Written correspondence: Challenges and adjustments of BACOM students in online learning

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Article Info

Abstract

The sudden shift from traditional to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic has made written communication the primary method for students and instructors to send and receive information. However, most students still experience challenges when communicating with their instructors in written form, especially first-year university students. Henceforth, this study aimed to understand the written communication challenges of freshman Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BACOM) students of S.Y. 2020-2021. Specifically, the study intended to determine the challenges encountered by the participants in written correspondence with their instructors in terms of online learning, the consequences of the challenges identified, and the ways to improve written communication between the participants and their instructors. This qualitative study used Hermeneutic Phenomenology in one state university in Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Data was gathered through an online focus group interview which was analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Findings of the study show that the major challenges endured by the students are uncertainty, sensitivity, comprehension deficit, poor internet connection, and grammar inaccuracies. As a result of these difficulties, the outcomes identified by the students are delayed inquiries, poor performance, low self-esteem, and a communication gap. Based on the students' suggestions, effective written communication can be improved between instructors and students by employing empathy, online etiquette, systematized platform, initiative, feedback, cooperation, clarity of instructions, clarity of concerns, and open communication. Chiefly, this study demonstrates that both students and instructors should be aware of their respective roles and duties to establish healthy, productive, and effective learning and communication now that the learning system has shifted online.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication and education are inextricably linked (Diloyan, 2017). As stated by Andrade (2015), Petrie, (2011), and Ajmal and Ahmad (2019), communication is central to education and a critical component in pedagogical practices and institutions to ensure student success. Also, in any academic setting, verbal, nonverbal, and written communication are all evident, with writing being the most commonly used method, particularly in higher education (Barrett et al., 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed billions of people and institutions to close down, severely affecting most of the world's economy and education, forcing academic societies worldwide to adapt and shift from the traditional mode of learning to online learning (Sahu, 2020).

Even though a research study by Enriquez (2014) explains that virtual learning has been around for the past years in classroom activities and instructions in the Philippines, the abrupt pedagogical shift to online learning brought huge adjustments to educational institutions, instructors, and students who are new to entering higher education institutions. Aside from that, a recent study by Amponsah et al. (2020) reveals that students who gain admission to tertiary education face new challenges because the transition period from high school to college frequently brings new stressors and necessitate coping strategies. Although there are ways to cope with the stress and unexpected situation, Kwaah and Essilfie (2017) suggests that students use a variety of strategies. Because of the diverse backgrounds that each student has, it will be impossible to cope and adjust instantly amidst the pandemic.

Since communication and mode of learning became online, the importance of effective communication plays a massive role in building students' character and relationship with their instructors (Alawamleh et al., 2020). With the current mode of instruction, written communication became the prominently used method for delivering and submitting instructional materials and activities. As Betts (2009) stated, "in online education, written communication is a primary form of communication between the institution and students as well as faculty and the students," whereby teachers and students used smartphones and other learning gadgets to exchange messages through text messaging, e-mail, and Facebook messenger (Simbulan, 2020).

According to Sparks et al. (2014), written communication is the process of effectively delivering multiple types of messages to different audiences in written form. Conversely, online learning is a type of distance education that takes place over the internet in which a course is thoroughly planned ahead of time to be delivered online (Bates, 2016). However, one of the major problems with this method of learning is that it may affect the students' involvement and communication in their course and instead become unproductive learners making them unfit for online learning (Delas Peñas, 2020),. Similarly, a recent article by Milosievski et al. (2020) observes that several of students' instructors barely teach and discuss the given instructional materials with them. As a result, students are forced to learn courses on their own, without the correct assistance of their instructors, making it difficult to connect with instructors about their subjects.

Alternatively, students can use learning technologies such as email and other correspondence tools to convey private messages to their professors (Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2005, as cited in Colorado & Eberle, 2010; Horton, 2006; Repman, Zinskie, & Carlson, 2005, p. 59). Other tools for correspondence include Google Classroom private inbox, which allows students and teachers to easily communicate and provide feedback (Shaharanee et al., 2016; Sudarsana, 2019), and Facebook Messenger, which students use to contact their instructors about subject content, permissions, and class schedules or exams (Abu-Alruz, 2014; Draskovic et al., 2013; Gunnulfsen, 2016). With all these being said, miscommunication may arise. Lawrence et al. (2019, as cited in Brown et al., 2020) assert that miscommunication can create barriers that may alter the meaning of a message which includes semantic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, physical, and context issues that may be specifically worsened in an online environment. Moreover, few researchers have been able to draw on structured remedies to improve written communication between students and instructors.

Arrieta et al. (2020) and Wilson (2017) suggested that there are available ways and practices that instructors may apply when communicating with their students, one of which is providing accurate contact information and online availability time. Arrieta et al. (2020) further explained that listening and attending to students' concerns and giving meaningful feedback is essential to creating great rapport with them. Additional findings (Section 6.2: Student Assessment, n.d., as cited in Palloff & Pratt, 2006) state that through instructors asking for more information or asking the students to share some aspect of their professional expertise helps facilitate the discussion and engage them in this instance.

A similar emphasis should be placed on written communication as in traditional classrooms. According to Alawamleh et al. (2020), whether in a face-to-face or online class, educators communicate to gain understanding and establish relationships to decide on how to establish timely and appropriate messages, as well as how to communicate effectively with one another. This is one reason why this study was created. It endeavors to place written communication in the forefront in this time of crisis. Although research studies on the challenges of online learning have been studied, few types of research have explored the challenges of written correspondence among students. Consequently, this study aimed to understand the written communication challenges of freshman Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BACOM) students of S.Y. 2020-2021 in a state university in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Specifically, this study put forward answers to the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by BACOM students in written correspondence with their instructors?
2. What are the consequences of the challenges identified by BACOM students in written correspondence with their instructors?
3. How can written correspondence between BACOM students and instructors be improved?

METHODS

Research Design

The study used qualitative approach in interpreting and analyzing the data to have an in-depth understanding and corroboration. The researchers aligned it to phenomenological study, incorporating Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Manen, 1990) which focuses on personal perceptions and a full understanding of the structure of individual experiences. This structure directs experiences as to how an individual comes to understand the world (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). This approach is applicable for the study as the phenomenological method focuses on experienced meaning of first-year Bachelor of Arts in Communication students (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Population and locale

The participants of the study were freashman Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BACOM) students of the Academic Year, 2020-2021 in a state university in Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Philippines. The researchers only focused on first-year students for the reason that they were new to the sudden shift of learning from face-to-face to an online learning environment and were encountering the situation as novice students. According to Krueger (2002), the preferred number of participants when executing focus group interviews must be between 8 and 10 people. With that, the researchers interviewed ten (10) first-year students from the two sections of Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BACOM). From a total population of forty-three, five from BACOM 1A were selected, and from a total population of forty-four, five from BACOM 1B were selected. The participants of the study were chosen through purposive sampling with the criteria that he/she is: an enrolled first-year BACOM student of A.Y. 2020-2021; using Google Classroom private inbox, Facebook Messenger, and email when communicating with his or her instructors; and, actively participating in online learning. To ensure that the participants satisfied the aforementioned criteria, the researchers created a group chat through Facebook Messenger for initial interviews.

Instrument

A semi-structured type of in-depth interview was used in which respondents must answer open-ended questions that were predetermined, allowing the interviewers to be equipped and prepared during the interview and allowing the interviewees to freely think of their answers which generated a successful reciprocal information exchange between the participants and interviewers (Jamshed, 2014; Kallio et al., 2016). After the construction of the initial interview guide, it underwent content validation by a language expert. Then, ten BACOM volunteers were interviewed for the pilot testing incorporating the framework of Kallio et al. (2016). The researchers used an online focus group interview via Google Meet during the pilot testing to record the whole interview. After that, revisions were made to improve the instrument which comprised of 7 questions.

Data collection procedures

All of the participants were openly notified with consent letters and briefed on the purpose and procedures of the study. During the data gathering, the researchers utilized Google Meet to conduct the online focus group interview, which was recorded and transcribed. The researchers employed a dual moderator focus group type as part of the scheduled online interview. In this kind of focus group interview, two moderators work together. One moderator is in charge of asking the questions, and the other is in charge of making sure the questions are answered by the participants. A single moderator is more likely to get distracted, hence having two moderators ensured that all the queries were discussed and the participants remained focused on the dialogue (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The interview lasted approximately one hour and forty-five minutes. After transcribing the data, the researchers returned the transcriptions to the participants for them to check, reflect, and validate the transcripts' veracity (Birt et. al, 2016). Following that, the comments of the participants were then taken into account.

Data analysis

The data from the recorded interview were thoroughly synthesized and subjected to reflexive type of thematic analysis. Braun et al. (2019) defined reflexive thematic analysis as a process of analyzing contextual evidence in order to address general or specific research questions regarding people's experiences, perspectives, and representations of a phenomenon. It consisted of six processes in performing the analysis namely familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

The researchers first familiarized themselves with the content of the data gathered. Thereupon, each view and opinion linked with the research questions were individually identified, coded, and then categorized accordingly by the researchers to generate appropriate concepts. After that, each categorized and re-categorized ideas were collectively reviewed, compared and contrasted by the researchers to arrive at the final themes that were defined and interpreted in accordance with the research questions. With deductive approach, the researchers had used their research questions as a starting point to develop broad thematic categories of interest and then classify the data into those categories during their initial read-through. While with the inductive approach, after the researchers have come up with a set of codes, they then let themselves generate new codes inductively and continuously as they sort through their data. Meanwhile, to further help the researchers with their coding and generating themes, the researchers also used a semantic approach. The semantic approach helps researchers with coding and theme development by analyzing a given data's acquired statements or content (Caulfield, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges encountered by BACOM students in written correspondence with their Instructors

According to the findings of the study, there were four challenges encountered by the students in terms of their written communication with their instructors (See Figure 1). It is divided into two factors, namely Reasons and struggles. Reasons include comprehension deficit, poor internet connection, and grammatical inaccuracies, while struggles include uncertainty and sensitivity.

Reasons

In this study, the term "reasons" refers to the perception or concept that makes it difficult for participants to interact with their instructors in writing.

Comprehension deficit

The participants often experience lack of understanding, lack of guidance or specificity to the delivered instructions, announcements, or private messages. They feel confused and get the wrong idea because they rely only on what they understand.

> P5 shared:
> *"What makes it hard for us to communicate with our instructors is that the instructions or the messages are quite unclear, undetailed or generalized, and the use of incomprehensible words is evident."*

The results indicate that the participants have a different level of understanding regarding a given instruction or a message, which makes it hard for them to communicate with their instructors. This is supported by the study of Milosievski et al. (2020) which remarks that many of their instructors

barely educate and discuss the assigned instructional materials to the majority of the students. As a result, students are compelled to acquire knowledge from their subjects independently without the direction of their instructors, making it difficult for the students to communicate with their teachers when they have issues or queries about their subjects. Conversely, a study by Hung et al. (2010) states that students should cooperate with other online students to avoid misinterpretation of given instructional materials and responses to concerns. This study found that asking questions helps clarify and understand a given subject and message.
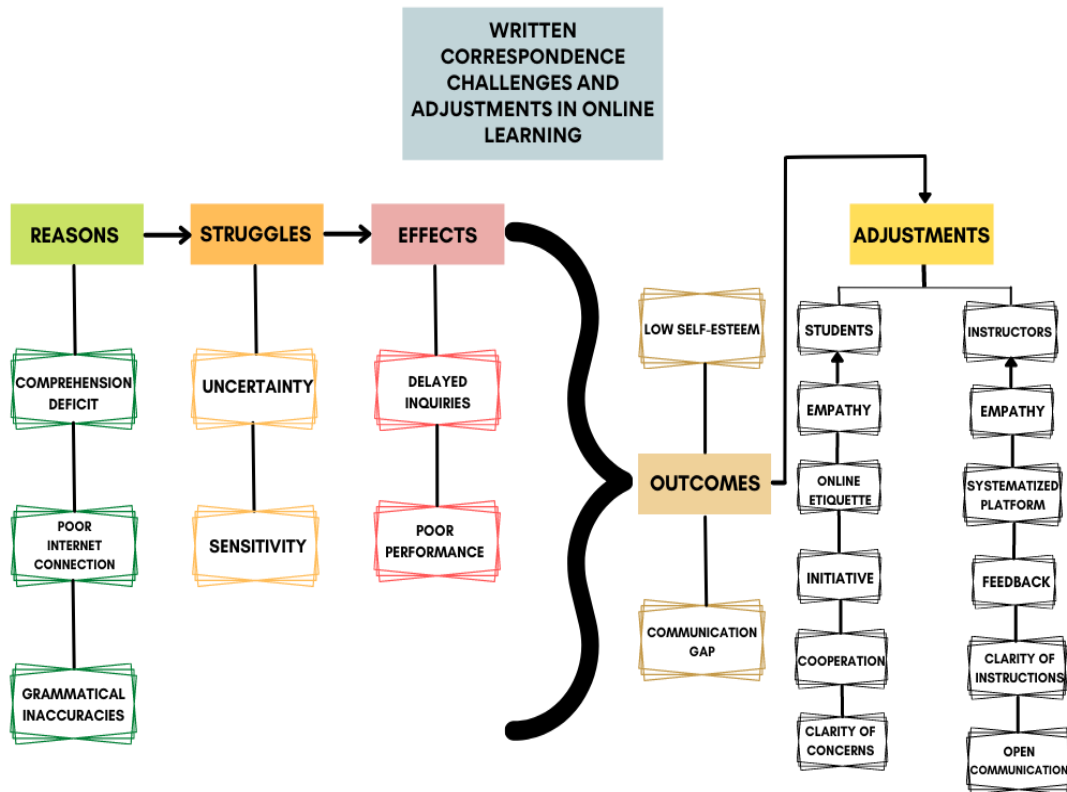

Figure 1. The framework for the written correspondence
challenges and adjustments in online learning

Poor Internet connection

The participants experience that they cannot send or ask their queries instantly via email or Facebook Messenger to their instructors due to their geographical locations causing signal interruption of their data and internet connection.

P5 shared:
"Sometimes, it makes it hard for us to communicate with our instructors because of the poor internet connection. So, the only thing that we can do first is to stare at their feedback and do not respond to them."

Based on the participants, they stipulate that having intermittent data or internet access in online learning is a problem that they have encountered, especially when messaging their instructors. This is supported by Aboagye et al. (2020) stating that poor networks are often a big issue for underdeveloped countries with insufficient telecommunications and information and communication technology. Amadora (2020) added that bundles in the country fluctuate and are not built similarly despite the fact that there are several internet services available in terms of speed and stability.

Grammatical inaccuracies

The participants can apply the guidelines in sending private messages, asking for clarifications, or responding to the messages of their instructors. On the other hand, the problem is that they lack terminology, enough vocabulary, and proper knowledge of grammar editing when constructing the content of the messages they want to send to their instructors via email or Facebook Messenger.

> P9 shared:
> *"One of the reasons that makes it hard for me to communicate in written communication was the lack of terminology or the vocabularies I use to organize my thoughts."*

The findings reveal that participants struggle to formulate and communicate their messages, questions, explanations, or concerns due to their insufficient comprehension of good grammar, terminology, and vocabularies. These findings are supported by Ismail (2010, as cited in Apsari, 2018), indicating that grammar is vital in any communication since it demonstrates how vocabularies are utilized. Royani and Sadia (2019) added that when students understand and apply appropriate grammar, they can communicate their ideas accurately and efficiently to others. In contrast, a study by Harmer (2004) explains that considering punctuation not only the grammar is a critical aspect of composing messages, and accurately employing punctuation is necessary. A study by Christal (2003) opined that if the text's punctuation marks were not utilized correctly, the reader or receiver might have difficulty understanding what was being written and conveyed.

Struggles

Struggles are obstacles, adversities, or problems that the participants have encountered when attempting to interact with their instructors in written form.

Uncertainty

The participants feel worried about how they will express their queries through written communication. They are confused on what platform (Fb Messenger, Google Classroom, or FB group pages) the instructions of their instructors will be posted or announced. Furthermore, the time that their instructors are available for messaging or consultations is observed to be uncertain because some of their instructors forget to indicate their consultation periods. They feel uneasy when asking clarifications and sending private messages, thinking that their messages might be misinterpreted by their instructors.

> P3 shared:
> *"When I receive a private message, to be honest, I don't know why there are uncertainties in clarifying instructions from my instructors. I often have self- doubts whenever I send a message to my instructors and when I receive one, I am usually hesitant to respond."*

These findings from their experiences suggest that the participants struggle to communicate with their instructors. They are undecided about the messages they have sent, fearful of being misinterpreted, and unsure whether they have responded to the appropriate platform in a way that it would be understandable to the instructor as well. These experiences of the participants are supported by Jordan and McDaniel (2014), stating that when people are uncertain, it gives them a sense of being confused, fearful, lacking understanding or cognitive guessing about potential events, or verification of a phenomenon's interpretation.

Sensitivity

Another struggle for the participants is that their instructors get easily angry at them without knowing the underlying reasons. They receive responses, but they often feel from their intuctors' messages that they were not considered and have to wait for their instructions or private messages again.

> P5 shared:
> *"Students struggle in sending and receiving messages when the instructor shows moody atmosphere or being snobbish. Some instructors are sensitive, and sometimes they will easily get mad without knowing the reason."*

These experiences of the participants demonstrate that the attitude of instructors towards their students has a huge impact on their interaction. This becomes a struggle to students especially when verbalizing their queries and concerns. The previously mentioned experiences of the participants support the statement of Villamor (2017), stating that the negative attitude of instructors towards their students has a significant influence on the ability, understanding, emotional well-being, communication, and behavior of students. As a result of this negativity, the students cannot cope with their concerns, lose interest in school, and would rather not interact with their instructors. On the contrary, a study by Lavri (2007) claimed that instructors evaluating their communication style and attitude towards their students' results in regaining control of their communication and helps themselves learn to adapt and respond to their students appropriately.

Consequences of the challenges identified by BACOM students in written correspondence with their Instructors

The following are the aftermaths of the challenges identified by the participants, and were divided into two parts as shown in Figure 1. One is the effects, which include delayed inquires and poor performance; and the outcomes, which include low self-esteem and a communication gap.

Effects

Effects relate to the situations or conditions that arise as a result of a problem or issue being addressed.

Delayed inquiries

According to the participants, most of them often suspend their queries and rely on others to ask the questions for them. In consequence, they would usually end up having delayed answers from their instructors.

P1 shared:
"Because I am shy, I do not know if my answer is correct, so I would rather wait for my other classmates to approach the instructor."

These statements only elicit that the participants do feel and intend to delay messaging their instructors via email or Facebook Messenger about their queries and clarifications and mostly depend on someone to raise them. These descriptions are supported by Howland and Moore (2002), noting that communication between students and instructors is a significant issue since students are hesitant to give their response or clarification and wait for the other students to lessen the difficulty of asking. On the other hand, Garrison et al. (2019) asserted that the students should take greater responsibility to adapt and adjust to the new mode of learning, to synthesize ideas, and to learn how to participate, stimulate curiosity, and communicate with their instructors to be an effective student in online learning.

Poor performance

The participants experience misunderstanding when reading given instructions and responses from their instructors. This reduces the good performance of the participants. They think that they are doing the correct instructions based on their understanding, but it is different from the expectations of the instructors.

P3 shared:
"The instructions and reading materials prepared or given by some of the instructors are hard to understand, and so it leads to poor performance. If we do not understand the lessons and the instructions, our performance can be affected."

These experiences of the participants imply that they sometimes misunderstand the written instructions of their instructors. This insufficient guidance from the course materials can lead to poor performance. This is supported by Delas Peñas (2020), stating that one of the most significant issues with online learning is that it might reduce students' interest and communication in their courses, causing them to become unproductive learners unsuitable for online learning.

Outcomes

In this context, outcomes refer to the end or final result of the reasons, problems, and impacts that the BACOM students have encountered.

Low self-esteem

As mentioned by the participants, they have fear of the possible reaction of the instructors from the messages they have sent. Moreover, they feel shy to ask help and support to resolve their queries.

P2 shared:
"We generally feel anxious or scared so instead of addressing our concerns, we dismiss them."

These findings from the experiences of the participants indicate that low self-esteem makes it difficult for a student to ask for what they want specifically when asking for clarifications. Their need for help and support makes them feel embarrassed or incompetent in some instances. These experiences are supported by Greeves (2020), stating that communication and self-esteem play a significant part in balancing these two aspects of themselves, and this feeds into how an individual presents themselves in the world. As a result, low self-esteem makes communication difficult, creating a vicious feedback cycle that erodes self-esteem further. On the flip side, Hung et al. (2010) reveals that shy students are more actively taking part in online environments than they are in traditional settings.

Communication gap

For the participants, they feel that their written communication with their instructors is unsustainable due to misinterpretation or incomprehensible responses or clarifications. Due to this instance, students would often choose not to message their instructors any longer and choose to be apprehensive knowing what their instructors will respond or convey.

P8 shared:
"I think one of the outcomes is the lack of confidence and the development of hate or fear to the instructors. We have this experience that one of our instructors has an attitude problem. When she gives us instructions, she expects us to understand them already. When we ask her for clarifications, she immediately assumes that her given instructions are not clear. This is true on our end and is the principal reason why we are asking for clarifications. As a result, we think this can be a striking factor in developing a gap between students and instructors in terms of their communication."

Results show that students and instructors are unable to communicate effectively because of misunderstanding or a lack of understanding the concern of the student and the response of the instructors. These experiences are supported by the study of Lawrence et al. (2019, as cited in Brown et al., 2020), in which the study asserted that miscommunication could create barriers that may alter the meaning of a message. These barriers include semantics, intrapersonal, interpersonal, physical, and context issues that may be specifically worsened in an online environment.

How written correspondence between students and instructors can improve

The participants also proposed different adjustments to improve written communication between the students and instructors. The suggestions of the participants include empathy, online etiquette, initiative, cooperation, and clarity of concerns for the students. For the instructors, the propositions of the participants include empathy, systematized platform, feedback, clarity of instructions, and open communication.

For students

The themes presented below were specified based on the standpoints of the participants.

Empathy

As students, the participants suggest that they should always be courteous when messaging their instructors, even if there are disagreements. They should understand that their instructor also have a workload and other students to deal with.

> P2 shared:
> *"We should also learn and understand our teachers because they handle many students. Furthermore, just like us (students), our teachers also have varying levels of coping mechanisms, so let us learn to understand them as well."*

These findings imply that each individual has their limit, and not all will always be available to respond to the clarifications or messages of a student, so understanding and consideration are always essential to maintain progressive communication. This is supported by Cramer (2019), stating that by replying politely to others, even if there is a disagreement, they should engage in polite communication. This allows them to share their views and opinions, understand the perspectives of others, form strong bonds, and work together to solve issues. Mahoney (2017) added that students must wait for their instructor's response when they ask or request assistance.

Online etiquette

According to the participants, they should always double-check their message and, check proper grammar and punctuation when constructing messages. Moreover, a clear subject line, greeting, closure, well-organized body, and correct language are imperative before sending messages to their instructors.

> P7 shared:
> *"Observing proper online etiquette such as using proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar. For me, spelling must not be taken for granted because it can lead to misunderstanding. In sending a message or any written materials, check the spelling and punctuations first."*

Based on the findings, it can be decided that the participants would be able to learn and improve their messages by ensuring that the content of their message is explicit and have correct grammar and spelling, both before and after creating their message. According to University Writing and Speaking Center (2021), the context of online etiquette refers to how students maintain a courteous, suitable, and professional message. Nevertheless, it is not limited to precise spelling and language, utilizing proper titles when addressing the recipient, and adequately identifying concerns. For students dealing with instructors, online etiquette is crucial.

Initiative

Based on the participants' suggestions, taking the lead to do what a student should do is essential since it is their prime duty. Taking the initiative to grasp the given information and monitor any posts from their instructors regularly is a great way to stay updated of any announcements or instructions.

> P2 shared:
> *"For us students, we must take the initiative to understand the given materials and then monitor the posted announcements and the other posts of our instructors."*

These findings indicate that students must take the responsibility to do their part and learn to interact with their instructors, but not exceeding beyond their online class time. Moreover, if the participants have queries, they should have the courage to ask about the instructors' posts or instructions. These results are supported by Postolati (2017), stating that being confident or taking the initiative demonstrates that they value themselves since they are prepared to defend their interests, voice out their opinions and emotions. It is a courteous approach displaying that they are conscious of the rights of others and also ready to work on dispute resolution.

Cooperation

For the participants, it is essential to discuss their concerns with other students to ensure that they have not misunderstood any announcements or instructions.

P6 shared:
"If students have concerns or clarifications, it is better to discuss them with classmates first. Other students might have good suggestions. If the concern is not solved, the option of sending a private message to the instructor should be done."

According to the shared responses of the participants, they indicate that when students in online learning encounter concerns, it is preferable to discuss them first with their classmates in order to develop better procedures for dealing with them. This is supported by Poth (2018), asserting that students benefit from meaningful cooperation because it encourages them to create connections with their peers, stimulates peer interactions, and allows them to learn from each other and offer feedback to one another before presenting such concerns or problems to their instructors.

Clarity of concerns

For the participants, it is imperative to make sure that when raising issues or questions to instructors by email, Facebook Messenger, or text message, the messages should be clear, thorough, and adhere to guidelines.

P5 shared:
"As a student, we should communicate with our instructors in a specific and understandable way. You should inform the instructor what you want to clarify and explain sides or views with pieces of evidence to show discernment. We should communicate or formally message instructors by following their guidelines."

The result indicates that it is vital to ensure that students' message is clear and concise, and the message is reviewed following the guidelines before delivering it via Facebook Messenger, email, or text message to their instructors. This statement is supported by Windle and Warren (2016), stating that student must convey their message or point of view as directly and concisely as possible.

For instructors

The themes discussed in this section are solely from the perspectives and suggestions of students for their instructors.

Empathy

From the participants, students suggest that their instructors understand their students to boost their confidence.

P1 shared:
"For me, instructors should also consider and understand how we adjust because, as students, we have other problems that burden us, and sometimes we are trying to cope. I suggest that both sides should adjust so that both will benefit and not create conflict."

These findings from the participants indicate that students and instructors face different situations, so instructors should try to recognize that their students are enduring something they do not know. These were supported by Firdaus (2017), stating that recognizing and contemplating one's circumstances assists both the teacher and the student in preventing arguments while building strong interpersonal ties and motivating learners to interact and engage more actively.

Systematized platform

According to the participants, in order to find out which online educational platform their students prefer, instructors should ask which is much more accessible and better for connecting with students in written form, particularly when giving instructions, modules, announcements, or private messages.

P8 shared:
"In my perspective, instructors should also learn to ask their students which platform is more convenient for private messages. They should also be more specific with their instructions and more consistent in giving information."

These findings from the participants indicate that instructors should reach out to their students through the given educational online platforms like Google Classroom. Other platforms can be used like Facebook Messenger, email, and text message when the students do not have internet access or mobile data to stay in contact with them. This is supported by Arrieta (2020), stating that it will be possible for all instructors and students to engage with the new form of teaching and learning if there is a well-established communication system in place. In contrast, Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland (2005, as cited in Colorado & Eberle, 2010) argued that there are other learning technologies such as email and other tools for correspondence that students can use to send private messages to their instructors, which is a commonly used method for communication in online learning.

Feedback

To show appreciation and help their students, instructors should try to give feedback that would assist their students in discovering and enhancing their areas of weaknesses, lift the student's feelings, and let them know that they are appreciated. With that, students will not feel like they are being judged for their shortcomings, and they will feel that their concerns are handled and responded to with care and intentions.

P2 shared:
"For instructors, I think they should frequent giving us feedback, monitoring our condition, and if we have read the instructional materials posted. In my perspective, everything is great if we have an accommodating, considerate, and kind instructor."

The result explains that an instructor's response enables students to evaluate their progress and identify areas for improvement that stimulate their self-reflection. According to Arrietta et al. (2020), listening and attending to students' concerns and giving meaningful feedback is essential to creating great rapport with students. On the contrary, Vesely et al. (2007) found that the presence of an instructor giving feedback is not enough, as instructors should also consider timely responses to help the students on their given instructional materials to improve their areas of weaknesses.

Clarity of instructions

Although the participants are communication students, others are still adapting to their present educational situation, making it difficult to manage and comprehend information quickly. For that reason, the participants suggest that the instructors provide specific instructions, explanations, and messages in simple words.

P8 shared:
"Instructors should be careful in written communication because we have differences in our level of understanding. It is better to use simple words or terms in written communication for students to have better understanding."

The findings show that instructors must provide precise and comprehensive instructions that are understood by students. According to Rogers (2019), it is comprehensible enough to students when instructors give essential background information or content on their instructions before sending it to their students. Instructors should try to explain concepts or ideas several times, using simple vocabulary and examples in posting their announcements, instructions, or private messages to help students understand them better.

Open communication

The participants suggest that instructors establish and emphasize effortless communication with their students. Also, instructors should be attentive toward their students, particularly if some students want help on anything they may have missed or misinterpreted in their announcements,

explanations, or private communications. Apart from that, instructors should allow students to express, discuss, and comment on their views, opinions, or explanations, allowing students to raise whatever questions they have without hesitation, uncertainty, fear, or worry.

P6 shared:
"Some instructors should lower their pride and know their limitations in teaching and giving instructions. Furthermore, when students ask questions, the instructor should always be open. As a student, we respect them, especially their time, and we know our boundaries and limitations when sending messages."

The findings from the participants indicate that instructors' being approachable can lessen the fear of students of expressing themselves. It has been shown that supportive teacher-student open interactions positively influence students' involvement and engagement. Nevertheless, a study by Mandernach et al. (2016) states that aside from accessible communication, evaluating students' involvement in online learning allows instructors to adjust their instructional techniques to change student motivation, interaction, participation, and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

This research has shed light on a variety of issues concerning the challenges of written correspondence among BACOM students in online learning. Findings from the study reveal that the common reason students are having trouble interacting with their instructors is that they lack enough understanding of the course materials because most of them are in different locations and do not have enough knowledge of terminologies and grammatical accuracy. As a result, students delay their questions and let their classmates do the asking and end up performing their tasks incorrectly. These effects have made the students think of themselves as incompetent for what they have accomplished. Furthermore, these created a gap between the relationship and communication of the students and instructors, which is unusual and may cause more miscommunication especially since it is happening online.

On another note, the students have suggested ways to enhance and achieve effective communication between them and their instructors, one of which is that both students and instructors should understand one another since not everyone has a friendly environment and can quickly respond to messages or queries. For the students, they realized that they should have more courage to learn and ask questions and be attentive and responsible for their duties as students. As for the instructors, the students proposed that they should learn to adjust alongside the students. Thus, asking the students what they prefer would make the written communication of both students and instructors better if they arrive at a mutual platform to use. Also, giving out comments and reactions to the queries of students helps build that connection, making the students more comfortable communicating with their instructors in written communication.

Moreover, allowing students to share and express their perspectives, concerns, and instructors showing that they are free to communicate, enables students to openly voice out their inquiries smoothly. All in all, this study has unveiled that both students and instructors should mutually know and do their best to adjust and fulfill their roles and responsibilities now that the learning system is online to promote healthy, productive, and effective communication.

Ultimately, in order to improve their vocabulary and sentence structure, the researchers advise students to read books and utilize an internet writing service like "Grammarly" to check and improve their grammar. Similarly, instructors should try to communicate with their students in a scheduled time, as well as to approach each student in their class when there is a sudden decline in the student's performance and the student is no longer responding to their messages, instructions, and announcements posted via Facebook Messenger, email, or private text message. Instructors should recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their students by giving feedback on what their message lacks and needs to improve. With this feedback or comment, students can distinguish what needs to be improved.

Despite the aforementioned results, this research contains limitations. In particular, this study is only limited to the perception of students, given that the sample for this study consists entirely of students. To investigate further, future researchers might study the perspectives of instructors on the challenges and adjustments in written correspondence. As previously mentioned, the participants were only first-year students of Bachelor of Arts in Communication. Hence, future researchers might expand to other degree programs to highlight if there would be a change in the challenges students

experience. Since the study is qualitative in its approach, researchers might do it quantitatively to make the results generalizable with more sample size.

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