

Sociolinguistic Adaptability, Emotional Regulation, and Communicative Confidence of College Students: An Input to Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program

Ella Mae G. Duron

Filamer Christian University, Inc. Roxas City, Capiz, 5800

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication in higher education requires not only linguistic competence but also the ability to adapt socially and regulate emotions in diverse interactions. This study investigated the sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence of college students within the higher education context. Anchored on the view that effective communication encompasses linguistic, social, and emotional competencies, the study examined the influence of sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation on students' communicative confidence in academic and social interactions. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design was employed to determine these relationships among 396 college students in the Province of Capiz for the Academic Year 2025–2026. The quantitative phase utilized standardized questionnaires to measure sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence, while the qualitative phase employed a researcher-developed interview guide to further explain the statistical results. Sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation were treated as independent variables, while communicative confidence served as the dependent variable. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), applying Frequency Count and Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r), with a 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that the respondents demonstrated a very high level of sociolinguistic adaptability and high levels of emotional regulation and communicative confidence. Significant differences in communicative confidence were found across varying levels of sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation. Moreover, a significant relationship existed among the three variables. Based on the findings, a Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program was proposed to strengthen students' communicative competence and interpersonal effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, effective communication requires more than grammatical competence; it also involves the ability to adapt language appropriately, regulate emotions, and communicate with confidence in diverse academic and social contexts. Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions, presentations, group activities, and intercultural interactions that demand sensitivity to audience, context, and communication norms. In multilingual and English-medium instruction settings, these communicative demands become more complex as students navigate linguistic diversity, academic expectations, and emotional pressures. Thus, communication competence in higher education is increasingly recognized as a combination of sociolinguistic, emotional, and interpersonal abilities necessary for academic success and professional preparedness (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Sociolinguistic adaptability refers to the ability to adjust language use according to social, cultural, and contextual demands. It enables learners to interpret meaning appropriately, respond effectively to different communication situations, and interact successfully with individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Tovar-Correal et al., 2025). Emotional regulation, on the other hand, involves the ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt during communication and academic interaction (Gross, 2019). Studies suggest that students with stronger emotional regulation are more likely to participate actively in

discussions, manage communication anxiety, and sustain meaningful engagement in classroom interactions (Pekrun, 2017; MacIntyre, 2017). Communicative confidence further supports active participation by encouraging students to express ideas, respond to feedback, and engage in collaborative learning despite linguistic limitations or fear of negative evaluation (Bernales, 2016; Jackson, 2019).

Despite the growing body of research on communication skills, limited studies have simultaneously examined sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence among college students in multilingual higher education settings. In the Philippine context, particularly in the Province of Capiz where English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon are commonly used, understanding these variables may provide valuable insights into students' communication experiences and academic engagement. This study draws on Communicative Competence Theory (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), and Pragmatic Competence Theory (Bachman, 1990) in examining the relationship among sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence. The following specific objectives guided the study: (1) determine the level of sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence of college students; (2) determine the significant differences in communicative confidence according to levels of sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation; (3) determine the significant relationship among all variables; and (4) propose and develop Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program to strengthen students' communicative competence and interpersonal effectiveness.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine students' sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence in the Province of Capiz (Creswell et al., 2018).

Participants

The study included 396 college students from various higher education institutions in the Province of Capiz, selected using stratified random sampling. In addition, 10 participants were chosen purposively to take part in the Focus Group Discussion.

Instruments

Three instruments were utilized to gather the data needed. The Sociolinguistic Adaptability Questionnaire (SAQ), Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), and Communicative Confidence Questionnaire (CCQ) were researcher-made instruments designed to measure college students' sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence in academic and social contexts.

The Sociolinguistic Adaptability Questionnaire (SAQ) was a 50-item researcher-made instrument using a five-point Likert scale. It assessed students' ability to adjust their language use across varying social, cultural, and situational contexts in terms of lexical adaptation, tone regulation, communication strategy, socio-cultural awareness, and metacommunicative awareness. The instrument underwent expert validation by six faculty members and pilot testing with 30 college students. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of .938, indicating high internal consistency.

The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) was a 50-item researcher-made instrument designed to measure students' ability to manage, monitor, and modify their emotional responses in academic and social communication situations. It covered indicators such as academic pressure control, anxiety management, emotional resilience, confidence and performance, and emotional self-regulation. After undergoing expert validation and pilot testing with 30 college students, the ERQ obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .893, indicating strong reliability.

The Communicative Confidence Questionnaire (CCQ) was a 50-item researcher-developed instrument using a five-point Likert scale that assessed students' perceived confidence in communication. It measured speaking confidence, interaction confidence, social communication confidence, accuracy and clarity confidence, and advanced communication skills. The instrument likewise underwent expert validation and pilot testing, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .827, which indicates acceptable to good internal consistency and confirms its suitability for the study.

The researcher-made questionnaires were specially modified to fit the unique culture and educational baseline of Capiz in order to ensure ecological and structural validity. The six faculty evaluators during the panel review scrutinized each item thoroughly to ensure that the scenarios, idioms, and academic challenges are consistent with the sociolinguistic realities of the Hiligaynon/Capiznon context and the specific operational settings of higher education institutions in the region. Pilot testing that followed showed that the wording was clear, relatable and linguistically accessible to the target student demographic.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to determine the levels and variability of sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence among the respondents. One-way ANOVA was employed to test for significant differences in communicative confidence across levels of sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine relationships among the variables at a 0.05 level of significance. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS, and ethical clearance and informed consent were secured prior to data collection to ensure adherence to ethical research standards. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify patterns in participants' responses. To capture the descriptive depth behind the statistical metrics, a qualitative phase was embedded into the study through a structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Participants for this phase were selected using a purposive sampling strategy drawing from the primary quantitative undergraduate cohort, choosing individuals based on their specific psychometric profiles, such as balanced high scores across all variables or high sociolinguistic adaptability coupled with varying levels of communication confidence, to ensure a wide range of perspectives that gave rich context to the numerical data. The generated transcripts were evaluated using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage reflexive thematic analysis framework to maintain structural transparency and interpretative rigor. This process involved transcribing the audio recordings verbatim for deep immersion, systematically applying open codes to lines relevant to students' lived experiences, grouping these codes into candidate thematic clusters, cross-checking themes against the raw data, establishing definitive operational titles for each refined concept, and constructing the final analytical narrative. To safeguard the trustworthiness and credibility of these qualitative findings, member checking was conducted by returning the transcripts and emergent thematic summaries to the focus group participants to verify that the interpretations aligned with their authentic experiences, while investigator triangulation was maintained by involving co-investigators in a collaborative peer review of the coding schemas to control for subjective interpretive bias.

RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed varying levels of competence across the three primary variables examined (see Table 1). Overall, the students demonstrated a very high level of sociolinguistic adaptability, indicating that they were generally highly capable of adapting their language use according to the context of the situation, the audience, and the purpose of the communication. This suggests that students possess a strong foundational understanding of how to move between the use of formal and informal language and are able to use the right strategies of communication in the right context. It is further implied that the students who obtained a very high level of sociolinguistic adaptability are not only linguistically competent but are also socially aware of the way language is used in different contexts. The relatively very high level may reflect students' constant exposure to different communication environments, such as those in schools, on social media, and in their daily lives, where interacting with different groups of people helps them become flexible and adaptive communicators. This result aligns with Pflaeging et al. (2026), who noted that sociolinguistic competence is an essential part of communicative competence that enables learners to use language in appropriate ways in various social contexts.

Despite this very high linguistic flexibility, students demonstrated a high level of emotional regulation, indicating that while they possess strong management skills, they remain within a structured threshold of emotional control. Specifically, students showed solid capabilities in managing academic stress, including deadlines, examinations, and workload demands, by employing task segmentation, planning, and prioritization. For anxiety management and emotional resilience, students manage feelings of nervousness, worry, or apprehension, especially during public evaluations or presentations, by practicing breathing techniques, maintaining a positive attitude, and utilizing thorough preparation. Furthermore, their high emotional self-regulation and confidence metrics show that students keep their composure when interacting with others, monitoring reactions and pausing to think before speaking to maintain positive social relationships. This result aligns with Gross (2015), who states that emotional regulation is a product of cognitive and social experiences, and Hartley (2017), who observed that resilience helps students to persevere in the face of academic difficulties and to stay emotionally stable.

Similarly, students' communicative confidence was found to be at a high level, indicating that while they are generally self-assured in terms of communicating or expressing themselves, there remains room for steady continuous growth. Students specifically showed confidence in handling conversations with different individuals, expressing their ideas in a public context, and engaging in advanced communication activities such as persuading, negotiating, or debating. This high profile signals that students actively use strategic preparation, rehearsal, and repetition to reduce anxiety, manage behavioral flow, and outline points to ensure accuracy and clarity. The combination of classroom group activities, language exposure, and active reflection that enables students to gain comfort and overcome initial hesitation may be responsible for their comparatively high communicative confidence. This is supported by Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, where it is highlighted that individuals' confidence in a task is enhanced through mastery experiences and positive reinforcement.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Description	SD
Sociolinguistic Adaptability	4.25	Very High	0.49
Emotional Regulation	4.07	High	0.50
Communicative Confidence	3.88	High	0.53

When students were categorized based on their sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation, further examination showed notable variations in communicative confidence (see Table 2). Students with higher levels of emotional regulation and stronger sociolinguistic adaptability consistently demonstrated better communicative performance, suggesting that these competencies play an essential role in enabling effective and meaningful communication. While sociolinguistic adaptability also showed a significant relationship with communicative confidence, its influence appeared structurally distinct when interacting with the affective and cognitive self-soothing boundaries represented by emotional regulation. Accordingly, the null hypotheses stating that there are no significant differences in communicative confidence across the levels of sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation are rejected.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance

Source of Variation	F	Sig.
Communicative Confidence and Sociolinguistic Adaptability	10.262*	0.000
Communicative Confidence and Emotional Regulation	69.883*	0.000

Moreover, Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence (see Table 3), indicating that these variables are closely interconnected. The strongest relationship was observed between sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation ($r = 0.715$), highlighting that students who are more skilled in regulating their language in accordance with the social context are also more skilled in monitoring and managing their emotional responses. A significant relationship was also found between emotional regulation and communicative confidence ($r = 0.576$), reinforcing the role of affective control and stress reduction in enabling clear thinking and confident verbal delivery. The significant association between sociolinguistic adaptability and communicative confidence ($r = 0.477$) further emphasizes that linguistic flexibility directly minimizes public speaking anxiety. This

supports the notion that confidence emerges when learners are able to balance what they say with how they feel during interaction, meaning that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3. Pearson r Among Sociolinguistic Adaptability, Emotional Regulation, and Communicative Confidence

Source of Variation	r	Sig.
Sociolinguistic Adaptability and Emotional Regulation	0.715*	0.000
Sociolinguistic Adaptability and Communicative Confidence	0.477*	0.000
Emotional Regulation and Communicative Confidence	0.576*	0.000

Overall, the findings underscore the multidimensional nature of communicative competence and suggest that while students demonstrate promising awareness and communication skills, greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening sociolinguistic adaptability and emotional regulation through targeted instructional interventions. These results provided the basis for developing the actionable intervention material, the “Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program”, designed to address identified gaps and to strengthen students’ communicative competence and interpersonal effectiveness.

Qualitative Findings from the Focus Group Discussion

Participants viewed sociolinguistic adaptability as an essential capacity for adjusting language use based on the audience, environment, and communication context. They agreed with the "very high" statistical level, attributing it to constant exposure to diverse settings, social media, and academic tasks like presentations or group work. However, while students exhibited high proficiency across sub-dimensions like tone regulation and communication strategy, lexical adaptation was noted as an area with room for continuous vocabulary expansion. As one student shared: “Constant exposure to different types of people both in school and in online environments makes us more flexible... we change when we move from informal communication in our personal circles to a more formal discussion in class settings.”

On emotional regulation, students saw it as a critical baseline skill for managing academic stress, performance anxiety, and negative emotional triggers. They agreed the "high" level was realistic, noting that while they experience physical nervousness and pressure during high-stakes evaluations, they rely on conscious coping mechanisms to maintain composure. A participant explained: “When I feel anxious, I take deep breaths and calm my mind. I also review what I studied beforehand... controlling emotions directly boosts my confidence.” Students emphasized that task prioritization, relaxation techniques, and mindset shifts keep them from experiencing cognitive freezing and allow them to maintain positive social interactions.

Communicative confidence was understood as being generally self-assured when expressing ideas in both social and academic environments. Self-ratings remained uniformly "high" across speaking, social, interactional, clarity, and advanced communication dimensions. Participants concurred with the statistical findings, identifying preparation, repetition, active listening, and social intelligence as the primary drivers of self-efficacy. One participant highlighted this developmental process: “My confidence developed over time because of constant interaction... at first, I was shy and hesitant, but repeated exposure made communication feel natural. Making mistakes is part of learning.”

Regarding the relationships and differences among the variables, participants observed that sociolinguistic adaptability, emotional regulation, and communicative confidence function as interconnected, dependent operations. The strong statistical variance and positive correlation coefficients were directly echoed in the students’ real-world experiences. Participants noted that language flexibility and emotional control serve as mutual reinforcement filters; when internal stress is regulated, external stylistic adjustments become much easier to execute. One student explicitly tied the elements together: “When I adjust my tone and words based on the situation and manage my nervousness, communication feels smoother... language adaptability, emotional control, and confidence are connected. One really helps the other.”

Overall, the FGD portrayed the variables as a multi-dimensional matrix where cognitive, affective, and linguistic skills converge to form genuine interactive capacity. These insights reinforced the quantitative data and directly

validated the structural design, objectives, and targeted workshop interventions outlined in the “Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program.”

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while students possess a very high level of sociolinguistic adaptability and strong awareness across its dimensions, specific psychological and contextual abilities, namely emotional regulation and communicative confidence, are highly influential in shaping overall interactive capacity. Awareness and strategic adaptability alone support linguistic adjustment, but effective communication depends heavily on affective management and self-assured execution. Sociolinguistic adaptability, particularly tone regulation and communication strategy, emerged as a widespread strength, reinforcing the claim that flexible sociolinguistic strategy acts as a major catalyst for situational academic engagement (Polzin-Haumann et al., 2025). However, lexical adaptation remains an area for continuous growth.

Emotional regulation, spanning academic pressure control and anxiety management; communicative confidence across speaking and social interactions both demonstrated significant differences and strong, interconnected relationships with how students adapt their language. Students who can manage performance anxiety and maintain psychological resilience demonstrate significantly stronger communicative confidence, validating established pedagogical frameworks which posit that proactive anxiety management and relaxation strategies directly precursor a student's self-efficacy and active willingness to communicate (Chiu, 2021; Martiningsih et al., (2024); Wang et al., 2025). These findings highlight the need for integrated instructional interventions combining behavioral management, language flexibility exercises, and confidence-building activities. The “Socio-Communicative Competence Enhancement Program” was developed in response to this need.

Conflict Of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. No financial, personal, institutional, or professional relationships influenced the design, conduct, analysis, or reporting of the research findings.

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