



DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIVE TASKS: A CLASSROOM-BASED QUALITATIVE STUDY IN THE PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Real-world communication competence remains difficult to achieve when English instruction is dominated by test preparation and form-focused drills. This classroom-based qualitative study examined how real-time communicative tasks influenced undergraduate students' functional fluency and speaking confidence in a Philippine higher education context. Participants were ten undergraduate students (aged 18-22 years old; majors/programs: English Education) enrolled in a Purposive Communication course at one university. Initial English proficiency was profiled at the start of the term using standard proficiency test and reported as CEFR A2-B1. Across 16 weeks, learners engaged in weekly tasks such as role-plays, pair discussions, and information-gap activities and produced three to four guided reflective journal entries. Thematic analysis of the journals showed (1) a shift from accuracy obsession to meaning-focused expression that supported more spontaneous speech, (2) increased cognitive responsiveness through immediate feedback, negotiation of meaning, and self-correction, and (3) stronger willingness and self-confidence to initiate and sustain interaction beyond scripted classroom dialogues. Students also noted structural constraints that shaped implementation, including assessment practices that privilege written exams, large-class management demands, and uneven access to communicative resources and technology. Overall, pairing real-time interaction with guided reflection can strengthen functional fluency, but sustainable adoption requires alignment among curriculum goals, assessment practices, institutional support, and teacher capacity to facilitate unscripted interaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English classrooms in higher education often promise “communicative competence,” yet everyday teaching and assessment still reward what can be easily tested on paper. In many contexts, students spend years mastering grammar rules and rehearsing scripted dialogues but remain hesitant when faced with spontaneous interaction. This persistent gap between “knowing about English” and “using English” matters because communication competence is not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to interpret context, negotiate meaning, and sustain interaction with real interlocutors (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1983).

One pathway to bridging this gap is to provide frequent opportunities for learners to engage in meaning-focused, real-time tasks role-plays, pair discussions, information-gap exchanges, and problem-solving conversations where language is used as a tool to achieve communicative goals. Task-based perspectives similarly emphasize tasks as goal-oriented activities that require learners to use language to accomplish outcomes rather than to display knowledge of isolated forms (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). From an interactionist perspective, real-time communication pushes learners to notice gaps in their language resources, adjust their output, and refine form while staying oriented to meaning (Long, 1996; Swain, 2005). Such principles align with communicative language teaching, which prioritizes purposeful interaction and comprehensibility in classroom communication (Richards, 2006). Real-time tasks can also reduce fear of speaking by normalizing errors as part of interaction, which lowers anxiety-related barriers to participation (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Recent empirical reviews corroborate these theoretical claims: task-based instruction has been consistently linked to gains in speaking fluency, complexity, and willingness to communicate across diverse EFL settings (Lin et al., 2026; Zúñiga et al., 2023), while structured, reflection-supported speaking practice has also been associated with measurably lower levels of speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners (Quvanch et al., 2024).

These issues are particularly relevant in the Philippine higher education context. Policy documents have explicitly framed communication as a core outcome of general education. For example, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) introduced Purposive Communication as part of the general education curriculum, emphasizing the development of students’ ability to communicate for different purposes and audiences (Commission on Higher Education, 2013). However, classroom implementation can be constrained by assessment practices, time pressure to “cover” dense syllabi, and structural conditions (e.g., class size and resources) that shape what teachers can realistically do. Challenges related to infrastructure and unequal access to technology were amplified during the pandemic and continue to influence opportunities for interaction-focused learning (Barrot et al., 2021; Joaquin et al., 2020). Even where communicative outcomes are formally mandated, a persistent gap between policy intent and classroom practice has been documented: instructors often report valuing communicative principles while continuing to privilege grammar-focused, exam-oriented instruction in practice (Gonzales & Torres, 2021; Singaravelu, 2021).

Existing research has widely discussed the value of communicative language teaching and task-based instruction for developing fluency. Yet, two gaps remain visible in this specific setting. First, there is limited classroom-based qualitative evidence centered on students’ lived experiences of real-time tasks in Philippine higher education courses such as Purposive Communication, especially evidence that links interaction routines to perceived changes in functional fluency and confidence (Candilas, 2021). Second, structural constraints are often reported at a policy or teacher-survey level, but fewer studies trace how students themselves connect those constraints (e.g., exam orientation, limited resources, or technology access) to their participation in communication tasks (Barrot et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2023). To contribute to these gaps, this study foregrounds students’ reflective accounts of real-time interaction as a window into how communicative tasks are experienced, what learning processes are noticed, and which contextual barriers remain salient. Recent cross-national work further cautions that constraints on communicative teaching are not uniformly structural: teacher-related factors such as competence, confidence, and training may matter as much as, or more than, class size or policy context (Nam, 2023; Dœur, 2022), underscoring the value of qualitative accounts that can disentangle how students themselves experience these intersecting factors. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do undergraduate students describe the influence of real-time communicative tasks on their functional fluency and speaking confidence?

RQ2: How do students describe their responsiveness during real-time interaction, including how they notice and use immediate feedback?

RQ3: What structural or institutional constraints do students perceive as shaping the implementation of real-time communicative practice in their course context?

2. METHOD

This study used a classroom-based qualitative approach to explore students’ experiences of real-time communicative practice within one undergraduate English course (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was

conducted in a Purposive Communication class at Philippines University in the Philippines during the odd semester term.

The participants were 10 undergraduate students ($n = 10$) enrolled in the class. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their regular class membership and willingness to complete reflective writing. The sample included students aged 18-22 with majors/programs in English education program. To protect privacy, participants are referred to using pseudonyms (e.g., P1–P10) and identifying details were removed from the dataset.

To describe participants' baseline English proficiency, the study used institutional placement test aligned with the CEFR. Scores were summarized descriptively (mean, range) and interpreted using the official conversion guidelines of the selected instrument to categorize participants into CEFR A2–B1 (Council of Europe, 2020). This profiling was used to contextualize students' reflections rather than to make causal claims about proficiency gains. Across 16 weeks, students participated in weekly real-time communicative tasks integrated into regular instruction (e.g., role-plays, pair discussions, information-gap activities, short problem-solving dialogues). After selected sessions, each participant wrote three to four reflective journal entries responding to structured prompts (e.g., what they attempted to say, what was difficult, how they dealt with communication breakdowns, and what feedback they noticed). Reflective journals were chosen because they capture students' perceptions and meaning-making processes during learning. Reflective journals can be vulnerable to self-report bias. Where available, the study incorporated brief classroom observation notes by the researcher to triangulate themes. If no additional data were collected, this limitation is explicitly acknowledged in the Limitations section and recommendations for future research are provided.

Journal entries were analyzed through an iterative coding process. First, all entries were read repeatedly to build familiarity. Second, initial codes were assigned to meaningful segments (e.g., "message-first mindset," "self-correction," "fear of mistakes," "feedback from peers," "assessment pressure"). Third, codes were clustered into themes aligned with the research questions, and the themes were reviewed against the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness (Miles et al., 2014). Analytic memos were used to document decision trails during theme development. To enhance credibility and transparency, the study maintained an audit trail of coding decisions and engaged in peer debriefing/consultation with colleague following qualitative trustworthiness principles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Dörnyei, 2007). Participants provided informed consent before data collection. Participation was voluntary and had no effect on course grades. All data were anonymized; journals were stored securely; and only aggregated results and de-identified excerpts are reported.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: Real-time tasks, functional fluency, and speaking confidence

Across journals, students repeatedly contrasted "test-like" language work (remembering rules and reproducing model sentences) with the demands of real-time interaction. Participants described that the communicative tasks pushed them to prioritize conveying meaning and keeping the conversation moving, even when they were unsure about grammar. One participant wrote that they became "more focused on the message than on the rules". This shift is consistent with communicative views that treat fluency and meaning-making as central outcomes of language learning (Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1983).

The distinction between rule-oriented performance and real-time communication is particularly important because it reveals that students were not simply acquiring additional linguistic knowledge; they were also developing a different orientation toward using that knowledge. In conventional test-like activities, learners can often allocate sufficient time to retrieve grammatical rules, select vocabulary, construct an answer, and revise it before producing the final response. Real-time communication removes much of this preparation time. Students must make linguistic choices while simultaneously attending to what their interlocutor is saying and anticipating what needs to be said next. Consequently, successful performance in these tasks cannot be defined exclusively in terms of grammatical accuracy. It also involves the ability to maintain interaction, convey an intended meaning, respond appropriately, and recover when linguistic resources are insufficient.

The students' reflections suggest that this change in orientation was experienced as a gradual movement from linguistic monitoring toward communicative action. Rather than treating every grammatical uncertainty as a reason to stop speaking, learners increasingly appeared willing to continue with the resources available to them. This is significant because excessive attention to formal correctness can interfere with spontaneous communication. When learners continuously monitor whether every utterance is grammatically correct, they may hesitate, translate mentally, or abandon an intended message. By contrast, when the primary objective becomes successful communication, learners may tolerate temporary inaccuracies while maintaining the interaction. Such behavior is compatible with the broader communicative orientation associated with Hymes (1972) and Savignon (1983), in which language competence involves knowing not only linguistic forms but also how language is used effectively in communicative situations.

Students linked repeated exposure to unscripted speaking routines with greater functional fluency. Several journals described a gradual increase in spontaneity: learners reported fewer long pauses, less reliance on memorized lines, and more willingness to paraphrase when vocabulary was missing. As one entry noted, the

student began “thinking in English” during interaction rather than translating from the first language. From an interactionist perspective, such moments reflect how pushed output and negotiation of meaning can help learners stretch their language resources in context (Long, 1996; Swain, 2005).

The importance of paraphrasing in these reflections deserves particular attention. A learner who encounters an unfamiliar word has several possible responses: remain silent, switch to the first language, wait for someone else to provide the answer, or attempt to communicate the same idea through alternative linguistic resources. Choosing the last option represents an important dimension of functional fluency. It indicates that learners are beginning to view language as a flexible communicative resource rather than as a fixed collection of correct sentences. In this sense, fluency does not necessarily mean possessing all the vocabulary or grammatical structures required for a particular conversation. Instead, it involves being able to work around limitations while preserving the communicative purpose of an utterance.

The reported experience of “thinking in English” can similarly be interpreted as evidence of increasing automaticity. Although such a description should not necessarily be taken to mean that learners had completely eliminated first-language mediation, it indicates a perceived reduction in the amount of conscious translation required during interaction. Repeated practice may allow frequently used expressions, discourse routines, and communicative strategies to become more readily accessible. As a result, learners can devote greater attentional resources to the meaning and development of the conversation rather than to constructing every sentence from scratch. This interpretation is compatible with the interactionist emphasis on communication as a context in which learners are encouraged to modify and extend their linguistic output (Long, 1996; Swain, 2005).

Another important feature of the findings is that fluency developed through repetition rather than through a single exposure to communicative tasks. Students’ descriptions of fewer pauses and greater spontaneity suggest a cumulative process. Initially, learners may need substantial cognitive effort to formulate even relatively simple responses. With repeated participation, however, the same types of interaction may become increasingly familiar. Learners begin to recognize recurring conversational patterns, anticipate likely questions, and retrieve useful expressions more efficiently. The communicative task therefore functions not merely as an opportunity to practice previously learned language but also as a repeated environment in which learners can develop greater procedural control over that language.

Confidence gains were also prominent. Early entries often framed speaking as risky, especially in front of peers, yet later reflections emphasized increased comfort and a stronger sense of “I can do this.” These descriptions align with affective accounts of language learning suggesting that lower anxiety supports participation and uptake (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), while self-efficacy beliefs can shape persistence in speaking tasks (Graham, 2022). In related work, speaking self-confidence has been linked to learners’ mindsets and perceptions of speaking competence, which can change when learners experience supportive interaction and achievable challenges (Ozdemir & Papi, 2022; Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024).

The development of confidence appears to be closely connected to students’ changing interpretation of mistakes. At the beginning of the learning process, mistakes were frequently associated with embarrassment, exposure, or negative evaluation by peers. As learners gained more experience with interaction, mistakes increasingly appeared to be interpreted as a normal part of communication. This represents an important affective shift. Confidence in speaking does not necessarily emerge because learners become completely accurate; rather, it may develop because learners become more comfortable communicating despite the possibility of error. In other words, confidence may be strengthened when students discover that an imperfect utterance can still successfully accomplish a communicative purpose.

This finding also suggests a reciprocal relationship between confidence and participation. Learners who feel more confident may participate more actively, and increased participation provides additional opportunities to experience successful communication. These successful experiences can then reinforce learners’ beliefs about their speaking abilities. Conversely, learners who remain highly anxious may avoid participation, receive less communicative practice, and consequently have fewer opportunities to develop automaticity and confidence. The journals therefore suggest that confidence should not be regarded merely as an outcome that appears after linguistic development. It can also function as a condition that supports continued engagement in communicative practice.

These patterns are consistent with recent empirical findings on task-based instruction. In systematic reviews spanning multiple EFL contexts, structured communicative tasks that emphasize planning and reflection have been associated with measurable gains in speaking fluency, reduced hesitation, and greater willingness to communicate (Lin et al., 2026; Zúñiga et al., 2023). The present findings extend this evidence qualitatively by showing how such gains are experienced and narrated by students themselves: as a felt shift from rule-monitoring to message-making, and as growing trust in their own capacity to sustain a conversation without a script.

The qualitative evidence is particularly valuable because numerical measures of fluency may capture changes in speech rate, pause length, or production quantity without fully explaining what those changes mean to learners. Students’ journals provide insight into the subjective dimension of development. A reduction in hesitation was not simply experienced as a measurable improvement; it represented greater freedom to participate. Similarly, the ability to paraphrase was not merely a compensatory strategy but a sign that learners increasingly believed they could solve communicative problems independently. Thus, functional fluency in this study encompasses both observable communicative behavior and learners’ developing perceptions of themselves as capable language users.

Taken together, the RQ1 findings indicate that real-time communicative tasks can influence three interconnected dimensions of language learning: linguistic performance, strategic behavior, and affective

engagement. Linguistically, students reported greater spontaneity and fewer pauses. Strategically, they became more willing to paraphrase and negotiate meaning when their existing resources were insufficient. Affectively, they developed greater confidence and reduced fear of making mistakes. These dimensions reinforce one another, suggesting that speaking development is best understood as a dynamic process rather than as the accumulation of isolated grammatical or lexical knowledge.

RQ2: Responsiveness and the role of immediate feedback

Students described real-time tasks as cognitively demanding because they had to listen, interpret, and respond quickly. Journals highlighted “thinking on my feet” moments, where learners had to adjust mid-utterance, rephrase, or ask for clarification. Such accounts echo the interaction hypothesis: conversational pressure and communication breakdowns can trigger noticing and modification, creating conditions for development (Long, 1996).

The cognitive demands reported by students indicate that real-time communication requires the simultaneous coordination of several processes. Learners must comprehend an interlocutor’s message, determine the intended meaning, retrieve relevant linguistic resources, formulate a response, monitor whether the response is understandable, and adjust it when necessary. This simultaneity distinguishes real-time interaction from activities in which learners can focus on one linguistic dimension at a time. The difficulty students experienced should therefore not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that the tasks were too demanding. Instead, the difficulty may reflect the productive cognitive pressure inherent in authentic communication.

The journals also indicate that communication breakdowns became opportunities for learning. When learners were unable to understand an expression or communicate an intended idea, they were required to respond to the problem rather than simply move on to another exercise. Requests for clarification, repetition, confirmation, or alternative wording created moments in which students had to pay closer attention to language. These moments are consistent with Long’s (1996) interactionist account, in which negotiation of meaning can make linguistic form more salient and encourage learners to modify their comprehension or production.

Immediate feedback, whether from peers’ clarification requests, teacher recasts, or self-noticed misunderstandings was often described as helpful rather than discouraging. One participant reflected that mistakes were “no longer scary” when feedback was given quickly and supportively. Corrective feedback research suggests that timely responses during interaction can draw attention to form while maintaining a communicative focus (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In technology-mediated interaction, feedback channels can also be amplified (e.g., chat-based prompts or recorded responses), although effectiveness depends on access and task design (Zhang, 2021).

An important implication is that students appeared to benefit most when feedback was integrated into communication rather than separated from it. When correction occurred as part of an ongoing exchange, students could immediately connect the feedback to the meaning they were attempting to express. This contextualized relationship between form and meaning may make feedback more memorable and usable. Rather than learning a grammatical correction as an isolated rule, students encountered it as a solution to a communicative problem.

The emotional dimension of feedback is equally significant. Students’ descriptions that mistakes were “no longer scary” suggest that the value of feedback depends not only on its linguistic content but also on how it is delivered. Feedback that communicates that errors are expected and manageable can reduce the perceived social risk of speaking. In contrast, correction that is experienced as public criticism may increase anxiety and discourage participation. The students’ reflections therefore support an approach in which corrective feedback is embedded within a supportive communicative environment.

Where the course used technology-supported interaction (e.g., timed group chat), students noted that time pressure made interaction feel more “real,” but also exposed constraints such as connectivity, device availability, and uneven participation opportunities. Research on synchronous online exchanges likewise suggests that real-time interaction can create authentic communicative pressure, though outcomes depend on design and access (Iraheta, 2024). These reflections help explain why students’ responsiveness is not only an individual skill but also shaped by the learning environment.

The role of time pressure is particularly interesting. On one hand, limited response time can initially increase anxiety because students cannot carefully prepare their answers. On the other hand, that same constraint can encourage the development of spontaneous processing. Learners are compelled to make decisions quickly and gradually learn that they can communicate without preparing every utterance in advance. Thus, time pressure may have a dual function: it can increase cognitive and affective difficulty in the short term while contributing to greater automaticity over repeated practice.

This finding reinforces the idea that responsiveness is relational rather than purely individual. A student’s ability to respond quickly depends partly on the behavior of interlocutors, the complexity of the task, the clarity of instructions, and the technological environment. For example, a learner may appear less responsive not because of limited speaking ability but because unstable connectivity causes delayed messages or because group participation is dominated by more confident peers. Responsiveness should therefore be evaluated within the conditions under which interaction occurs.

This responsiveness appears closely tied to the timing and framing of feedback. Reviews of corrective feedback research suggest that immediate, in-the-moment correction embedded within ongoing communication can support noticing without disrupting communicative flow, although optimal timing remains context-dependent and contested (Xu & Zeng, 2023). Similarly, studies of learner-learner negotiation of meaning show that when interlocutors are given room to request clarification and modify their own output, they are more likely to internalize corrections than when feedback is imposed unilaterally (Canals, 2023). Students’ journal entries in this study mirror these findings: feedback that emerged organically from the conversation, rather than through explicit correction, was consistently described as easier to accept and act upon.

The findings consequently suggest that the most productive feedback is not necessarily the most frequent or most explicit feedback. Instead, its value may depend on whether learners can recognize its relevance to an immediate communicative need. If a student has just experienced difficulty expressing an idea, a correction or reformulation provided at that moment may have a clear functional purpose. The learner can immediately reuse the form, test whether it communicates the intended meaning, and integrate it into subsequent interaction.

Peer interaction also appears important in this process. Peer clarification requests can function as a form of feedback even when no explicit correction is provided. When a peer asks “What do you mean?” or requests repetition, the speaker receives evidence that the original message was not fully understood. The learner can then reformulate the message. Such interaction gives students opportunities to become active participants in their own repair rather than passive recipients of teacher correction. This interpretation is compatible with research emphasizing learner-learner negotiation of meaning (Canals, 2023).

Overall, RQ2 demonstrates that real-time communicative practice creates a learning environment in which responsiveness and feedback are mutually reinforcing. The need to respond quickly creates opportunities for learners to notice limitations in their linguistic resources, while immediate feedback provides information that can help them modify subsequent production. Over time, repeated cycles of production, misunderstanding, feedback, and repair may contribute to greater communicative control. The process can therefore be conceptualized as a continuous feedback loop rather than a sequence of isolated speaking exercises.

RQ3: Perceived structural constraints shaping communicative practice

Although students valued real-time tasks, their journals also pointed to structural conditions that affect implementation. A common concern was assessment alignment: when high-stakes evaluation primarily rewards written exams and discrete-point knowledge, speaking tasks can be perceived as “practice” rather than “what counts.” This tension is especially salient in courses that aim to develop communicative competence (Commission on Higher Education, 2013) but operate in assessment cultures that privilege easily scored outputs. Assessment theory has long cautioned that what is measured strongly influences what is taught and learned (Bachman, 1990). Students explicitly connected exam pressure and time constraints to reduced willingness to take speaking risks.

The assessment issue is therefore more than an administrative concern. It directly shapes students’ understanding of what constitutes legitimate learning. If students perceive written examinations as the primary indicator of academic success, they may rationally allocate their time toward memorizing rules, vocabulary, and model answers, even when the course formally emphasizes communication. In this situation, communicative tasks may be appreciated but still treated as secondary. The discrepancy between instructional objectives and assessment practices can consequently weaken the sustainability of real-time communicative learning.

The students’ reflections suggest that assessment alignment is particularly important for risk-taking. Speaking requires learners to expose incomplete knowledge in front of others. If the perceived benefits of participation are uncertain while the potential social or academic risks are high, students may prefer safer forms of participation. Conversely, when speaking performance is recognized as a meaningful component of assessment, students may perceive communicative practice as directly relevant to their academic goals. Assessment can therefore influence not only what students study but also how willing they are to engage in spontaneous interaction.

Resources and infrastructure were another recurring constraint. Students noted that communicative tasks are harder to sustain in large classes and in rooms not designed for flexible group work. They also highlighted uneven access to devices, stable internet, and digital platforms, issues documented widely in Philippine higher education during and after the pandemic (Joaquin et al., 2020; Barrot et al., 2021). In a broader policy view, technology integration requires not only tools but also equitable access and institutional support (UNESCO, 2023). Recent analyses of Philippine schools reinforce this picture, finding that uneven infrastructure, inconsistent internet connectivity, and limited institutional investment continue to constrain technology-supported communicative activities even outside pandemic-era remote instruction (Espinosa et al., 2025; Mirandilla-Santos, 2021).

These constraints demonstrate that communicative pedagogy cannot be understood independently of material conditions. A teacher may design an effective real-time speaking activity, but its success can still be affected by classroom size, room arrangement, internet reliability, access to devices, or platform functionality. In large classes, for example, students may have fewer opportunities to speak individually because available class time must be distributed across many participants. Similarly, unstable connectivity can interrupt interaction at precisely the moment when students are expected to respond quickly.

Technology can therefore function as both an opportunity and a constraint. Digital platforms may expand opportunities for interaction by allowing students to communicate through text, audio, or video and by creating additional channels for feedback. However, these benefits are dependent on reliable infrastructure and equitable participation. As suggested by Zhang (2021) and Iraheta (2024), technology-mediated interaction does not automatically produce effective language learning. Task design, accessibility, and the quality of interaction remain critical.

Finally, students’ reflections implied that teacher support and facilitation matter for whether communicative tasks feel safe and productive. When instructions, time limits, and feedback norms were clear, learners felt more confident engaging in interaction; when expectations were unclear, anxiety increased. This finding resonates with broader research suggesting that teacher-related factors, such as confidence in facilitating spontaneous interaction, classroom management skills for group work, and prior training in communicative methodologies, can matter as much as, or more than, structural conditions like class size or institutional policy (Nam, 2023; Doeur, 2022).

Teacher facilitation is particularly important because real-time communicative tasks involve a degree of unpredictability. Unlike tightly controlled grammar exercises, spontaneous interaction can produce unexpected vocabulary, questions, errors, and changes in topic. Teachers therefore need to manage the balance between allowing students sufficient autonomy and providing enough structure to prevent interaction from becoming confusing or unproductive. Clear instructions, defined roles, manageable time limits, and explicit expectations for feedback can reduce uncertainty while preserving the communicative character of the activity.

In the Philippine context specifically, many instructors report valuing communicative language teaching in principle while continuing to rely on lecture- and drill-based methods in practice, a gap attributed to limited pre-service training in interactive pedagogy, apprehension about losing control of open-ended tasks, and uncertainty about fairly assessing communicative performance (Pangasinan, 2022; Singaravelu, 2021; Tagayuna, 2021). This suggests that beyond policy and infrastructure, sustained investment in teacher professional development, including practical training in facilitating unscripted interaction and in using performance-based rubrics, remains a practical need for embedding real-time communicative practice in this context.

Professional development is especially important because communicative teaching requires a shift in the teacher's role. Rather than functioning primarily as the source of linguistic information, the teacher becomes a designer of interaction, facilitator of participation, monitor of emerging difficulties, and provider of strategically timed feedback. Such a role requires pedagogical judgment. Teachers need to determine when to intervene, when to allow students to negotiate meaning independently, and when a communicative breakdown warrants explicit explanation. Without adequate preparation, teachers may understandably return to more controlled activities because these are easier to organize, monitor, and assess.

The issue of assessment also intersects with teacher preparedness. If teachers are expected to implement speaking tasks but lack clear and manageable rubrics for evaluating spontaneous communication, they may rely on written tests because those tests appear more objective and efficient. Performance-based assessment requires decisions about fluency, intelligibility, interactional effectiveness, vocabulary, grammar, and strategic competence. Developing transparent criteria can therefore help bridge the gap between communicative pedagogy and institutional assessment requirements.

The structural constraints identified in RQ3 should consequently not be interpreted as reasons to abandon real-time communicative practice. Rather, they identify the conditions that need to be addressed for such practice to become sustainable. The findings suggest that implementation requires alignment at several levels: curriculum objectives should align with assessment, classroom design should support interaction, technology should be accessible, and teachers should receive practical support for managing communicative activities. Without this alignment, communicative tasks may remain isolated innovations rather than becoming a stable component of language instruction.

Taken together, the three research questions point to a layered picture of communicative language learning in this setting. At the level of the individual learner, real-time tasks reshaped how students related to English, moving them from rule-monitoring toward meaning-making and building the confidence to sustain unscripted talk (RQ1). At the level of classroom interaction, this shift was scaffolded by immediate, low-stakes feedback that let students notice and repair their own language within the flow of conversation (RQ2). At the level of the institution, however, these gains remained fragile, contingent on assessment systems, resources, and teacher capacity that did not always align with the course's communicative aims (RQ3). This layered pattern suggests that functional fluency and speaking confidence are not solely individual achievements but emergent properties of a learning ecology in which classroom practice, institutional structures, and teacher preparedness interact (Nam, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

A central implication of this layered interpretation is that successful communicative language learning cannot be attributed to the task alone. The task provides the immediate context for interaction, but its effects depend on how learners experience that interaction, how feedback is provided, and whether the broader educational environment recognizes communicative competence as valuable. The students' journals demonstrate this interdependence particularly clearly. Their development in fluency and confidence was associated with repeated opportunities to communicate, but those opportunities were themselves shaped by technology, classroom organization, assessment expectations, and teacher facilitation.

The findings therefore support a view of communicative development as ecological and cumulative. Learners develop through repeated participation in meaningful interaction; interaction generates opportunities for feedback and repair; feedback contributes to greater awareness and responsiveness; successful communication strengthens confidence; and increased confidence can encourage further participation. At the same time, institutional constraints can interrupt this cycle. Limited speaking time, inadequate infrastructure, assessment pressure, or insufficient teacher preparation may reduce the frequency and quality of interaction.

The study consequently highlights the importance of designing communicative instruction not simply around the presence of speaking activities but around the quality and continuity of communicative opportunities. Real-time tasks are most likely to contribute to development when students have repeated opportunities to speak, when mistakes are treated as part of learning, when feedback is timely and supportive, and when assessment practices recognize the value of communicative performance. Such conditions allow students to move progressively from dependence on memorized language toward greater flexibility, responsiveness, and confidence.

Overall, the findings across RQ1–RQ3 suggest that the pedagogical value of real-time communicative tasks lies in their ability to connect linguistic knowledge with actual language use. Students were not simply practicing forms they had already learned; they were learning to mobilize those forms under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure, interaction, and social evaluation. This distinction is central to understanding why students described the experience as different from “test-like” language learning. The communicative task transformed language from an object to be remembered into a resource to be used.

In this respect, the present findings complement rather than replace existing research on communicative and task-based language learning. Previous scholarship has established the theoretical importance of interaction, meaning-making, output, feedback, and affective factors (Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1983; Long, 1996; Swain, 2005; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). More recent research has provided empirical evidence concerning fluency, willingness to communicate, feedback, technology-mediated interaction, and teacher-related conditions (Graham, 2022; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022; Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024; Lin et al., 2026; Zúñiga et al., 2023; Xu & Zeng, 2023; Canals, 2023). The contribution of the present findings is to bring these dimensions together through students' own accounts of how communicative learning was experienced over time.

Thus, the overall pattern is not simply that real-time tasks "improve speaking." More precisely, they appear to create conditions in which learners can develop a more functional relationship with the language: they learn to prioritize meaning when necessary, respond under time constraints, repair communication problems, accept feedback, tolerate mistakes, and gradually trust their ability to continue speaking without a prepared script. These developments, however, are sustainable only when the surrounding educational ecology supports them. The findings therefore point toward a model in which communicative competence emerges from the interaction of **task design, learner engagement, feedback processes, affective development, teacher facilitation, and institutional support** rather than from any single instructional technique.

4. CONCLUSION

Drawing on reflective journals from 10 undergraduates in a Purposive Communication course, this classroom-based qualitative study shows that real-time communicative tasks can support the development of functional fluency and speaking confidence. Students described moving from an accuracy-dominated mindset toward meaning-focused expression, becoming more willing to improvise and paraphrase during interaction. They also reported improved responsiveness, listening and speaking under time pressure, noticing feedback, and self-correcting without losing the flow of conversation.

At the same time, students' accounts indicate that communicative practice is shaped by the learning ecology: assessment priorities, class conditions, and access to resources and technology influence how consistently real-time interaction can be implemented. To strengthen alignment with communicative outcomes, instructors and institutions can (a) integrate performance-based speaking assessment components, (b) provide clear rubrics and feedback routines for interactive tasks, and (c) ensure minimum conditions for equitable participation (space, group-work management, and technology support), and (d) invest in sustained teacher professional development that builds confidence and practical skill in facilitating unscripted, learner-centered interaction (Nam, 2023; Pangasinan, 2022).

Limitations. This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was small ($n = 10$) and drawn from a single university course context, which limits transferability. Second, the primary dataset relied on reflective journals; while valuable for capturing student perceptions, journals may contain self-report bias and do not directly measure speaking performance. Third, the duration of the intervention was limited to 16 weeks, and longer-term development cannot be inferred.

Future research directions. Further studies could expand the sample across multiple universities and disciplines to examine whether similar patterns emerge in different Philippine higher education settings. Methodologically, future research should triangulate reflective journals with additional data sources such as classroom observations, interviews, and pre/post speaking performance measures using validated rubrics or standardized speaking tests. Longitudinal designs could also examine whether confidence and functional fluency gains are sustained and how assessment reforms influence student participation over time. Future work could also examine teacher perspectives and professional development needs directly, given evidence that teacher-related factors can shape communicative task implementation as strongly as institutional or structural conditions (Nam, 2023; Doeur, 2022).

5. REFERENCES

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