
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Learner Reticence at the Time of the Pandemic: Examining Filipino Students' Communication Behaviors in Remote Learning

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| ABSTRACT

Between the uncertainty of a global pandemic, the unfamiliar territory of fully remote education, and the detrimental effects of related crises on the educational system, emerging research on pandemic pedagogy have underscored the universal presences of 1) anxiety in students and teachers, 2) decreased communication opportunities, and 3) challenges with communication technologies –all of which have been found to affect students' communication behaviors in their remote classes. Learner reticence –students' inadequate ability in self-expression usually manifested in reluctance to engage in classroom discourse– remains one of the biggest instructional communication challenges most teachers face today. Recent pandemic-related changes in learning delivery have put students at an even bigger disadvantage in terms of self-expression, participation, and discourse since the majority of the difficulties they experience in remote learning involve and are affected by their resources' capacities to sustain communication with their teachers and classmates. This study investigated the self-perceived experiences of learner reticence of Filipino higher education students. With phenomenology as the main method of inquiry, all participants disclosed experiences of reticent behaviors in their remote classes during the pandemic; individual and personality-based factors were found to contribute the most to the students' experienced reticence. The participants' narratives also gave rise to insights on teacher immediacy and interpersonal communication in remote classes.

| KEYWORDS

Learner reticence, instructional communication, remote learning, Filipino, higher education, student communication, pandemic pedagogy.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The shift in learning modalities following the onset of Covid-19 –from traditional face-to-face to modular remote instruction– exacerbated and catalyzed many instructional communication-related challenges that instructors now must address and alleviate. Mahyoob (2020) determined technical, academic, and communication challenges universally experienced by institutions, teachers, and students that ultimately impact learning delivery during the pandemic. Leech et al. (2022) emphasized instructors' struggles in 1) keeping students engaged in remote learning, 2) dealing with students' being uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the necessary technologies, and 3) providing the needed support so that students are regularly available and responsive. Research on pedagogy during Covid-19 has also highlighted teachers' difficulty with transitioning their lessons to a remote format, the majority of which indicate that lessons and activities had not translated well to remote and that they struggled with finding adequate replacements for in-person teaching practices.

Between the uncertainty of a global pandemic, the unfamiliar territory of fully remote education, and the detrimental effects of the situation on the educational system, stress levels of both students and alike grew significantly in this pandemic. Students, too, are fraught with difficulties in continuing school in the midst of a global health emergency, an economic recession, and social unrest.

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Many families have grappled with financial worries, illness, loss, and food insecurity, making students more susceptible to behavioral and communicative changes. In investigating Filipino students' difficulties in remote learning, Rotas and Cahapay (2020) outlined 1) unstable internet and electric connectivity, 2) inadequate learning resources, 3) vague instruction yet overloaded lesson activities, 4) poor peer communication, 5) conflict with home responsibilities, and 6) physical and mental health struggles as their main challenges.

Learner reticence –students' inadequate ability in self-expression usually manifested in reluctance to engage in classroom discourse– remains one of the biggest instructional communication challenges most teachers face today. While dialogue remains to be one of the most effective ways to promote learning and is intended to result in emancipation for students, it may result in subjugation for shy, reticent students (Leonard & Johnson, 1998). Recent pandemic-induced changes in learning delivery have put students at an ever bigger disadvantage in terms of practicing discourse since the majority of the difficulties they experience in remote learning involve and are affected by their resources' capacities to sustain communication with their teachers and classmates. In the shared physical space of schools, teachers and students are naturally connected: learners are able to stay in the loop of their class discussions and requirements and are, at times, expected to participate in discussions. At an unprecedented time of connectivity and communication issues experienced in learning management systems (LMS), asynchronous and synchronous online classes, and in state-provided printed modules, this research asserts how student communication behaviors have changed (Busteed, 2022; Alawamleh et al., 2020; Biber et al., 2020) and how their in-class interactions have potentially decreased.

This exploratory study sought to describe the experiences of learner reticence in online classrooms potentially influenced by the instructional communication challenges brought about by the pandemic and the shift to remote learning. More specifically, this study attempted to answer: 1) *Do students experience learner reticence in their remote classes?* and 2) *What factors contribute to the learner reticence they experience in their remote classrooms?*

1.1 Learner Reticence

Reticence in communication has been described as experiences of communication avoidance in social and public contexts, particularly in novel situations that have the potential for negative evaluation (Keaten & Kelly, 2000). Reticence is the result of a communication breakdown or a deficit of perceived communicative competence – from a choice to avoid interactions to the complete inability to participate in communicative activities. It is a communicative behavior often perceived as a problem with cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions as one who experiences the phenomenon often operates on the belief that he or she is better off remaining silent than risk appearing foolish. Earlier research in communication reticence delved into finding correlations between communication apprehension and other communicative behaviors: nonverbal and relational communication (Burgoon and Koper, 1984), verbal encoding behaviors and language production (Burgoon and Hale, 1983), and other social withdrawal behaviors (Philips, 1984).

Wagner (n.d.) described the reticent student as “one whose fear of speaking out in the classroom prevents her or him from participating”. Reticent students participate less frequently in class, are less likely to volunteer contributions, and give shorter and less elaborate answers to questions (Crozier, 2001). While reticence is unfortunately often misinterpreted as a lack of interest or preparation (Soo and Goh, 2013; Wagner, n.d.), research has emphasized that reticent students might actually be well-prepared and are intensely interested in the discussion but are held back by this communicative phenomenon (Chang, 2011; Nguyen, 2018).

Recent studies on learner reticence have elaborated on student learning experiences and communicative behaviors in language classes (Zhang & Head, 2009; Liu & Jackson, 2011; Aghazadeh & Abedi, 2014; Nguyen, 2018; Aripin & Umam, 2019), where learners are ultimately expected to spend more time speaking especially using the language being learning. Speaking in the class activities and expressing ideas to strangers using the target language are the primary goals of students in these types of classes; however, research has revealed that reticence and anxiety are often present in these courses and may have a debilitating impact on language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Macintyre & Gardner, 1991; Liu & Jackson, 2008) that often manifest through speaking less to more negative forms of arousal (e.g. anxiety, tension, and incomprehensible speech). Fear of losing face, low proficiency, negative evaluation, cultural beliefs about appropriate behavior in classroom contexts, incomprehensible input, teacher's teaching techniques, lack of confidence, introversion, and perceived communicative competence (Tsui, 1996; Jenkins, 2008; Liu & Jackson, 2011; Xie, 2009; Delima, 2011) are among the causes of reticence reported in language classrooms.

Scholarship on classroom communication has also discussed learner reticence as experienced by students in nursing courses (Leonard & Johnson, 1998), postgraduate engineering courses (Hilton, 2018), and multicultural, multi-modal college classes (Peacock, 2017). While they do not share the same communicative expectations as language classes, higher education courses are often held in a more emancipatory learning format that integrates discourse and dialogue in the teaching-learning approaches

(Leggett et al., 2018; Leonard & Johnson, 1998). While dialogue has been found effective in promoting learning, it may result in subjugation for students who experience communication apprehension in the classroom.

1.2 Student Communication Behaviors at the Time of the Pandemic

Attending school at the time of a pandemic is an unprecedented experience for all students. While online and distance learning is not entirely new, the temporary closure of schools due to Covid-19 has forced institutions, teachers, and students to immediately adapt to new, fully-remote learning modalities with the intention of continuing education during a global health crisis. As teachers and students were thrust into a territory of unfamiliar communication dynamics, articles and emerging research on pandemic pedagogy have underscored the universal presence of 1) anxiety in students and teachers (Jehi et al., 2022; Cleofas & Rocha, 2021; Prentiss, 2021; Abdelwahed et al., 2020;), of 2) decreased communication (Fruehwirth et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021), and of 3) challenges with communication technologies (Barrot et al., 2021; Sawar et al., 2020; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020) –all of which were found to have affected students' communication behaviors in the remote classroom.

The onset of Covid-19 and associated educational and governmental mitigation strategies have been found to have exhibited persistent negative impacts on wellness and social behaviors among secondary and tertiary students (Copeland et al., 2021; Prentiss, 2021; Abdelwahed et al., 2020). Jehi et al. (2022) have delineated the common sources of students' pandemic-related anxieties: financial hardships, fears, decreased social interactions, decreased physical activities, poor sleep quality, and uncertainties in online learning. Students' declining mental well-being has been found to cause student withdrawal behaviors: decreased student enrollments (Busetta et al., 2021), decreased self-perceived vitality and learning (Sahin & Tuna, 2022), and increased time spent on social media for entertainment (Mukhtar et al., 2020; Temiz, 2020). While the general consensus remains that these pandemic-induced anxieties affect students' classroom communication negatively, Gonzales et al. (2020) found Covid-19 confinement to have exhibited a positive effect on higher education student performance in objective assessments.

Shifting to online learning during the pandemic negatively impacted students' mental health because the shift attenuated the teacher-student and student-student interactions (Fruehwirth et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021). Recent literature has continuously highlighted students' preference for physical classrooms over online classes due to many communication-related problems they face when taking online classes: lack of motivation, difficulty understanding the material, decrease in communication levels between the students and their instructors, and feeling of isolation caused by online classes (Alawamleh et al., 2022; Busteded, 2022; Selvaraj et al., 2021). Selvaraj et al. (2021) reported that in India, the preferred methods of teaching are recorded lectures (70 %) over live online lectures (20 %) –highlighting the decreased direct interactions between students and teachers. Snoussi and Radwan's (2021) study indicated that a large number of communication students still prefer traditional teaching methods as they claim to be missing an opportunity to receive evaluation and validation from their teachers and to practice their skills in applied courses. The decrease in communication opportunities has been ultimately found to cause students' negative perceptions of teacher-student communication in their online classes, evident in their strong feelings of disconnect with their instructors, the course content, and their fellow classmates (Alawamleh et al., 2020).

Almahasees, Moses, and Amin (2021) scrutinized the readiness of instructors to teach online as there was a significant percentage (40%) of their faculty respondents admitted to not having experienced teaching in any online or remote means. Their study's analysis also indicated that students were not able to decide whether their homes were suitable to attend online lectures. Students report external distractions from their family members while attending online classes. This was also echoed by Philippine-based (Dayagbil et al., 2021; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020) and international studies (Alawamleh et al., 2022; Almendingen, 2021; Amir et al., 2020) as well whose findings indicate that learners believed that their home environment is not conducive for learning when schools were closed, and physical contact was discontinued as there were many disruptions including internet connectivity.

In attempting to address the accessibility challenges in communication technologies, institutions and educators have utilized social media as a tool for distance learning (Khan et al., 2021, Papademetriou et al., 2022; Zarzycka et al., 2020) –increasing student involvement and active time in social media, as well. Papademetriou et al. (2022)'s investigation demonstrated students' positive perception of the impact of social media used in education, highlighting the promotion of teaching-learning, motivation of students to be active participants and establishing connections with the university community as its main advantages. This is supported by Zarzycka et al. (2020)'s study that asserted how active participation in distance classes and high utilization of social media used positively influenced the processes of communicating and collaborating among students. It is important to note, however, that while recent studies assert that students feel more comfortable and more natural using social media as a learning tool, many Philippine-based research still describes the lack of access to proper technology as one of the main barriers to learning continuity this pandemic (Barrot et al., 2021; Baticulon et al., 2021; Cleofas & Rocha, 2021; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Aside from environmental and technological disadvantages, Lim et al. (2022) further explained that students' social media exposure to COVID-19 may be considered a contributing factor to college Filipino college students' mental well-being, particularly their stress, depression, and anxiety.

2. Theoretical Framework

This investigation is principally informed by the scholarship on learner reticence as an instructional communication phenomenon. It also utilizes the Emotional Response Theory by Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe (2006) as a framework for data gathering and analysis. The in-depth interview questions will be based on the 1) common sources of learner reticence derived from literature and 2) operationalized components of the aforementioned theory.

2.1 Learner Reticence

Learner reticence is often identified as the learners' inadequate ability in self-expression, a problem in verbal response to the learning situation, or lack of initiative in the negotiation of meaning. It also demonstrates communication breakdown, a lack of ability to communicate, a failure of language stemming from shyness, anxiety, or a lack of knowledge (Bao, 2014). Students commonly experience instances in which they have something relevant to say but hesitate to do so –when the ability and desire to participate exist, but the process of verbalizing is inhibited, shyness or reticence occurs. The most common sources of students' reticence (Irwanti, 2017; Bao, 2014; Liu & Jackson, 2011) are summarized in Figure 1.0 below:

Figure 1.0: Common Sources of Learner Reticence

linguistic	limited vocabulary, non-mastery of grammar, bad enunciation
individual	lack of preparation, no experience
social-psychological	concern for test results and attitude to low mark and failure, attitude to making mistakes, being laughed at, being negatively evaluated, and being the focus of attention
affective	attitude towards the subject matter, motivation to learn or apply the topic, desire to learn
personality	extroversion, introversion, shyness, class-risk taking, and sociability
environment	friendliness of the teacher, personalities of their partners/classmates, task difficulty

2.2 Emotional Response Theory

First conceptualized by Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe (2006), the Emotional Response Theory attempts to explain students' responses based on their instructors' communicative behaviors. This theory has three components - *instructor communication behaviors*, *student emotional responses*, and *student approach-avoidance behaviors*. The instructor's behavior is assumed to trigger an emotional response in the student, which dictates whether the student takes an approach behavior or avoidance behavior. The theory posits that students experience one of three emotional responses to instructor communication, with their responses varying along a continuum. These responses are pleasure-displeasure, arousal-non-arousal, and dominance-submissiveness.

Pleasure describes a student's feeling of wellness - whether they feel comfortable, happy, or joyful. Conversely, *displeasure* describes the feeling of being uncomfortable, unhappy, or miserable. *Arousal* refers to one's energy level, with aroused students being stimulated, excited, or frenzied, and students with *non-arousal* being sleepy or sluggish. Students with feelings of *dominance* felt in control and empowered, while *submissiveness* has been described as indecisiveness or meekness.

These emotional responses are important because they dictate whether a student will engage in approach behaviors or avoidance behaviors. *Approach behaviors* include attending class, engaging in activities, and completing assignments— whereas *avoidance behaviors* include behaviors like reticence, decreased engagement, and decreased motivation. The main implication of the theory is that students' approach-avoidance behaviors can result in increased or decreased perceived cognitive and affective learning.

3. Methodology

This study proved to be primarily qualitative in nature as it attempted to provide a phenomenological understanding of learner reticence in a particular communication context, and it appropriated descriptive, constructivist methods of data gathering and analysis. In its endeavor to describe a specific, unique-to-its-context communicative behavior, the researcher found it necessary to obtain data from first-hand experiences of students currently attending or have attended online classes. In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit the personal experiences of participants; the analysis of their experiences was informed by the integration of two qualitative approaches –thematic analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Twelve (12) University of the Philippines Diliman undergraduate students belong to one of the four different academic clusters – three (3) students from the Arts and Letters cluster, three (3) from the Management and Economic Cluster, three (3) from the Science and Technology Cluster, and three (3) from the Social Sciences and Law Cluster– served as the study's participants. They were selected through snowball-convenience sampling as the participants needed to meet the following criteria:

- 1). They should have been enrolled in the University any time from the First Semester A.Y. 2020-2021 to the Midyear Term of A.Y. 2020-2021. These semesters were held at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic and thus were conducted in a remote, online set-up.
- 2). They should have enrolled and participated in classes that had at least one (1) online synchronous meeting via Zoom, Google Meet, or other video conferencing platforms.

Potential participants were contacted by the researcher through e-mail and Facebook messenger. In the initial and introductory message, the researcher introduced her personal background, disclosed and explained the nature of the research, and obtained the participants' verbal consent to be interviewed. The participants then scheduled a meeting with the researcher for when the actual interview was to be conducted. Due to the communication constraints posed by the pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, some via the video call function of Facebook Messenger and some via Zoom.

The researcher decided to implement semi-structured, in-depth interviews to foster a more open and interpersonal exchange with the participants. Semi-structured are usually guided by several key questions to help define the areas to be explored but also allow the researcher and the participant to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in detail. The following questions served as the study's interview guide:

1. On average, how much time do you spend communicating orally with your classmates and teachers in your synchronous online classes?
2. Is this more, less, or around the same amount of time you spend communicating orally during face-to-face classes (pre-pandemic)?
3. (If they mentioned that they communicate less) What do you think caused the decrease in communication? Feel free to enumerate as many factors as you can think of.
4. Aside from the decreased opportunity for communication, are there also other anxieties or reservations that you feel prevent you from sharing and communicating more in your online classes?
5. Are there teacher communicative behaviors that cause you to communicate less in your online classes?
6. Are there environmental or personal factors that cause you to communicate less in your online classes?
7. Do these factors affect how much you learn in class?
8. What can your teacher do to make you communicate more?
9. What can your classmates do to make you communicate more?

All twelve (12) interviews for at least sixty (60) minutes. While the interviews were based on the above questions, most of the participants responded eagerly and extensively that the researcher had to follow-up and probe further with more questions eliciting more detailed responses fundamental to constructing their narratives and personal experiences. The interviews were conducted in English since 1) it is the medium of instruction in the university, and 2) it is the language both the researcher and the participants are more comfortable using, given the academic nature of the interview.

Guided primarily by social constructivism, thematic and interpretative phenomenological analyses were used to produce generalizable insights, as well as personal, context-specific implications unique to the instructional communication phenomenon experienced by students during the pandemic. The study took advantage of thematic analysis' flexibility to be used within a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks and to be applied to a wide range of study questions, designs, and sample sizes, and interpretative phenomenological analysis' being an individualized, participant-oriented nature able to closely examine the participant's lifeworld and social interactions more closely. Constitutive and recurring themes among the participants' interview responses were determined to search for more latent, deeper themes in their experiences. Although factors affecting learner

reticence (Irwanti, 2017; Bao, 2014; Liu and Jackson, 2011) have already been determined prior to implementation, this study recognized the possibility of discovering new learner reticence factors from the lived experience of students in this new learning environment –although common themes present among the participants' responses were described, participants' individual, distinct nuances in self-perceived reticence and causes were also observed and noted down. The interpretation of the constitutive themes and individual nuances were also informed by the study's theoretical framework and related literature.

4. Key Findings and Analysis

This study investigates the experiences, perceptions, and causes of learner reticence in remote, online classrooms. The participants' experiences of learner reticence are prefaced by a summary of their demographics and concluded by the exposition of the various factors they deemed to have influenced their reticence and general communicative behaviors in this unique instructional setting.

4.1. Participant Demographics

The provision and inclusion of detailed relevant information about the participants allow researchers to move toward a position of universalism that recognizes that there may be universal psychological or communicative processes that manifest differently depending on the culture, age, degree program, and other varying personal characteristics of the participants. Understanding pertinent characteristics of the participants are crucial to effectively articulating their lived experiences as students. A summary of the participants' demographic information is reflected in Figure 2.0:

1. Figure 2.0: Summary of Participant Demographics

Arts and Letters Cluster		Year and Course at the time of the interview	Age	Sex Assigned at Birth
	Participant 1A	3rd, BFA (Visual Communication)	22	M
	Participant 1B	1st, Bachelor of Physical Education	19	F
	Participant 1C	2nd, BA Speech Communication	20	F
Management and Economics Cluster		Year and Course at the time of the interview	Age	Sex Assigned at Birth
	Participant 2A	4th, Bachelor of Public Administration	23	M
	Participant 2B	2nd, BS Economics	21	F
	Participant 2C	1st, BS Business Administration & Accountancy	19	F
Science and Technology Cluster		Year and Course at the time of the interview	Age	Sex Assigned at Birth
	Participant 3A	3rd, BS Chemistry	21	M
	Participant 3B	4th, BS Molecular Biology, and Biotechnology	22	M
	Participant 3C	3rd, BS Statistics	20	F
Social Sciences and Law Cluster		Year and Course	Age	Sex Assigned at Birth
	Participant 4A	2nd, BA Anthropology	20	M
	Participant 4B	3rd, BA History	22	M
	Participant 4C	4th, BS Social Work	22	F

4.2 Experiences of Learner Reticence

This study first and foremost wanted to confirm whether or not students perceive and exhibit learner reticence in their respective online classrooms. In the in-depth interviews, the participants were not directly oriented and asked about learner reticence and its manifestations –rather, the interview questions were loosely structured in a way that they themselves would introspect on their decreased oral communication time, internal feelings of shyness and communication apprehension, and reluctance to speak.

When asked about the time spent communicating orally in their synchronous online meetings, six out of twelve (6 out of 12) participants reflected on spending around *5 to 10 minutes* on average for a one-and-a-half hour synchronous online class, five out of the twelve (5 out of 12) shared only speaking for *less than five minutes* on average, and one (1) shared that they talk for around *10-15 minutes* for each online class. All of them realized that their average time communicating orally both with their teachers and with their classmates was less than the time they used to spend in their regular, face-to-face classrooms pre-pandemic. Although they are from different courses and clusters, most (10 out of 12) noticed that the learning set-up during the pandemic has really reduced their opportunities for socialization, even more with speaking in front of the class. Some participants also realized that the University of the Philippines’ mandate on online classes being non-mandatory may be one of the factors behind the students’ decreased oral communication time.

Using the decreased communication opportunities as a pivot for the next line of inquiry, the participants were then asked if they also felt some anxiety, apprehension, shyness, or general reluctance to communicate in their online classes. All twelve (12) participants shared that they feel a general sense of reluctance and apprehension to speak out in their online synchronous classes. They also all confirmed that this general sense of reluctance is more pronounced now in their remote classrooms than in their pre-pandemic classes, although four (4) participants clarified that they experienced general communication apprehension in their classes even before.

Participant 4A acknowledged that his reluctance to communicate is more apparent now despite online classes’ being more forgiving with self-presentation. Participant 1C, a Speech Communication major, revealed that normally, she enjoyed participating in classes and expressing herself in front of her professors and peers. However, when the pandemic hit and everyone experienced a shift in learning modality, it affected her overall disposition and willingness to communicate,

Participants 1A, 1B, 2A, 2C, 3C, and 4C shared very similar realizations about how their communication behaviors in their online classes are affected by the anxieties and apprehension brought about by the general state of the country’s public health, the challenges of remote learning, and the difficulties of dealing with work-from-home and homeschooling family members.

One of the four (1 of the 4) participants who recognized an existing degree of communication apprehension in pre-pandemic classes was Participant 3B, who realized that his shyness and introversion increased significantly during this pandemic because it was tougher to build connections with his teachers and classmates.

4.3. Factors that Contribute to Learner Reticence

The participants were further probed about the factors they perceive contribute to their manifestations and experiences of learner reticence in their online classes. After narrating their experiences with reluctance and shyness in their online classes, the participants were then asked to introspect on the factors or causes they believe contribute to these experiences of reticence. The factors they enumerated were then categorized based on Bao’s (2014) causes of learner reticence. The summary of their responses can be seen in Figure 3.0 below:

Figure 3.0: Perceived Causes of Learner Reticence Matrix

	Causes of Learner Reticence	Participants												Total	
		1A	1B	1C	2A	2B	2C	3A	3B	3C	4A	4B	4C		
linguistic	Apprehension/ anxiety due to limited vocabulary, non-mastery of grammar, bad enunciation														7
individual	Holding back on communicating because of lack of preparation, no experience														10
social-psychological	Apprehension/ anxiety because of an existing concern for test results and attitude to low mark and failure, attitude to making mistakes														5

The research's open, social-constructivist nature recognizes that factors affecting learner reticence may not at all be found in Bao's (2014) paper or in the existing literature on learner reticence. There may be causes of reticence unique to the temporal and cultural context (onset of Covid-19 between 2020 to 2021) or unique to the learning delivery (remote, online). In probing further, participants were asked directly if there were specific teacher communicative factors and environmental or personal factors that caused them to communicate less in their online classes. Two (2) common themes were found in the participants' responses: 1) decreased teacher immediacy and 2) uncondusive or unsupportive learning environment.

Participants 1B, 1C, 2A, 3B, 3C, and 4A were all able to note that compared to pre-pandemic, face-to-face classes, teachers' attempts to establish a working relationship between them and their students in the remote set-up have noticeably decreased. They have observed that teachers seem more tense and more formal in their online classes, always seeming in a rush to finish discussing what they needed to discuss that week. They have also noted the lack of interaction opportunities and physical space to establish immediacy.

In attempting to describe non-verbal immediacy behaviors, Participant 2A narrated how he felt so uneasy participating in online classes as he could also see how uneasy and uncomfortable his professors were in conducting their online synchronous classes. Ten out of twelve (10 out of 12) participants reported that their learning environments at home affected their communicative behaviors in their online classes. Seven (7) out of these ten asserted that even though they have a dedicated desk or learning space at home –with some having a makeshift area due to the sudden shift to learning delivery– having to share a space with other family members deters them from communicating freely in their online classes. Participant 2C entered the university a few months into the onset of Covid-19 (during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021), and their household's unpreparedness for having four people sharing the same space for work and school affected how she performed in her first few freshman classes. Participant 3A elaborated on the anxiety he felt when asked to turn on his webcam or unmute his microphone for his online synchronous classes. This sentiment was shared by participants 1B, 2A, 4A, and 4B.

To end the in-depth interviews in a transformative, solution-oriented perspective, the respondents were asked what they think their teachers can do –in their pedagogy, in their interactions with their classmates, or in the virtual learning environments they foster– to address and potentially eliminate the reticent behaviors they experience. Ten out of twelve (10 out of 12) participants reiterated that their reluctance to communicate in their online classes is not triggered by or directly caused by specific instructors, classes, or classmates; rather, these participants admitted that changes in their communicative behaviors are caused by their own attitude towards remote online classes in the context of the pandemic. Nonetheless, they were still able to introspect on a few ways on how their teachers can manipulate the virtual classroom environment so they can be encouraged to participate and communicate more. Two (2) common themes emerged in their reflections: 1) increase immediacy behaviors, and 2) allot out-of-class communication opportunities and channels.

5. Conclusion

Research on instructor communication behaviors is heavily dominated by studies on teacher credibility, power, and influence and their effects on student motivation, learning perception, and learning performance; this article attempted to shed light on instructional communication's relational dimension –emotional responses and student reticence. The findings of this study focusing on learner reticence and its dimensions allowed for unique, phenomenological depictions of communicative behaviors students experience in this unprecedented, universal shift to remote learning as it sought to describe the manifestations of learner reticence in online classrooms potentially influenced by the instructional communication challenges brought about by the pandemic. Through the participants' reflections and experiences, it attempted to answer: 1) *Do students experience learner reticence in their remote classes?* and 2) *What factors contribute to the learner reticence they experience in their remote classrooms?*

All participants expressed experiences of learner reticence evidenced in their decreased participation and communication in class, instances of anxiety and shyness, and feelings of resistance to communication. Though from varying fields and degree programs, all twelve (12) students described a decrease in the average time spent communicating orally with both their teachers and classmates in their remote classes compared to the time they used to spend in their regular, face-to-face classrooms pre-pandemic. The participants attempted to attribute the decrease in communication to the overall decreased opportunities for socialization due to pandemic-related isolation protocols, the University of the Philippines' non-mandatory attendance in online synchronous classes, and general changes in their mental dispositions due to pandemic-related challenges.

The participants' unique, individual experiences and perceived causes of reticence were further examined and analyzed to better understand the manifestations of this communicative behavior in an unprecedented instructional environment. The most common causes of reticence perceived by the participants involve affective, personality-based, and individual self-perception dimensions: *decreased desire to learn in general* was determined to be the most commonly perceived cause (cited by 11 out of 12 participants), followed by *holding back on communicating because of lack of preparation, no experience* (10 out of 12), and then *holding back due to class/ task difficulty* (9 out of 12), *increased introversion and/or shyness* (9 out of 12), *decreased sociability* and *decreased*

willingness to take risks (8 out of 12 participants for both causes). The study also recognized the potential existence of learner reticence causes unique to the temporal and cultural context (onset of Covid-19 between 2020 to 2021) or unique to the learning delivery (remote, online); factors affecting learner reticence may not at all be found in Bao's (2014) paper, or in the existing literature on learner reticence. Two (2) themes were found when the participants were probed if there were specific teacher communicative factors and environmental or personal factors that caused them to communicate less in their online classes: 1) *decreased teacher immediacy* and 2) *unconducive or unsupportive learning environment*.

The findings of the study proved to be consistent with recent literature on students' experiences and changes in mental well-being at the time of Covid-19. The participants enumerated feelings of anxiety, apprehension, decreased desire for learning, and demotivation as manifestations and causes of their decreased oral communication and participation in their online classes. Decreased motivation continues to be one of the biggest challenges for students in remote learning classrooms, according to various Philippine-based (Cabansag et al., 2020; Avila et al., 2021) and international literature (Mak, 2021; Raheim, 2021; Tan, 2020) –motivational decline associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has been greatly substantiated two years into the global health crisis. The absence of social interactions and extracurricular activities (i.e., athletics, performing arts, educational clubs) have caused many students to lose engagement in their synchronous and asynchronous class work. Students' academic performance has significantly declined (Cao et al., 2020; Dennon, 2021; Hicks et al., 2021) as a consequence of decreased motivation and other related cognitive and psychological struggles they experienced in this pandemic.

The disruption caused by the pandemic proved to have unintentionally affected interpersonal relationships and interactions of teachers and students (Herrmann et al., 2021). While the participants determined sources of reticence that are more individual, personality-based, and dependent on their own interpretations and coping strategies, *reluctance due to lack of preparation, perceived task difficulty*, as well as *decreased teacher immediacy* also surfaced as potential causes of reticence. These causes seem to take root in their teachers' pedagogical practices and strategies for learning continuity in their respective remote classes. In congruence with the study's theoretical framework, Kaufmann et al. (2016) assert that the onus is on educators to create a supportive online environment by being available, positive, and sympathetic. Protocols on social distancing and remote instruction have caused educators to rely on all types of media to connect and extend social interactions in the classroom; however, the participants still perceived challenges in fulfilling their requirements and difficulties in fully immersing themselves into the class partly due to missing instructor behaviors, verbal and nonverbal, that attempt to reduce the physical and/or psychological gaps between teachers and students. Research in pedagogy and educational psychology strongly supports the premise that effective instruction is in part facilitated by a high level of instructor immediacy (Hampton, 2018; Kupczynski et al., 2010), leading to one of the major insights of the study: that teachers' interpersonal communication behaviors are still –if not more– pivotal to catalyzing (or avoiding) student avoidance behaviors such as learner reticence.

While the findings of this research cannot be generalized due to the limited number of participants, it provides a new lens in looking at student communication behaviors in a unique, unprecedented context. Future studies are recommended to involve a bigger sample of respondents and incorporate other qualitative or quantitative variables. It may be interesting to find statistical correlations between learner reticence and specific instructor communication behaviors (e.g., verbal and non-verbal immediacy, credibility, use of humor); reticent behaviors and student performance in their online classes may also be worth looking into. Experiences of reticence may also be investigated in other learning delivery modalities adopted by educational institutions in this pandemic, such as printed modular distance learning and hybrid classrooms (online and in-person synchronous).

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