

Finding Their Voice: A Phenomenological Study of Grade 11 TVL Learners' Oral Communication Challenges, Meaning-Making, and Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the oral communication challenges experienced by grade 11 home economics students at Roxas National High School. Effective oral communication is essential for academic success, classroom participation, and future job readiness. Yet, students often experience emotional, cognitive, and linguistic barriers that diminish their confidence and ability to articulate concepts clearly. Specifically, the study aimed to identify these barriers and examine the coping strategies students employ when completing oral communication assignments. Data were collected through a transcendental phenomenological methodology using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations.

The results indicated that learners experienced emotional obstacles such as nervousness, anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation; cognitive obstacles such as mental blocks and difficulty in organizing ideas; and linguistic obstacles such as limited vocabulary, grammar difficulties, fluency issues, and pronunciation problems. Learners coped by preparing, repeatedly practicing, regulating their emotions, and receiving support from peers or teachers. The study concluded that the difficulties in oral communication were multidimensional and required structured support targeting emotional readiness, cognitive organization, linguistic competence, and classroom conditions. The findings emphasize the importance of combining the targeted teaching strategies, the supportive feedback practices, and the suggested Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy to improve learners' confidence and oral communication effectiveness.

Keywords: oral communication, speaking anxiety, linguistic barriers, coping strategies, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Oral communication is an important skill that helps learners to express ideas, engage in classroom interaction, and prepare for real-life academic and workplace communication demands. This skill is more relevant to the Senior High School setting, especially for Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) learners in the Home Economics strand, as their future work may require them to explain procedures, answer questions, interact with clients, and present information clearly. However, many students continue to struggle when asked to speak English during oral communication activities. These difficulties often manifest as nervousness, hesitation, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, difficulty organizing ideas, poor fluency, and avoidance of speaking tasks.

Existing studies have shown that oral communication difficulties are shaped by emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and classroom-related factors. Local studies have emphasized that Filipino learners commonly experience speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low confidence, and reluctance to participate in oral tasks. Limited vocabulary, grammatical concerns, pronunciation issues, and a lack of fluency further intensify these difficulties. International studies have likewise shown that speaking anxiety, cognitive overload, classroom climate, peer interaction, teacher feedback, and language limitations influence learners' oral performance. These findings suggest that oral communication difficulty is not caused by a single factor but by the interaction among learners'

emotions, thinking processes, language competence, and classroom experiences.

Despite the growing body of literature on speaking anxiety and oral communication difficulties, limited attention has been given to the specific experiences of Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners in local classroom contexts. Most existing studies focus on general language learners. In contrast, fewer studies examine how TVL learners experience oral communication challenges in relation to their strand, classroom tasks, and future work-related communication needs. In Roxas National High School, classroom observations have shown that some Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners hesitate during oral presentations, depend heavily on memorization, pause frequently, avoid voluntary participation, and show visible signs of anxiety during speaking tasks. These experiences indicate the need to examine not only the difficulties learners encounter but also how they interpret these challenges, how they cope with them, and what support may be developed from their actual experiences.

Anchored on this need, the present study explored the oral communication challenges, meaning-making, and coping strategies of Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners in Oral Communication in Context. Specifically, it investigated their lived experiences during oral tasks, the intrapersonal and linguistic factors contributing to their speaking difficulties, the classroom-related conditions shaping their participation, and the coping mechanisms they used to manage these challenges. The study sought to generate context-responsive insights that may guide teachers, school leaders, and curriculum implementers in designing support strategies that strengthen learners' confidence, participation, and oral communication competence.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the oral communication challenges of Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners in Oral Communication in Context. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Grade 11 learners regarding speaking difficulties during oral communication tasks, particularly in terms of emotional, cognitive, and academic impact?
2. How do intrapersonal factors such as self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and self-efficacy contribute to or intensify learners' speaking difficulties?
3. What linguistic competence factors, such as vocabulary range, grammar accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and coherence of ideas, are perceived by learners as barriers to effective oral communication?
4. How do classroom-related conditions, such as teacher strategies, peer dynamics, classroom climate, feedback practices, and speaking assessment structures, influence learners' oral communication challenges?
5. How do learners interpret and make meaning of their speaking challenges, and what coping mechanisms do they use to manage these difficulties?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To explore the oral communication challenges, meaning-making, and coping strategies of Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners, this study employed a qualitative research design using transcendental phenomenology. This approach was used to describe the essence of learners' lived experiences during oral communication tasks while allowing the researcher to set aside personal assumptions through bracketing. The study focused on how learners experienced speaking difficulties, how these difficulties were shaped by emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and classroom-related factors, and how learners managed such challenges in Oral Communication in Context.

The participants in the study were 10 Grade 11 TVL Home Economics Cookery learners from Roxas National High School, Hinatuan, Surigao del Sur, during School Year 2025–2026. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants with direct experience of oral communication difficulties. The selection followed specific inclusion criteria: the learners were officially enrolled in Grade 11 TVL Home Economics Cookery, were taking Oral Communication in Context, had been observed to experience difficulty in speaking tasks such as presentations, recitations, interviews, or class discussions, showed signs of speaking anxiety such as hesitation, nervousness, fear of mistakes, or reluctance to participate, and were willing to share their experiences through interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations.

The study used researcher-developed qualitative instruments, namely a semi-structured interview guide, a focus group discussion guide, a classroom observation checklist, and anecdotal records. These instruments were designed to gather detailed descriptions of learners' emotional, cognitive, academic, linguistic, and classroom-related experiences during oral communication tasks. The instruments were validated by five experts in English education and qualitative research who reviewed the clarity, relevance, sequencing, and alignment of the questions with the research problems. Their recommendations were incorporated before data collection.

To gather the data, prior authorization was obtained from Roxas National High School, and the learners and their parents or guardians were informed of the study's purpose, nature, and procedures. Informed consent and student assent were obtained. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the selected key informants, while classroom observations and anecdotal records documented verbal and non-verbal behaviors, participation, peer interactions, teacher feedback, and classroom conditions. The key informants were allowed to draft their responses and read them during the interview or focus group discussion to reduce pressure and help them express their experiences more clearly. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, at which point no new major ideas, patterns, or themes emerged from the responses.

The data were analyzed using transcendental phenomenological analysis. The researcher began with bracketing to minimize personal bias, followed by repeated reading of transcripts, observation notes, and anecdotal records. Significant statements related to oral communication challenges were identified and organized into meaning units. These meaning units were then grouped into emergent and superordinate themes aligned with the research questions, including lived experiences of speaking difficulties, intrapersonal factors, linguistic competence, classroom-related conditions, and meaning-making and coping mechanisms. To strengthen credibility, member checking was conducted by presenting summaries of the emergent themes to the key informants for verification. Triangulation was also applied by comparing data from interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and anecdotal records. The final themes served as the basis for developing the proposed intervention plans and the Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the thematic findings on the challenges of oral communication, meaning-making, and coping strategies among Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners. The analysis was organized around the research questions and the major themes that emerged from interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and anecdotal records. Five major themes were identified: learners' lived experiences of speaking difficulties; intrapersonal factors; linguistic competence barriers; classroom-related conditions; and meaning-making and coping mechanisms.

Theme 1: Learners Experienced Fear and Anxiety During Oral Communication Activities

This theme explores the emotional impact of oral communication tasks on Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners. Learners reported feelings of nervousness, anxiety, self-doubt, and mental blocks while performing presentations, recitations, and impromptu speaking activities. These responses were observed both in classroom behavior and in the learners' self-reports during interviews and focus groups.

Table 1. Emotional Impact of Oral Communication Tasks

Subtheme	Description	Participants' Responses
Nervousness	Physical and psychological tension before or during oral tasks	"I get nervous before presenting; my hands shake and my heart races" (KI2)
Anxiety	Fear of negative evaluation or poor performance	"Even when I prepare, I feel anxious I might say the wrong word" (KI5)
Self-Doubt	Lack of confidence in one's ability to speak correctly	"Sometimes I don't believe I can say it properly" (KI7)
Mental Block	Difficulty recalling words or organizing ideas under pressure	"I forget what I want to say in the middle of my presentation" (KI3)

The participants' nervousness was characterized by both physiological responses (e.g., shaking hands, racing heartbeat) and behavioral indicators (e.g., long pauses, hesitations). Anxiety was often linked to fear of being judged by classmates or teachers, intensifying the learners' hesitation to speak. Self-doubt emerged when learners questioned their ability to produce grammatically correct or fluent English, while mental blocks occurred when learners struggled to organize or recall ideas under time pressure.

These findings suggest that learners' oral communication difficulties are not merely linguistic but emotionally mediated, affecting participation, fluency, and cognitive processing. The observed emotional responses align with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, which identifies communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation as central barriers to speaking. They also corroborate Pabro-Maquidato (2021) and Aricheta et al. (2024), who emphasize that Filipino learners' speaking anxiety affects both confidence and classroom engagement.

Overall, Theme 1 highlights the critical role of emotional support and structured practice in addressing oral communication challenges. These insights inform the proposed Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy, which integrates preparation, rehearsal, and feedback to help learners manage anxiety and develop confidence in speaking tasks.

Theme 2: Intrapersonal Factors Intensified Learners' Speaking Difficulties

This theme describes how learners' internal beliefs, emotions, and perceptions influenced their ability to participate in oral communication activities. The findings revealed that self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and self-efficacy significantly shaped learners' willingness to communicate and their performance during speaking tasks.

Table 2. Intrapersonal Factors Affecting Oral Communication

Subtheme	Description	Participants' Responses
Low Self-Confidence	Doubting one's ability to communicate effectively	"Minsan po hindi ako kumpiyansa sa sarili ko kaya hindi ako agad nakakasagot." (KI4)
Speaking Anxiety	Fear and tension experienced before or during speaking tasks	"Kinakabahan po ako lalo na kapag maraming nakatingin sa akin." (KI8)
Self-Efficacy	Beliefs regarding one's capability to complete speaking tasks	"Kapag nakapag-practice ako, naniniwala akong kaya ko naman." (KI1)

The responses revealed that low self-confidence limited learners' willingness to participate in oral communication activities. Several participants expressed uncertainty about their speaking ability, particularly in English. Learners often compared themselves to classmates they perceived as more proficient speakers, leading to hesitation and reluctance to volunteer answers during classroom discussions. One participant stated, "Minsan po hindi ako kumpiyansa sa sarili ko kaya hindi ako agad nakakasagot" (KI4), indicating that confidence directly influenced classroom participation.

Speaking anxiety further intensified learners' difficulties. Participants reported feelings of tension, nervousness, and fear whenever they were required to speak in front of their classmates. The presence of an audience increased their fear of making mistakes, causing them to become overly conscious of their pronunciation, grammar, and delivery. As expressed by KI8, "Kinakabahan po ako lalo na kapag maraming nakatingin sa akin." Such experiences suggest that learners perceived oral communication activities as evaluative situations, which heightened their emotional discomfort and reduced their ability to communicate effectively.

The findings likewise highlighted the role of self-efficacy in shaping learners' responses to speaking tasks. Learners who believed that preparation and practice could improve their performance demonstrated greater willingness to participate despite experiencing nervousness. These learners viewed oral communication challenges as manageable rather than threatening. One participant shared, "Kapag nakapag-practice ako, naniniwala akong kaya ko naman" (KI1). This response illustrates how positive self-beliefs encouraged persistence and engagement even in demanding speaking situations.

The findings suggest that learners' speaking difficulties were not solely due to language skills but were also influenced by their perceptions of their own capabilities. Confidence, anxiety, and self-efficacy interacted to shape learners' participation, motivation, and performance during oral communication activities. When learners lacked confidence and experienced high anxiety, they became more hesitant to communicate. Conversely, stronger self-efficacy appeared to lessen the negative effects of speaking anxiety and encouraged greater engagement in oral tasks.

These findings corroborate Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence their motivation, effort, persistence, and performance. The findings likewise support Ahmad and Kusumaningrum (2023), who reported that self-efficacy positively influences oral communication performance among senior high school learners. Similarly, Jin (2024) found that learners with stronger academic self-efficacy demonstrated higher engagement and better language-learning outcomes. The results also align with Dikmen (2022) and Yu (2024), who emphasized that anxiety negatively affects speaking performance by interfering with learners' confidence and cognitive processing. Collectively, these studies reinforce the view that intrapersonal factors constitute a significant dimension of learners' oral communication challenges.

Theme 3: Linguistic Competence Barriers Limited Effective Oral Communication

This theme examines how learners' language skills affected their participation and performance in oral communication tasks. Learners reported challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and coherence of ideas, which limited their ability to express themselves effectively in English during class presentations, recitations, interviews, and impromptu speaking activities.

Table 3. Linguistic Competence Barriers

Subtheme	Description	Participants' Responses
Limited Vocabulary	Difficulty finding appropriate words	"I had limited vocabulary, especially in English, so I often asked my classmates for the right words." (KI5)
Grammar Accuracy	Errors in sentence construction	"I get nervous because I might say a sentence wrong." (KI2)
Fluency	Hesitation or pauses affecting speech flow	"Sometimes I pause too much and forget what I want to say." (KI7)
Pronunciation	Mispronouncing words or hesitation in speaking	"I mispronounce some words, and it makes me afraid to continue." (KI4)
Coherence of Ideas	Difficulty organizing ideas logically while speaking	"I find it hard to connect my ideas clearly in English." (KI3)

The findings indicate that linguistic competence barriers were closely linked to learners' emotional and cognitive challenges. Limited vocabulary and grammar errors increased nervousness and hesitation, while pronunciation difficulties further lowered confidence. Fluency and coherence issues were exacerbated under time pressure, causing learners to pause or provide incomplete responses. One participant noted, "I mispronounce some words, and it makes me afraid to continue" (KI4), demonstrating how language limitations intensified emotional stress and inhibited communication.

The evidence points to the conclusion that learners' speaking difficulties cannot be attributed solely to anxiety; linguistic limitations themselves directly affected oral performance. This supports the findings of Pabro-Maquidato (2021), who highlighted that vocabulary and grammar gaps contribute to Filipino learners' speaking anxiety. Similarly, Mora Bonilla et al. (2024) reported that limited lexical and grammatical knowledge impairs fluency and the expression of ideas, while Yu (2024) emphasized the impact of anxiety on cognitive processing during speaking tasks. Collectively, these studies reinforce the finding that linguistic competence is a critical dimension of oral communication challenges.

The thematic findings underscore the need for interventions that integrate vocabulary enrichment, grammar

practice, pronunciation drills, and fluency exercises alongside emotional support. Such interventions, like the proposed SPEAK-UP program and the Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy, can help learners build language competence while simultaneously reducing anxiety and improving overall oral performance.

Theme 4: Classroom-Related Conditions Influenced Learners' Oral Communication Challenges

This theme explores how classroom factors affected learners' oral communication experiences. Findings revealed that teacher strategies, peer dynamics, classroom climate, feedback practices, and assessment structures significantly shaped learners' confidence, participation, and overall performance in oral tasks.

Table 4. Classroom-Related Conditions Affecting Oral Communication

Subtheme	Description	Participants' Responses
Teacher Strategies	Support, encouragement, and guidance provided by teachers	"My teacher motivates me and corrects my mistakes kindly, so I feel more confident." (KI2)
Feedback Practices	Constructive feedback from teachers and peers	"Feedback from Ma'am and classmates helps me know what to improve without being embarrassed." (KI6)
Peer Dynamics (Positive)	Encouragement and support from classmates	"When my classmates encourage me, I feel more confident." (KI4)
Peer Dynamics (Negative)	Fear of judgment, ridicule, or criticism	"I am afraid of being laughed at if I say something wrong." (KI8)
Classroom Climate	Overall emotional and social atmosphere in class	"A supportive classroom makes me want to speak up more." (KI3)
Speaking Assessment Structures	Clear, structured tasks and adequate preparation time	"I feel less nervous when the teacher gives the task in advance and explains it clearly." (KI1)

The findings indicated that learners' participation and willingness to speak were heavily influenced by classroom conditions. Positive teacher support and constructive feedback encouraged learners to engage, while negative peer reactions or judgmental environments increased hesitation and anxiety. Learners reported that clear instructions and structured assessments reduced emotional pressure and allowed them to focus on expressing ideas effectively.

Teacher strategies and feedback were observed to mediate the learners' emotional and cognitive responses. For example, KI2 noted, *"My teacher motivates me and corrects my mistakes kindly, so I feel more confident."* Similarly, learners highlighted the importance of peer support in promoting confidence, as seen in KI4's response: *"When my classmates encourage me, I feel more confident."* Conversely, fear of negative peer evaluation exacerbated anxiety, limiting active participation (KI8).

These results align with Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning. They also corroborate Han, Li, and Haider (2022) and Bárkányi and Brash (2025), who highlighted that peer dynamics, teacher feedback, and classroom climate significantly influence learners' oral performance. Topping (2009) similarly emphasized that well-structured peer and teacher feedback promotes learner engagement and reduces anxiety.

The findings underscore the importance of addressing classroom conditions for improving learners' oral communication. Structured tasks, supportive teacher strategies, positive peer interaction, and constructive feedback are necessary to reduce anxiety and facilitate active participation. These insights informed the design of the TEACH-UP LAC sessions and the Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy, which integrates classroom support into learners' oral communication development.

Theme 5: Learners Developed Personal Meanings and Coping Mechanisms for Their Speaking Challenges

This theme presents how learners interpreted their oral communication challenges and the coping strategies they

used to manage speaking difficulties. The findings showed that learners did not simply experience anxiety, hesitation, and language barriers; they also responded through preparation, practice, help-seeking, emotional regulation, and positive meaning-making.

Table 5. Meaning-Making and Coping Mechanisms in Oral Communication

Subtheme	Description	Participants' Responses
Preparation	Studying and organizing ideas before speaking tasks	"We really prepared and did our best in Oral Communication." (KI1)
Practice	Rehearsing repeatedly to reduce nervousness	"I worked hard to practice so I would not become too nervous." (KI5)
Help-Seeking	Asking assistance from classmates or teachers	"I seek help from my friends when I don't understand the task." (KI2)
Emotional Regulation	Managing fear through self-encouragement and calming strategies	"I practice speaking to improve." (KI5)
Opportunity for Growth	Viewing mistakes as chances to improve	"I see my mistakes as a chance to improve." (KI9)
Learning from Mistakes	Understanding challenges as part of becoming a better speaker	"These challenges help me grow as a speaker." (KI6)

The findings revealed that preparation and practice were the most common strategies learners used to manage nervousness and improve oral performance. Learners felt more confident when they were given time to study, organize their ideas, and rehearse before speaking. Help-seeking also emerged as an important coping mechanism, as learners asked classmates or teachers for clarification, vocabulary support, or encouragement. These behaviors indicate that learners managed speaking difficulties through both personal effort and social support.

Emotional regulation was also evident in learners' attempts to calm themselves and continue despite fear. Rather than completely avoiding oral tasks, some learners tried to control their nervousness through practice and self-encouragement. More importantly, several learners interpreted mistakes as opportunities for improvement. As KI9 expressed, "*I see my mistakes as a chance to improve.*" This response suggests that learners gradually developed a constructive understanding of their difficulties and began to view speaking challenges as part of the learning process.

These findings support Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which explains that individuals respond to stressful situations based on how they appraise and manage them. The results also align with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, as learners who believed they could improve through practice showed greater persistence. Likewise, Vygotsky's Social Constructivism supports the role of peer assistance, teacher feedback, and classroom interaction in helping learners make meaning of their experiences.

Taken together, the findings indicate that learners' coping mechanisms were not limited to reducing anxiety; they also helped learners reinterpret their speaking difficulties as opportunities for growth. Preparation, practice, help-seeking, emotional regulation, and reflection should therefore be integrated into oral communication instruction. These insights support the proposed Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy, which provides learners with a structured process for organizing ideas, rehearsing speech, performing oral tasks, receiving feedback, and reflecting on improvement.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that Grade 11 TVL Home Economics learners experienced multidimensional oral communication challenges encompassing emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and classroom-related factors. Learners reported nervousness, anxiety, self-doubt, fear of negative evaluation, and mental blocks during oral communication tasks. These emotional challenges were closely linked to cognitive difficulties, including difficulty organizing ideas and recalling vocabulary, as well as to linguistic limitations, such as restricted vocabulary, grammar errors, poor fluency, and pronunciation difficulties. Classroom conditions, including

teacher strategies, peer dynamics, feedback practices, and assessment structures, further influenced learners' confidence, participation, and performance.

Intrapersonal factors, particularly low self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and self-efficacy, intensified learners' hesitation and avoidance of speaking tasks. Learners who believed in their ability to improve through preparation and practice demonstrated higher engagement and persistence. Furthermore, learners used coping mechanisms, including preparation, repeated practice, help-seeking, emotional regulation, and positive reinterpretation of mistakes, which helped them gradually manage speaking difficulties.

These findings indicate that learners' oral communication challenges cannot be attributed solely to skill deficiencies but also to emotional, cognitive, and environmental influences. Taken together, the results suggest that addressing oral communication difficulties requires structured, context-responsive interventions. The proposed SPEAK-UP learner-focused program, TEACH-UP teacher-focused LAC sessions, and the Plan, Practice, and Execute strategy offer systematic approaches to enhance learners' preparation, practice, and execution of oral tasks while providing emotional and linguistic support. These strategies may also be applied in other subjects requiring oral communication. Implementing these interventions can foster learners' confidence, improve participation, enhance linguistic competence, and promote more effective oral communication performance, contributing to both academic success and professional readiness.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study declares that no conflict of interest influenced its conduct. All efforts were made to ensure the integrity of the research, including obtaining institutional approval, securing informed consent and student assent, and maintaining confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and secure data management. Participation was voluntary, and key informants were allowed to withdraw at any stage without penalty. The research was conducted objectively, with cultural sensitivity observed, allowing learners to express themselves in their preferred language. Furthermore, all results were utilized solely for academic and research purposes, and the interpretation of findings was conducted in an unbiased and transparent manner.

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