

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

H. Ayesha Parveen¹, Dr. T. Mythili²

¹Research scholar, ²Assistant professor & Research Supervisor,
Department of Applied Psychology and Behavioral Research
Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed College for Women
Teynampet, Chennai.

Abstract

Communication Apprehension is the feeling of anxiety associated with communication or in anticipating communication. Communication Apprehension is identified as a hurdle to communication and thus has implications for graduate employment (Arquero & Tejero, 2011; Yazici, 2005; Zhang, 2002). This study was conducted to investigate the prevalence of communication apprehension among engineering college students, examining the level of communication apprehension and explores the influence of demographic variables on communication apprehension of engineering college students. A sample of 64 undergraduate engineering students was selected from through simple random sampling. Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) a self-report questionnaire was administered to identify the students with high, moderate or low communication apprehension levels. The data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics. Demographic variables like age, gender, department, birth order and its association with communication apprehension has been examined.

Keywords: Communication Apprehension, demographic variables, PRCA-24, Engineering Students.

Introduction

Engineering is a technical domain highly opted as career choice among the students. It is one of the top most preferred professional career courses by students and parents. Though many students aspire to become Engineer there arises a question whether everyone is employable. The research studies suggest otherwise. They are unable to get job because of lack of communication skills. Every student has to participate in group discussion and attend interviews before getting selected in for the prescribed job. Many students have difficulty in communicating during such situation where the mere thought of communication generates apprehension. The fear or anxiety that a person has when engaging or anticipating communication is termed as Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1984). Irrespective of their knowledge in technical domain, they must have to overcome communication apprehension in order to be successful in completing the course as well as getting selected in job interviews. Burk, McDaniel and White (1993) found that oral communication, being students' greatest weakness is the most important communication skill to possess.

According to Mohammed Huwari (2010), individuals with a high level of communication apprehension are less likely to engage in communication than an individual with low level of communication apprehension. Von Worde (2003) reports stated that “the fears of communicating orally and public speaking anxiety have long been accepted as psychological phenomena” and her views are supported by Woodrow (2001) based on her study indicated the interference of anxiety in oral communication. Unemployability among graduates has been an on-going issue in academic discourse which is an important area of research for scholars as well as the employers. Communication apprehension has been identified as a barrier to communicate and employers prefer graduates who are less apprehensive (Aquero & Tejero, 2009; Arquero & Tejero, 2011; Yazici, 2005; Zhang, 2002, Azevedo, Apfelthaler & Hurst, 2012; Bonk & Smith, 1998; Gammie & Joyce, 2009). Hence, there is a need to identify the students with high communication apprehension level in order to help them to alleviate their communication apprehension and to improve their communication skills for better employment.

Review of Literature

Ahrens, C. A., Meyers, C., Irelbeck, E., Burris, S., Roach, D. (2016) have identified that oral and written communications skills to be the most important skills graduates should possess when entering the workforce. The purpose of their study was to qualitatively explore agricultural communications students' perceptions of Communication Apprehension (CA) and Written Apprehension (WA). Students realized and identified areas of improvement that could help them lower their CA and WA. Recommendations for practice are provided in order to help alleviate CA and WA in agricultural communications students.

Zakaria, W. N. F. W and Hassan, N. S. I. C. (2015) explored the factors that lead to communication apprehension among Part One Diploma students from Business and Management Faculty, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Kelantan, Malaysia from psychological and socio-cultural perspectives. The study which involved 51 ESL students is conducted through a survey method using a set of questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical computer package (Statistical Package for Social Science). The means and percentages of each item in the questionnaire were used to look at the factors which contribute to communicative anxiety among the learners. The study revealed that both psychological and socio cultural factors do affect English learners' communication apprehension.

Kumar., Kaur, J., &Thakur, N. (2017) This study was conducted to know the public speaking anxiety in relation to different demographic factors like gender, age, family type, residential type, educational level, socioeconomic status. Descriptive method was used in the present study to obtain the pertinent and precise information. The sample of the study was 300 school and college students between the age group of 14-28years. Convenient sampling technique was used by the researchers for choosing the sample of the study. The objectives of the study was to investigate the gender differences, differences in age groups, educational

streams in public speaking anxiety, socioeconomic levels, residential areas and family structures. Public Speaking Anxiety scale developed by Bortholomay and Houlihan (2016) was used for data collection. Investigators used quantitative technique - t-test and one way ANOVA for data analysis and for getting the results. The findings of the study revealed that that there is no significant gender difference, age difference, educational stream differences, residential differences in public speaking anxiety, and no differences also emerged in the family type of the students. However, there exists a significant difference in public speaking anxiety among students from different socioeconomic levels.

In this study the following research questions has been addressed:

Q1: What is the level of communication apprehension among engineering college students.

Q2.The association between demographic variables and Communication apprehension of engineering college students

Methodology

Exploratory research design is adapted for the study. Self-administered questionnaire Personal Report on Communication Apprehension-24(PRCA-24) was used among a sample of 64 undergraduate engineering students from Chennai through random sampling. Ethical considerations are kept in mind and the students were informed about the confidentiality of their information. Chi square test has been done in order to find out the levels of Communication apprehension and its association with demographic variables.

Instruments used in this study

1. A self-report of communication apprehension is administered to the students. The questionnaire administered was Personal Report on Communication Apprehension-24(PRCA-24). There are 24 items measuring four subscales on context of group discussion, meeting, interpersonal and public speaking. This instrument has to be scored on 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).Adding the subscores gives the total Communication apprehension level. These levels are classified as High, Moderate and low communication apprehension. It is highly reliable (alpha regularly $>.90$) and has very high predictive validity.

2. Demographic details were also collected from the students along with this questionnaire. The demographic details including age, gender, department, birth order has been collected.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Shows the Percentage of Communication Apprehension among Engineering Students

Communication Apprehension (CA)				
	Maximum Score	Mean Score	SD	Percentage of Mean CA

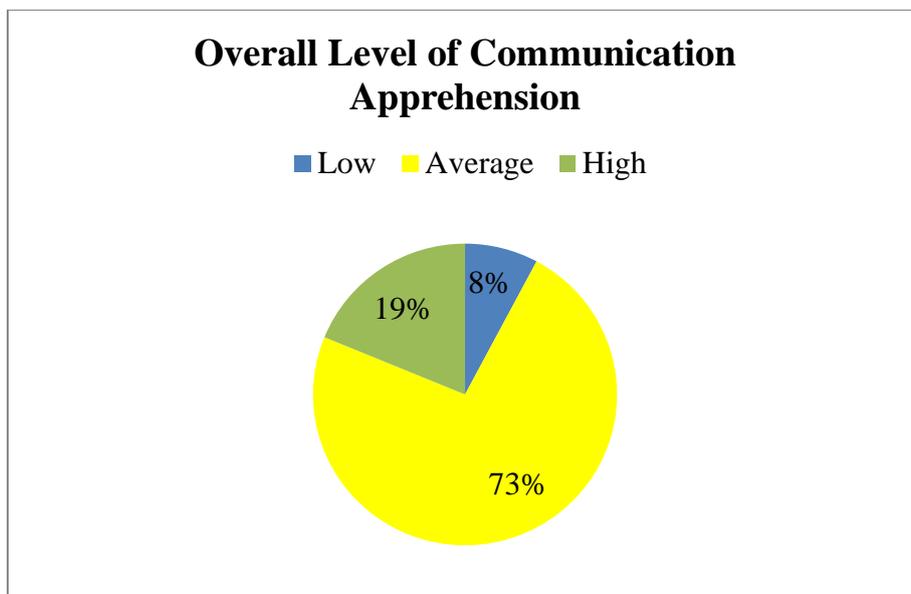
Group Discussion	30	15.03	3.39	50.10
Meetings	30	17.70	3.74	59.00
Interpersonal	30	17.23	4.15	57.43
Public	30	19.06	3.74	63.53
Total score	120	69.06	12.58	57.55

The above table shows that the percentage of communication apprehension was high in Public Speaking dimension with 63.53 percent and low in Group Discussion with 50.10 percent. The mean percentage was 59 percent and 57.43 percent in Meeting and Interpersonal communication dimensions respectively.

The high score in public speaking domain indicate the apprehension of students experience during public speaking or inter collegiate debate activities; this may be because students feel the fear of presenting before large audience and may be afraid of getting judged by many people. Many students don't get opportunity to speak before the crowd often. So, perceiving a situation of speaking in public in itself may increase anxiety. Students are comfortable in participating group discussion comparatively because they would have got exposure or trained in group discussion activities for interview purposes. Another reason may be they get to communicate with their classmates or contemporaries in most situations this may help to reduce anxiety during communication. Though a student may feel apprehensive in group discussion, even if they initiate the discussion they will be rewarded points for it. Hence, the apprehension may be low during group discussion.

The meeting dimension mean is 59 percent; this may be because the students feel less pressure comparatively with public speaking as they are no certain order to deliver their speech. Another reason may be it depends on the individual to choose whether or not he wishes to participate. The evaluation component will not be there in meeting situations which helps students to reduce their apprehension.

Interpersonal conversation dimension is with the mean 57.43 percent which is higher than group discussion and lower than public speaking and meeting may be because they may find communicating with less people compared to public speaking and meeting dimensions where the number of audience or people involved is high. Also, Interpersonal dimension is higher than group discussion may be due to the fear of their personality being perceived by others while communicating and how others will rate or assess them when they communicate may increase communication apprehension.



The above figure depicts 73 percent of the engineering students have average level of communication apprehension whereas 19 percent and 8 percent has high and low level of communication apprehension respectively. Students experiencing average level communication apprehension are more in number; this may be because they get training to improve their communication skills for interview purposes in the first three years of their education preparing them to face campus interviews. The second highest group of students 19 percent may have high apprehension because the traditional communication and language training may not be sufficient to alleviate their anxiety. These students may need further training to reduce their anxiety in order to communicate well. Finally 8 percent students have low communication apprehension may be because they got their training in communication skills during their schooling; they may perceive positively towards communication and may have high self-esteem which may be helpful to reduce the anxiety.

Table 2: Association between Level of Communication Apprehension and Demographic variables

Demographic variables		Total CA (n=64)						n	Chi square test
		Low		Medium		High			
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Age	19 years	1	20.0%	2	40.0%	2	40.0%	5	$\chi^2=3.47$ P=0.48 DF=4 (NS)
	20 years	3	8.3%	27	75.0%	6	16.7%	36	
	21 years	1	4.3%	18	78.3%	4	17.4%	23	
Gender	Male	5	17.2%	21	72.4%	3	10.3%	29	$\chi^2=8.04$ P=0.02* DF=2 (S)
	Female	0	0.0%	26	74.3%	9	25.7%	35	
Department	CSE	0	0.0%	5	62.5%	3	37.5%	8	$\chi^2=3.02$ P=0.55 DF=4 (NS)
	ECE	4	8.9%	33	73.3%	8	17.8%	45	
	MECH	1	9.1%	9	81.8%	1	9.1%	11	

Birth order	1st child	4	8.3%	39	81.3%	5	10.4%	48	$\chi^2=8.77$ P=0.01** DF=2 (S)
	2nd child	1	6.3%	8	50.0%	7	43.7%	16	

The above table 2 shows the level of communication apprehension and demographic variables among engineering college students. The scores indicate that there is no significant association in level of communication apprehension between different age groups and department. Whereas gender has a significant association in level of communication apprehension with $P=0.02$ indicating that female students have more communication apprehension compared to male students. The birth order has more impact in level of communication apprehension among the engineering students. There is a high significant association between birth order and level of communication apprehension with $P=0.01$, second born seem to have more level of communication apprehension compared to the first born. The reason may be our society gives more preference to first child by providing extra love, affection, personal attention towards the betterment of the child. The first born may have got more attention and from his parents than second born which may help to communicate more. The second born may have to face the sibling rivalry, competition or comparison by parents which may indirectly contribute to communication apprehension.

Conclusion and future implications of the research

Every college or university conducts communication and soft skills programe and other conventional or traditional communication skills training program for their students to equip them to be job ready and to get employment. Even after undergoing such training program some students may have communication apprehension in very high level. Such students' are to be identified in order to give them the treatment, as communication apprehension is a psychological phenomenon which can be alleviated though counseling and therapy. Early identification can help the students to overcome it. This will enhance their opportunity to get selected in interviews also by communicating effectively. This research can give much insight if this can be paired with practice sessions also. This will give the cumulative result of perceived as well as experienced communication apprehension.

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