



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
HUMANITIES, PHILOSOPHY
AND LANGUAGE
(IJHPL)
www.ijhpl.com



THE POWER OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG KIAS DEGREE STUDENTS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 30.07.2023

Revised date: 20.08.2023

Accepted date: 21.09.2023

Published date: 27.09.2023

To cite this document:

Nasir, N. A. M., Yaacob, N. H., Yaakub, N., & Razak, C. N. C. A. (2023) The Power Of Spoken Language: Understanding Communication Apprehension And English Language Anxiety Among KIAS Degree Students. *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Language*, 6 (23), 01-12.

DOI: 10.35631/IJHPL.623001.

Abstract:

Communication apprehension is characterized by the anxiety or fear individuals experience during interpersonal communication. In the context of foreign language learning, this apprehension can significantly impact learners' ability to effectively acquire, use, and master the language. Despite its importance, there remains a scarcity of studies exploring communication apprehension as a key contributor to anxiety, especially in language learning. This study focuses on examining communication apprehension as one of the four components known to trigger anxiety in foreign language learning. Specifically, the research targets KIAS degree students. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by delving into foreign language anxiety from the perspective of KIAS degree students. The research identifies anxiety-inducing situations and offers recommendations for educational interventions to address communication apprehension. Notably, the study reveals that these students feel uncomfortable or anxious in various situations, particularly when required to speak in English during impromptu tasks. By identifying specific triggers of anxiety, the research highlights the factors that hinder language learning progress among these students. This valuable knowledge can guide educators in developing appropriate instructional approaches and creating a supportive classroom environment. It is crucial for

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educators to pay special attention to learners struggling with communication anxiety, fostering a friendly and secure learning space where these students can confidently practice their language skills. This supportive environment plays a significant role in building their confidence and self-esteem, effectively alleviating unnecessary anxieties. Thus, this study sheds light on the significance of communication apprehension as a crucial factor influencing anxiety in foreign language learning among KIAS degree students. The findings underscore the importance of addressing this issue and designing tailored interventions to accommodate the unique challenges faced by these learners. Ultimately, by providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment, educators can empower the students to excel in their foreign language acquisition journey and enhance the overall language learning experience.

Keywords:

Communication Apprehension, FLCAS, Foreign Language Anxiety

Introduction

The widespread use of English as a global language in the education system is undeniable, primarily influenced by English's role as a significant language of economic and political power (Anderson, 2010). This influence has led many countries to adopt English as the instructional medium in their education systems, aiming to produce competent graduates capable of global competition. According to Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013), international students seeking higher education are required to attain a certain level of English proficiency, as most universities worldwide use English as the language of instruction and assessment. However, language barriers emerge as a primary hurdle for these students, many of whom come from non-English speaking backgrounds and struggle to communicate fluently and effectively in English, leading to anxiety and unease.

Thaher (2005) and Amogne and Yigzaw (2013) have conducted studies that emphasize communication apprehension as a prevalent cause of students' reluctance to speak English in front of their peers. This fear and anxiety take various forms, from trembling during public speaking to feeling awkward when presenting or expressing opinions in English (Sari, 2017). Existing literature predominantly revolves around university students (e.g., Tom, Johari, Rozaimi & Huzaimah, 2013) or non-Malaysian students (e.g., Amiri & Puteh, 2021; Jalleh, Mahfoodh, & Singh, 2021). To bridge this gap, this study aims to shed light on a core issue related to language learning among KIAS degree students learning English as a foreign language. By examining the specific language-related anxieties and communication apprehension experienced by these students, this research seeks to uncover the barriers that hinder their language acquisition and overall educational experience.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) encompasses a range of unease and fear experienced by individuals when learning or using a foreign language. Among its components, communication apprehension emerges as a significant factor contributing to learners' anxiety.

Communication apprehension is characterized by anxiety from a perceived lack of control over interpersonal communication situations. It is often prevalent in educational environments where learners may feel uncertain about their ability to communicate effectively (McCrosky,

1987). For language learners, this anxiety becomes more pronounced when using a foreign language, especially in front of others, leading to concerns about making mistakes, facing judgment, or struggling to express oneself accurately. Studies indicate that communication apprehension can strongly influence language learning, resulting in avoidance behaviours such as refraining from speaking in class or social settings, ultimately hampers language acquisition (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

The impact of communication apprehension is felt across all classrooms, but it becomes particularly pronounced in foreign language or ESL classes (Lucas, 1984). Research reveals that students with higher levels of communication apprehension tend to limit their oral participation, opting for silence as a coping mechanism to avoid potential embarrassment or criticism from peers and instructors (Mejias et al., 1991). Recognizing the interplay between communication apprehension, limited oral participation, and the preference for silence is crucial for educators and researchers to establish a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages active engagement and addresses challenges faced by apprehensive students.

Confidence is critical in learners' overcoming fear and improving fluency in an unfamiliar language (Shukor & Madzlan, 2022). When learners lack confidence in their language abilities, doubts about pronunciation, vocabulary usage, or grammar accuracy may hinder their willingness to engage in oral communication. Addressing this self-doubt becomes essential in breaking down barriers that inhibit students from confidently participating in language learning.

A related study by Jalleh et al. (2021) highlights the significance of communication apprehension among Japanese EFL international students in a language immersion program. Similarly, this study explores the anxieties and communication apprehension experienced by KIAS degree students learning English as a foreign language in a multilingual context. Both studies acknowledge the adverse effects of communication apprehension on learners considered foreign speakers of the target language. Jalleh et al. (2021) observed that apprehension was particularly evident in public speaking situations and interactions with native English speakers, negatively impacting oral proficiency and hindering active engagement in classroom discussions for language learners.

Overall, this literature review emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing communication apprehension among language learners to cultivate a supportive learning environment and enhance language acquisition and proficiency.

Research Methodology

Participants

This study focused on degree students enrolled at Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra (KIAS) as its participants. Initially, 339 eligible degree students were identified to partake in the questionnaire. The final sample size for data analysis was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) method for sample size estimation.

From Krejcie and Morgan's table, it was determined that a sample size of 181 students would be appropriate to represent a cross-section of the population, considering the total population

size of 339 degree students. Consequently, a final sample of 181 students was selected using purposive sampling techniques to participate in this research.

Before the questionnaire was administered to the participants, informed consent was obtained to uphold ethical considerations and protect the rights and privacy of the students. The questionnaire was thoughtfully designed to evaluate communication apprehension, language-related anxieties, and other pertinent factors influencing the language learning experiences of KIAS degree students learning English as a foreign language.

The data collected from the participant's responses to the questionnaire formed the foundation for the analysis and findings presented in this study. By ensuring a representative sample size, the research aimed to provide valuable insights into the communication apprehension experienced by KIAS degree students in the context of language learning and ultimately offer recommendations for educational interventions to address these challenges effectively.

Instruments

In this study, the researchers utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire, initially developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The FLCAS employs a five-point Likert scale, presenting respondents with a series of statements to gauge their level of agreement or disagreement. The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This questionnaire has a well-established history of usage in numerous research studies and has consistently demonstrated reliability across multiple administrations. Noteworthy past studies that employed the FLCAS include Aida (1994), Cheng et al. (1999), Saito et al. (1996), Matsuda & Gobel (2004), Elkhafaifi (2005), Dewaele & Al-Saraj (2015), and Gerencheal & Mishra (2019), all of which reported high Cronbach Alpha values of 0.7 and above, indicating its reliability. Therefore, the researchers deemed it appropriate for implementation in this study.

The FLCAS questionnaire consists of four components: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; 3) fear of negative evaluation; and 4) fear of the English class (Salim, Subramaniam, and Termizi, 2017). However, to align the investigation with the specific focus of this study, only items related to communication apprehension were analyzed and considered. This selective approach allowed the researchers to concentrate on foreign language anxiety concerning communication apprehension. The data analysis of the questionnaire was conducted using descriptive statistics through the SPSS software, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences regarding communication apprehension.

Table 1: FLA Components in FLCAS

FLA Component	Item No	Total Item
Communication apprehension	1, 3, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 20, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33	13
Test anxiety	8, 10, 21, 22	4
Fear of negative evaluation	2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 24, 31	7
Fear of English class	5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, 26, 28	9

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Demographic Background

Demography	Frequency N=181	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	75	41.4
Female	106	58.6
Age		
18-20	20	11.0
21-23	140	77.3
24-26	21	11.6
Course		
Syariah	130	71.8
Usuluddin	51	28.2

Table 2 displays the demographic profile of the student participants in this study. The respondents comprised 75 male students (41.4%) and 106 female students (58.6%). A considerable majority of the participants (77.3%) fell within the age range of 21 to 23 years. Most of the students are from Syariah courses (71.8%). The internal reliability of the F.L.C.A.S. questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a value of $\sigma = 0.89$. This signifies that the F.L.C.A.S. instrument employed in this research exhibits high reliability.

Table 3: Percentages of Students' Responses on Communication Apprehension in FLCAS

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English	9	29	46	12	4
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class	9	33	38	15	4
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	9	45	30	13	3
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class	29	44	20	2	4
14. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers	2	23	49	24	2
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	20	48	19	9	3
18. I feel confident when I speak in my English class	1	11	50	33	6
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my English class	15	40	34	11	1
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class	9	35	44	11	1
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says	14	40	30	14	2

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English	13	32	38	17	2
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English	4	23	54	17	3
33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance	26	42	25	6	1

*SA=Strongly Agree; A: Agree=; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 3 presents the percentages of students who selected each choice for the items in the FLCAS. To facilitate analysis, the percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number, which may result in a total that does not exactly add up to 100%. The analysis involved grouping the responses into two categories: positive responses agreeing with the statement (Strongly Agree and Agree) and negative responses (Disagree and Strongly Disagree).

The percentages provided indicate the proportion of respondents who agreed with each statement to some extent, with higher percentages indicating more significant levels of anxiety or discomfort. The respondents rated their anxiety levels on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (indicating the lowest anxiety) to 5 (indicating the highest anxiety).

For a detailed breakdown of the total percentage for each item, please refer to Table 4 below:

Table 4: Total Percentage of Communication Anxiety

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English (38%)
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class (42%)
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English (54%)
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class (73%)
14. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers (25%)
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting (68%)
18. I feel confident when I speak in my English class (12%)
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my English class (55%)
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class (44%)
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says (54%)
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English (45%)
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English (27%)
33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance (68%)

The results presented in Table 4 reveal varying levels of communication apprehension among the respondents, with certain items scoring higher than others. Notably, the highest anxiety levels were reported for item 9 ("I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class") with 73% agreement and item 33 ("I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance") with 68% agreement. Both items pertain to speaking in English without prior preparation, suggesting that KIAS degree students may feel more at ease when they have adequate time to organize their thoughts before speaking. These dominant scores highlight that impromptu speaking tasks are a significant source of anxiety for foreign language learners.

For many foreign language students, being called upon to speak in front of others, particularly in impromptu situations, triggers a sense of self-consciousness and nervousness. Highly anxious students tend to be particularly concerned about their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, fearing they may struggle to express their ideas clearly (Ajeng, 2016). Additionally, limited opportunities to speak English and societal attitudes towards English in the students' environment can contribute to high levels of communication apprehension (Jalleh, Mahfoodh, & Singh, 2021). Thus, the research indicates that various environmental and personal factors, such as low self-esteem, limited language proficiency, and demanding learning environments, contribute to the anxiety experienced by EFL students in impromptu speaking scenarios.

Furthermore, communication apprehension is not solely related to speaking but also to listening to spoken language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Accordingly, items 4 ("It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English") and 29 ("I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says") also indicate communication apprehension, with both scoring 54%. These findings suggest that students experience anxiety when they struggle to comprehend the teacher's words, possibly due to feelings of embarrassment or frustration. Similarly, item 15 ("I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting") at 68% indicates anxiety about being corrected, which may be associated with learners feeling that their English is inadequate and constantly fearing evaluation for making mistakes.

Item 30 ("I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English") received a relatively high score of 45%, implying that KIAS degree students may feel overwhelmed by the amount of English-related information they need to grasp. This aligns with previous research indicating that poor grammar proficiency, particularly in word arrangement and sentence structure, can deter learning and trigger anxiety among EFL students (Mukminin et al., 2015).

On the other hand, items 14 ("I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers") and 32 ("I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English") received relatively low scores at 25% and 27%, respectively. These findings suggest that learners may feel more at ease speaking with their peers compared to native English speakers. Communicating with native speakers, who often use more complex language and speak at a faster pace, can intensify speaking anxiety for FL learners (Cagatay, 2015). FL learners may perceive native speakers as a threat to their fluency and experience heightened anxiety when expected to use more sophisticated language, impeding their ability to communicate effectively in English (Woodrow, 2006).

The lowest score was recorded for item 18 ("I feel confident when I speak in my English class") at 12%. This item reflects students' confidence in speaking during their English class. The lower levels of communication apprehension observed in this item could be attributed to the small proportion of the KIAS degree student population sampled in the study. Schools with greater racial diversity and representation tend to create a more comfortable environment with a larger "in-group" for communication and identification (LaRochelle & Karpinski, 2016).

While the percentages across different items vary, many fall within a relatively narrow range, ranging from 54% to 73%. This indicates that for a majority of respondents, speaking and

learning English can be a source of anxiety or discomfort in various contexts. These percentages are influenced by various factors, including anxiety about speaking without preparation, understanding the teacher and being corrected, and feeling overwhelmed by the language's rules.

Table 5: Students' Communication Apprehension

	Item Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English	3.27	0.911	Average
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class	3.28	0.978	Average
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	3.41	0.937	High
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class	3.91	0.990	High
14	I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers	3.01	0.803	Average
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	3.75	0.995	High
18	I feel confident when I speak in my English class	3.32	0.787	Average
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my English class	3.56	0.896	High
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class	3.40	0.848	Average
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says	3.52	0.958	High
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English	3.36	0.965	Average
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English	2.92	0.806	Average
33	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance	3.85	0.910	High
	Total	3.43	0.906	High

Table 6: Interpretation Scale Mean Score

Mean score	Interpretation
1.0-1.80	Very low
1.81-2.60	Low
2.61-3.40	Average
3.41- 4.20	High
4.21-5.00	Very High

Table 5 displays the mean and standard deviation of students' communication apprehension, while Table 6 presents the interpretation scale of the mean scores, adapted from Baba (1997). Among the 13 items, item 9 obtains the highest mean (mean = 3.91), indicating high communication apprehension among students. This aligns with the total percentage of students who selected this item, which also records the highest percentage value (73%), indicating that most students agree with the statement. These students appear to feel pressure when required to speak spontaneously, as they believe they need more time to organize their thoughts or contemplate their responses before verbalizing them.

On the other hand, the lowest mean is attributed to item 32 (mean = 2.92), indicating a moderate level of communication apprehension. Students seem comfortable engaging in oral communication with native English speakers, suggesting a lack of anxiety in such interactions. However, it is worth considering that this research was conducted among KIAS degree students, and their limited opportunities to engage with native English speakers may contribute to this result. Consequently, they may have a limited understanding of the complexities of the native speakers' speaking style. This contrasts with Jalleh et al.'s (2021) findings, which reported that interacting with native English speakers caused high levels of apprehension among their students, ultimately hindering their oral proficiency and confidence in participating in classroom discussions.

Table 7: Communication Apprehension Level in Male and Female Students

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	74	3.23	0.936
Female	107	3.57	0.855

Table 7 presents the mean communication apprehension levels of male and female KIAS degree students. The data indicate that female students exhibit a higher level of communication apprehension, with a mean score of 3.57. In contrast, male students show moderate communication apprehension, with a mean score of 3.23. These mean scores are interpreted based on Baba's (1997) guidelines, as displayed in Table 6.

Based on the obtained means, it can be concluded that female students in this study experience higher communication apprehension compared to their male counterparts. This finding aligns with similar research results from Mejias et al. (1991) and Wicks-Nelson & Israel (2006), which also observed higher anxiety levels among female students compared to male students. This difference could be attributed to the notion that female students value their public image significantly, always aiming to present themselves in the best possible light to others. Bruce et al. (2005) further highlighted that female students dislike portraying themselves as less skilled or confident.

Limitations of the Study & Recommendation for Future Research

This study is subject to certain limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, there is room for further refinement and diversification of the data collection method and instruments used to assess communication apprehension. Future studies could adopt mixed-methods approaches, incorporating qualitative data collection methods like interviews or observations. These additional qualitative insights would provide a deeper understanding of learners' experiences and illuminate the nuances of communication apprehension.

Secondly, this study does not extensively explore the contextual factors contributing to communication apprehension among KIAS degree students. To address this limitation, future research could delve into various contextual elements, such as cultural influences, societal expectations, and educational policies that may impact language learning anxiety in this specific context. Researchers can gain comprehensive insights into the complex interplay between communication apprehension and these students' unique cultural and educational landscape by investigating these factors.

Conclusion

Drawing on the insights from prior research (e.g., Lucas, 1984; Mejias et al., 1991; Shukor and Madzlan, 2022; and Jalleh et al., 2021), it becomes evident that communication apprehension holds considerable significance in language learning settings, especially among university students. Learners with higher levels of communication apprehension often restrict their oral participation, resorting to silence or providing minimal responses to cope with their anxiety. Such a lack of confidence can impede their fluency development and intensify their apprehension.

Within the context of KIAS degree students, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique experiences and challenges they encounter while acquiring English as a foreign language. The study's findings contribute to the existing literature by pinpointing specific anxiety-inducing situations, like impromptu tasks, in which these students experience discomfort or nervousness when speaking in English. These findings align with Jalleh et al.'s (2021) observations, which emphasized the nerve-wracking nature of public speaking situations and interactions with native English speakers for learners. These anxiety-triggering scenarios can adversely affect the students' oral proficiency and hinder their active involvement in classroom discussions.

Hence, based on the synthesis of previous research and the findings from this study, educators must address communication apprehension and establish a supportive learning environment. Implementing strategies to bolster learners' confidence and self-esteem will enable them to practice and interact with the language more comfortably. By designing suitable instructional approaches and fostering a warm and secure classroom atmosphere, educators can alleviate unnecessary anxieties and encourage active engagement among learners who experience communication apprehension.

In conclusion, this study significantly enhances our understanding of communication apprehension among KIAS degree students within the foreign language learning context. By acknowledging their distinct challenges and identifying anxiety-provoking situations, the research underscores the necessity for targeted educational interventions. Integrating previous research underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing communication apprehension, promoting active participation, and supporting learners on their language learning journey.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra, who funded the publication of this article.

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