

***An Exploration of the Pedagogical Practices of Speech  
Communication Faculty Members of the Communication Division  
of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB)***

***Jea Agnes Taduran-Buera***

*University of the Philippines Los Baños*

***Abstract:*** *As speech communication educators, our challenge is to effectively teach students in an evolving education system. To meet this challenge, the faculty of the UPLB Department of Humanities' Communication Division seeks to enhance students' understanding of speech communication through courses focused on rhetoric and speech studies, performance, content production, and various aspects of communication as they relate to speech communication and its contexts. This paper explores the experiences of faculty members teaching speech communication concepts within the Department of Humanities and its BA Communication Arts program. Through focus group discussions, we will share insights on teaching experiences, classroom management, content handling, and student performance from the faculty members' perspectives. The goal is to examine the pedagogical practices of the Communication Division faculty in their instruction of Speech Communication courses.*

***Keywords:*** *speech communication, pedagogy, communication, thematic analysis*

## **Introduction**

Speech Communication is a diverse and flexible field that provides insight into the nature and elements of communication. It emphasizes developing listening, nonverbal communication, and speaking skills for effective interaction in various contexts. This discipline helps students understand key issues related to the art of communication, offering a balanced educational curriculum. The theories and skills gained from studying speech communication are essential for the BA Communication Arts (BACA) students of the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

The major courses of the BACA program (Nonverbal Communication, Rhetorical Criticism, Speech Communication in Conflict Resolution, Speech Communication Strategies for Classroom Instruction, Speech Making and Evaluation, Philippine Public Address, Oral Interpretation, Group Discussion and Leadership, and Communication in Public Relations) center on rhetoric and speech studies, performance, content production, and various dimensions of communication as it applies to speech communication and related contexts.

The introduction of the K-12 program brought significant changes to the general education (GE) curriculum. The transition of the former GE course, Speech Communication 1 or Oral Communication in Context, to becoming a core subject for senior high school students presented major challenges for faculty members. In his study, Vizconde (2015) highlighted several emerging issues within the K-12 system, including the displacement of teachers at the tertiary level, a lack of information about implementation guidelines, a two-year gap in university student enrollment, and insufficient resources for proper implementation. Additionally, the various challenges faced by teachers during the K-12 program's implementation, such as congested essential learning competencies, limited time, inadequate facilities, the need for additional training for faculty members, and an imbalanced student-teacher ratio (Lagundino, 2024).

Prior to implementing the K-12 program, the Large Lecture Class Policy (LLCP) for General Education courses, including Speech Communication 1 (SPCM1) was implemented in 2020. The memorandum regarding the LLCP aimed to "extend UP education to more deserving Filipinos" and stated that "initial testing of large classes indicates that class size does not impact student performance." The primary goal of the LLCP was to increase yearly enrollment numbers. While this may be cost-effective for the University, the negative impact on student learning and teacher morale is immeasurable. The policy faced strong opposition from university constituents, particularly faculty and students, for several reasons. First, there was a lack of adequate consultation and transparency regarding the changes. Additionally, there were concerns about the potential adverse effects on student learning and the challenges teachers would face in managing larger classes. Carlos (as cited in Pulumbarit and Cinco, 2010) emphasized that the LLCP "will lead to a decrease in the quality of education by

fundamentally altering teaching methods and diminishing student participation and critical discussions in class."

For SPCM 1, the required course outline, number of units, hours, and requirements remained the same, which created challenges for both students and faculty. Specifically, the 48 hours allotted for the course per semester have been divided. Students attend a large lecture class once a week for an hour and a half, where they study the theoretical components of the course. This large class, ranging from 160 to 190 students, is then divided into six "small" classes known as "recitation" sections. These recitation sections meet separately for another one and a half hours, two or three days after the large class. As a result, a student may have two different instructors for the large lecture class and the recitation class. Consequently, there is limited time for critical discussions, in-depth consultations, and regular feedback for remediation and improvement. The students who answered the survey separated the quality of teaching from class size.

The shift to online classes due to the pandemic has caused more challenges. A recent study by De Pano et al., titled "Reflections on the State of Speech Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman," examined the curriculum of the Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communication (BASC) program at the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) at UP Diliman. Speech communication classes have experienced a significant change in delivery methods, incorporating more challenging strategies. There has been a shift from traditional assessment methods to more complex individual interactions, which serve as the foundation for mastering and deeply understanding the lessons (Gula, 2022).

As speech communication educators, the challenge is to find effective ways to support students within the evolving educational landscape. This challenge remains a prominent concern for everyone involved. As societal priorities shift, so does the focus of our educational system. We are also currently witnessing a global trend towards innovation, alongside rapid changes and the threats posed by misinformation and artificial intelligence (AI). Concurrently, there are ongoing attempts to discover a one-size-fits-all solution to our educational shortcomings with a focus shifted towards the STEM subjects— science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

This shift raises important questions about the role of the Humanities in education. Many people argue that the Humanities are more essential in our classrooms than ever before. The Humanities enhance students' global perspectives and intellectual foundations, teaching them effective communication skills, fostering creativity and critical thinking, and promoting engaged citizenship. This belief drives the UPLB Department of Humanities' Communication Division to improve students' knowledge of speech communication, which leads to collaborative studies. In the article titled "The UPLB Speech Communication Identity: Weaving Humanities Roots, Institutional Practices, and Disciplinary Trajectories," my colleagues and I examined the identity of speech communication within the BA Communication Arts (BACA) program at the Department of Humanities at UP Los Baños. We outline the program's history, the

teaching and research practices of the faculty, and the research and creative projects undertaken by the students. This study further investigates the pedagogical practices of speech communication faculty members within the context of the Department of Humanities and its BA Communication Arts program.

## **Methodology**

The research employed a qualitative approach, using an interpretive paradigm to analyze faculty experiences in teaching, classroom management, content handling, and student performance. To fully understand faculty members' perspectives on teaching Speech Communication (SPCM) courses, rich data was gathered through qualitative methods. This approach allowed for detailed accounts of participants' viewpoints on the subject. The study utilized focus group discussions (FGD) as a qualitative method. Key characteristics of the focus group included participant involvement, homogeneity among participants regarding research interests, the generation of qualitative data, and a discussion centered on a topic determined by the research objectives. I facilitated the FGD with 16 participants from the Communication Division of UPLB. Each participant was given the opportunity to speak sequentially, and the discussion was recorded and transcribed.

Braun and Clarke's (2021) principles for reflexive thematic analysis were employed to capture patterns in the qualitative data. The six iterative and recursive stages of reflexive thematic analysis include: 1) data familiarization; 2) data coding; 3) generating initial themes; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining, and labeling themes; and 6) writing the report. The transcribed texts and initial notes were reread to begin the coding process. This was followed by grouping the codes into initial themes that emerged from the participants' responses. A further review allowed me to divide the initial themes and codes into three main themes and relevant sub-themes.

## **Results and Discussion**

As stated, this study builds upon and expands on the findings of a prior research with my colleagues from the division that emphasized on speech communication as a field of study, the development of communication studies as an academic discipline, and its place as a major area in the BACA program.

This study specifically explores how speech communication is taught at UPLB, focusing on the dominant theme of "Teachers as Facilitators and Mentors." It focuses on the pedagogical practices of faculty members within the Communication Division when teaching Speech Communication courses, highlighting the role of teachers as facilitators who embrace a student-centered learning approach. Creating a conducive classroom environment is essential, as discussed during the FGD. Faculty members emphasized the importance of establishing a space that is physically comfortable, emotionally

supportive, and academically engaging, where students feel safe, respected, and empowered to learn.

The participants shared insights on class composition, learning styles, course preferences, teaching strategies, and classroom assessments with a focus on students' performance, improvement, and well-being, and a commitment to being student-centered. Qualities of effective teachers were identified: competency, concern or interest in helping the students, energy level or enthusiasm about the subject, and speaking ability with interesting and well-paced presentation of course material.

The discussion also addressed challenges in managing speech communication classes, including instances where some students do not engage with the required readings and prefer creative or performative outputs. To verify whether students have engaged with the readings, several strategies were proposed. These included using note-taking on Google Docs, which can also double as a record of attendance. Other alternative assessment methods mentioned were oral exams, FGDs, and reverse recitations, where students ask questions based on the required readings. Collaborative strategies such as pair shares and the jigsaw method, which involves breaking main topics into subtopics for deeper exploration, were also highlighted.

Under the subtheme of classroom management, various strategies were discussed to promote positive learning and behavior. These strategies include setting clear expectations and explaining the relevance of theories both historically and in contemporary contexts. Building relationships with students by using their preferred names demonstrates respect and genuine interest in them. Additionally, Speech Communication teachers are expected to embody and demonstrate behaviors they want to see in their students, such as respect, encouragement, and positive reinforcement, rather than criticism or sarcasm. They should proactively address potential issues before they escalate and provide support to students in need.

Engaging students in constructive conversations and providing descriptive feedback focused on how they can improve their performance was deemed valuable for a meaningful learning experience. The participants also stressed the importance of consistently supporting all students to identify their strengths, interests, and needs in order to help them set and pursue their learning goals.

## **Conclusion**

As faculty members, we must adapt to overcome the pedagogical, technological, and social challenges posed by the rapid changes occurring around us. This adaptation reinforces our cultural and ethical responsibilities and values, enabling us to better understand and support our students. Therefore, it is crucial for faculty members to actively foster a positive and conducive learning environment. This includes promoting collaborative learning, a learner-centered approach that encourages group work to facilitate exchange and participation among students. This shared engagement helps

students take responsibility for their own learning.

We encourage our students to study and experience speech communication, exploring both the theoretical and practical aspects of human communication. Ultimately, this experience embodies the essence of a liberal education. Our goal is for students to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of communication competence in public speaking, argumentation, critical discourse, and interpersonal communication. They should also recognize the social, cultural, and historical significance of rhetoric and other communication phenomena, preparing them for further professional or academic pursuits in their chosen communication discipline.

## **Reference**

- 1) Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke: Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4). 2019
- 2) De Pano et al.: Reflections on the State of Speech Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman. *Philippine Humanities Review Speech*, 25(1). 2024
- 3) Gula, Louie: Speech Classes During COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges Faced by the Classroom Teachers. *Pakistan Journal of Distance & Online Learning Volume*, 8( 1). 2022
- 4) Lagundino, Cherelyn: Implementation and Challenges of the K-12 Program in Secondary Schools of District VI Quezon City: Basis for an Action Plan. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 25(4). 2024
- 5) Office of the Chancellor. Memorandum No. 001: Series of 2010. UPLB. 2010
- 6) Pulumbarit, Oliver and Cinco, Maricar: UPLB students, teachers stage protests vs large class policy. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/metro/view/20100129-250145/UPLB-students-teachers-stage-protests-vs-large-class-policy> (retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup>, January 2010).
- 7) Sayuno, Cheeno Marlo, Cruz, Carson Jeffrey, Taduran-Buera, Jea Agnes, and Blanco, Katrina Anne: The UPLB Speech Communication Identity: Weaving Humanities Roots, Institutional Practices, and Disciplinary Trajectories. *Philippine Humanities Review*, 25(1). 2024
- 8) Vizconde, Camilla: Issues, concerns, and prospects: teacher training institutions' views on K-12. *Philippine E-Journals*, 9(1-2). 2015