

Speaking in English: Oral Communication Apprehension and Self-Perceived Communication Competence among Marketing Undergraduates in Malaysia¹

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Abstract

In this study perceptions of final year marketing undergraduates were investigated at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when speaking in English. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to determine (a) the level of oral communication apprehension; (b) the level of self-perceived communication competence; and (c) to identify the relationship between the students' English oral communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence. A quantitative research design was adopted and McCroskey's well-known questionnaire was used to measure communication apprehension levels in four communication contexts (group discussion, meeting, interpersonal and public speaking). The Self-Perceived Communication Competence questionnaire by the McCroskeys' was used to measure communication in various contexts (public, meeting, group, and dyad) and from different receivers (stranger, acquaintance and friend). The results showed that the final year marketing undergraduates had moderate levels of oral communication apprehension. Their level of self-perceived communication competence was also at the moderate level. Results also indicated a significant correlation between communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence among the students.

Keywords: *Oral communication apprehension, self-perceived competence, marketing undergraduates*

Background of the Study

English is the language of international communication and the medium of instruction in most public universities in Malaysia, such as at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)—the context of this study. English communication skills are also considered a pre-requisite for many jobs, thus making it necessary for students to learn and master the language, especially for communication purposes. As the second most important language in Malaysia, English is extensively used in the education system.

Although English is taught from the level of primary school until university, many students at the tertiary level still have difficulty when communicating in English (Mustapha et al., 2010). Many studies have revealed that students fear the thought of speaking in English and seem to display signs of being ill at ease when communicating in the language (Subramaniam & Harun, 2013). These findings are of concern, especially since universities are partially responsible in preparing students be able to deliver information and express thoughts, feelings, and opinions competently. These communication skills are important as it improves students' chances at employment in the future (Abdullah et al., 2010). Given these observations, in this study the aim was to analyse UNIMAS marketing students' oral communication apprehension and their self-perceived communication competence. Findings from this study will add to current knowledge regarding Malaysian students' ability in oral communication, which will be of value for the planning of language curricula at the higher education level.

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