THE MODERATING EFFECT OF VERBAL LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPEAKING ANXIETY AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS AMONG ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of this study was to determine the moderating effect of verbal linguistic intelligence on the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills of the second year to fourth year English major students in the private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Region XI. Adapted survey questionnaires validated by experts were given to a sample of 300 students. Findings revealed that the of speaking anxiety, communication skills, and verbal linguistic intelligence are high. Moreover, findings revealed that speaking anxiety is significantly related to communication skills. Verbal linguistic intelligence also showed a positive significant relationship to communication skills. To determine the moderating effect of verbal linguistic intelligence, a logistic hierarchical regression was employed in this study. In this case, the findings revealed that verbal linguistic intelligence has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between speaking anxiety and communications skills. Students who have higher or lower levels of verbal linguistic intelligence demonstrated the same degree of communication skills as influenced by speaking anxiety. However, results revealed that separately speaking anxiety and verbal linguistic intelligence are important contributors to communication skills.

KEYWORDS: *Applied linguistics, education, speaking anxiety, communication skills, verbal linguistic intelligence, moderating effect, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION
Background of the Study
Communication skills refer to competence, body language, and dignification when speaking a language (Akkuzu & Akkaya, 2017). In a metric, competence denotes to the way an individual presents themselves when speaking and the quality of their thoughts; whereas body language refers to the accentuation while speaking (Guffey & Loewy, 2019). Lastly, dignification refers to being open towards criticism and fully understanding the context of the situation (Quintanilla & Wahl, 2019). According to Mahbub and Hadina (2021), college students with insufficient English oral communication skills can obstruct effective teacher-student interaction, making it challenging for students to ask questions, get feedback, and seek clarification — all of which can have an impact on how well they learn overall.

This problematic situation is not just an isolated case. In Korea, the insufficient English oral communication skills using the English language among college students in the academe can lead to challenges in group work, including poor coordination, ineffective collaboration, and conflicts, which can negatively impact academic performance and outcomes (Chae et al., 2019). As explicated by Fu et al. (2018), the limited English language proficiency hampers students' ability to actively participate in classroom discussions, deliver presentations, and engage in academic writing tasks.

The Philippines has long been acknowledged for its proficient utilization of English as a second language, however, in recent years, there are growing concerns about the students' deteriorating communication skills. According to Jugo's (2020) research, students' limited English communication skills make it difficult for them to convey their ideas clearly, participate in insightful debates, and understand academic texts written in the language. In the local setting, research conducted in a Tagum City public secondary school showed that students have problems at a moderate level with regard to their speaking performance and anxiety is the highest and most common reason for this problem (Genelza, 2022).

There are research and articles that had established the significance of communication skills – this notion is especially true in learning English (Ahmad, 2016), in business (Conrad & Newberry, 2012), teaching process (Muste, 2016), and in job efficiency (Ranjan et al., 2015; Siriwardane & Durden, 2014). As stated by Dearden (2014), having effective English communication skills enables students to interact with cutting-edge research, work with experts from other countries, and widen their horizons academically. However, the researcher

experienced a scarcity in finding a variable study in the locality of the Davao Region employing moderating analysis for the past five years with English major students as respondents.

With the existence of problems with regard to students' communication skills and the absence of studies locally and nationally, there is an urgency to conduct this research. When completed, the researcher would provide the participants with a copy of the results and findings. In addition, the results of this study would be presented to the Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the region. The result of the study would be presented nationally and internationally at conferences. The whole research would be submitted to an international journal for publication.

Research Questions

This research aimed to quantitatively evaluate the moderating effect of verbal-linguistic intelligence on the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' communication skills. This research specifically intended to answer these questions:

1. What is the status of communication skills, speaking anxiety, and verbal-linguistic intelligence of English major students in Region XI?
2. Is there a significant relationship between:
   2.1. speaking anxiety and students' communication skills;
   2.2. verbal-linguistic intelligence and students' communication skills?
3. Does verbal-linguistic intelligence significantly moderate the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' communication skills?

Research Design

This research utilized a quantitative research design specifically a descriptive correlational research design using moderation analysis. According to Creswell (2002), quantitative research is the process of gathering, evaluating, interpreting, and writing the findings of a study. Descriptive correlational design, on the other hand, searches for correlations between two or more factors. Simply stated, it investigates whether an increase or decline in one aspect influences the other (Tan, 2014). Using this design, the researcher was able to quantify the degree and significance of the causal relationships between the exogenous variables speaking anxiety, verbal-linguistic intelligence, and endogenous variable communication skills.

Moreover, the researcher utilized the moderating analysis study since the primary goal of this research is to investigate the moderating effect of verbal-linguistic intelligence on the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills. The direction of this relationship can likewise be changed by a moderating variable. Contextually, the moderating effect analysis was used to determine whether the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is affected by the moderator variable (Jose, 2017).

Place of Study

This moderating analysis study was conducted in Region 11, more precisely at the private higher education institutions, two from each of the provinces in the Davao region, formerly known as Southern Mindanao. Moreover, Figure 2.0 presents the map of the Philippines and Region 11. The study was conducted in seven private higher education institutions, namely School A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. There were two each of the provinces in the Davao region having a total of 300 respondents. The respondents were the 2nd year to 4th year English education major students of the ten selected private higher education institutions in Region 11.
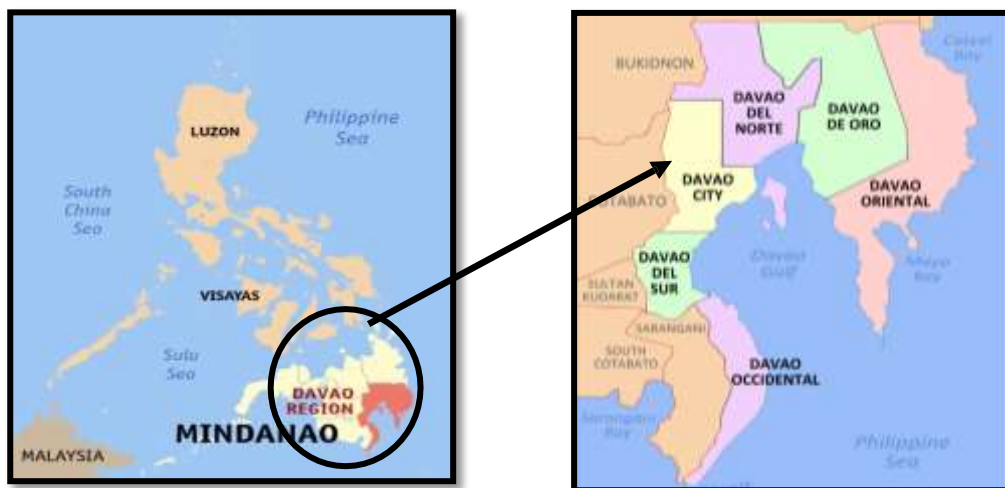

Figure 2.0: Map of the Philippine and Region XI

Data Treatment and Analysis

The following statistical tools were employed in data computation and hypothesis testing at the 0.05 level of significance.

Mean and Standard Deviation. This was utilized to measure and determine the level of students' speaking anxiety, students' verbal-linguistic intelligence, and students' communication skills. It also measured the standard deviation. Specifically, it was used to answer the problems 1, 2, and 3 to provide the mean for the level and status of each variable.

Pearson r Correlation. This statistical method was used to evaluate the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills and verbal linguistic intelligence and communication skills. Specifically, it was used to answer the problem 4.

Hierarchical Logistic Regression and ModGraph. This was used to show the interaction effect and to determine the moderating effect of verbal-linguistic intelligence on the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' communication skills. It was used to answer research question no. 5. Both Hierarchical Logistic Regression and ModGraph are valuable tools in quantitative research for analyzing relationships and interactions between variables.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive Level of Speaking Anxiety, Communication Skills, and Verbal Linguistic Intelligence of the English Major Students

Item	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Speaking Anxiety (IV)			
Communication Apprehension	0.67	3.87	High
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0.85	3.82	High
Low Self-Confidence	0.89	3.71	High
Overall	**0.72**	**3.80**	**High**
Communication Skills (DV)			
Competence	0.54	3.56	High
Discouragement	0.71	3.05	Moderate
Body Language	0.52	4.17	High
Dignification	0.52	4.12	High
Overall	**0.34**	**3.73**	**High**
Verbal Linguistic Intelligence (ModV)	**0.72**	**3.80**	**High**

The independent variable, *speaking anxiety,* gathered an overall mean of *3.80* being described as *High* descriptive level. This means that, on average, the respondents of the study experienced most of the time a high level of speaking anxiety. In this variable, the indicator *Communication Apprehension* obtained a highest mean of *3.87*. It suggests that the respondents were generally apprehensive about communicating with others which yielded a *High* descriptive level. This is seconded by *fear of negative evaluation* which obtained a mean of *3.82*, SD of *0.85*, indicating that the respondents were concerned by being judged negatively by others which indicated a *High* descriptive level. While *low self-confidence* has a mean of *3.71* also described as *High* descriptive level.

Likewise, the dependent variable, *Communication Skills* of the English major students gathered an overall mean of *3.73* which resulted to a *High* descriptive level. The mean score indicates that the second year to fourth year English major students' CS is observed most of the time. Among the four (4) indicators, *Discouragement,* followed its mean down to 3.05 described as *Moderate* descriptive level. While the other remaining three (3) indicators: *Competence, Body Language,* and *Dignification* reflected a high descriptive level with means of 3.56, 4.17, and 4.12 respectively.

Moreover, disclosed in row 3 of Table 1 is the moderating variable, *verbal linguistic intelligence* of English major students. The overall mean rating is *3.80* with a *High* descriptive level. This mean score indicates that the said variable is oftentimes manifested.

Table 2
Correlations Among Variables

	Communication Skills (DV)
Speaking Anxiety (IV)	.357**
	.000
Verbal Linguistic Intelligence (ModV)	.401**
	.000

It can be construed from the result that there is a significant relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills. The significant relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills of English major students suggests that high levels of speaking anxiety can increase the students' communication skills. Given this point, a study led by Brown and Miller (2016) showed that the heightened state of anxiety experienced during speaking situations can lead individuals to engage in active preparation, practice, and self-reflection. This proactive approach can result in improved communication competence and the development of effective strategies for managing anxiety. In essence, speaking anxiety can act as a catalyst for individuals to invest time and effort in honing their communication skills.

In the same way, a study by Gardner et al. (2019) exposed that speaking anxiety can motivate individual to prepare carefully for speaking tasks and to practice their communication skills. For example, Jansen et al. (2022) found out that self-comparison to others causes learners to show more competitive behaviors. Because the learners give more importance to achievement and want to be more successful, it may cause them to be more anxious especially in oral exams.

Meanwhile, the significant relationship between verbal linguistic intelligence and communication skill is aligned with the results revealed by Filiz (2020) who detailed that there is a favorable and significant association between students' verbal intelligence and communication abilities. Notably, a study conducted by Conroy (2010) also corroborates the study's results who found out that the more the students were conscious of their verbal intelligence through being hyperaware of sentence patterns in their reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the more they could hone their communication skills.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression to Assess the Moderating Effect of Verbal Linguistic Intelligence on the Relationship between Speaking Anxiety and Communication Skills

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			R Square Change
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	
1	(Constant)	3.091	.098		31.498	.000	.127
	Speaking Anxiety	.167	.025	.357	6.588	.000	
2	(Constant)	2.245	.139		16.153	.000	.153
	Speaking Anxiety	.162	.023	.345	7.004	.000	
	Verbal Linguistic Intelligence	.237	.030	.391	7.942	.000	
3	(Constant)	2.954	.629		4.694	.000	.003
	Speaking Anxiety	-.022	.161	-.047	-.136	.892	
	Verbal Linguistic Intelligence	.045	.169	.074	.263	.792	
	Speaking Anxiety by Verbal Linguistic Intelligence	.050	.043	.515	1.155	.249	

In the context of this study, speaking anxiety, the independent variable, was entered into the hierarchical procedure depicted as the step one. Regression results are shown in Table 3. When regressing speaking anxiety (B = .162, p<.001) and the moderating variable, verbal linguistic intelligence (B = .237, p<.001) in step 2, they were found to be significant predictors of communication skills of the second year to fourth year
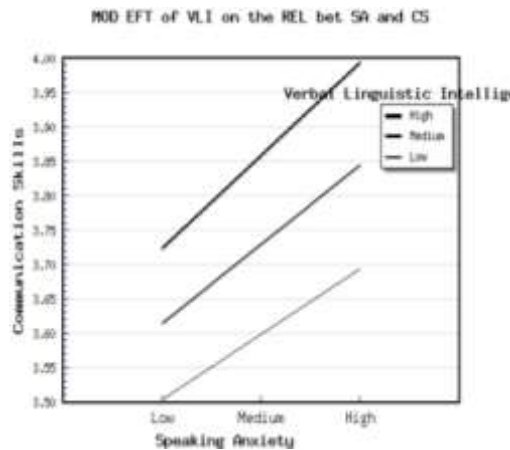
English major students in Region XI in their capacities as separate variables. The third step in the regression analysis was to determine the interaction effect of verbal linguistic intelligence on the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills, as proposed in hypothesis 2, so that the higher level of verbal linguistic intelligence does not increase

nor decrease the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills.

When the effect of one independent variable differs based on the level of magnitude of another variable (a moderator variable), then the interaction occurs. The interaction effect (B = .050 p > 0.05) which is the product of speaking anxiety and verbal linguistic intelligence is not significant, hence the acceptance of the null hypothesis that verbal linguistic intelligence does not moderate the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills.

This suggests that the interaction effect is not a contributor to the model variance. The result of the study could be further analyzed through R square change in Table 3. The R square change tells how much variance in the DV these predictors explained in each step. The R square change of .153 means an additional variance of 15% to the variance of 13% in Step 1 of the hierarchical regression. This shows that 15% of the variance in verbal linguistic intelligence of of the second year to fourth year English major students in Region XI is due to their speaking anxiety. The interaction term (speaking anxiety X verbal linguistic intelligence registered a 0.003 contribution to DV.

Figure 3.0: Graphical Depiction of the Moderating Effect of Verbal Linguistic Intelligence on the Relationship Between Speaking Anxiety and Communication Skills

The results of the regression indicated that both speaking anxiety and communication skills are significant predictors of verbal-linguistic intelligence of English major students in Region XI in their capacities as separate variables. However, the interaction effect or the product of speaking anxiety and communication skills was not a contributor to the model variance. This implies that verbal-linguistic intelligence does not significantly moderate the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills.

With the results on the correlation revealed above, the significant relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills established in this study supported the study of Brown and Miller (2016), it showed that the heightened state of anxiety experienced during speaking situations can lead individuals to engage in active preparation,

practice, and self-reflection. To emphasize, this proactive approach can result in improved communication competence and the development of effective strategies for managing anxiety. In essence, speaking anxiety can act as a catalyst for individuals to invest time and effort in honing their communication skills.

On the other hand, the significant relationship between verbal linguistic intelligence and communication skills supported the findings of the study conducted by Espineda-Villanueva (2019) which showed that there is a relationship between verbal linguistics intelligence and communication skills as indicated by computed value of .207 at .05 significance level. Therefore it can be concluded that students who find it challenging to communicate are those students with low verbal linguistics intelligence.

Table 4
Summary of Means on the Main Effects of Speaking Anxiety and Verbal Linguistic Intelligence

	High Verbal Linguistic Intelligence (ModV)	Medium Verbal Linguistic Intelligence (IV)	Medium Verbal Linguistic Intelligence (DV)
High Speaking Anxiety	3.72347	3.85819	3.99292
Medium Speaking Anxiety	3.61326	3.72818	3.84310
Low Speaking Anxiety	3.50306	3.59817	3.69328

The results of the table show that there is a significant main effect of both speaking anxiety and verbal linguistic intelligence. This means that the average scores for speaking anxiety and verbal linguistic intelligence differ significantly between the different groups. Equally, the results show that the average scores for speaking anxiety are higher for respondents with high verbal linguistic intelligence than for respondents with medium or low verbal linguistic intelligence. This is likely because respondents with the high verbal linguistic intelligence are more aware of the potential for negative evaluation in speaking situations which can lead to increased anxiety.

Such findings conform to the study of Quijano and Asio (2022) revelaed that students with anxiety or low level of confidence restricts the chances of learning and speaking the language hence pose serious threat to oral communication skills. To point out, they opined that the high level of anxiety among students seriously hampers the interaction between teacher and students which is extremely crucial to productive teaching and learning of the language. Since anxiety is a multi-faceted dilemma language barrier for students, therefore this problem needs to be studied.

Identically, the results showed that speaking anxiety influence communication skills of the students. However, verbal linguistic do not significantly moderate the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. This shows that anxiety is of great importance in the communication skills of the students. Several research discussed that students become concern about their speaking performances when they compare themselves to their classmates increasing their anxiety level (Ebadijalal and Yousofi, 2023). This is in support of the findings of prior studies stating that students' performances will deteriorate if their levels of anxiety are high (Derling et al., 2021). Additionally, this result is associated with Inada (2021), which led researchers to focus on considering student's feelings of anxiety specially when it comes to communications.

CONCLUSIONS
1. The descriptive level of the independent and dependent variables speaking anxiety and communication skills are high which signifies that these variables are evident most of the time. Likewise, the moderating variable-verbal linguistic intelligence, with a high descriptive level, signifies that it is also evident most of the time.
2. The results of the regression indicated that both speaking anxiety and communication skills are significant predictors of verbal-linguistic intelligence in their capacities as separate variables suggesting a complex and dynamic relationship between these variables.
3. In the moderation analysis, it depicts that verbal linguistic intelligence does not significantly moderate the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills of the English major students. This finding highlights importance of addressing speaking anxiety as a key factor influencing communication skills development in English language learning, even for students with strong verbal-linguistic abilities.

Recommendations
1. The result revealed alarmingly a high level of speaking anxiety. The school administrators, curriculum developers, teachers, and other stakeholders must work hand in hand as they play a crucial role in fostering a more supportive learning environment that encourages effective communication, enhance academic engagement, and mitigates speaking anxiety among English major students.
2. The results showed a significant relationship of the variables understudied. With this, the researcher suggester that the school administrators, curriculum, developers, and curriculum implementers may consider evaluating their teaching pedagogies, utilize the best of strategies and resources and use its advantages as tools to create a learning environment that empowers English major college students to overcome speaking anxiety, develop communication skills effectively, and achieve full academic potential.
3. The interaction effect or the product of speaking anxiety and communication skills was not a contributor to verbal linguistic intelligence. This implies that verbal-linguistic intelligence does not significantly moderate the relationship between speaking anxiety and communication skills. With this, the researcher proposes doing more research on the same issues investigated in this study.
4. The findings of this study may be used as guide for harnessing teaching strategies and implementing a more appropriate pedagogical practices in English classroom language setting to increase students' ability to communicate and use the language without any fear of participating. It should be noted that the completion of this study does not entirely measure the entirety or the wholeness of researches attributed to investigating the focus of the study. Similar study may be conducted using mixed-methods approach involving qualitative data collection from the lens of the students.

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