

Teaching Oral Communication Using Blended Learning in the Next Normal: Strategies, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms

Ma. Isabel F. Fortuno

Graduate School, College of Education, Polytechnic University of the Philippines
Metro Manila, Philippines

Author Email: maisabelfortuno@gmail.com

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Abstract. Due to coronavirus disease (COVID-19), schools shifted to blended learning in 2020. Consequently, in the school year 2022-2023, the division of Makati conducted an online English Assessment at the six senior high public schools in Makati; the results showed a low literacy level among students. Thus, this study investigated seven participants lived experiences in teaching the components of communicative competence: strategic and discourse, in the subject of Oral Communication, using blended learning in the new normal. The researcher used phenomenology to explore the teaching strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Data was collected using triangulation, which involved seven participants, three key informants, and three encoders. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that the strategies utilized in teaching discourse competence in online classes were teaching discourse markers, facilitation of speaking activities, feedback elicitation, and utilizing online platforms. Guided speaking activities, teaching discourse markers, and feedback elicitation were used in face-to-face classes. Meanwhile, teaching communication strategies, facilitating authentic activities, and utilizing multimedia platforms were used to teach strategic competence online. Moreover, teaching communication strategies, facilitating authentic speaking activities, and using multimedia tools were utilized face-to-face. The online challenges were the limitation of non-verbal cues, learners' lack of motivation, intermittent internet connection, limitation of authentic speaking tasks, and lack of immediate feedback. Consequently, in face-to-face interaction, low English proficiency, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and behavior were noted. To address these, the online coping mechanisms used were online and multimedia platforms, facilitating authentic speaking activities, applying learnings from webinars, motivating the students, eliciting feedback, and teaching communicative strategies. In addition, in face-to-face classes, collaborative guided speaking practices, utilization of online platforms, encouraging the students to speak in English, facilitation of authentic speaking activities, and classroom discipline were used.

Keywords: Blended learning; Discourse competence; Next normal; Oral Communication; Strategic competence.

1.0 Introduction

The education system faced a paradigm shift in education in 2019 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19), an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented blended and modular learning to address the change in education. "Blended learning" or "hybrid learning" from

The standpoint of DepEd is a fusion of "online distance learning" and "in-person" delivery of printed materials to the homes of the learners through the barangays (villages) for those who do not have internet access. The Department of Education utilizes television- and radio-based instructions in the localities where this is impossible. Leonor "Liling" Briones, former secretary of DepEd, further stated that such a method is no longer new, as it has been used in other schools and universities in the country (Uy, 2020).

With this change in learning delivery, DepEd has introduced its Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP), which describes the different methods of learning delivery options, which include but not limited to face-to-face, blended learning, distance learning, homeschooling, and other modes of delivery that will be implemented depending on the local COVID Risk Severity Classification and compliance with minimum health standards (DepEd Order No.12 s2020). The sudden change in the learning delivery of English language teaching caused by the pandemic has challenged teachers. The study conducted by Simbajon (2021) titled "Problems, Coping Strategies, and Online Teaching Readiness of English Teachers Amid COVID-19 Pandemic" explored the emerging problems that English teachers encountered. The teachers experienced the following challenges: time management, workload, and students' behavior. The latter describes the inability of the students to focus during class discussions and non-compliance with academic requirements. Another study conducted in Indonesia shared the same view on online learning; Rahayu and Wirza (2020) concluded that almost half of the teachers perceived online learning as an ineffective learning delivery mode. Among the reasons are a lack of communication between the students and teachers, insufficient technological infrastructure, and few motivated students due to less support from their parents, who do not know their role.

In the Philippine setting, Martinez and Talampas (2021) stated that English teachers had difficulty monitoring the learning progress of their students, especially when the subject is Oral Communication. The subject requires students to develop their skills in public speaking; due to the changes in teaching pedagogy, learners are asked to complete activities in the modules instead of focusing on developing their speaking skills in authentic situations. Subsequently, the Division of Makati conducted an Online English Assessment on the six senior high public schools in Makati for the school year 2022 to 2023. Its goal is to test reading comprehension, listening comprehension, grammar proficiency, pronunciation, and speaking among Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners. The study focused on the following schools: Nemesio I Yabut Senior High School, situated in Guadalupe Viejo; Makati High School – the first public secondary school in the premiere city; Fort Bonifacio High School, a public secondary school in West Rembo, Makati City; Pitogo High School (PHS), located in Negros St., Barangay Pitogo, Makati City; Benigno Ninoy Aquino High School, a public school found at Aguho St. Comembo; and Maximo Estrella Senior High School (MESHS), located in J. Magsaysay, Makati City.

The result of the six schools: Maximo Estrella Senior High School (MESHS), Nemesio I Yabut Senior High School (NIYSHS), Makati High School (MHS), Fort Bonifacio High School (FBHS), Pitogo High School (PHS), and Benigno Ninoy Aquino High School (BNAHS) showed that the Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners' reading comprehension is 'below grade level.' Their listening comprehension is 'elementary level 2,' while the Grade 11 learners in FBHS demonstrated 'elementary level 1'. The grammar proficiency of Grade 11 in MESHS, MHS, PHS, and FBHS is 'elementary level,' while NIYSHS' level is 'intermediate.' The result of Grade 12 in MESHS, NIYSHS, and MHS showed 'intermediate.' On the other hand, FBHS's level is 'elementary.' The pronunciation and speaking of Grade 11 and Grade 12 in NIYSHS, MHS, PHS, and FBHS exhibited 'accented with less clear diction.' Moreover, the Grade 11 in MESHS demonstrated 'heavily accented with unclear diction.' Meanwhile, the Grade 12 level is accented with clear diction.

In connection with the result of the study, Wahid et al. (2021) posit that teachers and students are not satisfied with online learning. Teachers found the method taxing as it required them to put extra effort into finding appropriate online platforms. On the other hand, students felt overwhelmed with online activities and homework, which resulted in poor academic performance. Similarly, the English Assessment conducted by the DepEd Makati during blended learning showed that students' results in the English Assessment are below their grade level. This will imply their speaking skills regarding coherence and cohesion, which

Describe their discourse competence. Having an 'elementary level' under listening comprehension, grammar proficiency, and pronunciation could cause them to have difficulty using verbal strategies during communication breakdown; the verbal and non-verbal strategies used to avoid communication breakdown refer to strategic competence.

Studies have investigated the development of strategic and discourse competence. Sucion et al. (2021) determined the effectiveness of the Powercoaching Program, which aims to develop students' oral discourse competence. The intervention describes various activities that help students with speaking difficulties, which include authentic situations and students' choosing topics when performing speeches. In connection with this, Efremenkova and Putistina (2019) explored the effectiveness of interactive learning in developing strategic competence in learners' oral speech in a foreign language. Both studies utilized different teaching strategies to enhance the two competencies: discourse and strategic competence. However, neither identified the challenges or coping mechanisms teachers experienced in online and face-to-face classes.

Another study conducted by Martinez and Talampas (2021) explored the lived experiences of English teachers in transitioning their teaching pedagogy from pre-pandemic to during the pandemic, as well as the coping mechanisms they utilized, conforming with the goal of the study, which is to explore the challenges and coping mechanisms of English teachers during online and face-to-face classes. Instead of investigating teachers' pedagogy before the pandemic, the study only focused on teachers' lived experiences amid the pandemic. Reyes et al. (2021) investigated the challenges encountered by Aeta students in conversational English using a phenomenological research design. Similarly, this paper explored the challenges that are faced by teachers in the new normal using the same research design.

The low literacy rate of the English Assessment in the Division of Makati for the school year 2022-2023 motivated the researcher to conduct this study. As indicated in the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) released by the Department of Education in 2020, the development and enhancement of listening and speaking skills and strategies for effective communication in various situations are the competencies that the subject of Oral Communication aims to develop among learners. Furthermore, Bernardo (2022) posits that the subject in the K-to-12 curriculum in the Philippines aims for learners to enhance listening and speaking skills and strategies for communication in various situations. Thus, this study aimed to discover the experience of teachers in teaching the subject using blended learning in the new normal. It also explored the strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms in teaching discourse and strategic competence. Through this study, the researcher could give valid recommendations that would improve the strategic and discourse competence of the students in the new normal.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative method to describe how Oral Communication teachers taught discourse and strategic competence in online and face-to-face classes in the new normal. A Phenomenological design was utilized to examine the views of the teacher participants' lived experiences. As defined by Donalek (2024), phenomenological studies describe the meaning of experiences for each subject on a specific phenomenon.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was administered in the four public schools of the Division of Makati: Makati High School, the first public secondary school in the premiere city; Fort Bonifacio Senior High School, a public secondary school in West Rembo, Makati City; Nemesio I. Yabut Senior High School, situated in Guadalupe Viejo; and Maximo Estrella Senior High School, located in J. Magsaysay, Makati, Metro Manila.

2.3 Research Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling in choosing the participants, a non-probability sampling that occurs based on the researcher's predetermined criteria (Nikolopoulou, 2023). In addition, people with knowledge and experience in research interests are selected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researcher based the selection on the three criteria: (a) Oral Communication teachers with at least three years of teaching experience; (b) teachers who are teaching in the Division of Makati from School Year 2021-2022 to School Year 2022-2023; and (c) teachers who have experienced teaching both online and face-to-face classes in the next normal. The participants of the study are the seven Oral Communication teachers from four schools: Makati High School with one (1) teacher-participant, Fort Bonifacio Senior High School with two (2) participants, Nemesio Yabut Senior High School with two (2) participants, and Maximo Estrella Senior High School with two (2) participants.

There were three key informants (KIs) who validated the credibility and reliability of the responses: a School Principal who was a former English teacher (Key Informant A), an English Education Program Supervisor in the

Division of Makati (Key Informant B), and a General Academic Strand Coordinator (Key Informant C). The KIs shared their expertise, insights, and knowledge on the focus of the study: strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms when teaching discourse and strategic competence in the subject, Oral Communication, in blended learning.

2.4 Research Instrument

Three experts validated the research instrument: A Teacher II in the Division of Pasig with a Master's Degree in Teaching English Language at De la Salle University, a senior high school English teacher with a Master's Degree in Teaching English Language at De la Salle University, and an Associate Professor V with a degree in Master of Arts in English Language Teaching at Polytechnic University of the Philippines. The researcher sent the interview questionnaire and validation checklist to their Gmail. The checklist includes the following parts: content validity, language validity, and format validity.

The interview questionnaire has three parts. The first part describes the demographic profile of the teachers. The second part explores the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in teaching discourse and strategic competence during online classes. The third part navigates the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in teaching discourse and strategic competence during face-to-face classes. Consequently, three key informants (KIs) answered the open-ended validated interview questionnaire via Google Forms. The research instrument is divided into two parts: The first part asked the KIs to share their expertise in teaching discourse and strategic competence in online classes – strategies used, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms. The second part included questions on the strategy, challenges, and coping mechanisms utilized in teaching discourse and strategic competence in face-to-face classes.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

A letter was sent to the Division of Makati to conduct the study. After the approval, the researcher sent the Google Form with the interview questionnaire and the informed consent forms to Facebook Messenger and the email addresses of the participants and KIs.

2.6 Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and interpreted the participants' responses using thematic analysis. It is a method that groups repeated ideas and responses, which shall be the basis for creating themes (Caufield, 2023). The researcher performed the six steps of thematic analysis. The first step is reading and familiarizing the data collected; the third step is highlighting the responses of the participants by creating codes; the third step involves creating themes from the codes; the fourth step is reviewing the accuracy of the themes; the fifth step is defining the themes; the sixth and final step is writing the analysis for each theme. Thereafter, the researcher utilized intercoder reliability (ICR), which pertains to the coding frame that ensures the same findings will emerge when multiple researchers code the duplicate content; this strengthens consistency in coding decisions (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). For this purpose, the researcher requested three English teachers from the division of Makati, all of whom had experience teaching Oral Communication in blended learning, to be the three experts who validated the label for each code. A reliability percent agreement determined the reliability of the generated codes, which is calculated as $(a+d)/(a+b+c+d) \times 100$ (for the proportion of agreement observed); the result yielded 80%.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

On June 5, 2023, the researcher sought approval by submitting the letter of intent and pertinent documents to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Then, the letter for data gathering was forwarded to the Division Office (DO) of Makati. As advised by the Ethics Committee, the researcher asked three experts to validate the research instrument. Upon the approval of (UREC) and DO Makati, the researcher gathered data from the selected seven participants from four schools in Makati. During the data gathering, the researcher reached out to the participants to inform them about the aim of the study and the procedure for collecting the data. The research instrument on Google Forms and the informed consent forms were forwarded to the participants. Further, the researcher sought permission from the Division Office of Makati to get a copy of the Language Assessment results of Grade 11 and Grade 12. The data gathered was used for academic purposes only, in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, or Republic Act No. 10173, which protects individual personal information and communication systems in the government and the private sector.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the themes generated from the data.

Table 1. Summary of Themes Generated from the Data

Codes	Themes	Meaning
1. The use of transitional devices	Teaching the Usage of Discourse Markers	This refers to the teaching strategy of using discourse markers and transitional devices to develop students' discourse competence.
2. Facilitating speaking activities in real-life situations	Facilitating Authentic Speaking Activities	This describes the speaking activities and tasks given to the learners to improve their oral discourse competence.
3. Giving of feedback	Feedback Elicitation	This pertains to giving the learners comments, suggestions, and feedback during speaking activities.
4. Utilization of multimedia resources	Utilization of Online and Multimedia Platforms	This refers to using different online platforms that aid in teaching discourse and strategic competence in online classes.
5. Facilitating pair speaking activities	Guided Speaking Practices	This involves the guided speaking activities prepared by the teachers in teaching discourse and strategic competence in blended learning. These activities could take the form of speaking prompts or structured discussions.
6. Group speaking task	Collaborative Speaking Activities	This refers to speaking activities being done in pairs or by group.
7. Teaching strategy in paraphrasing, clarification	Teaching Communication Strategies	This refers to teaching the strategies in communication that aid in developing learners' strategic competence.
8. Students' lack of participation	Students' Lack of Motivation	This happens when students do not actively participate in speaking activities.
9. Limited time to practice authentic speaking activities	Limitation of Authentic Speaking Tasks	This demonstrates the limited opportunity for speaking activities that are based on real-life situations.
10. Students' low self-esteem	Learners' Low Self-esteem	This pertains to the lack of confidence learners have experienced when using the English language in the communication process.
11. Low English proficiency	Learners' Low English Proficiency	This describes the challenge of having limited vocabulary and difficulty using the English language orally.
12. Poor internet connection	Intermittent Internet Connection	This refers to a poor internet connection teachers experience in online classes.
13. Lack of feedback	Lack of Immediate Feedback	This refers to the challenge of not being able to provide timely feedback to the learners when teaching strategic and discourse competence.
14. Limited opportunity to use gestures and facial expressions	Limitation of Non-verbal Cues	This pertains to limited opportunity to use gestures, facial expressions, and non-verbal cues in oral communication.
15. Encouraging the students to use the English language	Motivating the Students to Speak in English	This refers to the coping mechanism teachers use, which involves encouraging and motivating the students to practice speaking in English.
16. Managing behavior in the classroom	Classroom Discipline	This refers to the coping mechanism of reinforcing discipline to the students.

3.1 Teaching the Usage of Discourse Markers

The participants' standard answers indicated that teaching discourse competence in blended learning involves teaching the form and function of language. This includes teaching the learners how to use transitional devices and discourse markers to produce coherent utterances.

Participant G pointed out,

"To develop their cohesion and coherence, there were times I asked them to fill in missing words or phrases to complete a statement to teach them how to use transitional words."

Moreover, Key Informant C emphasized various strategies for developing discourse competence; he shared: *"Modeling: Demonstrate cohesive and coherent speaking. Use clear transitions, appropriate linking words, and an organized structure in speech. Explicit Instruction: Teach linking words/phrases (e.g., firstly, therefore, however) and discourse markers (e.g., in conclusion, on the other hand) explicitly. Show how they connect ideas and improve flow. Guided Practice: Provide opportunities for structured discussions or debates. Offer prompts and guidelines to encourage students to link their ideas together coherently."*

The responses validated Loncop's (2022) study, which emphasized the importance of teaching the language's form and function. The study suggests teachers should create authentic learning activities to develop linguistic and discourse competence.

3.2 Facilitating Authentic Speaking Activities

This emphasized the importance of facilitating speaking activities based on real-life situations in developing discourse and strategic competence in blended learning. Participants A and C also noted that strategies based on real-life situations and dialogues help the learners develop strategies for overcoming communication breakdown.

Participant A mentioned,

"I incorporate authentic speaking tasks that simulate real-world communication situations. It includes role-plays, simulations, or authentic materials. I create opportunities for students to apply and refine their strategic competence in meaningful contexts."

Participant C also stated,

"Modeling the proper communication by using cohesion and coherence in authentic situations will guide the students to develop their discourse competence."

Similarly, Loncop (2022) mentioned that teachers should devise authentic learning activities to develop linguistic and discourse competence. This includes conversation strategies through task-based activities; another component of the instructional materials includes watching authentic conversations of native speakers, such as those observed in CNN, BBC, or FOX interviews, to provide good models for teaching oral communication. Halimovna et al. (2019) posit the importance of developing communicative competence by providing students with the opportunity to think freely and giving learning activities that would encourage them to express themselves in solving a given problem, which in turn allows them to practice the use of the English language in authentic situations.

3.3 Feedback Elicitation

The participants' strategy described the process of giving learners comments, suggestions, and feedback when teaching discourse competence in online and face-to-face classes. This helps the learners track their progress in speaking tasks.

Participant B stated,

"I ensured I could give feedback on their outputs or performances. Giving feedback allows learners to be aware of their improvement and progress in developing their discourse competence." The participants also shared that group activities allow the students to give feedback to their classmates and the teacher.

In line with these responses, Şakiroğlu (2020) investigated the preferred process of how and when error correction should occur based on students' perspectives. The results showed that 90% of the learners would like to be corrected when they make errors while speaking English. The study also revealed that the students prefer receiving instructor feedback rather than from their peers. Thus, proper feedback is essential to speaking courses in EFL classes, which the instructors primarily implement.

3.4 Utilization of Online and Multimedia Platforms

Considering the limitations of online classes and not having in-person interaction with the students, Participant B shared that Facebook Messenger, Google Classroom, and Google Meet have been used during online classes. The researcher also noted that speaking activities could be done differently; due to limited face-to-face interaction during online classes, Participant B and Participant G required learners to submit video and audio-recorded speaking practices. Consequently, online classes limit face-to-face interaction; thus, participants utilize multimedia resources to develop learners' strategic competence.

Participant G mentioned,

"I once asked them to record a monologue to practice how they can use the strategies in communication."

Meanwhile, Participant C also shared, *"Sometimes reinforced my lessons with audio (music) and video analysis."*

Similarly, Key Informant C also pointed out, *"Explore various online tools that allow for synchronous communication, breakout rooms for smaller discussions, and platforms that enable better audiovisual interaction."* This agrees with the study of Toleuzhan et al. (2022), who explored the utilization of YouTube for students to learn English speaking skills. 288 Secondary Education students participated in the study. The research aims to investigate the most preferred categories of video websites that will be insightful in improving communication proficiency. Based on

the study, English films, vlogs, and songs are the most used categories. Furthermore, YouTube videos contributed to students' motivation and confidence during the experiment. These strategies affirmed the study of Al-jar (2021), who recommends integrating mobile apps such as pronunciation apps, daily English lessons, podcasts, listening and speaking apps, social media, and online videos in teaching communicative competence online.

3.5 Guided Speaking Practices

This describes the teaching strategy where the teacher demonstrates and models the proper communication in teaching discourse competence in face-to-face classes. Participant A stated, *"I model and provide examples of well-structured and coherent speeches or conversations."* Thus, modeling the proper communication with guided practice allowed them to practice their discourse competence orally. This strategy is also used as a coping mechanism in face-to-face classes.

In addition, Key Informant C pointed out,

"Structured Discussions: Organize structured discussions where students are encouraged to follow a logical sequence of ideas. Use prompts or guiding questions to maintain coherence. Modeling and Explicit Instruction: Model cohesive speech patterns and explicitly teach linking words, transitions, and discourse markers. Show how these elements enhance coherence in speech. Role-Playing and Debates: Engage students in role-playing activities or debates that require coherent communication. This encourages them to structure their thoughts effectively in real-time communication."

Mokhira (2023) posits that role-playing, simulation, watching English news and movies, online classes on TV, reading English newspapers and websites, and putting students in real-life language situations support the development of discourse competence.

3.6 Collaborative Speaking Activities

The participants use this strategy to teach discourse and strategic competence in face-to-face classes. This method highlights the importance of conducting and facilitating collaborative work during speaking activities.

Key Informant A mentioned, *"Guided speaking activities can develop the strategic competence of students."* Key Informant B also stated, *"Role-Playing Scenarios: Create situations where students simulate misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication. In developing strategic competence to avoid communication breakdowns, teachers should teach students problem-solving and critical thinking skills."*

This strategy agrees with the study of Toro et al. (2019), who conducted a study consisting of six English teachers and their 105 students, both second, third, and fourth graders from elementary school. Based on the study, seldom does facilitation of modeling, repetition, pair, and group work provide a desirable result. Consistent facilitation of those activities is necessary to develop their communicative competence and enhance their participation in oral activities. In addition, Efremenkova and Putistina (2019) proposed that interactive learning is one of the teaching pedagogies that would aid in developing strategic competence. The pedagogy involves learners in cognition, which enables them to understand, reflect, and express their opinions.

3.7 Teaching Communication Strategies

This refers to the teaching strategy in communication, which aids in developing learners' strategic competence in online and face-to-face classes.

Participant A shared, *"In developing strategic competence that would avoid communication breakdown, I always emphasize the importance of active listening, paying attention to what the speaker says."* Participant B also stated the same strategy: *"I would always encourage them to listen carefully to the person they are talking to, focus, and answer only the questions being asked."* This strategy was echoed by Participant G, who said, *"I would discuss the topic/lesson first so they would know the content."* She stated, *"I provide explicit instruction on communication strategies such as asking for clarification, paraphrasing, and summarizing."*

The participants' answers agree with Key Informant A, who said, *"Strategy training enables the students to examine examples and apply the strategies they have learned."*

Consequently, Lohmann et al. (2021) conducted a study investigating the classroom strategies that must be utilized during face-to-face and online learning. One current trend is the implementation of Hyflex instruction,

which refers to teachers providing instruction to students simultaneously in two modalities: online and face-to-face. Teachers must utilize the same best practices in classroom management in the Hyflex environment that they typically use in the face-to-face setting, including (a) teaching expectations, (b) modeling the desired behavior, and (c) providing timely and explicit feedback to support students.

3.8 Students' Lack of Motivation

This describes the challenge that participants encountered; it pertains to students' inattentiveness and lack of willingness to participate in the activities and discussion when teaching discourse and strategic competence in blended learning.

Participant F stated, *"It is to have them practice and do the activities in real time. Since it is an online class, some are just attending the class but not doing the assigned tasks."*

Sharing the same challenge is Participant A, who mentioned, *"Aside from the limited class time for oral activities, limited student participation has become a challenge for me. Some students may be reluctant to participate in discussions actively."*

Comparatively, Participant E stated, *"Lack of motivation, some students are not regularly attending online classes."*

The challenges experienced agree with the study of Siregar (2021), who posits that the teachers who teach speaking skills in online learning have various kinds of challenges, which are as follows: a) the students do not have a cellphone/android; b) bad internet connection; c) students' laziness during online learning; d) the importance of face-to-face learning in speaking skills because English teachers have difficulty measuring students' understanding and abilities during online learning. In addition, Among the many problems that the teachers, students, school, and parents faced were the validity of the problem, the lack of motivation—a very complex problem because it dealt with emotional readiness and stability—and the difficulty in understanding the module's topics because teachers do not personally explain the lessons (Gula, 2022).

3.9 Limitation of Authentic Speaking Tasks

This refers to the limited opportunity to facilitate speaking activities based on real-life situations when teaching discourse and strategic competence in online classes.

Participant A stated, *"For strategic competence, it was hard for me to communicate naturally with the learners. This situation leads to the lack of immediate feedback from the teacher."* Moreover, Key Informant C also shared, *"Online classes sometimes restrict natural interaction among students. Lack of Nonverbal Cues: In an online setting, nonverbal cues are crucial for coherent communication."*

This validated the study of Pangket (2019), who discovered that the common problems that hinder students' ability to speak in public include a lack of speaking opportunities.

3.10 Learners' Low Self-esteem

The participants highlighted that a lack of confidence among learners is one of the challenges they encountered when teaching discourse and strategic competence in face-to-face classes.

Participant G explained, *"Many of my students are not confident enough to speak in English, find it very hard to form a simple sentence in English, have wrong intonation, wrong pronunciation, are always absent, and sleep in my class."*

Consequently, Pangket (2019) found out in his study that the common problems that hinder students' ability to speak in public include a lack of speaking opportunities, the tendency to speak in vernacular, a lack of desire to express oneself in English, and the fear of being corrected when one makes a mistake. This response supports the study of Reyes et al. (2021), which found that the challenges the Aeta college students encountered in conversational English were their beliefs that they have weaknesses in the English language, poor vocabulary, and lack of confidence. Accordingly, Alaga-Acosta (2022) discovered that the primary cause of learners' fear of speaking is their lack of confidence.

3.11 Learners' Low English Proficiency

The teacher-participants mentioned that students demonstrated limited vocabulary and difficulty using the English language during face-to-face classes.

Participant G stated, *"Challenges may be students' language barriers. They have difficulty expressing themselves using the English language."*

Participant E also pointed out, *"Low English proficiency, learners are having difficulty using appropriate expressions and vocabulary, and also feeling low self-esteem."*

Key Informant A also emphasized, *"Inability to connect ideas and limited knowledge of the topic are the factors that contribute to communication problems in a face-to-face class."*

In addition, Key Informant C pointed out, *"Varied Skill Levels: Students often have different proficiency levels in speaking, making it challenging to tailor instruction to meet individual needs within a classroom setting."*

Meanwhile, Participant F expressed the same challenge, emphasizing that students' lack of vocabulary and limited expressions are problems in teaching strategic competence.

The responses of the participants and the key informants further adhered to the study of Reyes et al. (2021), who found that among the challenges the Aeta college students encountered in conversational English were their beliefs that they have weaknesses in the English language, poor vocabulary, and lack of confidence. Wiraatmaja (2022) also discovered that by a significant margin—roughly 70%—most English lecturers considered speaking the most challenging English skill to teach during online learning. Speaking was deemed the most difficult because of the following characteristics: students' hesitation and lack of language proficiency.

3.12 Intermittent Internet Connection

This refers to a poor internet connection that teachers and students experience when teaching strategic and discourse competence online.

Key Informant C stated, *"Online classes sometimes restrict natural interaction among students. Technological Hurdles: Technical issues like poor internet connectivity or platform glitches could interrupt students' speaking practice."*

Consequently, having an unstable internet connection also posed a challenge during class; Participant G pointed out, *"They refuse to open their mic because they have an intermittent connection since most of them are relying on mobile data."*

Participant B emphasized that having a poor and unstable internet connection hinders them from conducting lessons and activities for the learners. Furthermore, Siregar (2021) posits that the teachers who teach speaking skills in online learning have various kinds of challenges, which are as follows: a) the students do not have a cellphone/android; b) bad internet connection; c) students' laziness during online learning; d) the importance of face-to-face learning in speaking skills because English teachers have difficulty measuring students' understanding and abilities during online learning.

3.13 Lack of Immediate Feedback

The teacher-participants mentioned the challenge of not being able to provide timely feedback to the learners when teaching strategic competence online. Participant F shared that online set-up posts pose a challenge in giving feedback, which could make the students unaware of their progress.

This participant's response agreed with Key Informant C's answer: *"Limited Immediate Feedback: Providing instant feedback or support to students employing communication strategies online might be challenging due to the asynchronous nature of communication."*

Fonebi (2022) observed the same challenge when investigating high school ESL learners' English language learning strategies during online instruction and interactions. Respondents reported that they encountered challenges in English language learning in an online setting, which range from the respondents' profiles to their

exposure to media and across all the domains of learning strategies such as memory, cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective—managing emotions, both negative and positive, social, and compensation—relying on non-verbal communication.

3.14 Limitation of Non-verbal Cues

Most of the teacher-participants shared that the limitation of non-verbal cues is one of the challenges they encountered in teaching discourse competence in online classes.

Participant A pointed out, *"The most challenging aspect of online classes is the limitation on non-verbal cues. Online classes often lack the richness of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and gestures."*

Similarly, Key Informant B stated, *"Challenges encountered in teaching discourse competence online are technical issues, limited nonverbal cues, and maintaining the students' engagement and active participation."*

Key Informant C also shared, *"Lack of Nonverbal Cues: In an online setting, nonverbal cues are crucial for coherent communication."*

Lambencio (2023) identified the four factors affecting the discourse competence of Education English major students of Pangasinan State University (PSU): affective-related factors, linguistic-related factors, teacher-related variables, and linguistic-related components.

3.15 Motivating the Students to Speak in English

The participants affirmed that one of the coping mechanisms they used in teaching discourse competence in blended learning involved encouraging and motivating the students to practice speaking in English. Participant B emphasized encouraging students to answer in complete sentences so that they could practice speaking in longer sentences. He also added the use of questions focused on higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Participants C, D, E, and F in face-to-face classes encouraged their students to participate in speaking tasks. Participant E shared, *"I always tell them to think English, Speak English, and avoid translation."*

This was echoed by Participant C, who said, *"Think of ways to solve the existing problem, like applying effective strategies and encouraging students to speak without inhibition. First, in the native language, then in English. In writing, journal writing was a big help."*

Key Informant D shares the same strategy: *"Give group work and collaboration activities, incorporate real-world communication scenarios into your lessons, such as negotiation exercises or conflict resolution role-plays."*

This adheres to Cruz's (2019) study, which concluded that most students demonstrated outstanding performance after using a task-based method.

In teaching strategic competence in face-to-face classes, Participant G shared, *"Prepare authentic speaking/oral tasks in which students can apply their knowledge on cohesion and coherence. It is the same with strategic competence. I gave my students sample scenarios."*

Additionally, Key Informant C stated, *"Ongoing Practice: Provide consistent opportunities for practice and reinforcement of communication strategies through role-playing, simulations, and regular speaking tasks."*

Key Informant C's answer agrees with Toro et al.'s study (2019), which observed that seldom does facilitation of modeling, repetition, pairing, and groups provide a desirable result. Hence, consistent facilitation of those activities is necessary to develop their communicative competence and enhance their participation in oral activities. Furthermore, Efremenkova and Putistina (2019) reported that using interactive and collaborative forms of work contributes to developing strategic competence in a foreign language.

3.16 Classroom Discipline

Classroom discipline is the coping mechanism used by the participants in dealing with students' behavior when teaching strategic competence face-to-face.

Participant B responded, *"I tried to employ positive disciplining and words of encouragement to the students to eliminate their fear of speaking."*

Participant C also answered, *"Think of ways to give solutions to the existing problem, like applying effective strategies and encouraging students to speak without inhibition."*

Participant D also explained, *"Discipline and classroom management are important. When students are ready to listen, learning will take place."*

Similarly, Lohmann et al. (2021) conducted a study investigating the classroom strategies that must be utilized during face-to-face and online learning. One current trend is the implementation of Hyflex instruction, which refers to teachers providing instruction to students simultaneously in two modalities: online and face-to-face. Teachers must utilize the same best practices in classroom management in the Hyflex environment that they typically use face-to-face, focusing on modeling the desired behavior.

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the key findings, teachers used varied online resources such as Google Classroom, Google Drive, Google Meet, and YouTube when teaching strategic and discourse competence in online classes. They uploaded learning resources on Google Classroom and Google Drive, where students can easily access their lessons at home. Additionally, they integrated videos and audio analysis for speaking and listening exercises. Teachers used transitional devices to teach discourse competence. Modeling helped learners deliver their intended message with coherence and cohesion. In addition, teachers taught communication strategies and their application in authentic situations, which helped learners cope with communication breakdowns.

The challenges encountered in teaching discourse competence in online classes were learners' lack of motivation, intermittent internet connection, and lack of non-verbal cues. In face-to-face classes, the challenges were low English proficiency, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and student behavior. On another note, difficulty creating authentic situations, lack of feedback, poor internet connection, and students' participation were the challenges in teaching strategic competence in online classes. While in face-to-face, the following problems occur: misinterpretation, poor vocabulary, students' discipline, students' lack of participation, and students' lack of confidence. Utilization of online platforms, facilitation of authentic speaking activities, application of learnings from webinars, motivation of the students, feedback elicitation, and utilization of multimedia resources were the strategies employed to address the challenges in teaching discourse competence in online classes. In addition, in face-to-face classes, collaborative guided speaking activities, utilization of online platforms, and facilitation of authentic speaking tasks were used.

Among the coping mechanisms utilized in teaching strategic competence during online classes were collaborative speaking activities, utilization of online platforms, teaching communication strategies, application of the learnings from webinars, and facilitation of authentic speaking activities. Moreover, in addressing the challenges in teaching strategic competence in face-to-face classes, facilitation of authentic speaking activities, motivating the students to speak in English, and classroom discipline were employed.

In line with the results, the Department of Education should integrate authentic and contextualized applications of concepts in devising learning modules in English subjects, notably Oral Communication. Furthermore, it could help the learners develop their communicative competence by implementing an English-immersive environment in the classroom; the more they use the language, the more comfortable they will become, which improves their confidence in speaking. Moreover, teachers should assume the role of a learning facilitator and provide feedback in every speaking activity, as this will help learners track their progress. Future researchers may further investigate the effectiveness of the strategies and coping mechanisms in teaching discourse and strategic competence in blended learning by involving students as the sample size.

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Non-Declared

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