English Speaking Communication Apprehension Among Arabic - speaking Learners in a Study Abroad Context in Malaysia

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فهم التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية بين المتعلمين الناطقين باللغة العربية في سياق الدراسة بالخارج في ماليزيا

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Abstract:

This study explored the situations influencing Arab learners' communication apprehension in speaking English in a study abroad context. It investigated students' communication apprehension level in four situations (talking in small group, talking in large meeting, talking in dyad, and talking to the public) encountered three interlocutors, I.e., a friend, an acquaintance, and a stranger while they were studying in Malaysian universities. A total number of 42 participants involved in the study. The study adopted a quantitative approach. After collecting the data, dissipative and T- test analyses were used to examine it. The findings showed that participants had a moderate level (M: 3.19 SD:1.02, M: 3.30 SD :0.92, M: 3.25 SD:0.95, M: 3.16 SD: 0,95) in their communication apprehension in speaking English language in the four situations respectively and there was no significant statistical difference (P=3.32 > 0.05: T=1.003) in communication apprehension between postgraduate and undergraduate students. Arab students in Malaysia can develop their English-speaking confidence and ability to thrive academically and socially in order to get over their communication anxiety.

Keywords: Communication Apprehension, ESL, Arab Learners, Study abroad.

الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة مدى تخوف الطلاب العرب الدارسين بالخارج من استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في التواصل مع الاخرين في أربعة مواقف مختلفة. مثلا: (التحدث مع مجموعة صغيرة، والتحدث في اجتماع كبير، والتحدث مع شخص فقط، والتحدث مع الجمهور) في مواجهه ثلاثة محاورين، مثلا: التحدث مع صديق، والتحدث مع أحد المعارف، والتحت مع شخص غريب أثناء دراستهم في الجامعات الماليزية. إجمالي عدد المشاركين في الدراسة 42. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الكمي. وبعد جمع البيانات تم استخدام التحليل الوصفي واختبار T لفحصها. أظهرت النتائج أن المشاركين لديهم مستوى متوسط (M: 3.19 SD: 1.02، M: 3.30 SD: 0.92، M: 3.25 SD: 0.95، M: 3.16 SD: 0,95) من القلق في التواصل مع الاخرين اثناء استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في المواقف الأربعة على التوالي ولم يكن هناك فرق إحصائي (05<3.34:P=1.003 T =) بين طلاب الدراسات العليا والجامعية فى مستوى القلق لديهم. هذا مما يمكنهم فيمن تطوير ثقتهم في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية وقدرتهم على النجاح أكاديميًا واجتماعيًا من أجل التغلب على القلق لديهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القلق اثناء التواصل، الطلاب العرب، الدراسة بالخارج.

Introduction

Since English is taught at all levels as a required second or foreign language subjects, beginning in the first grade of elementary school at the age of six, the English language is regarded as one of the most important courses in most educational systems in the world. it is considered an essential subject to master in addition to other courses. Thus, a student's academic success could not be guaranteed if they were not proficient in the English language. Therefore, English language skills in oral communication are the most significant capability that can attract foreign investment and give rise to economic benefits Power & Shrestha [1].

Because English is becoming a more widely used worldwide language, oral communication in the English language has become increasingly common. Furthermore, as oral communication options have grown, ELT educators are increasingly focused on figuring out the best ways to support English language learners in mastering oral skills, which is a crucial component of English learning n classrooms which has been an emphasis on students' "talking in order to learn" MacIntyre et al. [2]. As a result, both scholars and language learners now view speaking as a crucial language acquisition skill. Since learners must apply their language knowledge and activate their communication skills,[3], frequently characterizes speaking as a difficult and multidimensional talent. In this regard, studies have shown that communication apprehension has a negative impact on oral communication skills. The apprehension to use English language leads to ineffective "interaction and language production" [4]. Based on this situation, there is a demand to assist the English learners to master oral communication skills which in turn help to overcome their communication apprehension.

Problem statement

The goal of teaching language has shifted recently from being able to manipulate the structure to being able to communicate using the language. As a result, communication skills are now prioritized in English language instruction [5]. Therefore, the present emphasis in English language instruction is on helping people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate well with one another. Prior research has not considered the issue of speaking communication apprehension among mixed Arab students pursuing degrees overseas. Moreover, prior research has not concentrated on the apprehension associated with oral communication among Arab university students studying English in Malaysia. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the speaking English communication apprehension among Arab ESL students in Malaysian study abroad context under various situations and the difference between them according to their study program.

Literature review

The term of Communication Apprehension (CA) was familiarized by McCroskey (1977) who delineated it as "the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons is considered as having different levels of communication apprehension" [7]. Human communication research has revealed that communication comprehension is one of the characteristics that is most often studied Levine & McCroskey, 1990; Hasni, Ismail, & Abdullah, [6,7]. According to Byrne, Flood, and Shanahan [8], an important element preventing learners from properly developing their communication skills is communication apprehension, or the dread of communicating. This is in line with another existing research. It was noted by McCroskey [9] that individuals with trait-like apprehension may experience discomfort and uncertainty in specific communication-related situations. As an illustration, whereas public speaking and group speaking are in distinct circumstances, group speaking may generate anxiety while public speaking does not. On the other hand, Keateen and Kelly [10] suggest that the most prevalent form of this anxiety is the dread of public speaking. According to Richmon and McCroskey [11], those who exhibit exceptional tolerance towards the peculiarities of others are less prone to have communication anxiety. Conversely, emotionally developed, and adventurous individuals have lower degrees of communication apprehension.

Communication apprehension (CA) is a significant challenge faced by many international students studying in Malaysian universities. Research has shown that high levels of CA can inhibit students' speaking and hinder the development of effective oral communication skills. Few studies have carried out on communication apprehending among international students in Malaysian study abroad context Amri and Puteh, [12]. A Study by Amiri & Puteh, [12] focusing on Japanese EFL international students in Malaysia found they exhibited high levels of CA, particularly in group discussions and conversations where communication occurs spontaneously. This apprehension is attributed to factors such as their cultural background, prior educational experiences emphasizing written over oral English skills, attitudes towards English in Japanese society, and limited opportunities to practice speaking. Another similar study involving students enrolled in study abroad programs in Malaysia was carried out by Jalleh et al [13]. In four different communication scenarios (group discussion, meeting, conversation, and public speaking contexts), the degrees of oral communication apprehension among Japanese EFL overseas students were investigated. The study used a quantitative methodology to assess the oral

communication anxiety levels of twenty-three first-year students enrolled in an immersion program at a public institution in Malaysia. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used to examine the data. The study's findings showed that the majority of the foreign Japanese EFL students showed signs of severe anxiety when speaking to others orally. The results of the study also demonstrated that oral communication happens organically in group discussions and debates, which may account for the highest levels of communication anxiety in these two communication situations. CA also impacts international students' ability to build relationships and bond with others. Idris et al [14] conducted a study at Universiti Utara Malaysia and found a significant negative correlation between English language apprehension and interpersonal bonding among international postgraduate students. Additionally, research suggests CA is inversely related to intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence. The apprehension of oral communication in English among Arab students particularly Jordanian students, has been a subject In Malaysia's Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), research has been conducted by Ariff and Mugableh [5] to understand the Jordanian students' communication apprehension. The study found that many of these students experienced high levels of apprehension, which was positively related to factors such as age, socio-economic status, and the program of study.

Material and methods

This study used a survey design because it uses a questionnaire to gather quantitative, numerical data, which is then statistically analyzed by SPSS software to identify findings in the responses to the questions. Fifty Arabic-speaking graduate and postgraduate students from Malaysian universities made up the sample size used for this study. The English communication comprehension survey instrument, which has 12 questions (Cronbach's alpha =.79) and was adapted from Yashima [15], was the tool used by the researcher to meet the study's objectives. The questions are divided into four categories: speaking in group, speaking in meeting, speaking in dyad, and speaking in public to three interlocutors (a friend, an acquaintance, and a stranger). Respondents have the option to select responses on a five-point Likert scale: 1= always apprehension, 2 = usually apprehension, 3 = sometimes apprehension, 4 = seldom apprehension, and 5 = never apprehension.

Results and discussion

The data from the instrument was entered into the SPSS software program to examine the study's aims. Descriptive and inferential statistical testing were reformed to achieve these aims.

Table 1: participants' Academic Programme

Programs	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	20	48.6
Postgraduate	22	52.4
Total	42	100

Table 1 shows total of respondents were 42 students and their different study programs, undergraduate program, and postgraduate program. Twenty (48.6%) of the participants were undergraduates, while the remaining twenty-two of them (52.4%) were enrolled in postgraduate programs. The respondents had a moderate level (M: 3.23 SD: .86) in their communication apprehension in the four situations (small group, large meeting, dyad, public speaking) situations.

Table 2: Communication Apprehension in small group.

	Scale	Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Usually		Always	
	Items	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Have a small-group conversation in English with acquaintances.	1	2.4	14	33.3	11	26.2	10	23.8	6	14.3
2	Have a small-group conversation in English with strangers.	2	4.8	12	28.6	14	33.3	8	19.0	6	14.3
3	Have a small-group conversation in English with friends.	4	9.5	10	23.8	8	19.0	8	19.0	12	28.6
	Meeting	1.0 – 2.4				2.5 – 3.4			3.5 – 5.0		
	M= 3.19 SD= 1.02	(31.0 %) Low				(28.6 %)Moderate			(40.5 %) High		

Table 2 presents the percentage, mean, and standard deviation for oral communication in small group. The findings indicate that most respondents expressed indecision, with an overall mean score of (3.19) and a standard deviation of 1.02. To be more precise, the study reveals that only 17 (40.5%) of the respondents reported having high anxiety, while the remaining 12 (28.6%) and 13 (31.0%) reported having moderate and low anxiety respectively.

Table 3: Communication Apprehension in Large Meeting.

	Scale	Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Usually		Always	
	Items	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Talk in English in a large meeting among strangers.	3	7.1	8	19.0	12	28.6	13	31.0	6	14.3
2	Talk in English in a large meeting among friends.	1	2.4	11	26.2	6	14.3	10	23.8	14	33.3
3	Talk in English in a large meeting with acquaintances	0	0	13	31.0	16	38.1	10	23.8	3	7.1
	Meeting	1.0 – 2.4				2.5 – 3.4				3.5 – 5.0	
	M= 3.30 SD= 0.92	(23.8 %) Low				(35.7 %) Moderate				(40.5 %) High	

The percentage, mean, and standard deviation for spoken communication in small group are displayed in Table 3. The majority of respondents indicated they were undecided, with an overall mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.92, indicating that the respondents had a moderate anxiety during speaking with each other's in small group. More precisely, the study reveals that only 17 (40.5%) of the respondents reported having severe anxiety, while the remaining 15 (35.7%) and 10 (23.8%) respondents reported having moderate anxiety and low anxiety, respectively.

Table 4: Communication Apprehension in Dyad.

	Scale	Never		Seldom		Sometimes		usually		always	
	Items	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Talk in English to friend.	3	7.1	9	21.4	12	28.6	6	14.3	12	28.6
2	Talk in English to acquaintance	0	0	12	28.6	17	40.5	11	26.2	2	4.8
3	Talk in English to a stranger	1	2.8	11	26.2	12	28.6	9	21.4	9	21.4
	Dyad	1.0 – 2.4				2.5 – 3.4				3.5 – 5.0	
	M= 3.25 SD= 0.95	(23.8 %) Low				(33.3 %) Moderate				(42.9 %) High	

The percentage, mean, and standard deviation for spoken communication in pairs are displayed in Table 4. The findings on communication within pairs indicate that the majority of participants expressed indecision, with an overall mean score of (3.25) and a standard deviation of 0.95, indicating that the respondents had a moderate anxiety in speaking in pairs. More specific, the analysis shows that only 18 (42.9 %) respondents stated a high anxiety. In contrast, 10 (23.8%) and 14 (33.3%) of the remaining respondents reported having low anxiety and moderate anxiety respectively when speaking with a single person.

Table 5: Communication Apprehension in Public Speaking.

	Scale	never		Seldom		sometimes		usually		always	
	Items	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Give speech in English to a crowd of strangers	3	7.1	11	26.2	12	28.6	11	26.2	5	11.9
2	Give speech in English to a crowd of friends	2	4.8	13	31.0	10	23.8	7	16.7	10	23.8
3	Give speech in English to a crowd of acquaintances	2	4.8	13	31.0	9	21.4	12	28.6	6	14.3
	Public speaking	1.0 – 2.4				2.5 – 3.4				3.5 – 5.0	
	M= 3.16 SD 0.95	(31.0 %) Low				(28.6 %) Moderate				(40.5 %) High	

The proportion, mean, and standard deviation for oral communication in public speaking are displayed in Table 5. The majority of respondents indicated they were undecided, with an overall mean of (3.16) and standard deviation of 0.95, indicating that the respondent had a moderate anxiety in speaking in public speaking in general. More specific, the analysis shows that only 17 (40.5 %) respondents stated a high anxiety, while the remaining 12 (28.6 %) reported a moderate anxiety and 13 (31.0 %) reported a low anxiety in giving public speech.

Table 6: Differences between programme and communication apprehension.

Variable	Program	N	M	SD	T	P
COM Apprehension	undergraduate	20	3.36	0.880	1.003	0.332
	Postgraduate	22	3.09	0.877		

Table 6 shows an independent samples T Test finding was utilized to determine if a difference existed between the mean of communication apprehension level of students who enrolled in an undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The mean of the undergraduate (n = 20, M: 3.36 SD:.88) and postgraduate (n = 22, M: 3.09 SD:.87) participants did not differ statistically significantly (T=1.003, P = 0.33>0.05) in their communication apprehension in speaking English language.

The first aim of the research paper was to explore the Communication Apprehension level among Arabic- speaking undergraduate and postgraduate individuals when talking in English in Malaysia. The survey items were clustered into four diverse situations of communication apprehension: small group, large meeting, dyad, and public speaking. The respondents of undergraduate and postgraduate individuals specified that they had moderate level of communication apprehension in all contexts of CA. It seems that the total mean of CA in small group is 3.19, meeting 3.30, dyad 3.25 and public speaking is 3.16. The individuals experienced reduced anxiety when speaking in front of crowded people then in a small group, in a dyad, and during meeting. This result of this research paper was a consistent with previous study mentioned above Amri and Puteh, [5], Idris et al, [14], that the most of international students had a communication apprehension to certain levels. More precisely, the result was almost revealed the same result of Jalleh et al.'s study [13] with a slight difference in terms of priority of communication oppression situations. In other words, this finding reveals that Arab speaking students exhibit high apprehension of being involved in large meetings speaking that yielded a source of high apprehension among the students as well as the other situations.

Conclusion

The study's objectives were firstly to explore speaking apprehension level among the Arabic speaking undergraduate and postgraduate learners when talking in English in Malaysian universities. The secondly aim was to clarify the difference between both learners according to their communication apprehension situations. The findings showed that the both study program learners experienced moderate level of communication anxiety in over-all, but this anxiety goes up in large meeting then followed by speaking with dyad. To conclude, Arab students in Malaysia can develop their English-speaking confidence and ability to thrive academically and socially in order to get over their communication anxiety.

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