

ORAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The communication apprehension is the anxiety or fear experienced by an individual before or during communicating and is one of the major barriers in communication among youth in their academics and professional growth. Therefore, the present study was conducted to study communication apprehension among postgraduate students of Punjab in English language. Data was collected through questionnaire from 200 postgraduate students drawn from four oldest and well-established universities of Punjab state. It was found that majority of students had moderate level of oral communication apprehension (OCA) in English. Further, it was found that majority of respondents had moderate level followed by low level and high level of apprehension during group discussions, interpersonal conversations and public speaking whereas in meetings most of the students had moderate level followed by high level and low level of apprehension. It was also found that on the average, students were most apprehensive in meetings followed by public speaking, interpersonal conversations and group discussions. As the communication apprehension restricts the overall growth of the students hence, it is recommended that more communication opportunities should be provided to students and focus should be laid upon the overall development of student's personality in order to decrease their apprehension.

Keywords : *apprehension, oral communication apprehension, group discussion, interpersonal conversation, public speaking.*

INTRODUCTION

Apprehension is the feeling of concern or fear about something, particularly the possibility of a negative or unpleasant event in the future. For instance, anxiety before a test, meeting, interview, or the first day of work. Despite being proficient in technical skills and good command over the language, individuals may experience anxiety while communicating. Such anxiety may hamper the communication process which can lead to poor performance in job interviews, this type communication barrier experienced by the speaker is called communication apprehension.

Studies shows that poor communication skills and communication apprehension or both can be the barrier to effective communication (Daly 1978; McCroskey 1984). James McCroskey coined the term, communication apprehension which is defined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey 1977). Horwitz (2002) cited that communication apprehension is the anxiousness or fear suffered by an individual of both real or anticipated conversation with a group or a person that can profoundly have an effect on their oral communication, social abilities and self-esteem. Communication apprehensive people are those who are afraid to communicate with others. One can divide communication apprehension into two

kinds i.e. written communication apprehension (WCA) and oral communication apprehension (OCA). The term, communication apprehension is often specifically used to refer OCA not only because it is more significant than the WCA but also because oral communication seems to trigger more alarm among a lot of individual and additionally it takes place throughout the life of an individual. This fear of oral communication covers public speaking, meetings with co-workers, interpersonal interactions and group discussions (McCroskey, 1984). There are four types of communication apprehension, such as anxiety related to the trait, context, audience, and situation (McCroskey 2001; Patel et al., 2023; Vegad et al., 2021). Trait communication apprehension is relatively durable personality type orientation towards any communication mode across various contexts. It presents that the person has an orientation to feel anxiety no matter what the context, audience or situation is. Context communication apprehension focuses mainly on communication apprehension in specific contexts (Khodifad and Solanki, 2023; Kumar et al., 2022&2023). Fear of public speaking is one of the most recognized examples of context anxiety. Audience communication apprehension can be understood clearly from the fact that some people feel apprehensive when they communicate with certain individuals or groups and not with other individuals and groups. Situational communication apprehension is a response to situational

constraints generated by another person or group. Overall, it can be concluded safely that anxiety in all instances prevents successful performance and over time may form a barrier to future performance and development. Hence, it is very necessary to address this problem and help the individual to be successful in his personal as well as professional life. Although studies on communication apprehension among students have been conducted in many countries but in India such studies are scanty.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) To study the level of oral communication apprehension in English among postgraduate students of Punjab.
- (2) To investigate whether there is any gender difference in oral communication apprehension or not.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was used to collect information from university students regarding oral communication in English. A structured interview schedule was used to conduct interview. Four old and well-established universities of Punjab were purposively selected for the study namely Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana; Panjab University, Chandigarh; Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and Punjabi University, Patiala. From each selected university, postgraduate students of both Masters and Ph.D. were the subjects of the study. Using a convenient sampling technique, a total of 50 postgraduate students, comprising 30 Masters and 20 Ph.D. were chosen from each of the mentioned universities, regardless of the discipline or stream of degree. As a result, 200 respondents made up the sample.

Instrument developed by McCroskey i.e. PRCA-24 was used. McCroskey developed the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) in 1975. It consists of 24 items/statements which was modified as per the needs of present study and respondents indicated their agreement to each statement using five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Pretesting

Interview schedule was pre-tested on 20 postgraduate students from the non-sampled university to find out reliability and validity of research tool. The reliability and validity are explained under the following sub-headings:

Reliability

It was determined by using split-half method where the responses on test items were split into two equal halves (first and the second half). Further correlation coefficient (r) was calculated by using average scores of both halves of the

test. Finally, reliability was calculated using the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula given as under:

$$\text{Reliability of full test } (r_{SB}) = \frac{\text{Two times correlation between half test}}{\text{One plus correlation between half test}} = \frac{2r}{1+r}$$

$$r = 0.843$$

Reliability coefficient was found to be 0.915 which suggest that the reliability of the test was excellent.

Validity

Intrinsic validity was determined by taking the square root of the calculated reliability coefficient. Whereas, content validity of the knowledge test was secured after thorough discussion with the members of the advisory committee.

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{r_{SB}}$$

The validity of the test was found to be 0.957. This revealed that the knowledge test was quite valid.

Score range

The scores of oral communication apprehension were divided into the three categories as low, medium and high with the score range of 24-52, 52-80 and 80-108 respectively by category interval method based on the observed scores. All the situations in which a student can experience apprehension while communicating orally in English were divided into four constructs as group discussion (6-26), meetings (6-28), interpersonal conversations (6-30) and public speaking (6-30). All the constructs included 6 statements/items and the apprehension levels of each construct were made by category interval method which was also based on observed scores i.e. Score range = .

$$\frac{\text{Maximum score observed} - \text{Minimum score observed}}{\text{Number of categories to be made}} (3)$$

The level of communication apprehension while talking in group was categorised in three categories as low, moderate and high with the score range of 6-13, 13-19 and 19-26 respectively and for meetings the score range was 6-13, 13-21 and 21-28 respectively. For interpersonal communication and public speaking the score range was 6-14, 14-22 and 22-30 for the three levels. The results are analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Oral communication apprehension among students along its constructs

Table 1 indicates gender wise distribution of

students according to their level of oral communication apprehension along various constructs i.e group discussion, meeting, interpersonal conversation and public speaking.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to the constructs of oral communication apprehension (OCA)

(n=200)

Constructs		Male (n _m =84)		Female (n _f =116)		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Group Discussion	High (19-26)	11	13.10	16	13.79	27	13.50
	Moderate (13-19)	55	65.48	64	55.17	119	59.50
	Low (6-13)	18	21.43	36	31.03	54	27.00
Meetings	High (21-28)	23	27.38	38	32.76	61	30.50
	Moderate (13-21)	43	51.19	53	45.69	96	48.00
	Low (6-13)	18	21.43	25	21.55	43	21.50
Interpersonal conversation	High (22-30)	15	17.86	18	15.52	33	16.50
	Moderate (14-22)	50	59.52	69	59.48	119	59.50
	Low (6-14)	19	22.62	29	25.00	48	24.00
Public speaking	High (22-30)	17	20.24	21	18.10	38	19.00
	Moderate (14-22)	46	54.76	68	58.62	114	57.00
	Low (6-14)	21	25.00	27	23.28	48	24.00

During group discussions in English, majority of respondents (59.50%) had moderate level followed by low level (27.00%) and high level of apprehension (13.50%). Gender comparison showed similar trend as majority (65.48%) of males and females (55.17%) had moderate level of apprehension during group discussions. Forty-eight per cent of respondents had moderate level followed by high level (30.50%) while the remaining had low level of apprehension (21.50%) during meetings. Gender wise also similar trend was observed as 51.19 per cent of males and 45.69 per cent of females had moderate level of apprehension during meetings.

During interpersonal conversation, majority (59.50%) had moderate level followed by low level (24.00%) and the remaining respondents (16.50%) had high level of apprehension. Gender wise also there was no major difference as majority of males (59.52%) and females (59.48%) had moderate level of apprehension during interpersonal conversations. During public speaking, majority of students (57.00%) had moderate apprehension followed by low apprehension (24.00%) and the remaining (19.00%) had high level of apprehension. Like other constructs for public speaking also, similar trend was observed as majority of males (54.76%) and females (58.62%) reported moderate level of apprehension during public speaking.

Oral communication apprehension among students

Gender wise distribution of students according to

their level of oral communication apprehension in English is shown in Table 2.

Overall data revealed that majority of respondents (61.50%) had moderate level followed by high level (23.00%) and the remaining (15.50%) had low level of OCA in English these results were in line with Dar and Khan (2014), Kho and Ting (2023) and Siska *et al* (2022) who reported that majority of students had moderate level followed by high and low level of oral communication apprehension. Majority of males (60.71%) as well as females (62.07%) had moderate level of OCA.

Gender differences in oral communication apprehension

The gender comparison among students for oral communication apprehension for various constructs was studied by comparing the mean score along various constructs using t-test.

The data in Table 3 indicate that in English language, on the average students were most apprehensive in meetings (\bar{X} =2.94) followed by public speaking (\bar{X} =2.89), interpersonal conversations (\bar{X} =2.83) and group discussions (\bar{X} =2.61). The results were in line with Foo *et al* (2015), who revealed that the level of apprehension gradually increases from group discussion, interpersonal, presentation to interview and lower level of communication apprehension

Table 2: Distribution of students according to oral communication apprehension (OCA) (n=200)

Oral communication apprehension (OCA)		Male (n _m =84)		Female (n _f =116)		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Level	High (80-108)	21	25.00	25	21.55	46	23.00
	Moderate (52-80)	51	60.71	72	62.07	123	61.50
	Low (24-52)	12	14.29	19	16.38	31	15.50

Table 3: Gender comparison among students for oral communication apprehension (OCA) (n=200)

Constructs	Male (n _m =84)		Female (n _f =116)		Total		t value
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
Group Discussion	2.64	0.67	2.58	0.71	2.61	0.69	.629
Meetings	2.95	0.78	2.94	0.78	2.94	0.78	.035
Interpersonal conversation	2.86	0.80	2.80	0.77	2.83	0.78	.501
Public speaking	2.86	0.78	2.91	0.80	2.89	0.79	-.427
OCA	2.83	0.64	2.81	0.66	2.82	0.65	.200

Table 4 Correlation of independent variables with oral communication apprehension (OCA) (n=200)

Sr. No.	Independent variables	OCA in English
1	Age	.059
2	Total siblings	.068
3	Brother	-.016
4	Sister	.121
5	Birth order	-.031
6	Family size	.043
7	Family income from all sources	-.064
8	Academic performance	-.025
9	Participation in cultural activities	-.310**
10	Participation in sports	-.126
11	Outings	-.166*
12	Participation in any social gathering	-.160*
13	Father's qualification	-.085
14	Mother's qualification	-.053

was reported in informal context such as interpersonal and group discussion. Gender wise comparison shows that males were more apprehensive in group discussions (\bar{X} =2.64), meetings (\bar{X} =2.95) and interpersonal conversations (\bar{X} =2.86) than females (\bar{X} = 2.58, 2.94 and 2.80 respectively) whereas, females were more apprehensive in public speaking in English (\bar{X} =2.91) than males (\bar{X} =2.86) which was in line with Byrne *et al* (2009) who observed that there was higher level of apprehension among female students than the male students regarding the public speaking. Further, overall communication apprehension of male students (

\bar{X} =2.83) was higher than the female students (\bar{X} =2.81). However, application of t-test for gender difference indicated that this gender difference in all the constructs and OCA was statistically non-significant. The results are in conformity with Dar and Khan (2014), who reported that there was no significant gender difference in oral communication apprehension. However, results are in contradiction with Araujo *et al* (2022), Foo *et al* (2015), Nayeem *et al* (2015) and Tahir *et al* (2017) who observed that male individuals had considerably lower communication apprehension than female ones whereas, Kho and Ting (2023) reported that male students experienced greater communication apprehension

than the female students. It may be due to various cultural differences, family background, educational qualification of parents and social participation etc.

Correlation

The data given in Table 4 depicts relationship of various independent variables with the OCA of the students selected as respondents for the study in English. Correlation coefficient between the participation in cultural activities (r value= -0.310), outings (r value= -0.166) and social gatherings (r value= -0.160) and OCA was found to be significantly negative depicting that with the increased participation in cultural activities, outings and social gatherings, the OCA among postgraduate students decreases.

CONCLUSION

Majority of students had moderate level of OCA while communicating in English. Nearly half or more than half of the students were having moderate level of apprehension in group discussion, interpersonal conversation, meetings and public speaking. There was no significant gender difference for OCA as well as its constructs. Correlation shows that with the increased participation in cultural activities, outings and social gatherings, the OCA in English among postgraduate students decreases.

The students had moderate to high communication apprehension therefore, it is recommended that institutes should stress upon the overall development of student's personality rather than grades only. Speaking, writing and personality development courses with more focus on practical experiences should be introduced in institutions which will significantly reduce communication apprehension and thus will further improve the future prospects of the students. More communication opportunities or platform should be provided to students in order to decrease their apprehension.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This is to declare that there is "No conflict of interest" among researchers.

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