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## COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND INTERCULTURAL WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Pragash. M<sup>1</sup>, Sultana. A<sup>2</sup>, Khor. K. K<sup>3</sup>, Charles Ramendran<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Malaysia  
Email: pragashm@utar.edu.my

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Malaysia  
Email: sultana@utar.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Malaysia  
Email: khor@utar.edu.my

<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Malaysia  
Email: charlesr@utar.edu.my

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### Abstract:

Willingness to interact with people from different cultures is the most fundamental factor for successful and effective intercultural communication, and also crucial in the simulation of desire for interaction in such context. However, high-level communication apprehension reduces the level of intercultural willingness to communicate, which eventually affects intercultural communication and vice versa. Meanwhile, some scholars argued that a moderate level of communication apprehension will increase intercultural willingness to communicate. Hence, this study started with the investigation of the level of both communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate and ended with the investigation on the relationship between communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate among multicultural undergraduates from five public universities in Malaysia. A total of 450 respondents were recruited to participate in this study. Neuliep and McCroskey's Intercultural Communication Apprehension scale and Kassing's Intercultural Willingness to Communicate scale were adopted and modified to assess respondents' communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate, respectively. Data were coded, entered, and analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Our findings show that all respondents were having a moderate level of communication apprehension which eventually triggered a high level of intercultural willingness to communicate among these respondents. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the moderate level of communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate, just like the results documented in the review of the literature. The implications of the findings are discussed at the end of this paper.

**Keywords:**

Communication Apprehension, Intercultural Willingness To Communicate, Intercultural Communication, Undergraduates, Public University

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**Introduction**

Most people in the world are now connected with each other through different means of communication which has not only crossed borders but cultures in a more expanded level (Behbahani, 2013). Arnett (1986) professed that intercultural communication is not something modern; as long as individuals from distinctive societies have been experiencing one another, intercultural communication happens. Hence, the ability to communicate effectively in the global marketplace or even workplace is an increasingly essential competency, as well as an important area of exploration in academic research (Croucher, 2017).

Intercultural communication is important in establishing integration in a nation whereby the local and neighbourhood setting being the starting point of the integration processes (Behbahani, 2013). Past studies argued that the willingness to communicate intercultural often influenced by individual's communication apprehension (Seyitoglu, Guven, & Kocabulut, 2015). However, there is no study ever investigated if multicultural Malaysian experience such communication apprehension towards intercultural communicate and its impact on intercultural willingness to communicate (IWTC).

Looking at the gap in the literature outlined above, the present study, therefore, is to examine the relationship between communication apprehension and IWTC among undergraduates in top five public universities in Malaysia.

As such, the research poses the following questions:

- RQ1: What is the level of communication apprehension among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?
- RQ2: What is the level of intercultural willingness to communicate among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?
- RQ3: What is the relationship between communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?

**Theoretical Framework**

The framework consists of one independent variables (communication apprehension) and one dependent variable (IWTC). In this study, communication apprehension was derived mainly from the Anxiety-Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory of Gudykunst (2003). The main objective of AUM theory is to explain the relationship between anxiety, uncertainty, and mindfulness in intercultural settings in order to increase intercultural communication effectiveness. However, the present study focused only on anxiety, whereby in this study it is referred as communication apprehension. Meanwhile, as the willingness to communicate is considered as predisposition to initiate intercultural communication, IWTC is employed as the dependent variable instead of the actual intercultural communication.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

## **Literature Review**

### ***Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWTC)***

Kassing (1997) defined IWTC as “one’s predisposition to initiate intercultural communication encounters”. Turner (1988) argued that one of the major reasons that people are not motivated to communicate with strangers is that they often do not see strangers’ behaviour as predictable. Consistently, Launay and Dunbar (2015) believe that people express a greater desire to engage with strangers that they think is more similar to them, thus get attracted to maintain relationships with such strangers. Neuliep (2016) further explained that the affective component of intercultural communication is the degree to which one approaches or avoids intercultural communication, which known as one’s level of motivation to interact with others from different cultures.

### ***Communication Apprehension***

Good communication is a basis of fruitful interactions, and anxiety about communicating beyond one’s cultural group can affect such interactions (Cavanaugh, 2015). Communication apprehension is defined as “the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others” (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). Hence, it has become an important factor that influences intercultural communication (Wang, Sun, & Liu, 2010), especially among students which different levels of communication apprehension occurs naturally (Whitaker, 2013).

In Malaysia, most studies were focused on communication apprehension between local and international university student (Ahmad, Azimi, Salleh, Mohamad, & Sannusi, 2017), general communication apprehension (Azrizal, 2014), and communication apprehension in second language (Lian & Budin, 2014). Only one study by Jaganathan and Kaur (2003) which investigated the impact of communication apprehension on intercultural communication among high school Chinese and Indian students. The study revealed that 40% of Chinese students and 30% of the Indian students reported high level of anxiety. However, the sample of the study were Chinese and Indian respondents only, and the samples are not the university students. Therefore, it gives privilege to the present study to further investigate the intercultural communication apprehension among multicultural undergraduates of Malaysian public universities.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample Size and Procedures***

The study was carried out in five top public universities of Malaysia based on the proportionate stratified sampling. Malay, Chinese, and Indian undergraduates who are studying in these five universities are selected as the population of this study. Since the total population of these five universities is approximately 89,310, the minimum sample size of 382 is required as suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2016). Therefore, by expecting 80% response rate, a total of 477

questionnaires were actually distributed to the multicultural undergraduates in these five universities, based on ethnic ratio of Malay: Chinese: Indian to 6:3:1.

The respondents were selected by using probability sampling which is systematic sampling whereby every third student who leaving the library was approached to answer the questionnaire. The process of data collection took approximately two months to complete. The researcher obtained 450 of usable responses in return, which yielded 94.33% of success rate. The number of usable responses was almost close the expected ethnic ratio of 6:3:1, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographics Profiles (N=450)**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Malay	272	60.4
Chinese	134	29.8
Indian	44	9.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### ***The Instrument***

The questionnaire consisted a total of 23 questions in three sections. Section A consisted of four questions on the respondents' demographic information. Section B consisted of 14 questions on the communication apprehension. Section C consisted of five questions on the intercultural willingness to communicate. Demographic questions in section A were designed to obtain respondents' information such as gender, ethnic, education level, and frequency of having intercultural communication in a week. The items of Section B have been adopted from Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) scale, developed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997). Meanwhile, items in Section C were adapted and adopted from Kassing's (1997) IWTC scale. Items in both Section B and C were measured with a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree", and 5 indicates "Strongly agree". Both the scales reported Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70.

### **Results and Analysis**

Data of PRICA and IWTC scale were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 22.

*RQ1: What is the level of communication apprehension among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?*

The level of communication apprehension was calculated based the formulae provided by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997). There are three steps involve in the calculation. The first step is to sum up the scores of items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 12. The second step is sum up the scores from items 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 14. And the last step is as shown below.

$\text{PRICA score} = (42 - \text{the result from step 1}) + \text{the result from step 2}$
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The total score can range from 14 to 70 and can be categorized into three groups as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Level of Communication Apprehension**

PRICA scores range	Communication apprehension degree
between 14 and 32	Low level
between 33 and 52	Loderate level
between 53 and 70	High level

All the three steps of calculations of PRICA score were performed via *Transform>Compute variable* analysis in SPSS. The mean score of PRICA is 43.55 (SD=2.43) as shown in Table 3, and the score recorded by the greatest number of respondents is 42, which been scored by 84 (18.7%) respondents.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of PRICA Score**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRICA Score	450	33.00	52.00	43.5543	2.43233
Valid N (listwise)	450				

**Table 4: Frequency Analysis of PRICA Score**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 33.00	1	.2	.2	.2
34.00	1	.2	.2	.4
35.00	1	.2	.2	.7
36.00	1	.2	.2	.9
37.00	1	.2	.2	1.1
38.00	4	.9	.9	2.0
39.00	10	2.2	2.2	4.2
40.00	1	.2	.2	4.4
40.00	16	3.6	3.6	8.0
41.00	33	7.3	7.3	15.3
42.00	84	18.7	18.7	34.0
43.00	72	16.0	16.0	50.0
44.00	74	16.4	16.4	66.4
45.00	54	12.0	12.0	78.4
46.00	55	12.2	12.2	90.7
47.00	23	5.1	5.1	95.8
47.43	1	.2	.2	96.0
48.00	9	2.0	2.0	98.0
49.00	5	1.1	1.1	99.1
50.00	1	.2	.2	99.3
51.00	2	.4	.4	99.8
52.00	1	.2	.2	100.0
Total	450	100.0	100.0	

Meanwhile, the score range is between 33 and 52 as shown in Table 4. This shows that all the respondents (100%) of this study are having a moderate level of communication apprehension. According to Logan, Steel, and Hunt (2015), a moderate level of communication apprehension is good, as it will encourage individuals to participate in intercultural communication.

*RQ2: What is the level of intercultural willingness to communicate among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?*

In the present study, the IWTC score can range from 5 to 25. Score of 12.6 and above is considered as high level of intercultural willingness to communicate, and vice-versa for IWTC score of 12.5 and below. The mean score of IWTC scale is recorded at 19.82 (SD=2.89) as shown in Table 5, and the score obtained by most number of respondents is 20, which been scored by 120 (26.7%) respondents.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of IWTC Score**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IWTC Score	450	13.00	25.00	19.8224	2.88757
Valid N (listwise)	450				

**Table 6: Frequency Analysis of IWTC Score**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 13.00	7	1.6	1.6	1.6
14.00	6	1.3	1.3	2.9
15.00	34	7.6	7.6	10.4
16.00	16	3.6	3.6	14.0
17.00	26	5.8	5.8	19.8
18.00	31	6.9	6.9	26.7
19.00	62	13.8	13.8	40.4
20.00	120	26.7	26.7	67.1
20.06	1	.2	.2	67.3
21.00	34	7.6	7.6	74.9
22.00	34	7.6	7.6	82.4
23.00	16	3.6	3.6	86.0
24.00	24	5.3	5.3	91.3
25.00	39	8.7	8.7	100.0
Total	450	100.0	100.0	

Meanwhile, the score range is recorded between 13 and 25 as shown in Table 6. This indicates that all the respondents (100%) are highly willing to participate in intercultural communication. This finding has proved that a moderate level of communication apprehension will motivate individuals to engage in intercultural communication, as opined by Logan et al. (2015).

*RQ3: What is the relationship between communication apprehension and intercultural willingness to communicate among undergraduates in Malaysian public universities?*

In order to answer the third research question, Pearson correlation analysis was performed. The result in Table 7 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between the PRICA and IWTC score ( $r = 0.259$ ,  $p = .000$ ), which means higher the level of communication

apprehension, it will increase the level of IWTC, and vice versa, subject to moderate level of communication apprehension.

**Table 7: Pearson Correlation Result**

		PRICA Score	IWTC Score
PRICA Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.259**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	450	450
IWTC Score	Pearson Correlation	.259**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	450	450

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The present study further investigated the statistically significant difference between genders, ethnic, frequency of intercultural communication, and year of study towards communication apprehension and IWTC.

Although there is no statistically significant difference found in communication apprehension between genders (Table 8), ethnics, and frequency of having intercultural communication in a week, however, statistically significant difference was evident in respondents' current year of study ( $F = 1.948$ ,  $df = 21$ ,  $p = .008$ ), as shown in Table 9. This shows that students' duration of being in university influences their level of communication apprehension.

**Table 8: Independent Samples Test of PRICA Score (Gender)**

		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
PRICA _Score	Equal variances assumed	3.420	.065	-.009	448	.993	-.00249	.27140	-.53587	.53088
	Equal variances not assumed			-.008	147.578	.993	-.00249	.30396	-.60317	.59818

**Table 9: ANOVA Result of PRICA Score**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ethnic	Between Groups	11.634	21	.554	1.256	.201
	Within Groups	188.846	428	.441		
	Total	200.480	449			
Current year of study	Between Groups	18.767	21	.890	1.948	.008
	Within Groups	196.353	428	.459		
	Total	215.120	449			
Frequency of having intercultural communication	Between Groups	17.285	21	.823	.959	.514
	Within Groups	367.435	428	.858		
	Total	384.720	449			

Meanwhile for IWTC, although there is no statistically significant difference was found between genders (Table 10), ethnics, and current year of study, however, statistically significant difference was found in frequency of having intercultural communication in a week ( $F = 1.884$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p = .030$ ), as shown in Table 11. This shows that students' frequency of having intercultural communication in a week did influence their IWTC.

**Table 10: Independent Samples Test of IWTC Score (Gender)**

		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
IWTC Score	Equal variances assumed	3.409	.065	-1.133	448	.258	-.36456	.32173	-.99685	.26774
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.076	159.666	.284	-.36456	.33879	-1.03364	.30452



**Table 11: ANOVA Result of IWTC Score**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ethnic	Between Groups	7.299	13	.561	1.267	.230
	Within Groups	193.181	436	.443		
	Total	200.480	449			
Current year of study	Between Groups	9.971	13	.767	1.630	.074
	Within Groups	205.149	436	.471		
	Total	215.120	449			
Frequency of having intercultural communication	Between Groups	20.457	13	1.574	1.884	.030
	Within Groups	364.263	436	.835		
	Total	384.720	449			

### Discussion

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between communication apprehension and IWTC. The results of this research had yielded some significant insights. In regard to communication apprehension, this present study revealed that all 450 respondents (100%) are having moderate level of communication apprehension and were found having high willingness to communicate in intercultural settings. Although no past studies have reported similar result, but some past studies had observed that when communication apprehension is at moderate level, one will be more willing to participate in intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 2003; Neuliep, 2016). This has been proved in this study whereby all the respondents who had reported moderate level of communication apprehension are correlated with their high IWTC.

The findings indicate that the undergraduates in Malaysian public universities are able to maintain their communication apprehension at the minimum and maximum threshold level, which contradict the findings of Pragash et al. (2018). This is due to the different environments between private and public universities in Malaysia, whereby the ethnic composition in public universities are more diverse than the private universities. Therefore, as professed by Allport's (1954) Contact Theory, such diverse cultural environment provides a comprehensive and favourable platform to the multicultural undergraduates to mingle around and further strengthen their intercultural bonding. Hence, Malaysian public universities should continue with the existing university practices to uphold the harmonies intercultural relationship among multicultural undergraduates.

### Recommendation

The present study found that undergraduates in Malaysian public universities are highly willing to communicate intercultural. However, we cannot assume that this high level of willingness reflects the actions taken by them in the actual intercultural communication or interaction. Hence, it is important to further investigate the impact of IWTC on the actual intercultural interaction among multicultural undergraduates in Malaysian public universities. Furthermore, significant difference was found between students' current year of study and communication apprehension, and also between students' frequency of intercultural communication and IWTC. Therefore, future studies should consider employing qualitative approaches to further investigate the impact of year of study and frequency of intercultural communication on both communication apprehension and IWTC.

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