

Evaluating communication apprehension among Undergraduates of four malaysian higher institutions

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Introduction

Communication apprehension is a prevalent occurrence among individuals that is not easily managed. Communication fear is unavoidable, whether one is in secondary school, college studies, or in the working stage. Communication apprehension is the term used to describe the anxiety or fear that arises when one is required to talk or convey their thoughts in the presence of others. The presence of this fear can have a substantial effect on both an individual's academic and personal life, resulting in feelings of worry, tension, and subpar performance in tasks connected to communication (McCroskey, 2009). This issue is not only occurring in Malaysia, but globally. Ireland (2020) found that accounting graduates demonstrate inadequate proficiency in delivering oral presentations. The study conducted by Rust, Gentry, and Ford (2020) provides evidence that communication apprehension is a significant issue among pharmacy students in the United States.

Although there is an increasing amount of research on communication apprehension, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies specifically examining undergraduates in Malaysia. This study seeks to fill this void by investigating the frequency of communication fear among undergraduate students in four Malaysian higher education institutions.

2.0 Literature review

Communication apprehension is the feeling of uneasiness that arises from actual or expected acts of communication, including both spoken and written forms. It is defined by a dread of being judged and anxieties about one's self-image, resulting in physical reactions such as perspiration, nausea, and forgetfulness (McCroskey, 1986). McCroskey categorized communication apprehension into four distinct types: trait anxiety, context anxiety, audience anxiety, and situational anxiety (McCroskey, 1982). Trait anxiety refers to a fear of communication that is rooted in one's personality, whereas context anxiety is the result of specific situations that provoke anxiety responses. Adrenaline contributes to the worsening of these worries, leading to bodily

manifestations such as increased heart rate and perspiration. McCroskey (1982) highlighted few ways in managing the communication apprehension. This includes “peer practice, positive self-talk, meditation, visualization, power posing, and relaxation techniques”.

A study conducted in 2020 by Zhang et al. revealed that communication apprehension is related to the academic performance. They did research on communication apprehension among undergraduate and highlighted personal traits such as self-esteem and anxiety, as factors that contribute to communication apprehension. Li et al. (2021) conducted separate research on the same issue where the findings revealed that social contacts, including peer support and teacher-student ties, were significant in reducing anxiety during communicating among undergraduate students.

The issue of Communication apprehension (CA) is widely examined where it is seen as impacting individuals in different situations. Fadda & Scalas (2016) found a considerable correlation between personality traits, such as introversion and neuroticism, and higher levels of CA. Their longitudinal study emphasized that individuals with high degrees of neuroticism and introversion experience heightened anxiety in communication environments, demonstrating that personality evaluations may be essential in comprehending communication apprehension.

Rimkeeratikul (2023) conducted a study that concentrated on the impact of intercultural elements on communication anxiety (CA). The study highlighted that cultural background plays a vital role in inducing communication apprehension. The study revealed a positive correlation between intercultural communication apprehension and general communication apprehension.

Further research conducted by Malik, Qin, & Oteir (2021) revealed that participants met communication apprehension and anxiety as a result of various self-related factors. The factors include psychological, cognitive, linguistic, academic, social, and cultural components. Their worry restricted from personality features, limited language proficiency, anticipated academic difficulties, scholastic competency, and inadequate pronunciation. Zeqiri's (2022) study found that participants were possessing moderate levels of communication apprehension, which had an unfavourable effect on their speaking presentation. Ozalp and Merc (2022) examine the inclination of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to involve in communication and their level of fear when speaking, specifically at a university in Turkey. The findings suggest that the students have a strong inclination to engage in communication and have a moderate amount of nervousness when speaking. Furthermore, they illustrate that the level of readiness to communicate has a direct impact on students' communication fear. Based on this statement, kids are having different level of fear and the fear is decreasing as they are encounter higher grade levels. It is suggested that the students should involve more frequent and not being interrupted in the conversations in a foreign language. This will reduce their anxiety while communicating the foreign language.

Similarly, in a more professional environment, the communication apprehension is associated with professional performance. A study conducted by Cardon et al. (2023) revealed that communication apprehension is ubiquitous in several contexts, giving examples in group discussions, meetings, interpersonal interactions, and public speaking. It is remarkably among professionals at their early stage of working. In addition, this study focussed on communication apprehension in both interpersonal and group settings. Furthermore, it hypothesizes that the communication apprehension is a factor that affects both inclusivity and the overall effectiveness of a team.

3.0 Methodology

3.1. Research design

The current study uses the quantitative research method. The objective of this study is to determine the degree of communication apprehension among undergraduate students from four higher education institutions in Malaysia.

3.2. Participants

In the study, the random sampling method was used in getting the responses. A total of 589 participants from four higher learning institutions in Malaysia participated in this study. The participants were drawn from various academic levels.

3.3. Instruments

The study uses McCroskey's instrument (PRPSA) with 34 questions.

3.3.1. Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)

Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) which was developed by McCroskey (1970) and has been

used in many different contexts and subjects to determine the degree of communication apprehension. Participants were asked to score 34 items on this instrument (on a Likert-type scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicate greater levels of apprehension within the respective sub-dimensions. The Cronbach Alpha value for the whole scale was >0.9. For this study, the Cronbach Alpha is 0.928.

3.4. Data collection procedures

A total of 589 questionnaires were obtained from four higher education institutions in Malaysia during the academic year 2022/2023. The questionnaires were distributed using Google Forms in order to fulfill the objectives of the study. Prior to the study, all participants were provided with clear instructions on how to accurately complete the relevant scales. They were also assured that their personal information and replies would be treated with utmost confidentiality, thus ensuring the reliability of the study. The process of completing the surveys required around 20 minutes.

4.0 Findings

Below is the demographic information of the respondents. Majority of the respondents are female with 418 in number. Malay is the dominant race and the respondents are mostly 20 and 22 years old. They are enrolling their degree programme. Almost half of the respondents are from USM.

Table 1: Demographic Information (n=589)

Table 2
level of

1) gender	Male	171
	Female	418
2) race	Malay	407
	Chinese	125
	Indian	36
	Others	21
3) age	18	81
	19	58
	20	109
	21	97
	22	141
	23	71
	More than 23	32
4) level of education	Certificate	11
	Diploma	133
	Degree	445
5) institution	UTHM	125
	USM	294
	USIM	46
	KOLEJ POLYTECH MARA	124

shows the

communication apprehension among the respondents. The formula in determining the level of communication apprehension is as below:

Step 1:

Add scores for items 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34

Step 2. Add the scores for items 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, and 26

Step 3. Complete the following formula:

$$PRPSA = 72 - \text{Total from Step 2} + \text{Total from Step 1}$$

Your score should be between 34 and 170. If your score is below 34 or above 170, you have made a mistake in computing the score.

High = > 131

Low = < 98

Moderate = 98-131.

Table 2: The level of communication apprehension among the respondents (n=589)

high	134 (22.8%)
moderate	438 (74.4%)
low	17 (2.9%)

Referring to the table provided above, the data suggests that a significant proportion of the participants exhibit a "moderate" degree of communication apprehension. 22.8% of the participants exhibit a "high" level of communication apprehension, whereas the remaining 2.9% or 17 participants are classified as having a "low" level of communication apprehension.

Table 3 presents the correlation between "gender" and "race" and the "level of communication apprehension". There is no significant relationship between "gender" and "level of communication apprehension" with a p-value more than 0.05 (p=0.245). Conversely, there is a notable correlation between "race" and the "level of communication apprehension," with a p-value of 0.041.

Table 3: Correlation table between “Gender”, “Race”, and “Level of Communication Apprehension”

Correlations		1. Gender	2. Race	level
1. Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-.071	.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.085	.245
	N	589	589	589
2. Race	Pearson Correlation	-.071	1	-.084*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.085		.041
	N	589	589	589
level	Pearson Correlation	.048	-.084*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.245	.041	
	N	589	589	589

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5.0 Conclusion

The objective of this study is to examine the extent of communication apprehension among undergraduate students at four higher education institutions in Malaysia. Furthermore, the researchers examined the possible impacts of certain demographic attributes, such as gender and ethnicity.

Malaysian undergraduates have a "moderate" level of communication apprehension. The results are consistent with the research conducted by Rimkeeratikul (2016), Subramaniam & Feroz (2008), and Ozalp & Merç (2022). Furthermore, gender does not play a substantial role in the communication apprehension of undergraduates. However, race does have a considerable impact on the level of their communication fear. The discovery of this research, which indicates that gender does not have a role in communication apprehension, aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Kulusaklı & Genç (2024). Unfortunately, the researchers have been unable to locate any existing literature that explores the correlation between "race" and "communication apprehension".

It is advisable to do additional research including diverse groups of respondents, focusing on various characteristics or factors that may contribute to communication apprehension. Moreover, many measures developed by McCroskey can be utilized to assess both communication apprehension and communication competence.

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