

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG UUM STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Communication apprehension (CA) has been the subject of several investigations in the last twenty years. For some people, CA is pathological (trait) while for others, it fluctuates from person to person, and from situation to situation (state). CA is a prevalent phenomenon which has been studied among college students in the United States of America. Little, if any, research has focused on CA among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

This study assessed CA among undergraduate students in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The undergraduate students were asked to fill the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) which measures the overall CA in group, meeting, dyadic and public speaking. These students were also required to indicate their: 1) major of study; 2) year in university; 3) gender; 4) race; and 5) state of residence.

The findings indicate that CA exist among the undergraduate students in UUM with the average overall score is slightly below than the studies conducted in the western countries. It was noted that there is no difference and relationship between 1) major of study; 2) year in university; 3) gender; 4) race; and 5) place of residence among UUM undergraduate students. It was also found that the first year and second year students were particularly apprehensive in meeting and public speaking as compared to the third and fourth year students. On the other hand, male undergraduate students had significantly low CA than female undergraduate students in meeting and public speaking. This study provides added information about CA among undergraduate students in Malaysia. Recommendations for further research are suggested.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is a dynamic, ever changing, continuous process by which people transmit information and their feelings to others (Cathcart, 1988). It involves the process of transferring meaning from one individual to another. This process can happen in a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional way in which feelings and ideas are expressed in verbal and nonverbal messages (Berko, et al., 1992).

Communication plays an important role in our lives. We communicate most of the times. During waking hours, we are constantly communicating in a variety of ways like talking, smiling, teaching or socializing and in different settings such as family, school, and society or intercultural. As adults, we spend as much as 42 percent of our total verbal communication time as listeners and 40 percent of our overall communication time as speakers. Only 15 percent of our communication time are spent reading, and 11 percent is spent writing (Rankin, 1930) in (Berko, et al., 1992).

Burgoon and Ruffner (1974), wrote that infants begin to learn the complex process of communication in the first week of life. They try to communicate to adults through crying, laughing, smiling, scratching their heads or waving their hands. This indicates that we learn to communicate and convey messages to others since our childhood, but when we grow up, we find that an individual always has the zeal to achieve greater speech proficiency, but always encounter difficulties to the realization of this goal. Many people have difficulty sharing themselves with others and feel uncomfortable about communicating in selected situations, like talking to the new



friends or voice out their opinions in the meeting. Others have difficulty communicating in public speaking, and they feel incapable and lost when they are asked to deliver a message even though they have messages in mind yet to be delivered. Very few speakers can escape from the "butterflies" phenomenon.

Research has in fact indicated that virtually 100 percent of us experience communication fear from time to time and almost 95 percent of the population reports having fear about communicating with some persons or group in their lives (McCroskey and Richmond, 1980).

Those who have the fear of communication does not only include those who are from the oriental countries like Malaysia, but it includes the American people who are being brought up in a more open and liberal society. Research have shown that this problem is probably the most common handicap that is suffered by people in contemporary American society (McCroskey and Wheelless, 1976). In another study, it was estimated that 80 percent of the people in America confess to being shy and that only about 7 percent of all Americans have never felt shy (Zimbardo, 1977).

An individual's who has fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons is considered as having different levels of communication apprehension (CA) (McCroskey, 1981). It has been found that apprehension exists about both oral and written communication (Daly and Miller, 1973).

People who experience a high level of CA are those whose anxiety about fear of communicating with others outweighs the projection of gains from such an activity (McCroskey, 1970, Philips, 1968), and are thus more likely to avoid it whenever possible.

The most characteristic behaviors of people with high level of CA are avoidance of communication and creation of a life environment that requires as little communication as possible. They prefer to work alone rather than with other people (McCroskey and Leppard, 1975).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Both case studies analyses by Philips & Butt (1966) and Wheelless (1971), discovered that the development of CA began early in the childhood years. McCroskey (1977) found that many children entered kindergarten were with high CA. Therefore, if CA is not a hereditary function and there are a few data pointing in this direction, the causes of CA must lie primarily in a child's experiences during formative years. But the causes of CA are not, and may never be, fully known.

Furthermore, many research on the relationship high CA and high school students' academic achievement, attitudes and behaviors were conducted in the western countries like America. Other scholars had looked at the environmental and inheritance factors related to CA since last twenty years. Nevertheless, there are very few research regarding factors that relate to CA have been conducted in the eastern countries like Malaysia. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate factors affecting CA among undergraduate students in UUM.

This research is carried out to establish a base of information about the level of CA among undergraduates. This study will provide data for parents, educational leaders and teachers to identify the problems of CA among the children and students. The findings will provide an empirical data related to differences and relationship in level of CA with respect to some demographic factors including major of study, the year in university, gender, place of residence, race and level of CA among UUM students.