

(i-COME'20)  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA 2020

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO  
COMMUNICATE AND COMMUNICATION CONFIDENCE**



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### Abstract

Willingness to communicate (WTC) plays a crucial role in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach at higher education institutions. However, the willingness to communicate (WTC) among undergraduates in Malaysia is low. This paper aims to identify the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication confidence. This study employed a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire from MacIntyre's and Weavers's to collect data from 187 undergraduates. This study employed stratified sampling and systemic random sampling technique. This study used Pearson bivariate correlation to measure correlation analysis. The findings showed that willingness to communicate is positively correlated with communication confidence and self-perceived communication competence. The findings also revealed willingness to communicate is negatively correlated with communication apprehension. This study contributes towards enhancing understanding about willingness to communicate (WTC) and its connections, self-perceived communicative competence and communication apprehension specifically in the field of English Language Teaching in tertiary education in a Malaysian context. This study also suggests that if the effectiveness of English language learning is to be improved, aspects of willingness to communicate and communication confidence should be given special attention.

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*Keywords:* Communicative language teaching, communication confidence, communication apprehension, self-perceived communicative competence, willingness to communicate



## 1. Introduction

English in Malaysia is a key contributor in developing the country to achieve its goal of becoming a high-income nation by 2020 (Darmi et al., 2017). According to the National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), English is also a compulsory condition for employees in most private sectors and government departments in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). The latest education transformation were outlined in the Education Development Plan 2013-2025 (Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013-2025, 2012) and it indicates English policy has been changed over for past few years to meet the demand of the globalization. English for communication purpose is seriously focused to develop a balanced graduate who is work-ready, competent and able to communicate well (Higher Education, 2012; The Executive Summary of Blueprint of Education Development Plan 2013-2025, 2012). The Malaysian Education system enforced phasing out of the English language as the medium of instruction and mode of lecturing in tertiary classroom.

However, the literacy achievement among the tertiary education students are still below the expectation. Evidently, the President of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), Aminuddin Awang has suggested “a study on students’ poor English proficiency” should be carried out in English language Seminar held on May 2019 (Mohamed R. (2019). In relation, the English Proficiency Index (2018) reported Malaysia ranked at 22nd out of 88 countries on a global scale. These showed English competency among students in Malaysia are poor compared in 2013 which was initially ranked at 11th position. Poor communication language skill is predicted as one of the reason for low ranking in English Proficiency Index 2018. It has been acknowledged that communication processes are active if the students are willing to communicate in the classroom (Dornyei, 2005). Therefore, willingness to communicate should be taken into a serious consideration because it initiates the communication process in L2 language (Crystal, 2003).

## 2. Problem Statement

English is taught as a second language in educational institutions in Malaysia. Despite 13 years of learning English, students still cannot master English at a targeted level and the literacy achievement among Malaysian students are still low (Ismail & Rosemala, 2008; Naginder, 2006). The local universities do not merely need to develop competent employees but also employees with high professional communication skills. Poor command of English and oral communication skills are two primary reasons that contribute to the high unemployment rate among Malaysian graduates (Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015). According to The Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 (2012) statistics, it shows that 54% of the undergraduate from six universities had a limited command of English. At the tertiary level, the issue of low English language proficiency among the local graduates still remains unsolved (Rusli et al., 2018). In relation, many local graduates failed to secure jobs due to lack of competence in the English language, evident particularly during interviews (Chan & Tan, 2006). Therefore, inadequate speaking skills impede local graduates from expressing their thoughts and ideas fluently during the interviews.

Acknowledging the importance of oral communication among Malaysian students, the Ministry of Education adopts the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) in terms to develop an effective communication skill for employability and career development in 2015. The CEFR is adopted to benchmark Malaysian students against international standards and to ensure the tertiary students are capable of using English not only for a local propose but variety purposes at international level. CEFR ensures the proficiency level attained by local Malaysia graduates are consistent and aligned with international standards. The Malaysia Education Plan 2013-2025 (2013) and Sankaran (2020) have reported that CEFR is based on the notion of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), so when the CEFR aligned curriculum is implemented, it is known as CLT. CLT helps to improve the students' communication skills in the L2 language. According to Savignon (2006), the CLT approach is applied to improve the learners' communication competence. However, Dornyei (2005) argued CLT might not be successful in achieving students' communication skills because a predicted factor plays a role between communication competences and practicing communication competence, underpin the importance of willingness to communicate. Therefore, willingness to communicate plays an important role in CLT classes.

In Malaysian tertiary classrooms, the students are moderately willing to communicate, as evident in Yousef et al. (2013) study in Malaysia. According to Siok et al., (2018), willingness to communicate among tertiary students in the English language classroom is low in Malaysia. Thus, Asmali (2016) predicted communication confidence (Ghonsooly et al 2012; Peng, 2009; Pattapong, 2010; Peng & Woodrow, 2010) causes low willingness to communicate. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the relationship between communication confidence and willingness to communicate. It is important to examine the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication confidence as this scope is related to CLT approach.

### **3. Research Questions**

- What is the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication confidence among Malaysian undergraduates?
- What is the relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence among Malaysian undergraduates?
- What is the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension among Malaysian undergraduates?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

- To examine the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication confidence among Malaysian undergraduates.
- To examine the relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence among Malaysian undergraduates.
- To examine the relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension among Malaysian undergraduates.

## 5. Research Methods

In the context of study, the study focuses on Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz School of Accountancy (TISSA) in Universiti Utara Malaysia. The respondents for this study focus on Year 2 (Semester 3 and Semester 4) which total 332 students. The purpose of selecting sample from Year 2, accounting students is those respective students have enrolled with “English for Professional Communication”. The sampling technique in this study is stratified sampling which involves dividing Year two, Bachelor of Accountancy into homogeneous groups (males and females).

### 5.1. Instrumentation

A questionnaire is used for the survey. The questionnaire consists of four sections which are section A (demographic profile), section B (willingness to communicate in the classroom) and section C (communication confidence). The Likert-scale for eight items for this study is ranged from 1-5.

#### 5.1.1. Willingness to communicate

There are eight items adopted from MacIntyre et al. (2001) in this questionnaire to measure the willingness to communicate. This study adopts McIntyre constructs’ because McIntyre held a believe that “an individual will communicate with other specific around them for specific purpose or to get an attention with each other” cited in Mohseni and Niknejad (2013, p. 127). The reliability of the items for willingness to communicate in this study shows Cronbach’s Alpha .80.

#### 5.1.2. Communication confidence

Communication confidence is measured through self-perceived communicative competence and communication apprehension. The items are adapted from Weaver’s (2010). There are 12 items adapted in this study. The reliability of these items was reported with Cronbach’s alpha value 0.79.

## 6. Findings

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is a significant relationship between willingness to communicate and communication confidence.

The results showed communication confidence is positively correlated with willingness to communicate. Therefore, the results showed communication confidence and willingness to communicate is significant ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ). The findings from this study is consistent with MacIntyre et al. (2003) study. MacIntyre et al. (2003) showed communication confidence has both positive and negative directions towards willingness to communicate. However, this study has a similar findings with Pattapong (2010) and Peng and Woodrow (2010) who revealed communication confidence has a positive correlation on willingness to communicate. Similarly, communication confidence has a direct positive effect on willingness to communicate among accountancy students in this study. Besides that, Peng (2009) studies showed communication confidence are the strongest predictor of willingness to communicate. Thus, the

findings from this study will be a contribution for Peng (2009) assumptions on the effect of communication confidence on willingness to communicate. The findings of this study shows that students are willing to communicate, however, the confidence to communicate is low. In relation, the findings from this study support Chan and Tan (2006) arguments on many local graduates failed to secure jobs due to lack of competence in the English language, evident particularly during interviews. The persisting issues of lack of communication competence among local graduates especially in the accountancies field is cause of concern these graduates are unable to secure employment according to Malaysian National Education Statistics (2013).

**H<sub>2</sub>**: There is a significant relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence.

Self-perceived communicative competence is positively correlated with willingness to communicate. Therefore, the results showed self-perceived communicative and willingness to communicate is significant ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ). Few studies have showed the significant relationship between self-perceived communicative competence and willingness to communicate such as Baker and Macintyre (2000); Covin et al. (2003); McCroskey and Richmond (1990); Peng (2009); Yashima et al. (2004). The results obtained in this study is in line with Yousef et al. (2013), who investigated the willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence among Malaysians' students. Their findings showed the relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence was weak among Faculty of Social Sciences undergraduates. Similarly, the findings from this study showed the relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communicative competence is weak. This findings are similar to the findings of study done by Gałajda (2017) where it was found that the students are afraid of making mistakes while communicating, therefore they remains silent in the classroom. Similarly, it found that respondents of this study perceived themselves as low competent in using L2 for interviewing someone in English by using original words. The results of this study assumed that the students are afraid of getting negative evaluation from the lecturer.

The respondents of this study perceived themselves as highly confident to communicate in the classroom. The findings showed they have highest mean score in self-perceived communicative competence when asking someone to repeat if they do not understand what the speaker has just said and lowest mean score when interviewing someone in English by using original words. Requesting someone to repeat if they do not understand seems to be the easiest communicative task in the classroom since the linguistic competence among the respondents of this study is good as they obtained MUET Band 3. This communicative act is called as "intentionality" (Huang & Wu, 2012, p. 68). MacIntyre et al. (1997) have added language students' sometimes over-estimate or under-estimate their language ability in the self-evaluations. For instance, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) study showed students' with high linguistic competence perceived themselves as low competent, but they are highly willing to communicate. Similarly, the findings of this study showed, students' with good linguistic competence (MUET Band 3) perceived themselves as moderately competent but highly willing to communicate. In addition, Senar (2014) argued that inaccurate self-perceived communicative competence caused by linguistic self-

confidence. However, this study does not intend to investigate the causes of inaccurate self-perceived communicative competence and linguistic self-confidence.

**H<sub>3</sub>**: There is a significant relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension.

The results also showed communication apprehension is negatively correlated with willingness to communicate. Therefore, the results showed communication apprehension and willingness to communicate is significant ( $r = -.36, p < .05$ ). The findings from this study showed the students with moderate communication apprehension have high willingness to communicate. The results of this study are also supported by Gałajda (2017); Shahbaz and Bashabsheh (2015). The strength of relationship between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension is weak in this study.

The respondents of this study experienced moderate level of communication apprehension. The findings in this study showed students have high mean score for communication apprehension when “asking for the meaning of English words if they do not understand and low mean score when giving short self-introduction about their hometown with notes”. “Giving a short self-introduction about their hometown” is the easiest communicative task in the classroom since, the respondents of this study will introduce themselves in every class at the beginning of the semester. The results high apprehension when “asking for the meaning of the English words” which the respondent of this study do not understand was influenced by the personality attributes, specifically “shyness” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 255) or fear of negative feedback from the lecturer (Chan et al., 2012). According to Chan et al. (2012), negative feedback is a psychological pressure for the students to take a risk to communicate in the classroom. Unfamiliar situations effect the students’ willingness level to communicate in the classroom (Chan et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be assumed that the students’ communication apprehension towards willingness to communicate is influenced by classroom environment.

## 7. Conclusion

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is successful when tertiary students are willing to communicate. Willingness to communicate is positively correlated with communication confidence. The study also revealed willingness to communicate has a significant relationship between communication apprehension and self-perceived communicative competence.

### 7.1. Implications

This study is expected to shed some lights into current English language policy in Malaysia which has recently been aligned to the CEFR which is the international standard of language proficiency framework that regulates the language education system across several countries in the world. The study can serve as preliminary data that can be used by the policy makers in order to make informed decisions regarding the time. This study equally significant in reforming the university educational curriculum structure in Malaysia, by increasing the credit hours for language learning and develop systematic university support for English language development.

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