COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES AT A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES AT A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Statement of Originality

The work described in Research Paper, entitled "Communication Apprehension and Academic Performance among Undergraduates at a Malaysian Public University" is to the best of the authors' knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

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ABSTRACT

Communication Apprehension and Academic Performance among Undergraduates at a Malaysian Public University

TAMMY TEO CHING SIN

This research investigated the relationship between Communication Apprehension (CA) and Academic Performance (AP) among undergraduates. The influence of demographic factors such as gender and ethnicity on the relationship between CA and AP was also investigated. Other factors such as Cognitive Style (CS) and Personality Traits (PT) which may impact on the relationship between CA and AP among undergraduates were also investigated. The research design used in the study was a “Cross-Sectional Survey” with correlational and comparative analyses. The sample in this study consisted of 250 undergraduates who were enrolled in the Bachelor of Science (Cognitive Science) program at the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Three instruments were used to collect the data in this research namely Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and Introversion Scales. Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine the relationship between CA and AP. The findings of this study showed that there was no association between CA level and AP among undergraduates. Besides, the Chi-square tests of independence was also used to determine the relationship between CA and gender, CA and ethnicity, CA and AP based on CS, and lastly, CA and AP based on PT. The study found that there was no association between CA level and gender among undergraduates. The results also showed that there was no association between CA level and ethnicity among undergraduates. On the other hand, the results showed that there was an association between CA and AP for field-mixed undergraduates. Lastly, these results showed that there was no association between CA and AP based on PT. The findings of these results will provide

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useful insight to assist educators of learning institutions in helping learners overcome the issue of CA as it might affect the learners' learning process and career development.
ABSTRAK

Kebimbangan Komunikasi dan Prestasi Akademik di kalangan Mahasiswa di Universiti Awam Malaysia

TAMMY TEO CHING SIN

Kajian ini menyelidik hubungan antara kebimbangan komunikasi (CA) dan prestasi akademik (AP) di kalangan mahasiswa. Pengaruh faktor demografik seperti jantina dan etnik terhadap hubungan antara CA dan AP turut dikaji. Selain itu, faktor seperti gaya kognitif (CS) dan ciri personaliti (PT) yang mungkin memberi impak kepada hubungan antara kebimbangan komunikasi (CA) dan prestasi akademik (AP) di kalangan mahasiswa turut dikaji. Reka bentuk kajian ini adalah "Survei Keratan Rentas" dengan analisis hubungan dan komparatif. Sampel kajian merangkumi 250 mahasiswa daripada program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Sains (Sains Kognitif) di Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Tiga intrumen kajian telah diguna untuk mengumpul data dalam kajian ini iaitu Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) dan Introversion Scale. Ujian Khi-Kuasa Dua tidak bersandar digunakan untuk menentukan hubungan antara CA dan A. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tiada hubungan antara CA dan AP di kalangan mahasiswa. Selain itu, Ujian Khi Kuasa Dua tidak bersandar juga digunakan untuk menentukan hubungan antara CA dan jantina, CA dan etnik, CA dan AP berdasarkan CS dan CA dan AP berdasarkan PT. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tiada hubungan antara CA dan jantina dalam kalangan mahasiswa. Selain itu, dapatan kajian turut menunjukkan bahawa tiada hubungan antara CA komunikasi dan etnik di kalangan mahasiswa. Namun, terdapat hubungan antara CA dan AP bagi kumpulan mahasiswa yang memiliki gaya kognitif bidang bercampur dalam kajian ini. Akhirnya, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tiada hubungan antara CA dan AP berdasarkan PT. Dapatan kajian ini dapat menyumbangkan maklumat untuk membantu para
pendidik dari institusi pendidikan dalam membantu pelajar mengatasi isu CA kerana CA mungkin mempengaruhi proses pembelajaran dan perkembangan kerjaya pelajar.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between communication apprehension (CA), cognitive style (CS), personality traits (PT) and academic performance (AP) among undergraduates at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The respondents were undergraduates in the program of Cognitive Science.

There are nine sections in this chapter. Section 1.1 provides the background of the study while Section 1.2 states the problem statement of this study. Section 1.3 states the objectives of the study while Section 1.4 states the research questions of the study. In the subsequent sections, Section 1.5 provides the research hypotheses of the study, Section 1.6 gives an insight of the research by providing the research framework of the study and Section 1.7 provides the meanings and definitions of various terms used in this study. Section 1.8 discusses the importance and significance of the study, while Section 1.9 which lists the limitations of this study, and, lastly, Section 1.10 provides a summary of chapter 1.

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication is an essential skill needed in our daily life so that we are able to share our opinion, knowledge and information with others. Scherba de Valenzuela (1992, p. 2) defines communication as “any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states.”

On the other hand, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington [OSPI],

“Communication is defined as a process whereby we give and deliver information to create a common understanding among sender and receivers. This process needs great skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking,
questioning, analysing, and evaluating. Use of these processes is developmental and transfers to all areas of life: home, school, community, work, and beyond."

(2010, p.1)

In the teaching and learning process, learners have to equip themselves with good communication skills so that they can learn effectively. If the learners do not have good communication skill, they will face problems or barriers when they have doubts in the learning journey. They might be reluctant to express themselves to their teachers or peers when they do not understand the lesson. Thus, this will affect their learning and indirectly affect their academic performance.

Besides, communication skill is one of the most crucial skills needed by undergraduates. This is because the undergraduates will have to go through job interviews and to be successful in the interviews to secure jobs. Therefore, undergraduates have to acquire good communication skill to be able to express themselves and to share their opinions and constructive ideas, during the interview sessions with potential employers. If the undergraduates experience CA, that will be a very big challenge they have to overcome in their first step in their search for a career.

Communication apprehension (CA) is perceived as “stage fright” in 1940’s, but now the most widely accepted definition of CA is “an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977, p.78). A person who suffers from CA faces difficulties in communication activities. Such feeling of fear or anxiety usually appears in different situations such as a meeting, public speaking or during a conversation. CA is a normal phenomenon and experienced by most people around. Everyone might have experienced CA, but different individuals will have different levels of CA. In addition, if the level of CA is high, it might become an obstacle in the communication activities with other people.
According to Shukri Zain (1997), communication is important in the classroom because exchange of knowledge occurs between individuals or groups. Besides, according to Kenneth (2007), teaching and learning hardly occur if there is no communication between students and teachers. Hence, learners need good communication skills so that they are able to communicate effectively with their teachers or instructors in order to understand the lesson and acquire knowledge effectively. Besides, they need to have excellent communication skills so that they are able to share opinions and ideas with peers and teachers, and to solve problems faced in their learning.

Thus, learners suffering from CA will experience negative impact on their learning and academic performance. According to Martha C. White (2013), undergraduates nowadays lack access to communication skill training courses during their study in the universities. They hardly have a chance to attend or be exposed to communication related courses. Thus, they may lack good communication skills upon graduating and this would definitely have a negative impact on their career development. They would need excellent communication skills to perform well during job interviews.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study looks at the relationship between CA and AP among undergraduates. CA could be a major cause to undergraduates experiencing uneasy situations when they communicate with their peers or instructors. CA might affect the undergraduates’ ability to express themselves during meeting, public speaking, group discussion and even interpersonal communication during teaching and learning activities.

Due to the impact of CA in undergraduates’ learning, there is a need to further investigate the relationship between CA and AP among undergraduates. Besides, the other contributing factors such as demographic variable, Cognitive Style (CS) and Personality Traits (PT) might
also influence the level of CA and AP. Furthermore, it is crucial to study the impact of CA on undergraduates because the past findings have been inconclusive.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between CA and AP among undergraduates.

Specifically, this study looked at the following research objectives:

Research Objective 1:

To determine if CA level is associated with

i. gender among the undergraduates.

ii. ethnicity among the undergraduates.

Research Objective 2:

To determine the relationship between CA and AP among the undergraduates.

Research Objective 3:

To determine relationship between CA and AP based on CS among the undergraduates.

Research Objective 4:

To determine the relationship between CA and AP based on PT among the undergraduates.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated in this study based on the research objectives stated previously:

Research Question 1:

i. Was there an association between CA level and gender among the undergraduates?

ii. Was there an association between CA level and ethnicity among the undergraduates?

Research Question 2:

Was there an association between CA and AP among the undergraduates?
Research Question 3:
Was there an association between CA and AP based on CS among the undergraduates?

Research Question 4:
Was there an association between CA and AP based on PT among the undergraduates?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This research has four research hypotheses based on the research questions stated:

H₀₁(i) : There was no association between CA level and gender among the undergraduates.

H₀₁(ii) : There was no association between CA level and ethnicity among the undergraduates.

H₀₂: There was no association between CA and AP among the undergraduates.

H₀₃: There was no association between CA and AP based on cognitive style (CS) among the undergraduates.

H₀₄: There was no association between CA and AP based on PT among the undergraduates.
1.6 Research Framework

The diagram below shows the research framework of this study outlining the main independent and dependent variables.

**Independent Variables**

Demographic Variables
- Gender
- Ethnic Group

Non Demographic variables
- Cognitive style (CS)
- Personality traits (PT)

**Dependent Variables**

- The level of Communication Apprehension (CA)
- Academic performance (AP) of undergraduates

*Figure 1.1. Research Framework*

1.7 Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, some of the specific terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1.7.1 Communication Apprehension (CA)

**Conceptual Definition**

CA has been defined as an "individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p.78).

**Operational definition**

In this study, CA is referred to as communication anxiety experienced by the undergraduates taking Bachelor of Cognitive Science at UNIMAS.
1.7.2 Academic performance (AP)

Conceptual Definition

AP is the educational goal achieved by a student, teacher or institution over a certain period. This is measured either by examinations or continuous assessments and the goal may differ from individual to individual or institution to institution. (Cambridge Advanced Learner Dictionary Third Edition)

Operational definition

In this study, the AP refers to the grade (CGPA) obtained by the undergraduates taking Bachelor in Cognitive Science at UNIMAS.

1.7.3 Cognitive style (CS)

Conceptual Definition

According to Rayner and Riding (1997), CS is a constant form of functioning which exists in the perceptual and intellectual activity. According to Habieb-Mammar, Tarpin-Bernard, Croisile and Noir (2001 as cited in Khatib & Hosseinpur, 2011), CS plays an important role in education. It is one of the factors which affects the students’ learning style preference, students’ academic achievement, instructional plan carried by the teachers and also the way teachers and students communicate in the classroom.

Operational definition

According to Witkin and Goodenough (1977), CS can be divided into two types, Field-Independent (FI) and Field-Dependent (FD). Thus, this study used the definition of CS by Witkin and Goodenough (1977) as CA can be divided into field-independence (FI) and field-dependence (FD) and measured using Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT).
1.7.4 Personality Traits (PT)

Conceptual Definition

The word Extraversion-Introversion was introduced by Carl Jung, a well-known German psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Basically, there are two types of behaviors and attitudes displayed by an individual when he or she interacts with the persons around in a social setting. Myers (1993, cited in Opt & Loffredo, 2000) argued that introverts are more interested in the inner world of concepts and ideas, while extravert is more interestedly involved with the outer world of people and things.

Operational definition

In this study, the definition of introvert and extravert by McCroskey (1998) was used and measurement of introvert and extravert was determined using Introversion Scale (McCroskey, 1998).

1.7.5 Undergraduates

Conceptual Definition

According to Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary 3rd edition (2008), undergraduates is defined as students studying for their first degree at a college or university.

Operational Definition

In this study, the definition of undergraduates refers to the students enrolled for the Bachelor of Science (Cognitive Science) in the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study investigated the relationship between the level of CA and AP among undergraduates and studies of this nature is still lacking in our country, Malaysia. This study will contribute to existing literature on the relationship between CA and AP among undergraduates. Therefore, this study could provide an insight on the relationship between the
level of CA and AP among undergraduates. This study will determine whether gender, ethnic
group, CS, PT and the level of CA influenced AP among undergraduates.

The findings of the study could also be useful references for future and further investigations
on relationship between the level of CA and AP among undergraduates. Furthermore, the
data collected by the researcher could be used by the universities and instructors to be alert
with the CA problem among the undergraduates and may come out with more
communication related course or activities to overcome CA among the undergraduates. It
would provide a basis for understanding how CA level is related to AP.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

This study was carried out in only one local university, University Malaysia Sarawak
(UNIMAS). Moreover, this study only involved the undergraduates from the Faculty of
Cognitive Sciences and Human Development and limited to undergraduates from Bachelor of
Science (Cognitive Science) of the faculty. This sample is not representative of the entire
population of undergraduates from other faculties and universities in Malaysia. Hence, this
study is limited in its generalizability of findings.

In addition, there are limitations in the ratio of male respondents to female respondents in this
study. There were more female respondents compared to male respondents and this is due to
the number of female students enrolled in this program. The differences in gender size might
influence the findings in this study. The demographic variables of this study are also limited
to gender and ethnic group. Other factors such as past learning experiences and age which
might impact on learning performance of the undergraduates were not considered in this
study.

Furthermore, the method in collecting data from the respective respondents is limited to the
use of questionnaires. The use of other data collection methods such as interview or
observation, which might provide additional information, are not included in this study.
1.10 Summary

This chapter has provided the introduction of the study which discussed the rationale for the study leading to the research objectives and hypothesis, and defined the relevant terms used in the study. It concluded with the significance and limitations of the study. The next chapter presents a review of literature relevant to the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into ten main sections. It begins with Section 2.1, providing a definition and concept related to communication apprehension (CA). This is followed by Section 2.2 explaining the concepts of academic performance (AP) and Section 2.3 discussing the relationship between CA and AP, Section 2.4 discussing differences in CA based on demographic, and Section 2.5 describing differences in AP based on demographic. Following are Section 2.6 discussing differences in CA based on Cognitive Style (CS), Section 2.7 discussing the differences in AP based on CS, Section 2.8 describing differences in CA based on Personality Traits (PT), Section 2.10 discussing differences in AP based on PT and finally Section 3.0 summarising the literature reviewed and how that contributed to the study.

2.1 Communication Apprehension (CA)

CA is defined as “an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977, p.78). According to Holbrook (1987), CA can also be defined as anxiety suffered by a person in an actual or anticipated communication with an individual or groups of individuals, which can affect their oral communication, social skills and self-esteem. A person suffering from CA faces difficulties and obstacles to communicate with others. As a result, this will influence one’s career, study and daily life which involve speech and written activities.

High level of CA means the person is having greater fear for taking part in activities involving communication. This fear will have negative implications on one’s study and career because of the need of communication skills to excel in study and career. For instance, an instructor would expect students to take part in class discussion for idea sharing during