Research Article

Communication Apprehension and Coping Strategies of the English Language Learners: Basis for Interactive Activities Enrichment

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ABSTRACT

Communication apprehension is an uneasiness experienced by all individuals, especially when speaking. Meanwhile, coping strategies are approaches people use in dealing with anxiety. This study determined the level of communication apprehension and coping strategies of the BSED-English major students of the College of Education (CED), Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Tampilisan Campus. The researchers used the descriptive survey method utilizing the survey-questionnaire checklists. The first instrument was adopted from McCroskey's (1981) cited in Diane (2015) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension 24 (PRCA-24). The other one is the validated researchers-made survey statements comprising 30-item statements categorized as strategies for overcoming communication apprehension in group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversation, and public speaking, with a Cronbach's alpha value of >0.70. The researchers also adopted McCroskey and Richmond's coding and scoring system, weighted mean, and frequency count. Results show that most of the English major students in JRMSU-TC have a moderate level of communication apprehension. Further, there is a difference in the level of communication apprehension when grouped according to group discussion, meetings, interpersonal communication, and public speaking, as well as in the overall weighted mean. Therefore, there is a difference in the level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students when grouped according to year level. In terms of coping strategies, students used the following strategies: accepting cultural differences, paying attention when talking to others and considering their cultural views, thoroughly preparing before the speech, and thinking of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as a reward. In this connection, there are proposed interactive activities that may help overcome the students' communication apprehension.

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1.0 Introduction

Language is a tool for communication. When we communicate, we express our ideas, either spoken or written. Anxiety comes in when we orally communicate since many factors need to be considered – the way we pronounce, our utterance, and articulation of the words, as well as the grammar and fluency in speaking. Communication Apprehension refers to an individual's anxiety associated with either actual or anticipated communication with another person. On the other hand, coping strategies are psychological patterns that individuals use to manage thoughts, feelings, and actions encountered during various stages of anxiety.

According to Bragg (2017), Communication apprehension (CA) is the fear of speaking publicly or interpersonally. It is an experience all individuals encounter to some degree. With this fear comes the accompanying feeling of reluctance and nervousness. The feelings associated with CA may be a trait-like ongoing concern experienced across multiple communicative scenarios or situational anxiety experienced in specific situations such as a public speech or job interview. A person with high communication apprehension may miss opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills of good interpersonal communication through evading interactions.

Furthermore, while all individuals experience CA, there has been much research for years. However, a significant gap in the understanding of CA experience is noticeable. Not much was known about the CA experience from the qualitative presumption and even less about the CA from the student CA perspective. Some studies offered a voice to the CA students by providing a detailed, concrete description of students' experiences with high CA. In today's context, a lack of comfort in communicating with others can be a ruinous inhibitor to success in school and work.

This study is of significant importance as it aims to investigate if the students in JRMSU-TC are also experiencing communication apprehension and the coping strategies to overcome them. It could help students identify and address their oral communication apprehensions, thereby enhancing their communication skills and academic performance.

This study is particularly relevant to BSED-English major students who, despite having sufficient English proficiency and enthusiasm to communicate in English, may have faced communication challenges due to anxiety. It aims to identify their communication apprehension level and coping strategies, providing valuable insights for their academic and personal development.

By assessing the communication apprehension and coping strategies of the JRMSU-TC BSED English major students, this study provides practical insights that can be used to develop effective interventions and support systems for students facing communication challenges.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the level of communication apprehension and coping strategies of the BSED English major students of the College of Education, Jose Rizal Memorial State University - Tampilisan Campus.

Specifically, it determined the following:

1. level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students per year level;

2. difference in the level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students when grouped according to year level;

3. coping strategies of the BSED English major students in overcoming communication apprehension per year level; and

4. possible interactive activities to overcome the BSED English major students' communication apprehension.

3.0 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of James-Lange's Theory of Emotion. According to this theory proposed by psychologist William James and physiologist Carl Lange, emotions occur due to physiological reactions to events. This theory suggests that seeing an external stimulus leads to a physiological reaction (Coleman & Snarey, 2011). For example, suppose your teacher asks you a question about developing the language; you begin to stutter, and your heart begins to race. The James-Lange Theory proposes that you are nervous. According to this theory of emotion, you are not stuttering because you are nervous. Instead, you feel nervous because you are stuttering. Our emotional reaction is dependent upon how we interpret those physical reactions.

Meanwhile, Lazarus and Folkman (1984), one of the pioneers of the coping theory, define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.

Based on their theory, coping involves spending mental energy in a way that can reduce stress. Whether conscious or subconscious, the ultimate goal of all coping mechanisms is to solve a problem. Coping strategies can be positive or negative, depending on whether they increase or reduce mental well-being. Coping is dependent on personality patterns and perceptual experiences. Moreover, the strategies one chooses for adapting to a situation are highly individualized, and coping is never the same for the two people.

As cited by Amiri and Puteh (2022), six themes emerged from strategies to overcome communication apprehension: self-confidence, efficient presentation strategies, passivity, positive cognitive restructuring, visualization techniques, and cultural awareness.

Self-confidence. Confidence is gained from acquiring sufficient knowledge of the subject matter and an ability to anticipate beyond the current research. Confidence in one's research is a great way to control anxiety during academic presentations.

Efficient presentation strategies. Strategies include preparing suitable slides, rehearsing notes, making eye contact with examiners, and memorizing the presentation.

Passivity. Passivity is an effective coping strategy in two situations: first when a student feels he lacks sufficient knowledge to argue with his examiner. Passivity was the basis for the coding category to avoid confrontation. Students may react expressively but non-verbally in response to intense oral communication apprehension. An individual may attempt to mask his true feelings of anxiety by smiling or laughing.

Positive cognitive restructuring. Strategies are used to help people change the way they think. It includes self-reflection on one's abilities and accepting comments from examiners. Some students overcame oral communication apprehension by remaining positive and trusting their work.

Visualization techniques. These techniques include imagining questions that might be asked. Students – especially those experienced in making presentations –need to prepare beyond simply making the presentation slides.

Cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is another way to cope with oral communication apprehension and mitigate communication breakdowns encountered with one's examination panel. For example, international students have become aware that Malaysia is a high power-distance society, and they must accept status differences to avoid misinterpretation of communication. This stress on the adaptability of coping strategies reassures the audience about their effectiveness. These theories are relevant to this study as both tackle the student's reactions when interacting with others using the English language and the coping strategies that they have practiced.

4.0 Methodology

The researchers used the descriptive-survey method in examining the communication apprehension level and coping strategies of BSED English major students in the College of Education. It further determines whether there is a difference in communication apprehension and coping strategies of the BSED English major students of CED, JRMSU-TC when grouped according to year level. The respondents of this study were eighty-six (86) or 78.89% of the one hundred nine (109) total population of BSED English major students of the College of Education enrolled during the school year 2021-2022.

The two different data-gathering instruments were the instrument adopted from McCroskey's (1981) as cited in Diane (2015), the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension 24 (PRCA – 24), and the other researcher-made survey statements, which were submitted to three experts and have undergone pilot testing with 15 students who had not included as subjects of the study. The researchers utilized Google Forms to distribute McCroskey's (1981) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension 24 (PRCA – 24) and the researcher-made questionnaires or survey questions to gather necessary data from the respondents.

McCroskey and Richmond's coding and scoring system was used to identify the level of communication apprehension. Meanwhile, statistical treatment such as weighted mean was used to identify the difference in the level of communication apprehension, and frequency count was used to determine the coping strategies of the BSED English major students of the College of Education.

5.0 Results and Discussion

Level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students per year level

Figure 1 reflects the level of Communication Apprehension of the BSED English major students in terms of communication using the English language. The survey questionnaire contains four sub-scores in communication apprehension: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversation, and public speaking. The results were added to identify each student's communication apprehension level. The overall level was identified through averaging. The table reveals that in the first-year English major students, there were thirty-five students obtained a moderate level, six students got a high level of communication apprehension, and one student obtained a low level of communication apprehension.

Of the second-year English major students, nine students had a moderate level of communication apprehension, seven students had a high level of communication apprehension, and no one had a low level of communication apprehension.

Meanwhile, among the third-year English major students, there were ten with a moderate level, two with a low level of communication apprehension, and one with a high level of communication apprehension.

Lastly, for the fourth-year students, nine students obtained a moderate level, five students obtained a low level of communication apprehension, and one student got a high level of communication apprehension.

Generally, sixty-three students had a moderate level of communication apprehension, fifteen had a high level of communication apprehension, and eight English major students obtained a low level of communication apprehension.

This implies that the majority of the participants, regardless of year level, were experiencing a moderate or normal level of communication apprehension. Few participants were experiencing high CA and only eight among the participants experienced low CA.

The result agrees with the study of McCroskey (2008), who concluded that 20% of students in a required public speaking course experience problems with communication apprehension, and all students experience a little communication apprehension. According to Diane (2015), "It is the way a person feels about communication, not how they communicate." They are then expected to experience nervousness and stuttering while speaking in front due to low self-confidence and unpreparedness.
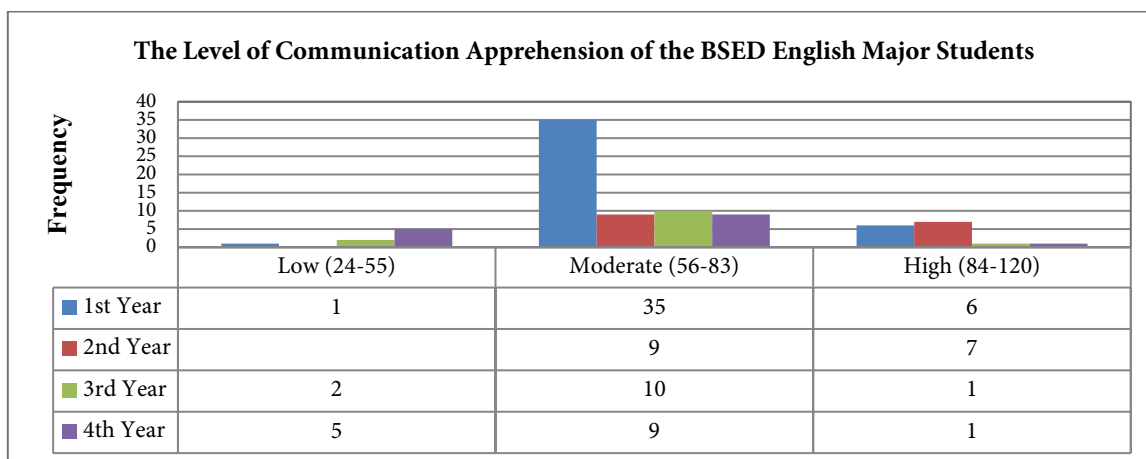

The Level of Communication Apprehension of the BSED English Major Students

	Low (24-55)	Moderate (56-83)	High (84-120)
1st Year	1	35	6
2nd Year		9	7
3rd Year	2	10	1
4th Year	5	9	1

Figure 1. Frequency of Students with Communication Apprehension

Difference in the level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students when grouped according to year level

Table 1 presents the difference in the level of communication apprehension of the respondents. In a group discussion, the first year got a weighted mean of 16. 48, the second year got 16.31, the third year got 15.46, and the fourth year got 13. This implies that first-year English major students have higher communication apprehension in group discussions than other year levels.

For meetings, the second-year students got a weighted mean of 20.5, the first year got 18.76, the third year got 18.54, and the fourth year got a weighted mean of 15.47. This indicates that second-year students have higher communication apprehension in meetings compared to other year levels.

In interpersonal conversations, the second-year students got a weighted mean of 18.14, the first year got 18, the third year got 14.15, and the fourth year got 11.53. This means that

second-year students have higher communication apprehension in interpersonal conversations compared to other year levels.

For public speaking, the second-year students got a weighted mean of 22.56, the first-year got 20.83, the third-year got 20.39, and the fourth-year got 17. This infers that second-year students have higher communication apprehension in public speaking compared to other year levels.

In totality, the second-year English major students got a greater weighted mean of 3.42 than the first-year. While the third year obtained less than 8.97 from the second year, and the fourth year got a lesser weighted mean of 11.54 from the third year. The difference in the level of communication apprehension is observed when grouped according to group discussion, meetings, interpersonal communication, and public speaking and in the overall weighted mean for communication apprehension. Thus, there is a difference in the level of communication apprehension of the BSED English major students according to year level.

According to Richmond and McCroskey (1995), low communication apprehension is classified as abnormally low apprehensive. This may be a reflection of extreme comfort or lower levels of self-monitoring, which means that you may speak out at any time, no matter what the consequences. Moderate apprehension is generally able to communicate in various contexts. It is more influenced by the audience, level of preparation, situation, and type of communication. High apprehension is usually unable to overcome the apprehension on its own. The apprehension often becomes a controlling communication force and can often interfere with personal and professional success.

Table 1

The Difference in the Level of Communication Apprehension of the BSED English Major Students According to Year Level

YEAR LEVEL	$\bar{x}$	DESCRIPTION
First Year	74.09	Moderate
Second Year	77.51	Moderate
Third Year	68.54	Moderate
Fourth Year	57.00	Moderate

Coping strategies of the BSED English major students in overcoming communication apprehension per year level

Meanwhile, in the coping strategies, the first-year students chose the following strategies: "I accept cultural differences to lessen communication interruptions," "I think of it as a casual conversation," and "I choose not to argue; instead, I will accept ethnic inclusiveness" as their most used coping strategies. Students lessen their anxiety by accepting cultural differences when talking to other people. They accept diverse viewpoints from other people's cultural perspectives. The first-year students accept cultural differences and ethnic inclusiveness, which enable them to communicate with people and lessen their uneasiness when talking. When interacting, they feel especially conspicuous, sometimes increasing communication apprehension. So, thinking of it as a casual conversation will dispel or reduce the anxiety speakers tend to feel in front of someone when talking in various contexts.

On the other hand, the second-year students selected strategies such as "I use self-affirmations for motivation," "I nod when I agree with the opinion of others," and "I let go of any tension and continue to breathe normally" as their most preferable coping strategies used whenever they feel communication apprehension. They chose self-affirmations to motivate themselves, as self-affirmation has been shown to have powerful effects on overcoming negative thinking and self-doubts while communicating. Additionally, they chose to nod because they agreed and they do not want to be asked. In this case, the students chose to nod, which indicates how they deal with communication apprehension. Moreover, breathing typically allows students to feel more relaxed and less nervous. It releases nervousness and allows connection with the audience.

Third-year students chose "I accept cultural views to avoid communication misinterpretation," "I pay attention and consider their cultural views," and "I accept cultural views to avoid communication misinterpretation" as their commonly used strategies in overcoming communication apprehension. Third-year students commonly use these strategies, which give positive outcomes once used, for it helps the speakers acknowledge and understand others. They consider accepting cultural differences from other perspectives. This implies that third-year students are open to accepting cultural differences,

enabling them to connect with people excellently by appreciating one's culture.

Consequently, the fourth-year students selected the following strategies: "Make gestures or signals and continue saying what I want to express," "I imagine the possible questions or topics that my group mates might ask," and" I do not think of negative thoughts to gain self-confidence" as their frequently used coping strategies to lessen communication apprehension. The fourth-year students used gestures that allowed them to communicate various feelings and change what they wanted to express. It provides emphasis and meaning to whatever they want to convey. Furthermore, imagining possible questions whenever in a meeting is one way to deal with communication apprehension since if you visualize probable questions, you will have time to think and construct answers in your mind. Then, you will be ready to share some points. This will give them ease and comfort in speaking in front of them without losing focus. They also lessen their communication apprehension by restructuring positive thoughts and not negative thoughts in interacting with someone. This will give them a positive outlook when speaking.

In totality, the strategies classified and mentioned above are the strategies that various students widely use in their respective year levels.

Nurdevi (2018) supported the present finding. He revealed that coping strategies help the students deliver their ideas, thoughts, and opinions in group and individual presentations. This similarly relates to the findings of Raja (2017), whose study revealed that students who feared speaking could perform well if they used particular coping strategies to fight their anxiety.

Possible interactive activities to overcome the BSED English major students' communication apprehension

Table 2 presents the possible interactive activities to overcome the BSED English major students' communication apprehension. The table illustrates the categories, interactive activities, and objectives.

Moreover, the table shows the interactive activities to be initiated to lessen their communication apprehension. The main objectives of the interactive activities and the communication performance are to explore ideas, experiences, and opinions where each participant has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of important issues and to develop intellectual skills, social skills, and personal growth associated with increased self-confidence in meetings. Additionally, guiding them towards having good communication skills in conversing with someone and enhancing the ability to structure and organize thoughts promotes confidence and effective public presentation.

Based on the result of the study, the program to be initiated should have varied strategies to be used for the successful implementation of the interactive activities. Strategies include the student asking a question then one will answer, joining a group of organizations in school to share opinions formally or informally, assigning students to a specific role, and allowing them to think creatively of words to use and how it might feel to be in a situation and have students discuss a point against another within a mediated session.

This claim was made strong by Yusuf (2015) when she claimed that interactive activities could improve one's performance by motivating students through positive interaction between teacher and student and between students and students.

Table 2

Proposed Interactive Activities for the BSED English Major Students of JRMSU-TC CED S.Y. 2022-2023

Categories	Interactive Activities	Objectives
Group Discussion	Conversation around the circle Think and Share Cabbage Relay	To explore ideas, experiences, and opinions where each participant has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of important issues.
Meetings	Joining a group of organizations Joining seminars or symposiums Team Building Meetings	To develop intellectual skills, social skills, and personal growth associated with increased self-confidence in meetings.
Interpersonal Conversations	Role-playing program Dialogue Telephone Conversation	To improve social skills when learners collaborate with others and work as a team. Allows the learners to act out and make sense of real-life situations. Guides them towards having good communication skills in conversing with someone.
Public Speaking	Debate Program Extemporaneous Speaking Impromptu Speaking	To enhance the ability to structure and organize thoughts and promote confidence and effective public presentation.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the majority of the English major students in JRMSU-TC have a moderate level of communication apprehension. These respondents are moderately anxious about communicating using the English language. It revealed that there was a difference in the level of communication apprehension per year level. All year levels used coping strategies to overcome communication apprehension, and they differ in some ways. Students employ coping strategies to lessen the anxiety that they are experiencing in a different context. These could also improve their skills in speaking.

It is therefore recommended that students with high and moderate anxiety levels may be encouraged to participate orally to enhance their speaking skills, and instructors create a friendly environment in the class to minimize their oral communication apprehension level. Students with high and moderate anxiety may refer to and apply the most used strategies in this study to lessen their communication apprehension, as it may also be effective for them. Instructors/professors may impose more exercise speaking activities that can be used in contexts such as group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. The institution may adopt innovative approaches and strategies to be implemented by the instructors to lessen communication apprehension. In addition, educators should provide meaningful content geared toward improving their students' communication skills. Finally, a similar study may be conducted with other participants who are not English majors to see if similar findings will prevail.

Acknowledgment

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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