







Engagement, Adaptation, and Disruption in Online Oral Communication: A Narrative Inquiry into Senior High School ESL Learner Attitudes

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International Journal of Interdisciplinary Viewpoints

Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 19–29, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.64612/ijiv.v2i3.95>

Abstract

Online distance learning has transformed the delivery of performance-based language subjects, particularly Oral Communication, where interaction and social presence are essential for speaking development. This study explored the attitudes of Senior High School ESL learners toward their Oral Communication class in an online distance learning modality using a qualitative Narrative Inquiry design. Four purposively selected learners from different academic strands in a private higher education institution in Bacolod City, Philippines participated in unstructured interviews during School Year 2020–2021, and data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Findings revealed three interrelated themes: Agentic Engagement in Online Oral Communication, Negotiated Adaptation to Online Modality, and Structural and Affective Disruptions in Digital Communication. Learners sustained engagement through intrinsic motivation, teacher presence, and peer collaboration, while adaptation involved shifts in communicative identity and recognition of communication skills as essential for future success. However, technological instability, environmental distractions, and heightened performance anxiety influenced participation. Overall, learners’ attitudes toward online Oral Communication were shaped by relational, technological, and emotional factors, highlighting the need for supportive, flexible, and psychologically safe online speaking environments.

Keywords

Oral communication; ESL learner attitudes; online distance learning; narrative inquiry; learner engagement; pedagogical presence; digital learning ecology

Received: 15 December 2025

Revised: 21 February 2026

Accepted: 15 March 2026

Published: 30 March 2026

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Peer Review Statement

This article underwent a double-anonymous peer review process in accordance with the editorial policies of the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Viewpoints. Both authors and reviewers remained anonymous throughout the review process.

Open Access Statement

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Viewpoints is a fully open-access, peer-reviewed journal. All articles are freely available online immediately upon publication without subscription or access fees.

Funding Statement

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

The authors contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, and supervision. The author approved the final manuscript.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Citation

Oliveres, S. M., Salvador, R., Lobaton, V. P., & Guitche, M. (2026). Engagement, Adaptation, and Disruption in Online Oral Communication: A Narrative Inquiry into Senior High School ESL Learner Attitudes. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Viewpoints*, 2(3), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.64612/ijiv.v2i3.95>

Introduction

The expansion of online and distance learning has fundamentally reconfigured the pedagogical conditions under which Oral Communication is taught and learned. As a performance-based domain of language use, oral communication depends on interactional immediacy, embodied expression, and the co-construction of meaning through real-time dialogue. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires responsiveness to paralinguistic cues, negotiation of communicative intent, and continuous adjustment to interlocutor feedback. These interactional processes are mediated differently in virtual environments, where technological interfaces, spatial separation, and altered temporal structures reshape communicative experience. Consequently, the capacity of online modalities to support speaking development has emerged as a central concern in contemporary language education. Within digitally mediated learning environments, learners' attitudes toward technology-supported speaking tasks play a decisive role in shaping participation, engagement, and communicative performance (Palvia & Matta, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024). Attitudes toward language learning are not merely individual preferences but contextually situated orientations shaped by affective experience, perceived communicative demands, and prior interactional histories (Ong, 2020). In online speaking contexts, these orientations intersect with performance anxiety, communicative self-efficacy, and perceived social presence, all of which influence learners' willingness to participate in interaction (Saksopin et al., 2025). From a socio-constructivist perspective, attitudes toward online oral communication are therefore understood as relationally produced dispositions that emerge through engagement with pedagogical design, technological mediation, and classroom interaction.

Global scholarship presents a complex and sometimes contradictory portrait of online oral communication instruction. Virtual environments have been associated with reduced performance anxiety and expanded opportunities for rehearsal, reflection, and self-paced preparation (Wang, 2023; Ericsson & Johansson, 2023). At the same time, researchers consistently report diminished spontaneity, restricted access to non-verbal feedback, and weakened perceptions of social presence, which may constrain authentic communicative exchange (Quvanch et al., 2024; Uztosun & K ok, 2024). The quality of interactional design, immediacy of teacher feedback, and learners' digital self-efficacy have been identified as critical determinants of positive speaking experiences (Huang & Zou, 2024; Alharbi, 2025). Synthesizing these findings, recent reviews emphasize that outcomes in digital language learning are shaped less by technological platforms themselves than by pedagogical structure, relational dynamics, and affective engagement (Nair & Yunus, 2021).

Within the ASEAN context, research further highlights the sociocultural situatedness of online oral learning. Collaborative digital tasks and structured reflective practices have been shown to strengthen willingness to communicate among ESL learners (Mandalika & Sulistianingrum, 2024; Sasaki et al., 2023). Nevertheless, persistent barriers including unstable connectivity, fear of negative evaluation, and limited opportunities for spontaneous dialogue continue to undermine engagement (Badrasawi et al., 2024; Paraguas, 2025). Comparative investigations also indicate that learners frequently perceive face-to-face classrooms as more supportive of communicative risk-taking and interpersonal connection than virtual environments (Poolperm & Boonmoh, 2024; Yusof et al., 2025). These regional patterns demonstrate that learner attitudes toward online speaking are embedded in material infrastructure, cultural expectations, and local communicative norms. Philippine-based research reflects similar tensions while foregrounding structural realities specific to local educational contexts. Empirical studies document heightened speaking apprehension, difficulty receiving immediate corrective feedback, and challenges in performance assessment during remote instruction (Lungay, 2023; Pe a, 2025). Teachers likewise encounter constraints in sustaining dialogic interaction and adapting performance-based speaking tasks to digital platforms (Fortuno, 2025; Ubando, 2025). Although flexibility and accessibility are widely acknowledged advantages, many learners experience interactional disconnection, environmental distraction, and increased cognitive load (Cano, 2022; Delson, 2022). Investigations among Senior High School students further reveal heterogeneous motivation and participation patterns, indicating the need for closer examination of learners' affective and interpretive experiences (Tomas, 2023; Salagan, 2024).

Despite expanding empirical attention to online language learning, several gaps remain evident. First, Philippine research on online Oral Communication has been dominated by quantitative approaches, providing limited access to learners' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Second, prior investigations have tended to examine general English learning rather than the distinctive interactional and performance demands of Oral Communication as an embodied communicative practice. Third, few studies have employed narrative or interpretive methodologies capable of capturing how motivation, anxiety, identity, and agency are negotiated within digitally mediated speaking environments. These limitations constrain the development of context-responsive pedagogies grounded in learners' experiential realities and limit theoretical understanding of how communicative dispositions evolve in virtual learning ecologies.

Responding to these gaps, the present study examines the attitudes of Senior High School students toward their Oral Communication class in an online distance learning modality through qualitative narrative inquiry. By foregrounding learners' storied accounts, the study explores how engagement, difficulty, and motivation are constructed and negotiated within technologically mediated speaking tasks. The research contributes to theorizing digital oral pedagogy within multilingual Philippine contexts and provides empirically grounded insights for

instructional design that balances technological affordances with the relational foundations of communication learning. In doing so, it advances an understanding of online Oral Communication as a dynamic relational ecology in which learner attitudes are continuously shaped through interaction, context, and lived experience.

Methodology

Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to examine how Senior High School students construct attitudes toward Oral Communication in an online distance learning modality. Narrative inquiry views experience as storied and contextually situated, focusing on how individuals construct meaning through the narration of lived events (Clandinin, 2022). In language education, narratives function as interpretive resources through which learners negotiate identities, attitudes, and learning experiences within specific social contexts (Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Accordingly, attitudes were understood as dynamic and relational constructions shaped by interaction and context (Wei, 2023). Narrative inquiry guided both data generation and interpretation. Participants' experiences were elicited as storied accounts through dialogic interviews and reflective narratives, and analysis attended to how these experiences were structured, situated, and made meaningful across contexts. Reflexive thematic analysis was used as an analytic strategy to identify patterned meanings while preserving narrative coherence. Grounded in an interpretivist–constructivist epistemology, the unit of analysis comprised participants' narrated experiences of engaging in online Oral Communication, enabling in depth examination of how learners interpret communicative participation in distance learning environments.

Participants

The study employed purposive criterion-based sampling to select information-rich participants with direct experience in online Oral Communication (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Patton, 2022). Eligible participants were Senior High School students enrolled in Oral Communication courses at a private university in Bacolod City, Philippines, during School Year 2020–2021, who had completed at least one academic quarter of online instruction and demonstrated sustained engagement in the course. Recruitment was facilitated through institutional gatekeepers who disseminated study invitations to qualified students. Interested students contacted the researchers voluntarily, and those under the researchers' direct instruction were excluded to minimize power imbalance. Participants represented different academic strands, including Accountancy, Business and Management, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Tourism. The group included both male and female students with varied self-reported speaking proficiency levels and prior exposure to online learning environments. Four participants were included, consistent with narrative inquiry's emphasis on depth, relational engagement, and intensive exploration of lived experience rather than sample size breadth (Clandinin, 2022; Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Participants were regarded as conversation partners to emphasize the co-construction of meaning in the research process.

Collection

Data were generated through unstructured interviews and supplemental written narratives, consistent with narrative inquiry's focus on lived and storied experience (Clandinin, 2022). Unstructured interviews enabled participant-centered accounts without imposing predetermined response categories, allowing learners to articulate their interpretations of online Oral Communication experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Each of the four conversation partners participated in one interview session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Participants also provided reflective written narratives through personal messaging platforms to enrich contextual understanding and support data triangulation. Institutional approval was secured prior to data collection, and participants were recruited through authorized gatekeepers. All participants provided informed consent and were briefed on the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality safeguards in accordance with established ethical guidelines (British Educational Research Association, 2024). Participants were assigned identification codes (CP1–CP4), and no personal identifiers were retained. Interviews were conducted in quiet settings selected by participants. With consent, sessions were audio-video recorded, and field notes were maintained to document contextual and non-verbal information (Saunders et al., 2023). Recordings were securely stored and transcribed verbatim for subsequent narrative and thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participants and their parents were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. Written informed consent from parents and assent from students were secured before participation. Participation was strictly voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. To protect confidentiality, pseudonymous identification codes (CP1–CP4) were assigned to participants. All digital data were stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. To mitigate potential power imbalances, students under the researchers' direct instruction were excluded from participation, and recruitment was facilitated through institutional gatekeepers. Trustworthiness was established in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was enhanced through verbatim transcription, triangulation of data sources including interviews, written narratives, and field notes, as well as member checking. Participants reviewed their transcripts and preliminary narrative interpretations to verify accuracy and clarify intended meanings prior to final analysis.

Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through systematic documentation of analytic decisions, forming an audit trail. Transferability was supported through a detailed description of the research context and participant characteristics.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), integrated with the interpretive orientation of narrative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach enabled systematic identification of patterned meanings while preserving the storied and contextual character of participants' experiences in online Oral Communication. Analysis was inductive and primarily semantic, with themes understood as interpretive constructions generated through researchers' reflexive engagement with the data. Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase analytic process, the researchers immersed themselves in the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, written narratives, and field notes, supported by reflexive memo writing. Initial codes were generated to capture participants' accounts of engagement, adaptation, and challenges in digitally mediated speaking. Codes were then compared within and across narratives and organized into candidate themes. These themes were reviewed, refined, and defined in relation to the entire data set and the study's interpretive focus. The final analytic narrative integrated thematic patterns with participants' individual stories to preserve narrative coherence. Analytic rigor was supported through reflexive documentation, an audit trail of coding and theme development, triangulation of interviews, written narratives, and field notes, and member checking to ensure interpretive resonance with participants' accounts.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the interpretive findings derived from the narrative accounts of the four conversation partners who experienced Oral Communication in an online distance learning modality. Guided by narrative inquiry and Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the analysis conceptualizes learner attitudes not as fixed psychological traits but as contextually constructed orientations emerging through interaction, experience, and meaning-making (Clandinin, 2022; Barkhuizen et al., 2024; Ong, 2020). Within digitally mediated speaking environments, these orientations are shaped through the dynamic interplay of technological conditions, pedagogical presence, peer relationality, and self-regulatory demands. From 228 units of meaning organized into 18 analytic clusters, three interrelated themes emerged: Agentic Engagement in Online Oral Communication, Negotiated Adaptation to Online Modality, and Structural and Affective Disruptions in Digital Communication. Collectively, these themes indicate that learner attitudes toward online speaking operate along a dynamic continuum shaped by motivational processes, relational pedagogy, and infrastructural constraints rather than by technological modality alone (Palvia & Matta, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024; Nair & Yunus, 2021).

Agentic Engagement in Online Oral Communication

The first overarching theme, Agentic Engagement in Online Oral Communication, reflects learners' active and purposeful participation in digitally mediated speaking tasks. Rather than representing stable positive dispositions, participants' responses reveal agentic meaning-making through which engagement is constructed, sustained, and negotiated within relational and technological conditions. Consistent with narrative inquiry, attitudes emerge as storied responses to experience rather than predetermined learner characteristics (Clandinin, 2022; Barkhuizen et al., 2024). This finding aligns with research demonstrating that engagement in digital language learning is mediated by perceived relevance, teacher presence, and affective orientation rather than technological affordances alone (Palvia & Matta, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024). In this study, agency manifested through intrinsic motivation, strategic participation, relational responsiveness, and pedagogically mediated confidence development. Such engagement reflects what attitude theory describes as experiential orientation—patterns of response shaped through ongoing interaction with learning contexts (Ong, 2020). Within this theme, five interrelated subthemes were identified.

Intrinsic Communicative Drive

Intrinsic communicative drive refers to learners' internally generated motivation to develop speaking competence despite the structural constraints of online learning. Across all four conversation partners, narratives consistently expressed enjoyment, resilience, and a belief in personal growth through participation in digitally mediated Oral Communication. Participants framed engagement not as mere compliance with instructional requirements but as meaningful involvement in communicative development. CP1 described participation as both enjoyable and challenging, stating, "I really enjoy listening in class... it was both fun and challenging," and further explained that oral communication allowed her to "harness [her] speaking skills and enhance the way [she] recite[s]." Similarly, CP2 expressed anticipatory enthusiasm toward synchronous sessions, explaining, "We should enjoy our oral communication class and I got excited every time we met." CP3 emphasized effort and self-belief as central to communicative success, stating, "As long as we work hard for it, and as long as we believe in ourselves, we believe that we can do it." CP4 articulated confidence development as a transformative outcome of participation, remarking, "Self-confidence is a superpower. Once you start to believe in yourself, magic starts happening." Collectively, these narratives indicate that communicative engagement was sustained by internally activated motivation rather than externally imposed pressure. This pattern aligns with research demonstrating that intrinsic motivation supports persistence and deeper engagement in technology-mediated speaking environments

(Wang, 2023; Ericsson & Johansson, 2023). From an attitudinal perspective, these responses reflect experiential orientation—learners’ affective and motivational positioning shaped through ongoing interaction with learning contexts (Ong, 2020). Affective orientation has likewise been shown to significantly predict participation and communicative achievement in digital language learning settings (Fathi et al., 2024).

Importantly, participants did not uniformly interpret the interactional constraints of online learning as barriers to development. Although virtual environments may reduce spontaneity and limit access to non-verbal feedback (Quvanch et al., 2024; Uztosun & Kök, 2024), some learners reinterpreted mediated communication as psychologically manageable spaces for practice. This interpretation is consistent with findings that technology-mediated speaking environments may moderate performance anxiety for certain learners by reducing perceived evaluative pressure (Saksopin et al., 2025; Wang, 2024). In this sense, intrinsic motivation functioned as a regulatory resource that enabled learners to reinterpret structural limitations as opportunities for competence development. Taken together, the findings suggest that intrinsic communicative drive operates as both an affective and adaptive mechanism within digitally mediated speaking environments. Rather than being diminished by technological constraints, internally sustained motivation enabled learners to engage productively with online Oral Communication, transforming mediated interaction into a viable context for confidence building and skill development.

Purposeful Academic Investment

Beyond affective enjoyment, learners articulated a conscious and reflective acceptance of Oral Communication as a meaningful academic pursuit. Their narratives reveal not only emotional engagement but also cognitive endorsement of the subject’s relevance and utility, indicating deliberate investment in communicative learning. Participants framed Oral Communication as functionally significant for everyday interaction and personal development. CP1 emphasized the necessity of communication for conveying meaning, explaining that “Oral Communication... is especially important... we cannot deliver message... so communication is very important.” CP2 similarly expressed an emergent recognition of its broader life value, stating, “I realize... that oral communication is truly important in our life.” CP4 connected learning directly to self-improvement, noting that “Just the thought of learning something that I can use to improve myself, motivates me.” These accounts position engagement not merely as interest-driven participation but as reasoned commitment grounded in perceived usefulness. Such cognitive endorsement reflects what digital learning research describes as performance expectancy and effort expectancy—learners’ beliefs that instructional activities are beneficial and manageable, which in turn sustain motivation and participation (Huang & Zou, 2024; Alharbi, 2025). When learners perceive communicative tasks as personally meaningful and instrumentally valuable, engagement becomes intentional rather than incidental.

This interpretive pattern is particularly significant within the Philippine context, where remote instruction has been associated with increased speaking apprehension and participation challenges (Lungay, 2023; Peña, 2025). The present findings suggest that cognitive recognition of subject relevance can function as an adaptive resource that stabilizes engagement despite modality-related difficulties. Rather than passively accepting instructional demands, participants actively constructed the value of Oral Communication through personal meaning-making, linking learning to everyday communication and future self-development. Purposeful academic investment therefore reflects a cognitively mediated form of engagement in which learners rationalize and internalize the significance of communicative competence. Within digitally mediated environments, this evaluative orientation appears to support sustained participation by anchoring motivation in perceived relevance rather than situational enjoyment alone.

Active Digital Participation

Agentic engagement was further manifested through learners’ deliberate participation strategies in digitally mediated speaking activities. Rather than withdrawing in response to modality-related constraints, participants described actively asserting their communicative presence through intentional behavioral and self-regulatory practices. Participants portrayed participation as a conscious effort rather than a passive response to instructional prompts. CP2 emphasized sustained involvement regardless of certainty or difficulty, stating, “I am a very active person... whether I know the answer or not, I would really try to participate in class recitation... even though we attend classes online, we should be active.” CP3 similarly described consistent responsiveness during synchronous interaction, explaining, “I answer the questions of my teacher whenever there is a recitation.” CP4 highlighted preparatory self-regulation, noting, “I make it a point to study in advance. I tend to open modules in e-LMS.” These accounts indicate that participation was enacted through intentional behavioral engagement, advance preparation, and sustained communicative effort. Such patterns reflect digital self-regulation and communicative persistence within technologically mediated learning environments. Prior research indicates that engagement in online speaking contexts is strongly shaped by learners’ digital self-efficacy and the availability of structured opportunities for participation (Huang & Zou, 2024; Mandalika & Sulistyningrum, 2024). Collaborative interaction and guided reflection have likewise been shown to strengthen willingness to communicate among ESL learners in online environments (Sasaki et al., 2023). The present findings extend this perspective by illustrating how learners themselves actively generate participation through strategic effort and anticipatory preparation.

Importantly, these participation strategies emerged despite widely documented concerns that online platforms may weaken social presence and reduce interactional immediacy (Quvanch et al., 2024). Participants did not uniformly interpret reduced immediacy as grounds for disengagement. Instead, they enacted agency through sustained behavioral involvement, suggesting that communicative participation is not solely determined by technological affordances but is also shaped by learner disposition and pedagogical facilitation. Active digital participation therefore represents a behavioral expression of agentic engagement in which learners intentionally maintain communicative involvement under mediated conditions. Rather than reinforcing deficit-oriented assumptions about online oral instruction, these narratives demonstrate that participation can be strategically produced through self-regulation, initiative, and adaptive effort within technologically constrained environments.

Perceived Pedagogical Presence

A central driver of agentic engagement was learners' perception of pedagogical presence. Participants consistently attributed their sustained participation to instructors' relational responsiveness, enthusiasm, and accessibility within the digitally mediated classroom. Rather than experiencing online instruction as socially distant, learners described teacher presence as an interactional resource that supported confidence and communicative involvement. Participants emphasized affective and relational dimensions of teaching rather than technological features of instruction. CP1 associated engagement with the instructor's enthusiasm and patience, explaining that "The teacher loves what she is doing... she can deliver better the lessons... It is the best, especially when your teacher has so much patience." CP2 linked motivation to interactive questioning practices, noting that she became more engaged when the teacher actively prompted participation: "I got excited because [the teacher] was asking questions." CP3 highlighted relational accessibility, stating that online interaction still allowed students to "build rapport with the teacher and get close." These accounts indicate that perceived instructor presence functioned as a relational anchor that sustained communicative confidence despite physical separation. Such findings align with research demonstrating that perceived teacher presence and immediacy significantly influence participation, satisfaction, and engagement in digital learning environments (Huang & Zou, 2024; Alharbi, 2025). Instructional responsiveness, questioning strategies, and relational accessibility have been shown to mediate learners' willingness to communicate by compensating for reduced physical co-presence (Rotjanawongchai, 2024). Within online speaking contexts, pedagogical presence operates not merely as instructional delivery but as an interactional condition that supports emotional security and communicative risk-taking.

This interpretation is particularly meaningful in relation to studies reporting the difficulty of sustaining dialogic interaction in remote instruction (Fortuno, 2025; Ubando, 2025). While digital environments may constrain spontaneous interpersonal exchange, the present findings suggest that perceived authenticity and responsiveness of the teacher can mitigate these limitations. Learners did not experience reduced physical proximity as equivalent to relational distance when pedagogical interaction remained visible and responsive. Perceived pedagogical presence therefore functioned as a relational mechanism that mediated engagement within technologically structured environments. Rather than technological affordances alone shaping participation, learners' communicative involvement was sustained through interactional trust, emotional accessibility, and instructional responsiveness. These findings reinforce the view that effective digital oral pedagogy depends less on platform design than on the maintenance of relational teaching practices that preserve the social core of communication learning (Palvia & Matta, 2023).

Collaborative Empathy

A further dimension of agentic engagement emerged through learners' sensitivity toward peers, reflected in patterns of cooperative participation and mutual support. Rather than approaching communicative interaction as competitive performance, participants described engagement as relationally oriented and socially responsive. Participants expressed attentiveness to classmates' contributions and a willingness to support shared participation. CP1 emphasized respect for peers' voices and a desire to contribute collectively, stating, "I respect what my classmates say when they answer in class recitation. I want also to share to others whatever I learn from school." CP2 similarly described assuming an active role to sustain interaction, humorously noting, "In order to save them, I am the one raising my hand up (laughs)." These accounts indicate that participation was not solely individually motivated but embedded within a sense of communal responsibility and shared communicative effort. Such peer-oriented engagement reflects collaborative dynamics that have been shown to enhance willingness to communicate and strengthen collective efficacy in digitally mediated learning environments (Mandalika & Sulistyaningrum, 2024). When learners perceive interaction as mutually supportive rather than evaluative, participation becomes socially sustained rather than individually pressured.

This finding contrasts with studies reporting fear of negative evaluation and communicative inhibition in online environments (Badrasawi et al., 2024; Paraguas, 2025). In the present study, participants described supportive peer dynamics that mitigated evaluative anxiety and facilitated communicative confidence. This suggests that classroom relational culture, rather than technological modality alone, plays a decisive role in shaping participation patterns. Consistent with socio-constructivist perspectives on language learning, these findings reinforce the view that attitudes toward online speaking are dynamically produced through relational interaction,

motivational orientation, and contextual experience (Fathi et al., 2024; Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Although digital environments may constrain spontaneity and reduce embodied immediacy (Quvanch et al., 2024; Uztosun & Kök, 2024), they do not inherently suppress communicative development. When supported by collaborative peer relations, pedagogical presence, and learner agency, online settings can function as socially viable spaces for speaking growth.

Negotiated Adaptation to Online Modality

The second major theme that emerged from the narratives of the conversation partners is Negotiated Adaptation to Online Modality, originally framed as ambivalent attitude. Rather than reflecting a simple shift between positive and negative responses, the findings reveal an ongoing process through which learners actively adjusted their perceptions, expectations, and communicative practices within digitally mediated speaking environments. These adjustments were shaped by perceived relevance, prior experiences, and evolving communicative identities. From a narrative inquiry perspective, such attitudes are temporally situated constructions that develop through lived experience and reflective meaning-making (Clandinin, 2022; Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Consistent with broader research, learner responses to online oral communication are shaped not only by technological conditions but also by perceived usefulness, social presence, and the demands of participation in mediated interaction (Palvia & Matta, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024). In this study, adaptation emerged as an active process of reinterpretation rather than passive acceptance, expressed through learners' evolving understandings of communication, learning, and self in digital space.

Future-Oriented Communicative Consciousness

A significant component of negotiated adaptation was learners' recognition of Oral Communication as relevant to their future professional and social lives. Participants interpreted communicative learning not merely as an academic requirement but as preparation for real-world interaction and long-term personal development. CP2 explicitly linked classroom learning to professional practice, explaining, "There are many things I could apply in my life in this subject. If you are a doctor, you need to entertain your patients... ask them what or how they feel... so oral communication is very important if one decides to be a doctor. We can enjoy more opportunities in life." Similarly, CP4 emphasized the future utility of communicative competence, stating, "Our class can be helpful to me in the future. It also gave me knowledge about how to be an effective communicator... during job interviews and presentations." These accounts indicate that learners anchored their engagement in anticipated future roles, framing communicative competence as a resource for professional and social mobility. Such future-oriented meaning-making aligns with research showing that perceived professional relevance strengthens willingness to communicate and sustains engagement in digital language learning environments (Mandalika & Sulistyaningrum, 2024; Sasaki et al., 2023). Perceived usefulness of learning platforms likewise supports continued participation despite modality-related constraints (Huang & Zou, 2024; Alharbi, 2025). Within the Philippine context, studies further indicate that perceived career relevance can stabilize motivation among Senior High School learners navigating online English instruction (Tomas, 2023; Salagan, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that adaptation to online Oral Communication was anchored in anticipatory self-development. Rather than passively accepting instructional demands, learners recalibrated their engagement by aligning communicative learning with imagined future identities and opportunities.

Reframed Subject Perception

Negotiated adaptation also involved the reconstruction of prior beliefs about Oral Communication. Familiarity with the subject did not necessarily generate immediate enthusiasm; rather, learners' perceptions evolved as they encountered content that rendered communicative learning personally meaningful and experientially relevant. Adaptation therefore occurred not only through behavioral adjustment but through interpretive redefinition of what the subject represented. Participants described shifts in how they understood the nature and purpose of communication itself. CP1 articulated an expanded conception of communication beyond verbal exchange, reflecting, "Communication is not about merely talking... it is not just exchanging words, but also listening for feedback... without it, we could not come together." This account reframes communication as relational and reciprocal rather than purely expressive. In contrast, CP2 initially associated Oral Communication with monotony and disinterest, admitting, "To be honest... oral communication has not been my favorite subject... I think [it is] a boring subject... and I don't like reading a lot." However, subsequent learning experiences prompted a perceptual shift. She later expressed strong interest in language barriers, explaining, "Language barriers... is my most favorite topic... I learned that it is really important that we have one language so that we and the Chinese can understand one another." These narratives demonstrate how exposure to meaningful communicative contexts enabled learners to reconsider the subject's relevance and value. Such perceptual transformation reflects the interpretive and experiential construction of learner attitudes emphasized in narrative and socio-constructivist perspectives of language learning (Barkhuizen et al., 2024; Wei, 2023). Attitudes toward communication are not fixed predispositions but evolving orientations shaped through interaction with learning experiences and contextual meaning-making (Ong, 2020). When learners encounter instructional content that connects communication to lived social realities, previously held assumptions may be re-evaluated and recontextualized. Conceptual understanding is therefore not merely accumulated but reconstructed through experience.

This process is particularly significant in digitally mediated environments where reduced spontaneity and limited embodied interaction may initially contribute to perceptions of monotony or detachment (Quvanch et al., 2024; Uztosun & K ok, 2024). Under such conditions, the meaningfulness of instructional content becomes a critical interpretive resource. When communicative tasks illuminate real-world interaction, social coordination, or intercultural understanding, learners are more likely to reframe the subject as relevant rather than routine. These findings reinforce the argument that attitudes toward digital oral instruction are shaped not solely by technological modality but by instructional design, perceived relevance, and experiential engagement (Palvia & Matta, 2023). When learners encounter communicative topics that illuminate authentic social interaction and practical communicative challenges, subject perception shifts from academic requirement to meaningful communicative practice. Reframed subject perception therefore represents an adaptive interpretive process through which learners reconstruct the significance of Oral Communication in response to lived learning experience.

Identity Reconfiguration in Digital Space

The third subtheme reflects learners' negotiation and reconstruction of communicative identity within the distance learning environment. Adaptation to online Oral Communication did not involve only behavioral or cognitive adjustment but also shifts in how learners understood and presented themselves as communicators in mediated interaction. CP4's narrative illustrates this process of identity recalibration. She described experiencing social withdrawal, communicative hesitation, and self-consciousness in online interaction, explaining, "I couldn't socialize. I was shy to interact with other people... I opted to have just a few friends... I am ashamed to speak up." At the same time, she described deliberate efforts to modify her communicative behavior, stating, "I studied by myself how to communicate with others... I approach people in different ways... my personality seems different... I project the same kind of personality so as not to annoy them." This account reflects not only emotional difficulty but intentional identity management and adaptive self-presentation within digitally mediated communication. Such experiences are consistent with Philippine research documenting heightened speaking apprehension and challenges in sustaining dialogic interaction during remote instruction, where reduced immediacy and increased self-awareness can reshape participation patterns (Lungay, 2023; Pe a, 2025). Studies of Senior High School learners further indicate heterogeneous engagement trajectories during digital learning transitions, with some students requiring adaptive strategies to regain communicative confidence (Tomas, 2023; Salagan, 2024). CP4's narrative exemplifies this adaptive trajectory, demonstrating movement from withdrawal toward intentional communicative self-development.

From a narrative and socio-constructivist perspective, identity in online speaking contexts is not fixed but dynamically reconstructed through interaction, reflection, and contextual adjustment (Wei, 2023; Barkhuizen et al., 2024). Attitudes toward communication evolve as learners reinterpret their capabilities and relational positioning within mediated environments. Digital participation therefore becomes a site of identity work in which learners negotiate how to speak, present themselves, and relate to others. Consistent with contemporary digital pedagogy research, communicative engagement is shaped not solely by technological affordances but by the relational and pedagogical conditions through which learners experience interaction (Fathi et al., 2024; Huang & Zou, 2024). Although remote instruction introduces structural constraints, it also creates spaces for reflective self-regulation and identity reconstruction. Identity reconfiguration in digital space thus represents an adaptive process through which learners renegotiate communicative selfhood in response to the demands and possibilities of online learning.

Structural and Affective Disruptions in Digital Communication

The third major theme that emerged from the narratives is Structural and Affective Disruptions in Digital Communication, originally framed as negative attitude. Rather than representing simple pessimism or disengagement, these responses reflect the ways interactional, infrastructural, and performance-related constraints shaped learners' emotional and cognitive experiences of online Oral Communication. Participants' attitudes were closely tied to the conditions under which communication occurred, revealing how technological mediation reorganized participation, responsiveness, and communicative effort. Consistent with research on digital learning environments, attitudes toward online communication are shaped through the interaction of technological affordances, social presence, and learner regulation rather than by modality alone (Palvia & Matta, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024). Within the Philippine context, remote instruction has been associated with heightened speaking apprehension, reduced dialogic immediacy, and challenges in sustaining interactive engagement and assessment practices (Lungay, 2023; Pe a, 2025). In this study, such disruptions did not simply produce withdrawal but became conditions learners had to navigate, interpret, and manage within mediated communication.

Technological and Environmental Constraints

A primary source of disruption emerged from infrastructural instability and environmental distraction, both of which directly shaped learners' participation and emotional regulation in online Oral Communication. Rather than functioning as minor inconveniences, these conditions structured when, how, and whether communicative interaction could occur. CP2 vividly described the material unpredictability of synchronous participation, recounting that during class recitation, "the electricity went out... Wi-Fi was not accessible... I tried looking for a signal; I even climbed a tree." She also noted persistent environmental noise, explaining that "roosters crow in

the morning... and there are children playing outside.” Although narrated humorously, these experiences reveal the fragility of communicative access within unstable technological and domestic conditions. Such infrastructural and environmental disruptions are widely documented as barriers to effective online oral participation, particularly in contexts where connectivity and learning spaces are inconsistent (Badrasawi et al., 2024; Paraguas, 2025; Cano, 2022; Delson, 2022). Participants further described how these constraints altered the quality of interaction itself. CP1 observed that “even if you want to listen, you get distracted by the noise,” and noted that performing in recorded or video-based tasks felt different from face-to-face communication because “the teacher cannot see how you speak out.” These accounts indicate that technological mediation did not simply interrupt access but reshaped communicative visibility and responsiveness. Such experiences align with research indicating that online modalities often reduce immediacy and limit access to non-verbal feedback, thereby weakening the interactional richness that supports speaking development (Quvanch et al., 2024; Uztosun & K ok, 2024). When communicative cues are diminished and participation is environmentally constrained, learners’ engagement becomes effortful and emotionally taxing. Technological and environmental instability therefore functioned as structural conditions that not only interrupted participation but also shaped learners’ affective orientation toward communication itself.

Performance Vulnerability in Mediated Spaces

Beyond environmental and infrastructural disruptions, learners described heightened vulnerability in multimedia-based performance tasks that required recording and public sharing of communicative output. These tasks increased self-consciousness by making performance more visible, repeatable, and open to evaluation. CP4 described feeling compelled to participate despite discomfort, explaining that “there were mostly video activities... and I was so shy doing those... but... what grades will I earn?” She further expressed anxiety about public exposure, stating that video outputs were “posted in our public group... I was scared... what if someone who knows me sees my activity and would judge me or laugh at me.” Performance tasks that required visible facial expression and gesture intensified this apprehension, particularly in activities such as news casting where “it is a necessity that the face is seen... it is also about the gestures of the news reporter.” These accounts reflect mediated self-presentation anxiety shaped by heightened performance visibility and perceived audience scrutiny. Such experiences align with research indicating that fear of negative evaluation may persist—and in some cases intensify—in online speaking environments where recordings function as durable performance artifacts (Badrasawi et al., 2024; Yusof et al., 2025). Philippine studies similarly report increased speaking apprehension in remote instruction, particularly when assessment requires video-based performance (Peña, 2025; Lungay, 2023). Unlike live interaction, recorded communication extends exposure beyond the moment of performance, amplifying self-monitoring and reducing perceived control over audience response.

Learners also described tension between performance demands and personal regulation. CP3 reflected retrospectively, “I should have focused more on oral communication... I should not have taken it for granted... I should have been more motivated.” This statement suggests that mediated performance environments require sustained self-regulation, with difficulty sometimes interpreted as personal inadequacy rather than situational constraint. From a narrative and socio-constructivist perspective, such responses reflect evolving self-evaluation shaped by contextual participation demands (Clandinin, 2022; Wei, 2023). These findings indicate that performance vulnerability in online Oral Communication emerges at the intersection of technological mediation, heightened performance visibility, and evaluative self-awareness. Structural features of multimedia assessment reshape how learners experience exposure, scrutiny, and communicative risk, thereby influencing both emotional response and willingness to participate. Taken together, the three themes—Agentic Engagement, Negotiated Adaptation, and Structural and Affective Disruptions—indicate that learner attitudes toward online Oral Communication are dynamically constructed through the interaction of motivational, relational, and material conditions. Students actively sustain participation through intrinsic motivation, cognitive valuation of communicative competence, and supportive teacher–peer relationships, yet this engagement is continually reshaped as they reinterpret learning in relation to future goals, evolving subject understanding, and shifting communicative identities. At the same time, infrastructural instability, environmental distraction, and heightened performance visibility introduce emotional and interactional constraints that structure how participation is experienced. Online Oral Communication thus emerges not as a uniformly enabling or limiting modality, but as a mediated learning ecology in which agency, adaptation, and disruption operate simultaneously. Learner attitudes develop through ongoing negotiation between opportunities for communicative growth and the structural realities that shape digitally mediated interaction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the attitudes of Senior High School students toward Oral Communication in an online distance learning modality through qualitative narrative inquiry. By foregrounding learners’ lived experiences, the findings demonstrate that attitudes toward online speaking are not fixed dispositions but dynamically constructed through the interaction of motivational resources, relational pedagogy, and material learning conditions. Students sustained engagement through intrinsic motivation, perceived relevance of communicative competence, and supportive teacher–peer relationships, while simultaneously negotiating technological instability, performance

visibility, and evolving communicative identities. Online Oral Communication therefore operates as a mediated relational learning ecology in which agency, adaptation, and structural constraint continuously interact.

These findings highlight the need for online Oral Communication instruction that supports both interaction and psychological safety. Teachers should scaffold speaking tasks through staged practice, guided rehearsal, and formative feedback to sustain communicative confidence. Structured peer feedback and collaborative rehearsal can strengthen social presence and normalize shared challenges in mediated communication. To reduce performance anxiety in recorded tasks, instructors should provide flexible submission options, transparent criteria, and opportunities for revision. At the institutional level, flexible participation policies and context responsive assessment designs can mitigate technological and environmental constraints. Together, relationally responsive and technologically adaptive practices can foster more supportive and meaningful online speaking development.

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