

The Influence of Communication Apprehension on Students' Spoken Performance

Luiza Zeqiri, Phd

English Department

University for Business and Technology

Pristina, Kosovo

luiza.zeqiri@ubt-uni.net



Abstract— Communication apprehension has a great impact on students' academic achievements. In English as a foreign language classroom setting we often see students who become very insecure whenever they are asked to engage in activities which require applying public speaking or doing any communication activities in a foreign language. The fear of public speaking is present in almost every language classroom in a university environment. Communication between students and the teacher becomes more problematic when students have to use a foreign language in the classroom. Even though the role of communication skills is very important, the impact that communication apprehension has, has not received the required attention from the teachers or researchers. The number of students' who struggle when communicating in a foreign language (English in this case) is very high and unfortunately these students suffer in silence without getting any help from their instructors, parents, psychologists etc. There were seventy-five participants who took part in this study. All students at South East European University in, Tetovo. The main instrument for the data collection was a standardized questionnaire created by McCroskey who has given a tremendous contribution in the field of communication. This reliable questionnaire is widely used by many other authors, teachers and researchers. From the results of this study it was concluded the students who failed to deliver good presentations and scored lower grades, were at some level; from average to severe, all affected by communication apprehension.

Keywords—public speaking; language; anxiety; inhibition

I. INTRODUCTION

English speaking skills are very difficult to be acquired and applied by some students who learn English as a foreign language. We have seen students who have suffered emotionally when asked to prepare presentations or perform role plays in front of the classroom. Communication apprehension has indicated to be an obstacle for successful speaking performances in the classroom.

Therefore, it is crucial that the emotional difficulties which hinder effective communication are investigated. The results from this research will firstly inform teachers that there are students who don't feel comfortable speaking a foreign language in the classroom; secondly, they will show the actual number of students who are affected by communication apprehension and the impact that communication apprehension has on students' success will be emphasised.

It is important that we give an exact definition of communication apprehension according to McCroskey, J. C. (1970) edited by Burgoon, M. (Ed.) (1982: 136-137) [3]: "communication apprehension is a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication." It should be pointed out that without McCroskey, J. C's. continues investigation and research, the exploration of communication apprehension would have been very challenging and more difficult.

The importance of comfortable communication is crucial not only in academic institutions, but in every day life as well. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute by informing the readers that students don't refuse to communicate because they don't have the necessary knowledge, but there could be something else which hinders their effective communication. Practicing how to avoid speaking apprehension in class will help students outside of the classroom as well.

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Effective communication is essential in our everyday life; meaning that we can not function without being able to communicate with others. Without proper and comfortable communication our lives would have been more complicated. According to McCroskey, J.C. (2005: 4) [8], "communication is seen as the way people get things done". Thus, imagine not being able to achieve your goals no matter how small or big they are!

However, communicating effectively is a skill which should be practiced. If there was no anxiety or fear while speaking with others or in front of others, then communication would not be considered as complicated as it is. Stacks, D. & Boozer, R. (1984: 115) [11] state that "one of the major fears that people have is the fear of communication." Knowing how big this fear is, the communication process in a classroom setting should be given enough time and effort by the ones who teach or practice it.

That communication process is not very easy, is also explained by Sadasivan, L. (2002: 48) [10] who states that people have "sets of defenses to protect their ego," however, children start looking for their self-identity after "physical, emotional and cognitive changes" occur. Sadasivan, L. (2002: 48) [10] adds that when learning a second language and they have to adopt a new identity they "develop defensive inhibition" because they are concerned about their self-esteem.

Beck, C. S. (2022: 2) [1] in her article "Communication in the 2020s: viewing our world through the eyes of communication" asserts that: "Through communication, we enact who we are, express our ideas, relate to others, make a difference, and decide what to believe". She has investigated the role of communication during the pandemics saying that this time revealed the importance communication has in people's lives.

Another author, Corbett, C. (2018) [4] mentions that nowadays we have all the luxury of easy ways of communication with the use of technology, but we have never before failed to communicate effectively like now. Other authors, Brian D. Blume; Timothy T. Baldwin; Katherine C. Ryan (2013) [2] claim that not being able to communicate comfortably can be an obstacle for being a successful student or employee.

Taylor, S. (Ed.). (1999) [12] has analysed the severity of anxiety in different people saying that there are people who easily get anxious compared to others who need to go through a very difficult time in order to suffer from anxiety symptoms. Taylor, S. (Ed.). (1999: 9) [11] gives the following explanation regarding how much people are affected by the fear of their symptoms: "Just as people vary in their proneness to experience anxiety symptoms, so do they vary in their fear of these symptoms." He explains that majority is not severely affected by anxiety, but there are people who would panic.

Researchers should not only investigate the impact that communication anxiety has on students' academic performances, but on their lives as well. This is in accordance with Petry, Andrew C., (2016: 26) [9] who declares that: "CA has the potential to have many negative effects on multiple aspects of an individual's life."

III. METHODOLOGY

The instrument which was used to test the research hypothesis which states: "Communication apprehension has a negative impact on students' oral performances;" is McCroskey's, J. C. 1982 [7] "Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (24)". This is a standardized questionnaire, which is applicable for research purposes. This questionnaire is a valid questionnaire used by many other researchers in order to test 'communication apprehension' because of its high reliability. This instrument is a 24 item Likert Scale questionnaire which was administered to the participants.

M. Croucher, et al., (2019: abstract) [5] on their paper "A multi-national validity analysis of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)" state that: "The PRCA-24 serves as an exemplar of a US-designed and validated measure frequently used outside the US without tests of validity or measurement invariance."

The questionnaire items measuring the communication apprehension of the students, were all appropriate for the students' English fluency level. Before the students started to answer the questionnaire, the teacher read all the items one by one making

sure that everything was clear to the students. A few explanations or translations were given for a few students. Having understood all the questions, the students were asked to give their answers by marking the statements as follows: "Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5". According to McCroskey, J. C. (1982: 1) [7], the results were based on the following scores: "Below 51 very low level of CA, between 51-80 average CA, above 80 high level CA." the scores are calculated using the formula given by the author.

The participants were divided into two groups according to their spoken performance results during one semester. The students whose grades in their speaking classes were 5-7 were considered as low-performing students, whereas students who received 8-10 were considered as high-performing student. Twenty-five students were students who achieved higher points in their presentations and 50 students who scored lower oral performance points. They were all students at South East European University in Tetovo.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is important that we share the questionnaire items so that we give a clear picture of what exactly suffering from communication apprehension means. So, the following are the "Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)" questionnaire items written by McCroskey, J. C. (1982: 1) [7] that were given to the students in order to measure their 'communication apprehension' level:

- _____1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- _____2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- _____3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- _____4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- _____5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- _____6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- _____7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
- _____10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- _____11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
- _____12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- _____13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- _____14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- _____15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- _____16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- _____17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- _____18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- _____19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- _____20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- _____21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- _____22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- _____23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

____24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

The PRCA questionnaire results will be illustrated separately (using charts) in three groups of 25 students in order to have a better understanding of how the points range throughout the groups. The aim is not to compare the results of the groups between each other, but it will help us to easily illustrate the results in smaller groups. The quantitative results will be calculated and then reported using SPSS for statistics, which will be precisely interpreted.

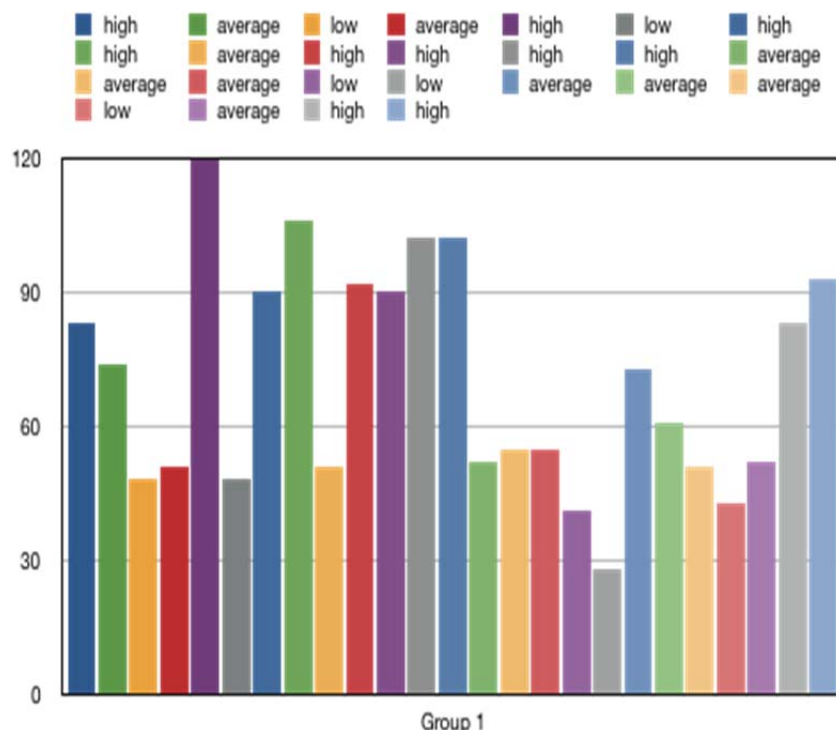


Chart 4.1 - Personal Report of Communication Apprehension – low-performing students

Chart 4.1 illustrates the results of the first group of low-performing students. From the results it can be concluded that 10 students showed a high level of communication apprehension ranking from 80-120 which according to McCroskey means high level of communication apprehension and *ten* students showed to have an average level of communication apprehension. Only five students showed to have a low communication apprehension level.

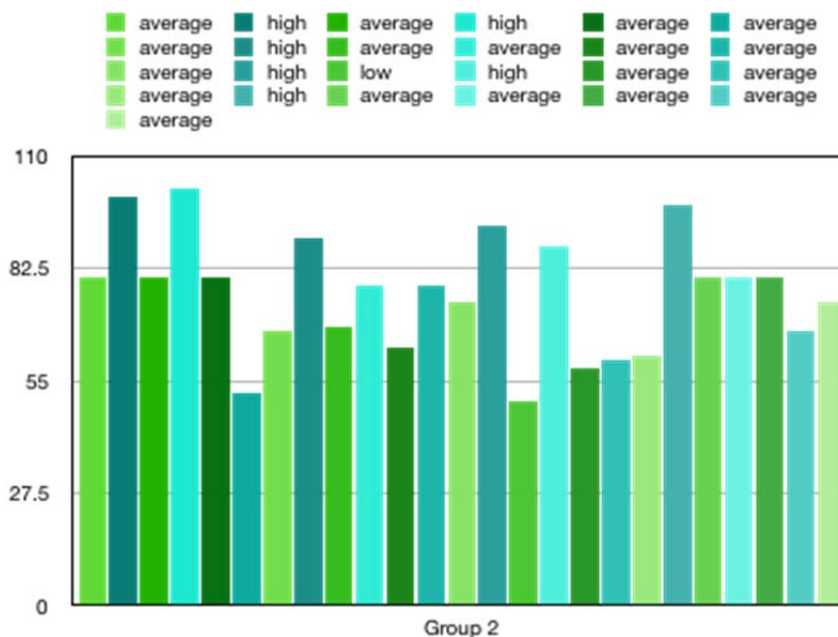


Chart 4.2 - Personal Report of Communication Apprehension – low-performing students

Chart 4.2 shows the results of “personal report of communication apprehension” of the second group of low-performing students. In the second group of students there were only *six* students who were highly affected by communication apprehension and 18 students who were moderately affected by communication apprehension. Only 1 student had a low level of communication apprehension.

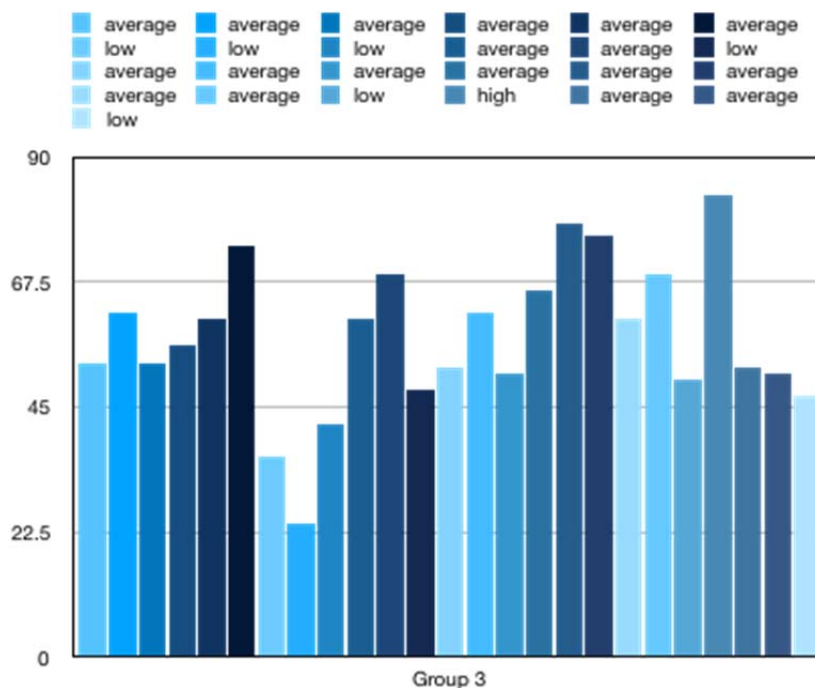


Chart 4.3 - Personal Report of Communication Apprehension – high-performing students

Chart 4.3 illustrates the results of the third group of high-performing students. In this group there was *one* student affected by high level of communication apprehension and *eighteen* students affected by a moderate level of CA. Only six students had a low level of communication apprehension.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Chart 5.1 below gives a clear illustration of the overall percentage of the three levels (low, average, high) of communication apprehension. It can be concluded very clearly that majority of the students suffer from a 'moderate level of communication apprehension'. What's more is that 23% of the students suffer from severe communication apprehension compared to those who have a low level of communication apprehension 16%.

The number of students with moderate and high levels of communication apprehension is very big. There were even cases of students scoring more than 100 based on the scale given by McCroskey. The results of the students affected with low level of communication apprehension are between 24 and 51 based on the scale given by McCroskey. Everything above 51 indicates a moderate or high level of CA.

We can infer that majority of the students (from both groups of students, receiving higher and lower presentation scores) reported being affected by communication apprehension at a moderate level. From the low-performing groups, 16 students out of 50 reported being strongly affected by CA, and 28 students reported having moderate level of communication apprehension. Only 6 students had low level of communication apprehension. Whereas, 1 out of 25 high-performing students showed to be highly affected by CA and 18 students being moderately affected by CA. From these numbers we can freely conclude that affective variables do have a great impact on hindering students' communication or speaking in a foreign language.

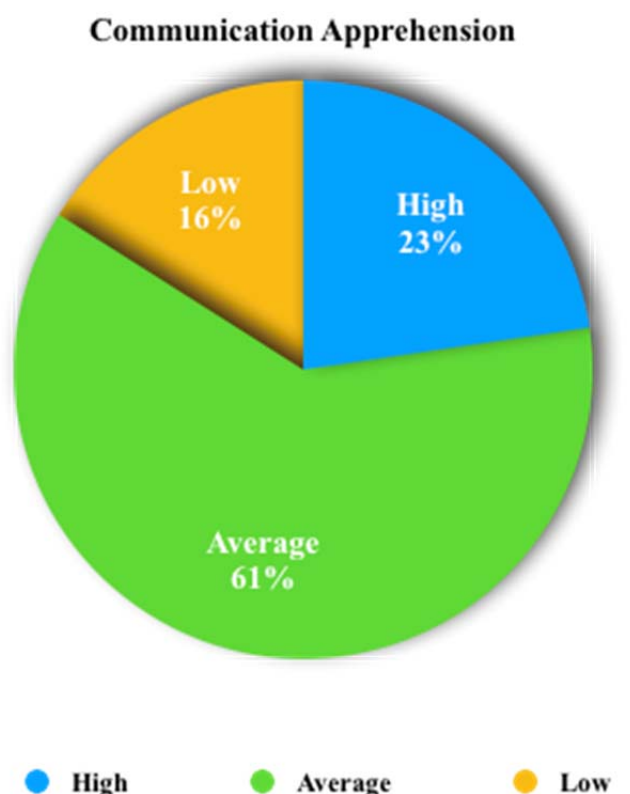


Chart 5.1 Level of students' communication apprehension

To conclude, from the results it can be verified that 84% of the students ended up showing that they suffer from affective factors and this has a negative impact on their communication, which leads to communication apprehension. So, the high level of communication apprehension shows to have a very negative effect on students' performance.

As it can be seen from TABLE 4.1, high-performing students have a lower *mean* ($M=57,4800$) compared to low-performing students' *mean* ($M= 72,9000$), which means that they are less affected by communication apprehension. High-performing students also have a lower *standard deviation* which means that their answers are closer to each other, they don't vary a lot between each student.

TABLE 4.1 Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

Group Statistics					
	Advanced & Intermediate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PRCA	Higher performance scores	25	57,4800	13,49111	2,69822
	Lower performance scores	50	72,9000	20,20532	2,85746

From TABLE 4.2 below, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t=-3,445$ with a Sig., .001 which means that $p<0,05$ which is lower than the tolerated level $p<0,05$. This shows that there is a statistical significance on the level of PRCA between the two groups of students, which proves the hypothesis correct. This means that: "Communication apprehension has a negative impact on students' oral performances".

TABLE 4.2 Measuring the statistical significance between the two variables

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
PRCA	Equal variances assumed	6,563	,012	3,445		,001	15,42000	4,47576	-24,34017	6,49983
	Equal variances not assumed			3,924	66,841	,000	15,42000	3,93008	-23,26481	7,57519

From the results of this study we can suggest that the need for future research related to communication apprehension is fundamental if we want to improve our communication with our students. Future researchers should investigate different treatment methods and ways how to deal with mild, moderate or severe cases of communication apprehension symptoms.

REFERENCES

- [1] Beck, C. S. Communication in the 2020s: viewing our world through the eyes of communication scholars (1st ed.). Routledge, 2022 p. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003220466>. Date accessed: 07.07.2022
- [2] Brian D. Blume; Timothy T. Baldwin; Katherine C. Ryan. Academy of management learning & education, 2013, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 158. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amle.2011.0127>. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258439890_Communication_Apprehension_A_Barrier_to_Students'_Leadership_Adaptability_and_Multicultural_Appreciation. Date accessed: 05.07.2022
- [3] Burgoon, M. (Ed.). (1982). Communication yearbook 6 (1st ed.). Routledge, 1982, p. 136-137. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203856246>. Date accessed: 20.07.2021
- [4] Corbett, C. The Art of Plain Speaking: How to Write and Speak in a Way that Will Impress the People that Matter (1st ed.). Routledge, 2018 p. 4. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351257282>. Date accessed: 05.07.2022
- [5] M. Croucher, S., Kelly, S. Rahmani, D. Jackson, K., Galy-Badenas, F., Lando, A., Chibita, M., Nyiranasbimana, V., Turdubaeva, E., Eskiçorapçı, N., Condon, S. M., Stanaliev, G., & Orunbekov, B. (2019: abstract) A multi-national validity analysis of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), Annals of the International Communication Association, 43:3, 193-209, DOI: 10.1080/23808985.2019.160278. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23808985.2019.1602783>. Date accessed: 05.02.2020
- [6] McCroskey, J. C. "Oral communication apprehension: A reconceptualization, Annals of the International Communication Association, 1982 6:1, 136-170, DOI: 10.1080/23808985.1982.11678497. Date accessed: 17.03.2021
- [7] McCroskey, J. C. Personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA-24). *An introduction to rhetorical communication* (4th Ed). 1982 Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Available at: <http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/prca24.htm>. Date accessed: 12.02.2019
- [8] McCroskey, J.C. An introduction to rhetorical communication (9th ed.). Routledge, 2005 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315663791>. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315663791/introduction-rhetorical-communication-james-mccroskey> Date accessed: 05.07.2022
- [9] Petry, Andrew C., "Communication apprehension affects performance". Masters Essays. 49. 2016 pp. 5-6 <http://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays/49>. Date accessed: 06.07.2022
- [10] Sadasivan, L. Affective variables in the ESL performance of learners in Kerala. 2002. p. 48. Available at: http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/38688/8/08_chapter%202.pdf. Date accessed 13.01.2021
- [11] Stacks, D. & Boozer, R. An experimental study of written communication apprehension and language choice in a business setting. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 5, 1984 p. 115. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20865565>, 12.02.2015. Date accessed 28.06.2022
- [12] Taylor, S. (Ed.). Anxiety sensitivity: theory, research, and treatment of the fear of anxiety (1st ed.). Routledge, 1999 p. 9. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410603326>. Date accessed: 12.06.2022