

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION: DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. Communication apprehension (CA) is a widely discussed issue in the fields of language and communication and can emerge at various stages of an individual's life, from early childhood to university studies and professional environments. It is often described as the anxiety or fear experienced during public speaking or when using language across different communicative activities. This paper aims to highlight key studies related to CA, with a specific focus on research situated within language-learning contexts. In addition, two constructs closely associated with CA willingness to communicate (WTC) and communication competence are reviewed to illustrate how these factors interact and influence communication behaviour. A concise overview of CA and its related issues is provided, leading to the development of a conceptual framework that integrates these variables. Relevant theories underpinning the topic are discussed, and the instruments commonly used to measure CA, WTC, and communication competence are outlined to support future research in this area.

Keywords: *communication apprehension, anxiety, language activities, willingness to communicate, communication competence*

Introduction

Communication skills are increasingly recognized as critical competencies for engineering professionals (Wu et al., 2023), playing a crucial role not only in academic success but also in career advancement. Engineering graduates are expected to effectively communicate their ideas, work collaboratively in teams, and present technical information clearly to both technical and non-technical audiences (Van den Beemt et al., 2020). Despite the technical focus of engineering curricula, the demand for engineers who possess strong communication skills has led educators to emphasize the integration of communication training within engineering programs (Linvill et al., 2019). However, a significant barrier to developing these skills is communication apprehension (CA), a form of anxiety associated with speaking or communicating in front of others. Communication apprehension is prevalent across various fields, but it has been notably observed among engineering students due to the technical nature of their studies and the limited emphasis on developing soft skills (Winberg et al., 2020). In Malaysia, where the engineering sector is a key driver of economic growth, addressing communication apprehension is essential to ensure that engineering graduates are not only technically proficient but also capable of articulating their ideas effectively (Kho and Ting, 2023).

Communication apprehension

According to McCroskey (2010), communication apprehension (CA) refers to the cognitive-based anxiety that individuals experience when they engage in real or anticipated communication with others. CA is categorised as an individual's level of fear

or anxiety associated with interpersonal communication (McCroskey, 2010). McCroskey (2010) argue that the feeling of fear or nervous when doing any speeches. However, this feeling has positive and negative impact in the process of communication. Communication apprehension can happen in many situations such as delivering speech, singing, intercultural, and even with social media (Whyte, 2019). Among studies conducted in the aspects of group discussions, interpersonal conversations, meetings, and public speaking (Rimkeeratikul, 2018). In addition, Blume et al. (2013) mentioned that anxiety in communication might be a hindrance to success in career or academic performances. Russ (2013) states that people with communication apprehension would feel uneasy when they have to communicate across four different contexts; public, mass, group, and interpersonal. Since McCroskey (2010) developed the concept of communication apprehension, the popular theory on communication apprehension is oral communication apprehension. There are a few scenarios being touched in communication apprehension: group discussions, meetings, conversations, and public speaking (McCroskey, 2010).

Past research shows that a link exists between communication apprehension and student results (Messman and Jones-Corley, 2001) where it is found that this is one of the major failures in students' performances (Chen and Agrawal, 2017). This happens when the students face stress and anxiety at dealing with classmates and teachers. With this situation, they are being identified as having a negative impact on students' academic performance (Hsu and Goldsmith, 2021). Rimkeeratikul (2023) works on communication apprehension and intercultural. This study was conducted among postgraduate students in Bangkok and results revealed that students who possess higher ICA have also possessed higher CA from the aspects of meetings and group discussions. Therefore, it can be concluded that some researchers believe that culture is possible to be the factor that contributes to higher levels of communication apprehension (Jalleh et al., 2021; Croucher et al., 2015). Ardana and Swandana (2024) work on how receptionists at Desa Potato Head Bali hotel communicate. They touch on the element of culture in delivering the message to the guests. In more recent years, research has also focused on the impact of communication apprehension in the context of digital. Studies conducted 15 to 20 years ago have explored how online communication platforms, such as social media and virtual meetings, influence communication anxiety. These studies suggest that while some individuals may experience reduced apprehension in digital settings because of the perceived anonymity as well as with the reduction of social presence. Others may experience anxiety related to technology usage and virtual interactions. This shift in focus highlights the evolving nature of communication apprehension in an increasingly digital world. Rahmani et al. (2023) work on how online communication apprehension affects individuals through technology.

Language activities

English language activities, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing tasks, play a crucial role in both language acquisition and enhancing communication skills. These activities are particularly beneficial for undergraduates, especially those for whom English is a second language, as they offer structured opportunities to practice communication in a supportive setting. Participation in these activities can significantly reduce communication apprehension (CA) by helping students gain confidence and proficiency in their language use. Engaging in regular English language activities allows

students to gradually become more comfortable with speaking, ultimately increasing their willingness to communicate (WTC) and decreasing CA. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of various English language activities in reducing communication apprehension among undergraduates. Previous research found that regular involvement in group discussions significantly decreased CA levels among university students, as these activities provided a platform for low-pressure, peer-to-peer communication. Similarly, a study reported that engaging in debates improved students' critical thinking abilities and confidence, leading to a reduction in communication apprehension and an increase in WTC.

Previous study emphasized that structured public speaking activities were instrumental in helping students overcome their fear of speaking in front of others, thereby enhancing their communication skills for both academic and future career contexts. Chen and Agrawal (2017) demonstrated that role-playing activities were particularly effective in reducing CA among students by offering simulated real-life communication practice in a controlled environment. Finally, peer teaching and feedback activities played a significant role in reducing CA by encouraging a supportive peer environment where students could freely express themselves and receive constructive input. Participation in language workshops and clubs provided consistent, informal practice opportunities, which greatly contributed to decreasing CA and fostering a positive attitude towards communication.

Willingness to communicate

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is described as an individual's ability to be involved in communication when the individual is given the chance. It is considered a significant interpreter of communication behaviour, especially when dealing with second language (L2) contexts (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994). In the academic and professional settings, WTC influences students' involvement in many situations such as class discussions, group projects, and interactions with friends and teachers. For engineering undergraduates, technical presentations are crucial and high WTC is important for success of the study performance. However, communication apprehension (CA) can significantly impact a student's WTC, often leading to unwillingness to participate, which can negatively affect their academic and professional development.

Research suggests a strong negative correlation between WTC and CA (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Students with high levels of CA typically show low WTC. This is shown in their fear, language barriers, and lack of confidence where it becomes a big hindrance for them from engaging in communication activities. With the technical terms, engineering students are experiencing higher CA as well as WTC. In Malaysia, where English is often the medium of instruction in engineering programmes, language anxiety further worsens the CA and reduces WTC. There are relationships between L1 WTC and other psychological constructs such as self-perceived communication competence (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990), communication apprehension as what has been studied by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), the aspect of shyness (Teven et al., 2010), as well as introversion (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; McCroskey and Richmond, 1990). Willingness to communicate happens in two situations; willingness to communicate as a personality trait, and willingness to communicate as a situational construct. This is well explained by the pyramid model of willingness to communicate as in *Figure 1*. The "pyramid model" combines generally consistent variables with steady influence (distal factors) and situation-specific variables (proximal factors) to impact a learner's

propensity to talk in a second language and, eventually, to utilize it. All pyramid tiers are interconnected, as illustrated below (Katsaris, 2019).

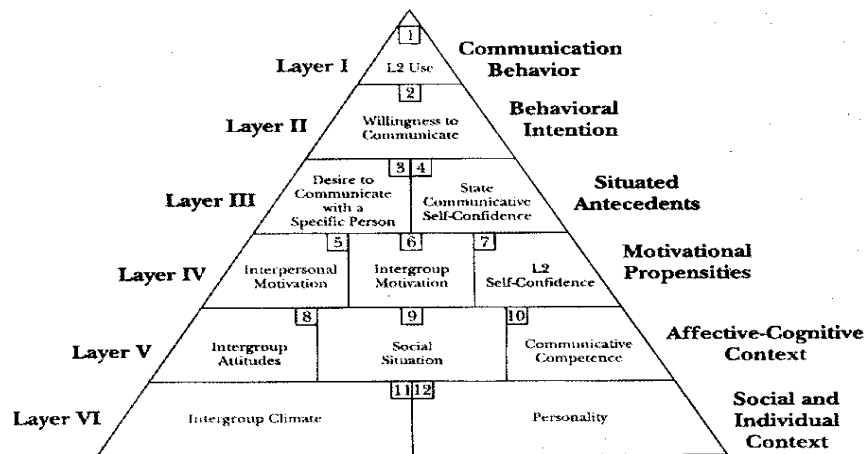


Figure 1. Pyramid Model of Willingness to Communicate (WTC).
 Source: MacIntyre et al. (2020).

Models of WTC. (1) The WTC Model by McCroskey and Richmond (1990): This model identifies several important components influencing WTC, including individual differences, situational factors, and the context of communication. (2) McCroskey and Richmond (1990) Model: This model emphasizes the role of motivation and anxiety in second language communication. It incorporates psychological and social variables, such as self-confidence, which affect one's willingness to be involved in communication. Studies on WTC have been conducted and related to many aspects. Botes et al. (2022) found moderate positive correlations were found between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and WTC. Elahi Shirvan et al. (2019) identified motivation, communication anxiety, and L2 competence as significant predictors of WTC. Lower WTC has been linked to communicative anxiety, low self-confidence, and feelings of cultural alienation (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Allahyar et al. (2022) investigate how teachers' views of learners' WTC influence the frequency and technique of their turn allocation. Their research discovered that professors gave more voluntary turns to students who they considered to have a greater degree of WTC. Furthermore, the manner of turn allocation differed for these pupils.

Communication competence

Communication competence is defined as “adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing” (McCroskey, 2010). Speaking self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) is how an individual perceives their own competence at spoken communication. Although much of the research conducted in L1, the growth of research in L2 is promising. In addition, communicative competence can be considered to be the target of second language acquisition (Whyte, 2019). In the Asia context, research was conducted in Lampung, Indonesia and the results revealed that the students have a moderate level of willingness to communicate. The study discovered a moderately significant link between learners' SPCC and CA using the correlation formula. Using regression analysis, it was

discovered that their SPCC could predict 23% of the variance in their CA. A study on communication competence and social media use has been done by Sheldon and Ware (2023). Findings show that the students have a low level of communication competence using McCroskey and McCroskey scale. The findings revealed that Instagram and Facebook were utilized for social compensation, particularly by participants who perceived themselves to have inadequate communication competence skills. Older people were more skilled at communicating in a range of circumstances. Communication competency is a theory that seeks to capture everything needed to anticipate, characterize, and explain effective communication. Scholars studying the subject have attempted to identify universal components of competence, ultimately raising the question of whether competence is a set of teachable skills, a set of innate characteristics that only some communicators possess, or neither (Backlund and Morreale, 2015).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the terms of communication apprehension, willingness to communicate and communication competence are interrelated. These terms have evolved into wider perspectives, starting in the area of communication and later in the scope of second language acquisition. Based on the literature review above, one conceptual framework is developed in seeing the relationship of the variables. Communication apprehension is measured by PRCA - 24 with 24 items, willingness to communicate is measured by Willingness to Communicate Scale with 20 items, and communication competence is measured using Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) with 12 situations. In addition to the above variables, the researcher would like to add one more variable, which are language activities. This is to scope the future studies to the area of language acquisition. Language activities prepared reflected the dimensions of communication apprehension by McCroskey. Below is the framework of the research.

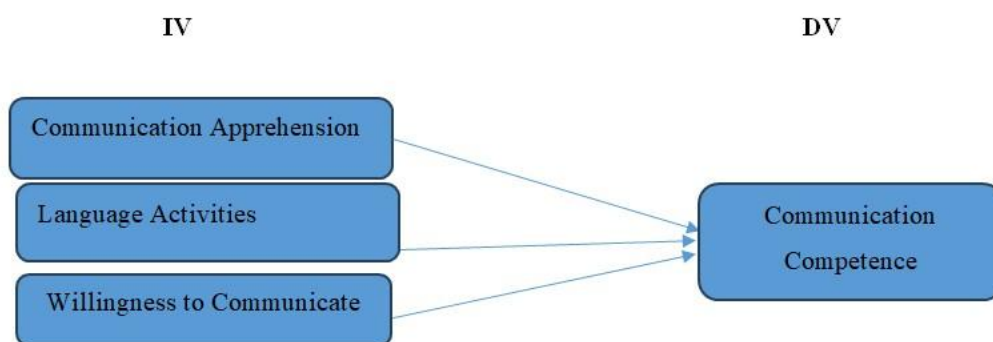


Figure 2. Conceptual framework.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

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