instructional materials. Guided by Rhetorical Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, and Communication Apprehension Theory, the research adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry design. Data were generated through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, allowing participants to describe their lived experiences, perceived competencies, and challenges in public speaking. Findings indicate that many learners perceive themselves as generally capable in areas such as speech organization, multimedia use, and motivation to communicate. However, these perceived strengths are often tempered by recurring difficulties, particularly in managing anxiety, expressing ideas in English, and sustaining real-time comprehension during speech delivery. Rather than functioning solely as a constraint, anxiety is frequently described by students as a productive tension that encourages preparation, repeated practice, and self-monitoring. Participants consistently highlight the value of experiential learning opportunities, peer collaboration, and timely, constructive feedback in building confidence and improving performance. Notably, students tend to define success not only in terms of technical proficiency but also in terms of personal growth, reduced apprehension, and the ability to connect meaningfully with an audience. These insights point to the need for learning environments that are culturally responsive, supportive, and low-pressure, where students can gradually develop their communicative competence. By foregrounding the interplay among the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of learning, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about public speaking pedagogy. It recommends developing flexible, context-sensitive instructional materials that emphasize practice-based activities, guided reflection, and the appropriate use of technology to better address the diverse needs of learners in higher education.

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1. Introduction

Standing in front of an audience, heart racing, and palms sweating is a feeling many of us know all too well. Public speaking, a skill that often triggers discomfort and anxiety, is a familiar feeling to many (Dewi, 2024). Despite the unease it can cause, public speaking is a vital skill, essential in personal interactions and professional settings. Most individuals have faced the nerves and apprehension of addressing an audience. Reflecting on the first experience with public speaking, one might recall the intense nervousness, the sweat born of anxiety, and the quiet hope that no mistakes or embarrassing errors were made (Gadzheiv, 2022).

Eser's (2024) findings revealed that a substantial majority recognize the importance of public speaking for career success: 97% acknowledge its necessity, and 85% consider it critical for career advancement. These insights underscore the essential role that public speaking plays in shaping students' future success and professional growth.

Despite the critical role that public speaking plays in career advancement, it remains an area that needs to be addressed, particularly in tertiary institutions in North Cotabato. There is growing concern that both school administrators and college instructors at private and public institutions may need to fully appreciate the importance of fostering public speaking skills. This gap underscores the pressing need for targeted research to elevate the educational system's awareness of the value of public speaking. Institutions can better prepare students for future success and professional growth by prioritizing their development. Thus, this study lays the foundation for identifying effective strategies to enhance students' speaking skills, ensuring they are well-prepared to enter their professional lives confidently after graduation. By exploring college faculty perspectives on teaching public speaking, the research aims to

inspire innovative approaches that will empower young professionals as they begin their careers.

Furthermore, this study serves as a valuable tool for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting quality education, as stated in its 7th goal, and promoting skills essential to sustainable economic growth and social development. By enhancing students' public speaking abilities, this study promotes quality education and fosters skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and social development.

Worldview and Theoretical Lens

Rhetorical Theory. Aristotle and Kenneth Burke offer valuable insights for anyone seeking to understand and teach the art of public speaking. Aristotle's approach highlights three core elements: ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning). These artistic proofs are vital tools for speakers to persuade their audience effectively, and they remain highly relevant in modern contexts such as political speeches and advertising (Aisyah, 2022; Torto, 2020).

On the other hand, Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory shifts the focus toward the ethical dimensions of communication. He emphasizes a comic perspective—encouraging speakers to engage in self-reflection, foster empathy, and use rhetoric to persuade, create understanding, and foster dialogue. Burke's approach enables a deeper analysis of communication, helping speakers understand the motives behind rhetorical strategies and how they affect audiences (MacCarron, 2021). For researchers and educators, these theories offer a robust foundation for exploring how to teach public speaking effectively, blending persuasive techniques with ethical engagement to help students speak confidently, communicate meaningfully, and communicate responsibly.

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Cognitive dissonance theory. It was introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957 and offers a compelling framework for understanding how individuals are driven to bridge the gap between conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors (Athaya, 2022). This psychological concept can be a powerful motivator for student growth in public speaking. When students recognize the gap between their current speaking abilities and the level of proficiency they aspire to, it creates discomfort (Nánay, 2023). This internal conflict fuels a desire for change. This dissonance pushes them to actively improve their skills, practice more effectively, and refine their delivery techniques.

For researchers, applying cognitive dissonance in learning environments provides valuable insights into how awareness of this gap can significantly develop confidence and competence. By addressing and resolving this internal tension, students are empowered to step outside their comfort zones, embrace new challenges, and achieve measurable growth in public speaking performance.

Communication apprehension theory. James McCroskey (1970) focuses on the fear or anxiety individuals experience when speaking in public, influenced by factors like audience size, context, formality, and personal traits. Understanding this theory can help in research exploring college students' perspectives on learning to develop public speaking by highlighting the challenges they face due to anxiety (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2021).

College students in various courses may share insights with their language instructors or teachers in addressing these anxieties in the classroom, using strategies such as practice, relaxation techniques, and a supportive environment (Robalski, 2021). Examining how faculty will assist students in managing communication apprehension in their teaching can inform best practices for helping students overcome their fear of public speaking and build greater confidence.

Research Questions

The study will explore college faculty's perspectives on teaching public speaking to students. More specifically, this answers the following questions:

1. What are students' needs in learning public speaking?
2. How do students describe their experiences, challenges, and successes in learning public speaking, and how do these influence their confidence, engagement, and skill development?
3. Which learning strategies do students perceive as most effective in helping them develop confidence, clarity, and competence in public speaking?
4. Based on the findings, what student-centered interventions or programs can be designed to better support learners' needs and improve the effectiveness of public speaking instruction in college settings?

Literature Review

The literature review draws on peer-reviewed articles, studies, and books to examine college faculty perspectives on teaching public speaking to students.

Public speaking is a powerful skill that significantly impacts both professional and personal interactions. It holds the potential to captivate an audience, persuade with compelling arguments, and drive meaningful change. Effective public speaking shapes individuals' communication, influence, and connections (Jhangiani, 2023).

In today's competitive job market, possessing strong public speaking skills can set individuals apart from their peers and open doors to career advancement. Skills in delivering persuasive presentations, leading impactful meetings, and engaging in professional networking enhance one's credibility and influence.

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Practical speaking ability is crucial to a student's success in mastering English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This skill is defined by the capacity to communicate orally using the target language, and it is considered the most vital aspect of language learning. However, studying the language is not enough; active practice is essential. Speaking involves more than just using words—it is about conveying meaningful messages to the listener. Good oral communication requires the speaker to effectively deliver their message so the listener can fully understand it. This involves more than just articulating words; it includes using symbols and gestures as part of the communicative process, as Ningsih *et al.* (2023) highlighted.

Developing public speaking skills is a key learning objective in the intermediate English class - Renewable Energy. Given that opportunities for practice outside of class are limited, students' communicative competence is often enhanced through presentation tasks during lessons. Thus, students must practice regular speaking to improve their proficiency and confidence.

Public Speaking Needs Analysis

A needs analysis for college students learning public speaking highlights critical insights into their skills, challenges, and the teaching methods required for effective learning. The analysis underscores the need to integrate public speaking into the curriculum to improve students' communication skills and boost their overall confidence (Osumo, 2024).

Importance of Public Speaking in Education. Public speaking plays a crucial role in developing essential skills like oral communication, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding. These skills are vital for college students and contribute to their academic and personal growth (Li, 2023; Osumo, 2024). Incorporating public speaking courses into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' English language proficiency

and elevate the quality of their overall education (Dan & Yan, 2020).

Identifying Student Challenges. Research has shown that many students need help with public speaking due to difficulties such as pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and low self-confidence (Astriani *et al.*, 2023). These factors often hinder their performance. Additionally, public speaking anxiety is a common obstacle, with students experiencing higher anxiety levels typically showing lower levels of performance in speaking tasks (Megawati & Apriani, 2023).

Tailoring Educational Approaches. A well-conducted needs analysis is essential for designing a syllabus that addresses students' specific challenges and aligns course objectives with their needs (Syamsuddin & Afgani, 2019). Integrating technology and employing innovative teaching strategies can increase student engagement and improve learning outcomes in public speaking courses (Dan & Yan, 2020). However, it is essential to recognize that not all students prioritize public speaking equally, leading to varying levels of engagement and motivation in these courses.

Nature of Public Speaking Today

Public speaking remains a major challenge worldwide, with a significant portion of the population struggling to overcome the anxiety associated with it. Roughly 75% of people experience some form of fear or discomfort when speaking in public. In the United States alone, about 15 million individuals have glossophobia, the intense fear of public speaking, on a daily basis (Zauderer, 2023). These figures highlight the pressing need for public speaking training and support systems.

This widespread challenge reveals the global significance of public speaking, not just as a skill but as a critical factor in personal development and cultural interaction (Zauderer, 2023). The persistent difficulties many

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encounter in mastering public speaking underscore the importance of addressing these barriers, enabling individuals to grow and engage more effectively in diverse settings.

The current state of public speaking in colleges across the Philippines reflects a multifaceted relationship between communication skills, anxiety, and educational interventions. Although students are expected to develop strong oral communication skills, many face significant obstacles, particularly anxiety about public speaking.

Communication skills and challenges. One major challenge is the decline in English proficiency, which affects graduates' competitiveness in the job market (Bertulfo, 2024). Despite English being the primary language of instruction, both educators and students report heightened anxiety during public speaking, which negatively affects their ability to communicate effectively (Pontillas & Talaue, 2021; Plandano *et al.*, 2023; Osumo, 2024).

Impact of Public Speaking Anxiety. Research highlights that this anxiety is prevalent among various groups, with high audience anxiety being common across demographics (Plandano *et al.*, 2023).

In response, interventions such as "Popsispeak" have shown promise in alleviating public speaking anxiety and improving students' oral communication skills (Pontillas, 2020). These programs demonstrate the potential of targeted approaches to meaningfully enhance students' public speaking abilities.

To address these issues, institutions are urged to incorporate more public speaking activities and related courses to help students gain confidence and improve their communication skills (Plandado *et al.*, 2023; Lungay, 2023). Additionally, enhancing teacher education programs with more communication courses is recommended to better equip future educators for the classroom (Pontillas & Talaue, 2021).

Despite ongoing challenges, there is growing awareness of the importance of public speaking, driving reforms to create a more supportive environment for students to develop these crucial skills.

Strengthening the public speaking of college communicators.

Public speaking competencies encompass a range of skills critical for effective communication in public forums. Recent studies have identified vital competencies, including fluency, organization, nonverbal communication, and audience engagement. Key competencies were presented to fully enhance college students' communication.

Fluency and Clarity. Proficient speakers exhibit fluency, which includes clear articulation and appropriate pacing. Research by Werdiningsih and Mukminatien (2023) suggests that although many students demonstrate fluency, they often struggle to organize their presentations effectively.

Non-Verbal Communication. A significant aspect of public speaking is non-verbal communication, including eye contact, gestures, and body language. Kho and Ting (2023) emphasize the importance of training programs that enhance these skills to foster stronger connections with the audience.

Organizational Skills. The logical structuring of a speech is fundamental to effective communication. However, many participants in public speaking training report difficulties in organizing their content, highlighting the need for more focused instruction in this area (Werdinginsih & Mukminatien, 2023; Mardininginsih, 2023).

Confidence and Persuasiveness. Studies show that building confidence and enhancing persuasive speaking skills can significantly improve a speaker's overall effectiveness,

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particularly for educators (Syafuruddin *et al.*, 2023).

Despite these essential competencies, communication apprehension remains a barrier for some individuals, underscoring the need for ongoing support and tailored training to master public speaking (Kho & Ting, 2023).

The findings strongly emphasize the critical need for a comprehensive approach to public speaking training. While fluency and persuasive skills are vital, the recurring challenges in organizing presentations highlight the necessity for more focused training in structuring content. Additionally, the focus on non-verbal communication and audience engagement clearly illustrates that public speaking is as much about presence as it is about words. Continued support is essential for overcoming communication apprehension, underscoring the need for public speaking programs to provide long-term, personalized support to ensure lasting competency.

Best Practices in Teaching Public Speaking

Effective teaching practices for public speaking in the 21st century call for a balanced approach that integrates traditional methods and modern innovations to address the dynamic needs of students in a technology-centric world. Educators must adapt to these changes while maintaining core strategies that enhance students' communication skills.

Ensuring articulation and clarity. Instructors should serve as models of clear, confident speech, using simplified language to help students better understand complex ideas (Falanga, 2023). This approach not only improves comprehension but also keeps students more engaged. Equally important is the use of body language. Communication extends beyond verbal expression, and teachers should demonstrate the power of body language in conveying emotions and meaning, guiding students to use non-verbal cues effectively.

Practice and feedback are pivotal to mastering public speaking. Regular practice opportunities, whether in small peer groups or through recorded sessions, help students refine their skills (Dufner, 2022). Teachers should provide detailed feedback through peer reviews, teacher assessments, or video playback, focusing on aspects such as speech structure and delivery. Student-centered learning is another essential practice that fosters an inclusive environment, promoting active participation and peer interaction, particularly in online and remote learning settings.

Incorporating technology is essential in modern public speaking education. Tools such as video conferencing, discussion forums, and online feedback platforms can enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Teachers should also assist students in generating content and structuring their speeches (Dufner, 2022). Techniques like mind mapping and collaborative planning help students organize their thoughts more effectively and encourage creativity.

Addressing common challenges is also vital. Teachers need to recognize issues such as public speaking anxiety or the temptation to plagiarize. By offering strategies to overcome these obstacles, such as promoting originality and providing supportive environments for speaking practice, teachers can help students develop both confidence and emotional intelligence (Dufner, 2022). Ultimately, public speaking is not just about content delivery but also about building self-esteem and interpersonal communication skills.

In summary, modern best practices for teaching public speaking focus on several key elements, including clear communication, effective body language, and regular practice. The strategic integration of technology and a strong emphasis on student engagement are also crucial. These approaches not only develop students' public speaking skills but also provide them with vital

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life skills indispensable in today's highly interconnected society.

Effective Strategies in Teaching Public Speaking.

The instructor employs interactive strategies, both individual and collaborative, designed to enhance students' English-speaking skills, particularly in public speaking (Pawar & Anscombe, 2022). These well-structured activities aim to foster classroom interaction, encouraging students to actively participate through speaking and writing to express their perspectives or share information (Cahill *et al.*, 2022). Through these methods, students' speaking confidence and fluency are significantly strengthened through interactive tasks and fluency-building games (Hamdu *et al.*, 2020; Santoso *et al.*, 2022).

The activities effectively promote active learning, focusing on improving English-speaking skills—a critical area in language education (Rahman *et al.*, 2023). The academic curriculum now emphasizes developing these skills, particularly given the challenges students face as they transition from distance learning to face-to-face classes. During remote learning, students were more comfortable speaking with their cameras off. However, the return to physical classrooms has weakened their confidence and fluency, as they now have to speak spontaneously in front of an audience.

To address this issue, the instructor implements strategies tailored for in-person learning to help students regain their confidence in public speaking. These include oral recitations, class reporting, group work, memorization, and debates (Habibi *et al.*, 2018).

Additionally, methods such as lateral thinking, the Six Thinking Hats approach, and the integration of ICT tools, including Mentimeter, Padlet, and Wixsite, are used to further engage students.

College students' reinforcement in public speaking.

Reinforcing public speaking skills for college students is vital in improving their communication abilities and reducing anxiety. Fundamental approaches include incorporating public speaking into the curriculum, offering constructive feedback, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere.

Public speaking plays a critical role in fostering essential skills such as critical thinking and cross-cultural communication, which are increasingly important for today's college students (Li, 2023). Mastery of speaking not only enhances academic success but also equips students for professional environments (Perse, 2024). Moreover, best practices were recommended to address the difficulties college students face when starting college or are already in college.

Positive Reinforcement. Instructors should provide encouraging feedback to boost students' confidence, an essential factor for success and retention in public speaking courses (Weismann *et al.*, 2018; Pertiwi, 2019).

Peer Feedback Workshops. Involving students in peer evaluations fosters a collaborative learning environment, which helps to alleviate anxiety (Weismann *et al.*, 2018).

Low-Stakes Assignments. These assignments allow students to practice public speaking in a less stressful setting, helping them build confidence over time (Weismann *et al.*, 2018).

Technological Integration. The integration of online resources into public speaking courses can enhance student engagement and strengthen their communication skills, ultimately making learning more accessible (Dan & Yan, 2020).

While these strategies are highly effective, there is always room to enhance student support. For those who continue to struggle with anxiety,

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personalized guidance and additional resources can provide a valuable opportunity to overcome their challenges and thrive. Tailored interventions can make a significant difference, helping each student develop confidence and succeed in their public speaking journey (Plandano *et al.*, 2023).

Public speaking sharpens comprehension and critical thinking.

Public speaking is a powerful tool for sharpening students' comprehension and critical thinking skills. Through active participation in public speaking, students not only learn to communicate more clearly and confidently but are also driven to critically assess and organize their thoughts in a more structured and meaningful way.

Critical thinking development. Public speaking courses promote reflective thinking and genre analysis, enabling students to improve their ability to organize and express their ideas effectively (Ramos, 2020). Assignments such as forum discussions and presentations are instrumental in fostering intellectual skills, such as fair-mindedness and intellectual integrity, which are essential for success in both academic and professional settings. *Comprehension Enhancement.* Incorporating public speaking into college curricula has been shown to improve oral communication skills while deepening students' overall understanding of course content (Li, 2023). Techniques such as structuring arguments and employing persuasive language help students grasp complex topics more effectively (Taman *et al.*, 2024). While some argue that public speaking may only enhance critical thinking for some students due to differences in individual engagement and prior experience, the general trend points to a positive connection between public speaking and the development of cognitive skills.

Public Speaking builds leadership.

Furthermore, effective leadership is closely linked to solid communication; leaders who

articulate their vision and inspire their teams are better positioned to drive positive change. Public speaking also plays a crucial role in persuasion and negotiation, enabling individuals to influence opinions and achieve goals through engaging storytelling and reasoned arguments. Beyond these professional advantages, public speaking improves personal communication skills by fostering clear expression, active listening, and meaningful connections. It also supports personal development, builds self-confidence, and encourages individuals to step out of their comfort zones, ultimately contributing to their growth and self-assurance.

Professional Oral Communication

In recent years, the shift from face-to-face to digital interactions has led to a gradual decline in essential communication skills, such as expressive intonation, effective nonverbal cues, and the ability to structure clear, logical speech. This transition has created a growing need to address these skills, particularly in educational settings. In the study of Bylkova *et al.* (2021), courses such as Russian Language and Culture of Speech, Business Communications, Copywriting, Business Rhetoric, Corporate Culture, and Professional Language Communication (in both Russian and foreign languages) have been integrated into the curriculum to address these gaps.

These courses aim to teach students the art of rhetoric and public speaking, focusing on speech culture and professionally oriented communication. This approach ensures that students not only develop higher-level verbal and written communication skills but also gain the ability to engage in meaningful, effective exchanges in their future careers (Svetlana *et al.*, 2018).

By embedding these disciplines within the curriculum, educators can help students reclaim and refine communication skills that have been overshadowed by the rise of digital interaction,

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fostering a new generation of articulate, confident professionals.

Many employers in Russia and internationally prioritize hiring candidates with strong oral communication and self-presentation skills. Employees who excel in these areas tend to perform better professionally and often experience rapid career advancement (Prabavathi & Nagasubramani, 2018). Additionally, individuals with strong communication skills are usually more motivated to engage in further training and self-improvement. To nurture these abilities in students, educators must implement targeted teaching methods, such as project-based learning (Hanson *et al.*, 2018). In this approach, students participate in collaborative, creative projects with a shared goal, culminating in a presentation or public speaking event. This process not only hones their communication skills but also prepares them for real-world professional scenarios, where the ability to convey ideas clearly and confidently is essential.

Over the years, experts from various fields—such as linguistics, sociology, and psychology—have examined the complexities of public speaking. Their research has consistently identified challenges in this area and proposed solutions to address them. One of the critical areas of focus has been the impact of speaker anxiety on vocal delivery, which significantly affects the overall success of a speech. Researchers have highlighted the importance of aligning the speaker's gestures with their verbal message, as this non-verbal communication plays a critical role in enhancing the audience's understanding and engagement (Bylkova *et al.*, 2021).

Many scholars also agree that public speaking skills should be introduced early, ideally in primary school. These skills not only help students become effective communicators but also serve as valuable tools for learning and assessing their understanding of academic

material. A crucial component of these speech training programs is addressing the anxiety that children often experience before speaking. Reducing this anxiety allows students to focus on delivering their message confidently. To help students develop these communication skills, specially designed programs—including public speaking training—are used to guide them in preparing and delivering clear, informative speeches (Herbein *et al.*, 2018). These programs are essential in building students' competence and confidence in public speaking, laying the foundation for future success.

Research has shown that the challenges schoolchildren face in preparing public speeches mirror those of college students, with anxiety a common issue when speaking to unfamiliar audiences (Gallego *et al.*, 2020). To improve oral communication skills and reduce this anxiety, it is essential to focus on developing self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their abilities and their capacity to organize and execute actions needed to achieve desired performance outcomes (McNatt, 2019). Self-efficacy is critical in empowering students to overcome the fear of public speaking and perform confidently.

Additionally, studies have highlighted the importance of strong oral communication and presentation skills in the workplace. Employers consistently rank these skills as critical factors when considering candidates for a job, as employees with practical communication abilities tend to achieve higher productivity and experience tremendous career success (Bylkova, 2020). This underscores the need for educational institutions to prioritize the development of public speaking skills, as it benefits students academically and significantly enhances their employability and long-term career prospects.

Gap and Synthesis of the Study

Despite the breadth of existing literature, much of the discussion on public speaking remains descriptive, often cataloguing skills, challenges,

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and teaching strategies without clearly connecting how these elements interact within specific learning contexts. While prior studies consistently identify anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and gaps in fluency, organization, and nonverbal communication as persistent concerns, they stop short of explaining how these lived challenges shape students' actual experiences in developing speaking competence, particularly in EFL classrooms. This leaves an important gap: a limited understanding of how

students make sense of their struggles, adapt to instructional practices, and gradually build confidence over time. Addressing this deficiency requires moving beyond generalized accounts toward a more experience-centered perspective. Hence, this study adopts a narrative inquiry approach to capture and examine students' personal stories, offering a more grounded and nuanced account of how public speaking skills are formed, negotiated, and transformed within real classroom settings.

2. Materials and Methods

This chapter presents the research design, research locale, respondents, research instruments, data-gathering procedure, and statistical tools.

2.1 Research design

Researchers employing qualitative research designs focus on uncovering complex, real-world phenomena that are often difficult to grasp through traditional quantitative approaches (Tenny et al., 2022). This method allows for a deeper exploration of participants' attitudes, behaviors, and lived experiences, revealing insights that numbers alone may overlook. In the present study, a brief quantitative survey using Likert-scale items was initially administered as a preliminary needs assessment to identify students' baseline perceptions of the importance and challenges of public speaking. The results of this survey were not treated as primary data for statistical analysis; rather, they served as a guiding tool in refining the focus of the inquiry and in developing prompts for the narrative data collection.

The main phase of the study remained firmly qualitative, utilizing a narrative inquiry approach to capture students' personal accounts and meaning-making processes. The flexibility of qualitative research, with its open, non-linear framework, enabled participants to express their thoughts and emotions more freely, thereby enriching the depth of the data. In examining

college students' perspectives on public speaking instruction, this approach facilitated the emergence of themes and patterns that can inform more responsive teaching strategies and instructional materials.

By prioritizing participants' voices while being informed by an initial needs assessment, the study offers a balanced yet methodologically coherent approach. This integration ensures that the research remains grounded in authentic student experiences while still being responsive to identified learning needs, ultimately supporting the development of more student-centered public speaking instruction.

2.2 Research Locale

The research was conducted in Region XII, specifically in North Cotabato, a province centrally located in Mindanao, Philippines. Known for its rich cultural diversity and vibrant agricultural economy, North Cotabato is home to several public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). These institutions, primarily located in urban areas such as Kidapawan City—the provincial capital—and municipalities like Midsayap, Kabacan, and Matalam, are integral to the region's educational framework. They offer diverse academic programs and serve as essential hubs for both scholarly and community development, making them key contributors to the province's progress. This focus provides an intriguing landscape for

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researchers interested in the intersection of education, culture, and regional development.

2.3 Participants and Sampling

The study engaged twelve (12) college student participants drawn from a pool of 175 individuals who met the established inclusion criteria. Selection was guided by data saturation, with participants taking part in in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). These students served as the primary data source, as their lived experiences and perspectives provided meaningful insights into the concerns and needs of the student population under study. Rather than aiming for numerical representation, the study prioritized depth and richness of information, which is central to qualitative inquiry.

The sample size of twelve was considered adequate, as recurring patterns and themes began to emerge during data collection, indicating that sufficient depth had been achieved. This aligns with existing qualitative research guidance suggesting that saturation can be reached with relatively small, focused samples when the research problem is clearly defined (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

A purposive sampling strategy, specifically criterion-based sampling, was employed to ensure that all participants met the predefined characteristics relevant to the study. This approach enabled the inclusion of individuals whose experiences directly aligned with the research objectives, thereby strengthening the data's relevance and credibility. As noted by Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024), criterion-based sampling is particularly appropriate for studies in which the accuracy and trustworthiness of participants' perspectives are essential.

By carefully selecting participants who met the established criteria, the study ensured that the data collected meaningfully represented the target student group, thereby enhancing the overall rigor and contribution of the research.

2.4 Data Collection

The researchers personally oversee the data collection process, following a structured series of steps to ensure the study is conducted smoothly and ethically. First, once the research instruments have been validated, approval and endorsement were secured from the institution's research director. Following this, formal requests were sent to selected public and private schools in North Cotabato to obtain permission for the study. Upon approval, the researchers coordinated with school supervisors to schedule data collection at a time that would not interfere with regular activities while also allowing ample time to guide participants through the instructions for the interview-based questionnaire.

Prior to data collection, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation. Only those who provided written consent were included in the study. Confidentiality is paramount, and the researchers ensured that respondents' identities remained anonymous throughout the study. Signatures on the consent forms were collected well in advance of data collection to ensure that recruitment is free from any coercion or undue influence. Once the data collection was complete, the researchers encoded, transcribed, translated, and thoroughly analyzed the information.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researchers employed the Colaizzi method to analyze participants' interview responses with an interpretivist approach. This method is a structured approach to thematic analysis known for its focus on capturing the essence of participants' experiences. Its alignment with the broader framework of thematic analysis highlights its flexibility and accessibility in qualitative research (Saunders *et al.*, 2023).

The Colaizzi method involves key steps: familiarizing oneself with the data, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings,

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clustering themes, and returning to participants for validation. This iterative process ensures the analysis remains grounded in the participants' perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. Integrating this approach with Braun and Clarke's systematic framework for thematic analysis further enables researchers to identify and interpret patterns in qualitative data, adapt the method to various research contexts, and ensure its relevance to specific research questions (Squires, 2023). While the Colaizzi method provides a rigorous approach to thematic analysis, it is also important to recognize the potential value of other qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory or interpretative phenomenological analysis, which may offer different insights depending on the research objectives.

Furthermore, data triangulation was used in this research to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings by combining multiple data sources or methods. This helps capture diverse perspectives and validate conclusions, especially in complex or multicultural settings (Megawati & Apriani, 2023). It is valuable in fields like education and healthcare for cross-verifying data (Brittain & Carrington, 2024). However, while it provides a richer understanding, triangulation can also present challenges, such as ensuring methodological rigor (Stoll, 2024) and managing conflicting interpretations that may complicate the research process.

The researchers employed the following process to apply the data triangulation successfully:

Collecting information from a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents, or employing multiple methods, like focus groups, to gather a wide range of perspectives.

Engage in cross-verification by comparing and contrasting the data to uncover consistent patterns and identify any discrepancies.

Integrating these diverse data sets to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Validation is achieved by using the triangulated data to support findings and conclusions, ensuring that they are credible, well-supported, and robust.

2.6 Research Instrument

This study primarily employed a narrative inquiry design, with a supportive quantitative component used solely for needs analysis in public speaking. Two instruments were utilized to ensure a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences and instructional needs.

The first instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which served as the main data-gathering tool. It was composed of core questions and follow-up probes designed to elicit detailed narratives on students' lived experiences in public speaking contexts, including their perceived difficulties, emotional responses, coping strategies, and communicative behaviors. The development of the interview guide was anchored on Rhetoric Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, and Communication Apprehension Theory. Content validation was conducted through expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and theoretical alignment.

The second instrument was a researcher-made survey questionnaire, used strictly as a supporting tool for needs analysis. It was developed based on the initial qualitative findings to quantify and further validate the observed patterns in learners' public speaking competencies. The survey consisted of 34 Likert-scale items grouped into five domains: Speaking Confidence and Fluency, Speech Planning and Expression, Listening and Interaction Skills, Visual and Multimedia Support, and Motivation and Engagement in Public Speaking.

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Before its full administration, the survey instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts in language education and research methodology, focusing on item clarity, construct relevance, and alignment with identified qualitative themes. Revisions were made in response to their recommendations to improve precision and readability.

The instrument was then subjected to pilot testing involving 30 respondents who were not part of the main study. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded an overall reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.91$, indicating excellent internal consistency. This confirms that the instrument is reliable for assessing learners' public speaking needs across the identified domains.

2.7 Ethical Practices

In recent years, ethical considerations across contexts—such as healthcare, artificial intelligence, and data mining—have highlighted the importance of informed consent, fairness, and accountability.

Informed consent was obtained through a formal letter, authorized by the institutional directors of research, that approved the investigation. Participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives and procedures via email and provided their consent to participate. To ensure transparency, copies of the findings were shared with all contributors to the research and its conclusion.

Vulnerability of research participants. The study involved students from various courses at public and private colleges in North Cotabato, who were invited to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, with the option to accept or decline the invitation, thereby respecting their rights and addressing their vulnerability.

Ethical challenges in healthcare. Research is multifaceted, requiring careful navigation of issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of vulnerable populations (Streiner *et al.*, 2024).

Data Mining Ethics. In the realm of data mining, ethical considerations encompass data privacy, informed consent, and the potential for algorithmic bias, underscoring the importance of transparency and robust regulatory frameworks to uphold trust in data-driven research (Dubey *et al.*, 2024). Although existing literature underscores the necessity of strong ethical frameworks, there is concern that the rapid pace of technological advancements may outstrip current guidelines, leading to unforeseen consequences in practice.

2.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

The researchers took rigorous measures throughout the study to minimize or eliminate potential biases and distortions in the results, thereby enhancing the study's trustworthiness. Four key factors support the study's credibility: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility. The researchers meticulously followed standard procedures appropriate to the study's design and context. The researchers were trained to analyze the participants' responses thematically, drawing from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, the interview-based questions, designed by the researchers, were validated by experts to ensure reliable data collection and thematic analysis.

Confirmability. The researchers ensured confirmability by meticulously summarizing the content of each question asked during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, highlighting overlapping themes without bias. The detailed, comprehensive interviews were enriched with vivid descriptions, enabling participants to perceive the findings objectively. This approach added depth and transparency,

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ensuring that all contributions were valued and accurately reflected in the results.

Transferability. This study's findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts or settings. In qualitative research, it is primarily the researcher's responsibility to ensure such generalizability. In this study, the researchers meticulously described the methods and sampling techniques, the data sources, data collection instruments, study procedures, and data analysis to enhance transferability. Prior to data collection and analysis, the researchers obtained approval from relevant public and private institutions to conduct the study. They also ensured that participants gave informed

consent to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, reinforcing the study's ethical standards.

Dependability. In this study, the researchers establish dependability by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail that documents all decisions and processes throughout the research. To further ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings, an external auditor was engaged during the later phase of the study to review and verify the process logs, including transcripts, methodology, and results. This approach provides a rigorous check on the study's procedures, reinforcing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

3. Results

The results and discussion are presented through a narrative analysis, integrating quantitative findings and qualitative insights to provide a

comprehensive understanding of learners' public speaking competencies, experiences, and development needs.

Table 1.1 Learners' Public Speaking Competency Needs Analysis.

Category	Items	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Agreement Level
<i>Speaking Confidence & Fluency</i>	1	I feel confident speaking in front of a group.	2.95	0.60	Evident	Agree
	2	I can organize my ideas clearly when giving a speech or presentation.	3.10	0.52	Evident	Agree
	3	I can maintain fluency and avoid long pauses when speaking publicly.	3.05	0.55	Evident	Agree
	4	I can adjust my tone, volume, and body language to engage listeners.	3.08	0.50	Evident	Agree
	5	I can respond appropriately to questions or feedback during a discussion.	3.15	0.49	Evident	Agree

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	6*	I feel nervous or anxious when speaking in front of native speakers or fluent audiences.	2.80	0.66	Evident (reverse-coded)	Agree
Category Mean			3.05	0.55	Evident	Agree
<i>Speech Planning & Expression</i>	7	I can plan my speech before presenting to make it organized.	3.14	0.50	Evident	Agree
	8	I can choose words that best convey my ideas when speaking publicly.	3.12	0.52	Evident	Agree
	9	I can summarize my ideas concisely during presentations.	3.18	0.49	Evident	Agree
	10	I can use storytelling or examples to make my presentation interesting.	3.20	0.47	Evident	Agree
	11	I can revise my speech or talking points to improve clarity and impact.	3.10	0.52	Evident	Agree
	12*	I often struggle to find the right words when speaking publicly.	2.90	0.60	Evident (reverse-coded)	Agree
Category Mean			3.11	0.52	Evident	Agree
<i>Listening & Interaction Skills</i>	13	I can understand questions and comments from the audience.	3.25	0.46	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
	14	I can follow discussions during meetings or Q&A sessions.	3.08	0.55	Evident	Agree
	15	I can adapt my speech based on audience reactions or feedback.	3.12	0.52	Evident	Agree

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	16	I can recognize different accents or speaking styles in an audience.	3.00	0.57	Evident	Agree
	17	I can take mental notes to respond appropriately during discussions.	3.05	0.58	Evident	Agree
	18*	I find it difficult to understand fast or complex questions from the audience.	2.85	0.65	Evident (reverse-coded)	Agree
<i>Visual & Multimedia Support</i>	19	I can integrate slides or visuals effectively into my presentations.	3.25	0.46	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
	20	I can explain charts, graphs, or diagrams clearly to my audience.	3.28	0.44	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
Category Mean			3.06	0.55	Evident	Agree
	21	I can combine spoken words with multimedia to enhance understanding.	3.27	0.43	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
	22	I can interpret body language and reactions from the audience to adjust the audience's delivery.	3.20	0.48	Evident	Agree
	23	I feel confident evaluating the effectiveness of my visual aids.	3.22	0.45	Evident	Agree
	24*	I feel nervous using technology or multimedia during presentations.	2.80	0.66	Evident (reverse-code)	Agree
Category Mean			3.21	0.49	Evident-Highly Evident	Agree
<i>Motivation & Engagement in Public Speaking</i>	25	I enjoy opportunities to speak publicly in class or community settings.	3.40	0.38	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree

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26	I prefer interactive activities, like debates or role-plays, to improve speaking skills.	3.35	0.40	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
27	I am motivated to practice public speaking regularly.	3.38	0.39	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
28	I like using real-life scenarios to prepare speeches or presentations.	3.36	0.41	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
29	I feel engaged when learning through multimedia or storytelling.	3.45	0.37	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
30	I enjoy receiving constructive feedback to improve my public speaking skills.	3.48	0.36	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
31	I like exercises that allow me to share my personal experiences in public speaking.	3.44	0.37	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
32	I prefer learning materials that reflect my culture and community.	3.32	0.41	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
33	I feel confident using humor or storytelling to engage my audience.	3.50	0.35	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
34	I enjoy mixing different media types, such as audio, video, and visuals, in my speeches.	3.27	0.43	Highly Evident	Strongly Agree
Category Mean		3.39	0.39	<i>Highly Evident</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
Overall Total Mean		3.16	0.48	<i>Evident- Highly Evident</i>	<i>Agree</i>

In Table 1, the results reveal that learners demonstrate moderate to high competency in public speaking skills, with an overall mean of

3.16 (SD = 0.48), interpreted as Evident–Highly Evident. This suggests that students have a solid foundation in English language skills, which is

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essential for developing public speaking skills. The relatively low standard deviation indicates consistency across learners, suggesting that the majority share similar strengths and challenges in public speaking-related competencies.

Speaking Confidence & Fluency shows a mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.55), indicating that students generally feel confident in public speaking but still experience mild anxiety, particularly when addressing native speakers or fluent audiences (reverse-coded item 6). This aligns with Communication Apprehension Theory (McCroskey, 1970), which posits that fear or anxiety in public speaking arises from audience size, context, and personal traits. Despite these mild stressors, learners maintain the ability to organize ideas, adjust tone and body language, and respond appropriately during discussions, indicating a foundation for further confidence-building interventions.

Speech Planning & Expression yielded a mean of 3.11 (SD = 0.52), showing that learners are capable of planning, organizing, and expressing ideas effectively. However, minor difficulties in word retrieval (reverse-coded item 12) highlight a specific need for vocabulary enrichment and guided practice in spontaneous speech. This finding supports the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), as students who perceive a gap between their current skills and desired speaking proficiency are internally motivated to improve. Their awareness of this gap can be leveraged to enhance engagement in activities like rehearsal, peer feedback, and scaffolded speaking exercises.

Listening & Interaction Skills reports a mean of 3.06 (SD = 0.55), suggesting that learners are generally competent in understanding questions, adapting to feedback, and engaging with the audience. The reverse-coded item 18 indicates that some students struggle with rapid or complex audience queries, underscoring the need for targeted training in listening comprehension under real-time conditions.

These findings reinforce previous literature (Astriani et al., 2023; Megawati & Apriani, 2023) and highlight that listening skills are crucial for effective public speaking, particularly in EFL contexts, where comprehension challenges may exacerbate anxiety.

Visual & Multimedia Support shows a mean of 3.21 (SD = 0.49), demonstrating that learners are proficient in integrating visual aids, slides, and multimedia into presentations. The reverse-coded item 24 suggests occasional nervousness when handling technology, indicating that practical exposure and confidence-building exercises with multimedia tools are necessary. These results support the literature on the importance of multimedia literacy in public speaking (Ningsih et al., 2023) and highlight opportunities to reinforce skills.

Motivation & Engagement in Public Speaking yielded the highest mean of 3.39 (SD = 0.39), revealing that students are highly motivated and engaged. They prefer interactive, culturally relevant, and multimedia-supported activities such as debates, storytelling, and role-plays. This is consistent with findings by Dan & Yan (2020) and Li (2023), which stress that engagement and interest significantly influence language learning and skill development. High motivation levels provide a strong platform for designing interventions that are both participatory and skill-enhancing.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through multiple frameworks:

Rhetorical Theory (Aristotle and Burke). Learners' competence in fluency, clarity, and multimedia use supports the development of ethos, logos, and pathos in their speeches. Their ability to combine verbal and visual strategies aligns with Burke's emphasis on ethical, empathetic, and audience-centered communication (MacCarron, 2021). *Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957).* The minor gaps in vocabulary retrieval and situational

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anxiety create internal dissonance, motivating learners to engage in deliberate practice to refine both content and delivery. Awareness of this discrepancy drives skill improvement, reinforcing growth-oriented interventions.

Communication Apprehension Theory (McCroskey, 1970). Reverse-coded items highlight areas of mild anxiety, demonstrating that even competent learners may experience stress when performing in front of audiences or using unfamiliar tools. Structured interventions such as rehearsal, low-stakes presentations, and relaxation techniques can mitigate these challenges. In conclusion, the overall analysis confirms that learners are well-prepared for public speaking tasks but benefit from targeted

interventions to reduce anxiety, improve access to vocabulary, enhance rapid listening comprehension, and build technological confidence.

The combination of strong foundational skills and high motivation suggests that instructional strategies incorporating interactive activities, multimedia integration, culturally relevant content, and scaffolded practice will maximize learners' public speaking competence. These findings both support and extend existing literature on public speaking and EFL development, demonstrating that while learners are equipped with essential skills, strategic instructional design is necessary to address the remaining challenges effectively.

Table 1.2 Overall Public Speaking Competency.

Overall Mean	Overall SD	Cohen's Interpretation	General Interpretation
3.16	0.49	<i>Evident-Highly Evident</i>	Learners show good overall public speaking skills, with strengths in motivation, multimedia use, and speech planning. Minor anxiety or nervousness persists in speaking in front of fluent or unfamiliar audiences.

Based on the overall results in Table 1.2, the learners obtained a mean of 3.16 with a standard deviation of 0.49, which is interpreted as Evident-Highly Evident according to Cohen's scale. This indicates that, as a group, learners demonstrate good overall public speaking skills. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that these competencies are consistent across most students, with few extreme variations in performance or confidence levels.

The findings show that learners' strengths lie in motivation, multimedia use, and speech planning. Students exhibit high engagement when performing public speaking tasks, preferring interactive activities, culturally relevant examples, and the use of slides, charts, or other visual aids to enhance communication.

This aligns with the existing literature, which emphasizes that motivation and engagement are critical factors for effective language learning and public speaking proficiency (Dan & Yan, 2020; Li, 2023). High scores in planning and structuring speeches reflect learners' ability to organize ideas, summarize points concisely, and apply storytelling or examples to make presentations effective. Despite these strengths, the data also highlight minor challenges. Learners reported some anxiety and nervousness when speaking in front of fluent or unfamiliar audiences, as indicated by reverse-coded items. This aligns with Communication Apprehension Theory (McCroskey, 1970), which posits that even competent speakers may experience fear or stress in public speaking situations depending on the audience, context, and perceived

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expectations. Additionally, occasional difficulties with vocabulary retrieval and rapid listening comprehension suggest that targeted interventions are needed to address these gaps, consistent with Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), in which recognition of skill gaps motivates learners to improve.

From a theoretical perspective, learners' ability to integrate verbal and visual elements, adjust delivery, and maintain fluency supports the application of Rhetorical Theory (Aristotle and Burke). Their skills provide the foundation to build ethos, pathos, and logos, while also encouraging ethical and audience-aware communication. Meanwhile, their awareness of remaining challenges—such as nervousness and

minor fluency gaps—creates productive tension that can drive growth and skill refinement. In summary, the overall findings indicate that learners are well-prepared to perform public speaking tasks, possessing a solid foundation in speech planning, multimedia use, and motivational engagement. The areas requiring further development include anxiety management, vocabulary access during real-time delivery, and coping with fast or unfamiliar audience interactions. This overall competency profile highlights the need for a structured, skills-focused public speaking curriculum that leverages learners' strengths while addressing specific challenges through guided practice, interactive activities, and supportive feedback mechanisms

Table 2. Students' Experiences, Challenges, and Successes in Learning Public Speaking.

Main Theme	Global Theme	Significant Statements	Interpretive Idea
<i>Anxiety and Fear as Primary Barriers</i>	<i>Emotional Barriers to Speaking</i>	<i>“Naunahan ka ng kaba kaysa confidence”</i> (Fear comes before confidence) IDI_P2	Anxiety is the most dominant factor that limits performance and disrupts cognition (e.g., mental block, distraction).
		<i>“Naba-blackout ako”</i> (I experience mental blackout) FGD_P4, P6	
		<i>“Parang nagsha-shaking... hindi alam sasabihin”</i> (Shaking and unsure what to say) IDI_P5	
		<i>“Hiya at pressure nakakalimot”</i> (Shyness and pressure cause forgetting) FGD_P9, P11, P12	
		<i>“Fear of judgment of the crowd”</i> IDI_P1	

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<i>Language and Confidence Difficulties</i>	<i>Linguistic and Self-Efficacy Challenges</i>	<i>“Language difficulties... English speaking”</i> FGD_P1, P7, P10, P5	Language proficiency and self-confidence are interconnected barriers affecting clarity and delivery.
		<i>“Mag stutter... hindi prepared”</i> (Stuttering due to lack of preparation)	
		IDI_P8	
		<i>“Low confidence speaking in front of many people”</i>	
		FGD_P1, P3, P9	
		<i>“Deep words difficult to express”</i>	
		IDI_P7	
		<i>“Nawawala confidence pag kinakabahan”</i> (Confidence lost due to nervousness)	
		IDI_P4	
<i>Defining Success through Confidence and Audience Connection</i>	<i>Outcome-Based Perception of Success</i>	<i>“Speaking clearly and confidently”</i>	Success is perceived not only as performance but as internal growth and audience impact.
		FGD_P1, P9, P12	
		<i>“Connected sa audience”</i> (Connected to audience)	
		IDI_P2	
		<i>“Naiintindihan ng listeners”</i> (Audience understands message) FGD_P7, P8, P10	
		<i>“Reduced nervousness shows improvement”</i> IDI_P9	
		<i>“Achieving personal goals in speaking”</i> IDI_P3	

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<i>Experience Builds Confidence and Engagement</i>	<i>Experiential Learning and Skill Development</i>	<i>“Nasasanay pinapasalita”</i> (Becomes used to speaking through practice) FGD_P9, P2, P10, P1 <i>“Practice and activities increase confidence”</i> FGD_P1, P2, P6, P8, P10 <i>“Supportive peers and teachers help”</i> IDI_P1 <i>“From nervous to confident through engagement”</i> IDI_P2 <i>“Exposure (e.g., reporting, advocacy) improves skills”</i> FGD_P11, P12	Repeated exposure and participation foster gradual confidence and competence.
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The findings presented in Table 2 reflect a pattern already familiar in both local and international discussions of public speaking, but what makes them compelling is their clear grounding in the students' lived experiences. Their statements do not simply confirm theory—they give it texture, showing how these ideas are actually felt and negotiated in real classroom situations.

At the center of the students' experiences is anxiety, which appears not as a minor obstacle but as the starting point of their engagement with public speaking. Expressions such as *“naunahan ka ng kaba kaysa confidence”* and *“naba-blackout ako”* point to a disruption that is both emotional and cognitive. This aligns closely with McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory, which explains that fear in speaking contexts is shaped by audience presence, perceived evaluation, and individual traits.

What the data adds, however, is the immediacy of this experience: students from the various

institutions in the Cotabato province do not describe anxiety as something abstract, but as something that physically interrupts their thinking—shaking, forgetting, and losing control of their speech. In this sense, anxiety is not just a feeling; it actively interferes with performance. This supports existing studies (Megawati & Apriani, 2023; Plandano et al., 2023) that link high anxiety with low speaking performance. However, the findings also suggest that anxiety is not purely a limitation. When viewed through the lens of Cognitive Dissonance Theory, the discomfort students feel may also function as a trigger for change. The gap between how they currently perform and how they believe they should perform creates tension. Statements such as experiencing nervousness but gradually improving imply that this discomfort pushes them toward preparation and participation. In other words, anxiety does not disappear first before improvement happens; rather, improvement often begins while anxiety is still present.

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Alongside emotional barriers, linguistic and confidence-related difficulties shape the students' speaking experiences. The recurring mention of "*language difficulties*," "*stuttering*," and inability to express "*deep words*" reflects a common issue in EFL contexts, where language proficiency and self-confidence are closely tied. The students' accounts reinforce the idea that difficulty with English is not just technical but psychological, and is very common even in regional areas in the Philippines, specifically in Cotabato province. When they struggle to find words, their confidence drops; when confidence drops, their delivery weakens. This circular relationship is supported by Astriani et al. (2023), but the present findings make it more explicit: students are aware of this cycle and can describe how quickly confidence collapses once anxiety sets in.

At the same time, these challenges complicate the assumptions of Rhetorical Theory. Aristotle's ethos, pathos, and logos depend on a speaker's ability to present ideas clearly and persuasively. However, the students' experiences show that before they can even think about persuasion or audience appeal, they are dealing with more basic concerns—remembering what to say, managing fear, and forming sentences. This suggests that in this context, rhetorical competence develops only after a certain level of linguistic and emotional stability is achieved. Burke's perspective, which emphasizes identification and empathy, appears more applicable here. Students define success not only as speaking well but as being understood and connected to the audience, "*naiintindihan ng listeners*" and "*connected sa audience*." These responses show that students value communication as a shared process rather than a one-sided performance.

Their definition of success further shifts the focus from technical performance to personal growth. While clarity and confidence remain important, success is also measured by reduced nervousness and the achievement of personal

goals. This finding both supports and extends existing literature. While studies such as Jhangiani (2023) emphasize effectiveness and influence, students highlight internal progress as equally meaningful. Improvement is not judged solely by external standards but by changes in how they feel about speaking. This suggests that public speaking education should not rely only on performance-based metrics but also consider psychological development.

The most consistent counterpoint to anxiety in the data is experience. Students repeatedly mention that confidence develops through practice—"*nasasanay habang pinapasalita*" and "*practice and activities increase confidence*." This strongly aligns with experiential learning principles and reinforces the recommendations found in Dufner (2022) and Pawar & Anscombe (2022). However, what stands out in the findings is that practice is effective not simply because it improves skill, but because it normalizes the experience of speaking. Repeated exposure reduces the unfamiliarity of the situation, which in turn reduces fear. Equally important is the role of social support. The mention of "*supportive peers and teachers*" highlights that confidence is not developed in isolation. This supports Weismann et al. (2018), who emphasize collaborative and low-stakes environments, but the findings suggest something more relational: students gain confidence when they feel that the classroom is a safe space for mistakes. This reflects Burke's idea of rhetoric as a form of identification—students become more willing to speak when they feel understood rather than judged.

Interestingly, the findings also reflect broader shifts noted in the literature regarding post-pandemic learning environments. In Cotabato province, the difficulty in speaking may partly be due to reduced face-to-face interaction in previous years, wherein students in junior and senior high school were found to be the most challenging years due to limited

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technological support and no speaking engagements or exposure. They are more likely to be introverted or even develop anxiety about all their competencies, which has weakened their spontaneous communication skills. The students' need for repeated exposure and structured activities supports the argument that confidence must be rebuilt through intentional classroom practices.

Overall, the results do not contradict existing theories but refine them. Communication apprehension theory explains why students feel anxious, cognitive dissonance explains how that discomfort can lead to growth, and rhetorical

theory explains what effective speaking looks like. However, the students' experiences show that these processes do not occur in neat stages. Anxiety, difficulty, practice, and improvement happen simultaneously and often unevenly.

What emerges from this study is a more grounded view of the development of public speaking. It is not a straightforward progression from fear to confidence, but a continuous negotiation between emotional barriers, language limitations, and repeated experience. Students do not wait until they are ready—they become ready by going through the discomfort, often with the support of others.

Table 3. Perceived Effective Learning Strategies for Public Speaking Development.

Main Theme	Global Theme	Significant Statements	Interpretive Idea
<i>Practice as the Core Strategy</i>	<i>Repetitive Skill Development</i>	<i>"Practice makes better/perfect"</i> FGD_P7, P8, P10, P6	Continuous and varied practice is the most essential strategy for building confidence and fluency.
		<i>"Practice sessions reduce anxiety"</i> IDI_P4	
		<i>"Mirror practice helps self-evaluation"</i> IDI_P4	
		<i>"Reading and watching improve speaking"</i> IDI_P5	
<i>Collaborative Learning (Group Work & Peer Support)</i>	<i>Social Learning Environment</i>	<i>"Gestures and delivery practice"</i> IDI_P3	Learning with peers creates a safe space that enhances confidence and participation.
		<i>"Group work reduces kaba (fear)"</i> FGD_P2, P3, P8, P9	
		<i>"Hindi nag-iisa (not alone)"</i> IDI_P2	
		<i>"Peer interaction builds confidence"</i> IDI_P1	

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		<i>“Practice with friends is effective”</i> IDI_P8	
		<i>“Support system improves engagement”</i> IDI_P7	
<i>Constructive Feedback for Improvement</i>	<i>Feedback-Driven Learning</i>	<i>“Constructive and specific feedback is effective”</i> FGD_P10, P11, P12	Feedback serves as a critical mechanism for identifying weaknesses and guiding improvement.
		<i>“Direct but meaningful feedback”</i> IDI_P2	
		<i>“Feedback shows areas to improve”</i> FGD_P8, P10, P5	
		<i>“Positive and negative feedback both help”</i> IDI_P1	
		<i>“Timely feedback improves performance”</i> IDI_P1	
<i>Supportive and Low-Pressure Environment</i>	<i>Psychological Safety in Learning</i>	<i>“Supportive, non-judgmental environment”</i> FGD_P1, P9, P10, P8, P7	A psychologically safe environment significantly enhances confidence, participation, and skill acquisition.
		<i>“Calm and comfortable setting”</i> IDI_P2	
		<i>“Less pressure improves performance”</i> FGD_P5, P9	
		<i>“Guidance from teachers/mentors”</i> IDI_P4	
		<i>“More interactive speaking opportunities”</i> IDI_P2	

The findings in Table 3 point to something very grounded in actual classroom experience: students do not become better speakers through theory alone, but through repeated exposure, social support, and guided correction within a

safe environment. What is striking is how closely the participants’ accounts reflect what happens in real speaking situations, especially in contexts where anxiety and language limitations

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are present, such as in many Philippine classrooms, especially in Cotabato province.

At the center of the findings is practice as a lived routine rather than a formal requirement. When participants repeatedly stated that “*practice makes better*” and that “*practice sessions reduce anxiety*,” they were not referring to abstract improvement but to a gradual shift in their experience of speaking. In actual situations, the first attempt is often marked by hesitation, mental blocks, and physical signs of anxiety. However, as one participant shared, even something as simple as mirror practice allowed them to notice their own gestures, facial expressions, and delivery.

This aligns with Ningsih et al. (2023), who emphasized that speaking is not limited to verbal output but includes gestures and overall delivery. What the findings add, however, is that students become aware of these elements not only through instruction but also through repeated self-exposure. This supports the idea that fluency and confidence are built over time, but it also challenges the assumption that practice must always be structured (Dewi, 2024). In this case, informal strategies like watching videos or practicing alone already contribute to improvement. From a theoretical standpoint, this pattern is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory. Students are aware of the gap between how they currently speak and how they want to perform. That discomfort—often felt as *kaba* or nervousness—pushes them to practice more. The process is not always comfortable, but it is productive. Instead of avoiding speaking tasks, students gradually confront them, reducing the dissonance between their actual and desired performance. In this sense, practice is not just repetition; it is a response to internal tension.

The role of collaborative learning further shows that public speaking development is not an individual process. Statements such as “*hindi nag-iisa*” and “*group work reduces kaba*” reveal how students experience relief when

speaking is shared with others. In actual classroom settings, speaking in front of peers who are facing the same difficulty creates a different atmosphere than in formal presentations. The fear of judgment becomes more manageable because the audience is perceived as supportive rather than critical. This supports McCroskey’s communication apprehension theory, where anxiety is influenced by audience and context. When the environment becomes familiar and less formal, anxiety decreases, allowing students to participate more actively.

At the same time, these findings reinforce social learning perspectives found in the literature, particularly the emphasis on peer interaction (Weismann et al., 2018). However, the data suggest something more specific: it is not just interaction that matters, but the sense of shared struggle. Students from Cotabato province gain confidence not simply because they are working in groups, but because they realize others are nervous as well, making the experience feel more normal. This slightly shifts the focus from collaboration as a strategy to collaboration as emotional support. Feedback is another critical element, but the participants’ descriptions highlight the importance of how it is delivered. Phrases like “*direct but meaningful*” and “*positive and negative feedback both help*” suggest that students do not reject criticism; instead, they value it when it is clear and actionable. In practice, vague comments such as “*improve your delivery*” are less helpful than specific guidance on what to adjust. This supports Dufner’s (2022) claim that detailed feedback improves performance, but the findings also indicate that timing matters. When feedback is given immediately after a speaking task, students can still recall their performance, making the corrections more meaningful.

This process can also be viewed through Burke’s rhetorical theory. Feedback encourages self-reflection, allowing students to examine not just what they said but how they affected their

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audience. Over time, this develops a more conscious approach to speaking, where students begin to consider ethos, pathos, and logos in their delivery, even if they do not explicitly label them. In this way, feedback becomes a bridge between technical improvement and rhetorical awareness.

Perhaps the most consistent theme across the findings is the importance of a supportive and low-pressure environment. Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for a “*non-judgmental*” and “*comfortable*” setting. In real terms, this reflects classrooms where mistakes are treated as part of learning rather than failure.

When pressure is reduced, students are more willing to take risks, such as speaking spontaneously or experimenting with delivery styles. This supports existing literature on low-stakes speaking tasks (Weismann et al., 2018), but the findings go further, showing that psychological safety is not merely a supporting condition—it is central to participation. This directly connects to communication apprehension theory.

Anxiety does not disappear entirely, but it becomes manageable when the environment changes. The presence of supportive peers, approachable instructors, and interactive activities transforms speaking from a high-risk task into a learning opportunity. In the Philippine context, where fear of embarrassment (*hiya*) often shapes classroom behavior, this

Intervention Designed Framework

The findings of the study reveal that many college students continue to struggle with public speaking due to persistent anxiety, fear of negative judgment, low confidence, and difficulty organizing and expressing ideas clearly, specifically in Cotabato province. These challenges are not merely individual shortcomings but are shaped by classroom environments that often emphasize performance

finding is particularly relevant. A low-pressure environment reduces the social cost of making mistakes, thereby increasing participation.

When viewed through Aristotle’s rhetorical framework, a supportive environment also allows students to develop credibility (*ethos*) and emotional connection (*pathos*) more naturally. Confidence does not emerge from memorizing techniques but from repeated successful experiences in speaking. As students become more comfortable, their delivery becomes more authentic, making their communication more effective.

Overall, the findings both support and refine existing literature. While previous studies emphasize practice, feedback, and collaboration, this study shows how students experience these elements in real learning contexts. Practice is tied to managing internal discomfort, collaboration is linked to emotional reassurance, feedback is valued for its clarity and timing, and the learning environment shapes the willingness to participate. Rather than functioning as separate strategies, these elements work together to reduce anxiety and gradually build competence.

In essence, public speaking development in this context is not a linear acquisition of skills but a continuous negotiation between fear, effort, and support. Students improve not because the process is easy, but because the environment allows them to persist despite the difficulty

over process, leaving students with few opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive and low-pressure context. As a result, students tend to associate public speaking with stress rather than growth, which affects both their participation and overall learning. Given these realities, there is a clear need for a structured yet flexible intervention that directly responds to students’ lived experiences, gradually builds their confidence, and situates speaking as a meaningful and achievable skill.

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In response, the SPEAK-UP Framework (Student Program for Enhancing Authentic Communication Knowledge) is proposed as a

student-centered intervention to address these gaps through a staged, practical approach.

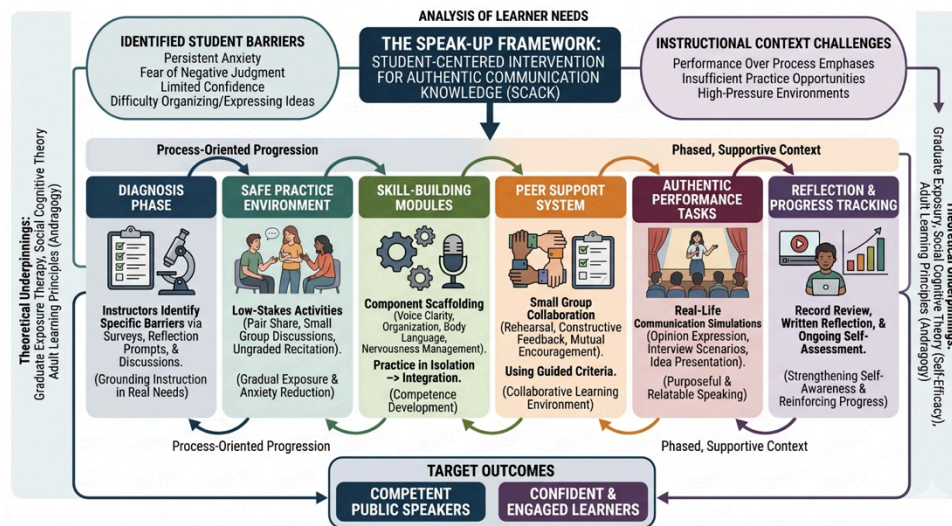


Fig.1. SPEAK-UP Framework

The framework begins with a **diagnosis phase**, where instructors actively identify students' specific barriers through short surveys, reflection prompts, or informal discussions. This step ensures that instruction is grounded in actual student needs rather than assumptions. From this foundation, the program moves on to creating a safe practice environment, where students are first exposed to low-stakes speaking activities such as pair sharing, small-group discussions, and ungraded recitations. This gradual exposure is essential in reducing anxiety, as students are given space to speak without the immediate pressure of formal evaluation. Building on this, the framework introduces **skill-building modules** that break down public speaking into manageable components, including voice clarity, organization of ideas, use of body language, and strategies for managing nervousness. Each skill is practiced in isolation before being integrated, allowing students to develop competence without feeling overwhelmed. Alongside this, a **peer support system** is established, in which students work in small groups to rehearse, give

feedback, and encourage one another using simple, guided criteria. This shifts the learning environment from being purely teacher-driven to more collaborative, where students learn not only from instruction but also from shared experience. As students gain confidence, they are gradually engaged in **authentic performance tasks** that reflect real-life communication situations, such as expressing opinions on relevant issues, simulating interviews, or presenting ideas. These tasks make speaking more purposeful and relatable, helping students recognize its value beyond the classroom. Finally, the framework emphasizes **reflection and progress tracking**, where students review recordings of their performances, write brief reflections, and assess their own improvement over time. This process strengthens self-awareness and reinforces a sense of progress, which is critical in sustaining motivation.

Overall, the SPEAK-UP Framework offers a realistic and implementable approach that aligns with how students actually experience learning

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to speak in public. By moving from low-pressure practice to authentic performance, and by combining skill development with

emotional support, the framework aims to produce not only competent speakers but also more confident and engaged learners.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Students demonstrate a developing but not yet fully stable competence in public speaking.
Learners show generally strong performance in planning, organizing ideas, fluency, and the use of multimedia tools. However, inconsistencies still emerge during actual speaking tasks, indicating that their skills require further reinforcement to achieve confidence and stability in real communication contexts.
2. Communication anxiety and limited linguistic resources continue to hinder speaking performance. Fear of evaluation, nervousness, and difficulty retrieving appropriate vocabulary remain significant barriers, particularly in spontaneous speaking situations. These factors directly affect fluency, confidence, and overall delivery.

3. Learners exhibit high willingness and readiness to engage in speaking activities when properly supported. Motivation is evident when tasks are interactive, meaningful, and connected to real-life or culturally relevant contexts, suggesting that engagement is strongly influenced by instructional design.
4. Sustained improvement in public speaking requires consistent practice in a supportive learning environment. Regular exposure to speaking tasks, constructive feedback, peer support, and psychologically safe classroom conditions play a crucial role in reducing anxiety and strengthening communicative confidence.

5. Recommendations

In light of the conclusions, the following prioritized and action-oriented recommendations are proposed to guide instructional design, policy direction, and future research:

1. Adopt a structured, progressive public speaking program (SPEAK-UP Framework) as a core instructional model. Higher education institutions, in coordination with CHED, should institutionalize a scaffolded approach that begins with low-pressure speaking tasks and gradually progresses to formal and authentic oral performances. Each

stage must intentionally integrate confidence-building activities, skill refinement, and guided reflection to ensure systematic development of speaking competence.

2. Embed communication anxiety reduction strategies and language scaffolding within speaking curricula. Public speaking courses should explicitly include interventions such as guided rehearsals, vocabulary enrichment activities, rehearsal-based simulations, and structured spontaneous

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speaking exercises. These should be designed to reduce fear of negative evaluation while strengthening real-time language processing and expression.

3. Prioritize establishing collaborative, feedback-rich speaking environments. Faculty should implement consistent peer interaction activities such as group presentations, paired rehearsals, and structured peer feedback sessions using clear rubrics. Teacher training on delivering constructive, non-threatening feedback should also be strengthened to foster a psychologically safe and supportive classroom culture.

4. Develop a long-term monitoring and evaluation system for public speaking development outcomes. Future research and institutional assessment systems should track learner progress across semesters using a mixed-methods approach, including performance-based assessments, self-efficacy measures, and reflective journals. This will enable continuous evaluation of instructional effectiveness and inform evidence-based curriculum refinement aligned with CHED standards.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by several factors that affect the scope and generalizability of its findings. *First*, the participants were drawn from selected institutions within Cotabato province, which means the results may not fully represent learners from other regions with different linguistic backgrounds, resources, or educational contexts. *Second*, the study relied heavily on self-reported data (Likert-scale responses and personal accounts), which may be influenced by social desirability bias or students' subjective perceptions rather than actual performance. *Third*, the cross-sectional design captures learners' competencies and experiences at a single point in time, limiting the ability to

observe changes or development in public speaking skills over time. *Fourth*, while the qualitative data provided rich insights, the sample size for interviews and focus group discussions was relatively limited, which may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences.

Lastly, the study did not include direct observation or objective performance assessments (recorded speech evaluations), which could have strengthened the validity of the findings by triangulating perceived and actual speaking abilities.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data Availability Statement

This study does not include supplementary files such as additional figures, datasets, or multimedia materials. The primary data were derived from survey responses, interviews, and focus group discussions conducted among

selected college students in Cotabato province. These data served as the basis for analyzing learners' public speaking competencies, experiences, and perceived learning strategies. To ensure transparency and academic integrity, selected anonymized data (e.g., survey instruments, coded responses, and thematic

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summaries) may be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. All data were collected and handled in accordance with ethical research standards.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the development and completion of this study.

- *Denzel John H. Villaver* – Student researcher; led the conceptualization of the study, conducted data collection and analysis, and drafted the manuscript.
- *Ruselle Ann R. Robledo, LPT* – Research coordinator, provided guidance in research design, supervised the implementation of the study, and reviewed the manuscript for language, coherence, and academic rigor, particularly in the field of language and literacy education.
- *Life Gabriel F. Osumo, LPT, MED-LT, CRS* – Research specialist and creative works coordinator; contributed to the refinement of the research framework, validated analytical procedures, and enhanced the overall presentation and scholarly quality of the manuscript.

All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content and integrity.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB) Statement

This study involved human participants; however, it adhered to institutional ethical standards for educational research. Proper permissions were secured from the institution, and the study followed ethical guidelines in conducting surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No personal or sensitive identifying information was disclosed in the research.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study or its findings.

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