

Neuroticism and Oral Communication Apprehension among Accounting and Business Students in Malaysian Public and Private Universities

Fatimah Hanim Abdul Rauf *

Universiti Tenaga Nasional

Email: fatimahhanim@uniten.edu.my

Faizah Mohd Khalid

Universiti Tenaga Nasional

Email: faizah@uniten.edu.my

Muhammad Fikri Akmal Zainal Azman

Universiti Tenaga Nasional

Email: iky_rimal@yahoo.com

Nur Ehsan Firdaus Lim

Universiti Tenaga Nasional

Email: teddy_lim05101991@yahoo.com

** Corresponding Author*

Abstract

Purpose: To examine the relationship between neuroticism and level of oral communication apprehension among accounting and business students in Malaysian public and private university.

Design/methodology/approach: Questionnaire surveys were distributed to accounting and business students of public and private university. Instruments for neuroticism are based on Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-S), while PRCA-24 is used as the measurement of oral communication apprehension

Findings: Neuroticism is significantly positively related to oral communication apprehension signifies that high neurotic students have a greater oral communication apprehension than the other ones. This study also found that no significant difference exists in oral communication apprehension between different courses and types of institution.

Research limitations/implications: The sample consist of accounting and business students of a public and private university. Perhaps in future, samples may include more universities and other courses.

Practical implications: Contribute to the literature on the factors influencing oral communication apprehension among accounting and business students in Malaysia. Hopes to benefit the academic institution as well as the professional bodies who play significant role in building students' oral communication.

Originality/value: The findings contribute to literatures on whether this personality trait give impact to students' oral communication apprehension in Malaysian university.

Paper type: Research paper

Keywords: Personality factors, Oral communication apprehension, Students

Introduction

Individuals must have good communication skills in order to engage effectively with their peers and instructors, especially throughout their university years. Communication is crucial for success, as it is required to build a healthy relationship in campus and, as a result, in the workplace. Nevertheless, majority of graduates who enter the labour market struggle with communication comprehension, particularly in oral communication, which can be seen in classroom, when students are required to present their arguments, participate in group discussions and presentations. Although some people desire to speak with others, their fear or anxiety may prevent them from doing so (Limbago et al., 2020).

Among the most difficult and important decisions that any student must make is to select academic course and university (Arquero et al., 2017). Accounting major was perceived as a profession that has a lower usage of oral communication skills as in accordance with Daly and McCroskey (1975). They also discovered that students who want to avoid any course or profession that requires strong oral communication skills may choose to study accounting, based on the misconception that accounting is solely about numbers and thus oral communication is unimportant. Majority of the accounting students tend to majoring in accounting instead of other courses due to their wrong perception towards the need of writing and communication skills in the course where they do believe that accounting field requires the least level of oral and writing communication (Rebele, 1985).

An effective communication is essential for an accountant, otherwise, the knowledge of accounting cannot be delivered efficiently (Palmer, 2004). Studies in Spain, UK and Ireland by Arquero et al. (2007), Hassall et al. (2000) and Warnock et al. (2005) reported, accounting students presented greater communication apprehension compared to the business students. Their findings are similar to previous researches in United States (Simons et al., 1995; Stanga & Ladd 1990). Stanga and Ladd (1990) further argued that business and accounting students encounter a challenge when trying to develop their capacity to communicate

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Communication apprehension, has been recognised as a primary component that affects individual's motivation to communicate and ability to build good communication skills. McCroskey's (1986) depicts communication apprehension as "the way a person feels about communication not how they communicate". McCroskey (1977, p.78) defined oral communication apprehension as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons". One of the key elements associated with poor communication skills is communication apprehension. Fear, worry, and a lack of confidence while interacting with others are all factors that contribute to a lack of communication skill. Oral Communication Apprehension (OCA) is a term that refers to verbal communication that can include visual aids. Previous researchers have documented the definition of oral communication apprehension (Blanthorne et al., 2005; Burnett, 2003; Tanyel et al., 1999).

Neuroticism can be defined as a feeling of inadequacy and uneasy (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). Emotional stability, often known as neuroticism, relates to "an individual's typical level of anxiety, worry, and ease of emotional upset" (MacIntyre et al., 1999). During a conversation, this personality type is prone to get apprehensive. They are overly concerned with what is going on around them. Neuroticism has also been linked to various levels of depression. Previous studies found that a high level of neuroticism is the first symptom of depression and the cause

of future recurrences. Some of them discovered that neuroticism-related genetic variables account for over half of the genetic variance in depression (Roberts & Kendler, 1999).

Besides, there are other theories that will be used to support the findings as an explanation of the matter. The theory is the Personality-Based Variables which influence the oral communication apprehension. Extroversion, communication apprehension, self-esteem and neuroticism are among the factors that can influence communication (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). MacIntyre et al. (1999) states that an extrovert with high self-esteem enjoys social engagement and communication, thus places a greater importance on communication. A person with low emotional stability, on the other hand, exhibits neurotic traits such as uneasiness, insecurity, and distress. These individuals are prone to becoming nervous during communication, resulting in a high level of oral communication apprehension. The theory is intended to explain the concept of personality traits which affect the oral communication apprehension.

In terms of anxiety, students who have a high fear of communicating will appear to be more neurotic (Tahir et al., 2017). A study conducted by Dewaele (2013) found that neuroticism is strongly positively correlated with oral communication apprehension. The respondents who were more emotionally stable suffered less oral communication apprehension. Meanwhile, high neurotic respondents' shows significantly higher oral communication apprehension. The result is similar with Kiany et al. (2012). Hence, it can be concluded that neurotic people tend to be an oral communicator apprehensive either in public meetings or among their friends. Based on above, the hypothesis is as follow:

H1: There is a significant relationship between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension among Malaysian university students.

As good communication is crucial nowadays, accounting and business education programmes put a major emphasis on assisting students to improve their communication skills. However, it appears that not all students gain from strengthening their communication skills. (Shanahan, 2011). Students who chose more technical, professional programmes had much greater levels of communication anxiety than their peers. (Loureiro et al., 2020). Ameen et al. (2000), Aly and Islam (2003), Gardner et al. (2005) and Meixner et al. (2009) found that accounting major had higher oral communication apprehension scores as they had scores in majority of the communication settings, which are three out of four settings than other business major. This is similar to studies in Spain, UK and Ireland by Arquero et al. (2007), Hassall et al. (2000) and Warnock et al. (2005). According to Daly and McCroskey (1975) some students may choose to study in accounting under the misconception that accounting is solely concerned with numbers, thus, oral communication is unimportant. Minai and Salleh (1998) and Lee (2011) found a difference in students' oral communication apprehension between accounting and non-accounting major in Malaysia. However, Ameen et al. (2010) found no variations between accounting majors, other-business majors and non-business majors. Based on these literature reviews, the hypothesis is as follow:

H2: There is a significant difference in oral communication apprehension between courses of study among Malaysian university students.

Gecer and Gumus (2010) found, private university students shown lower communication apprehension levels and vice versa. It is due to the students are encouraged to communicate with their lecturers at private universities. Furthermore, with higher socioeconomic and paying relatively higher education fees, these students are less likely to feel stressed when talking with their instructors, hence are more willing to communicate. Thus, based on the previous study, the hypothesis is as follow:

H3: There is a significant difference in oral communication apprehension between types of institutions among Malaysian university students.

Methods

This study uses purposive sampling as it covers accounting and business students in a public and private university in Malaysia, which shall remain anonymous. The reason of choosing these universities because both universities are ranked top 20 universities in Malaysia based on QS World University Ranking. 400 questionnaires were distributed to each public and private universities, totalling to 800 questionnaires. Each 200 questionnaires were distributed to the accounting and business students of both universities, respectively. This is based on Roscoe (1975) who recommends an adequate sample size is larger than 30 and less than 500.

All the questions in every section except for Section A, are using five-point Likert scale. The first section gathers data on the respondents' demographic background. The second section consist of questions to obtain the data regarding the neuroticism which is adapted from Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-S) by Eysenck *et al.* (1985). The final section is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), a revised version consists of 24 statements, designed by McCroskey (1986).

Findings

This study aimed investigates the relationship between neuroticism and level of oral communication apprehension among the Malaysian university students, and was analysed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences Version 26.

Table 1: Results of Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Neuroticism	0.836
Oral communication apprehension	0.844

Table 1 above indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha for the instruments is more than 0.7, showing that the instruments have higher internal reliability as it is closer to 1.00 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The Central Limit Theorem (CLT) can be applied when the total respondents are 30 or more with the assumptions that the sampling distribution of the sample mean is nearly normal (Paret & Martz, 2009), Therefore, this study use parametric tests to test all the hypotheses as the sample of current study is more than 30.

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Information

	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	201	28.9
	Female	494	71.1
Age	18-20	221	31.8
	21-23	422	60.7
	< 24	52	7.5
Race	Malay	521	75.0
	Chinese	110	15.8
	Indian	53	7.6
	Others	11	1.6
Major courses	Accounting	340	48.9
	Business	355	51.1

Types of Institution	Public university	362	52.1
	Private university	333	47.9

Table 2 shows the respondents' demographic information. Majority of the them are female (71.1%), age between 21-23 years (60.7%), Malay (75%), majoring in business (51.1%) and from public university (52.1%).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Oral communication apprehension	24.00	113.00	65.7237
Neuroticism	12.00	60.00	36.9986

Based on Table 3, the students' level of oral communication apprehension is considered average as it is between the scores of 51 to 80. The mean for neuroticism is moderate, indicating that they are not a neurotic person.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Oral Communication Apprehension

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions	28	190	174	242	61
2	My thoughts become confused and mixed when I am giving a speech	26	226	220	182	41
3	Communicating in class usually makes me uncomfortable	20	156	214	247	58
4	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations	29	95	226	290	55
5	I am afraid to express myself in class	23	161	258	199	54
6	I'm afraid to speak up in conversations	19	124	196	287	69
7	Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in class	27	214	215	187	52
8	I have no fear of giving a speech	38	159	239	214	45
9	Ordinarily, I am very calm and relaxed in conversations	17	55	215	352	56
10	I am very relaxed when answering questions in class	23	97	268	259	48
11	While conversing with a new friend, I feel very relaxed	8	68	195	351	73
12	Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in conversations	21	159	205	251	59
13	I dislike participating in group discussions	34	132	191	262	76
14	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion in class	33	109	251	213	89
15	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions	16	70	167	375	67
16	I feel relaxed while giving a speech	22	109	273	240	51
17	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions	17	66	228	320	64

18	While giving a speech, I get so nervous and I forgot facts that I really know	47	256	225	136	31
19	Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in class	16	85	217	326	51
20	While participating in a conversation with a new friend, I feel very nervous	24	192	213	204	62
21	I like to get involved in group discussions	21	59	245	315	55
22	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and stiff while giving a speech	36	235	232	146	46
23	Engaging in group discussions with new people makes me tense and nervous	39	186	229	192	49
24	I face the prospects of giving a speech with confidence	16	79	257	256	87

Table 4 illustrates frequency of agreement in oral communication apprehension statement. Most of the students agree they feel tense and nervous while participating in group discussions, feel uncomfortable communicating in class, hesitant to speak up in conversations, and dislike participating in group discussions. However, some of them feel very calm and relaxed in conversations especially with new friends.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Neuroticism

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Does your mood often go up and down?	75	305	160	119	36
2	Do you ever feel 'just miserable' for no reason?	54	217	184	189	51
3	Are you an anger person?	37	195	226	178	59
4	Are your feelings easily hurt?	52	264	241	104	34
5	Do you often feel 'fed-up'?	29	159	209	217	81
6	Would you call yourself a nervous person?	48	264	217	137	29
7	Are you a worry person?	44	261	234	130	26
8	Would you call yourself tense or highly strung?	37	260	224	141	33
9	Do you worry too long after an embarrassing experience?	46	228	217	165	39
10	Do you suffer from 'nerves'?	43	231	228	149	44
11	Do you often feel lonely?	24	130	208	250	83
12	Are you often troubled about feelings of guilt?	45	185	244	178	43

Table 5 shows frequency of agreement in neuroticism statement. Most of the respondents agree that they often feel 'fed-up' and often feel lonely. Meanwhile, many of them disagree that their moods often go up and down, feel miserable for no reason, and they are a worry, tense and nervous person.

Table 6: Relationship of Neuroticism and Oral Communication Apprehension

No.	Variable	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
1	Neuroticism	0.370	0.000

A correlation analysis is conducted to identify a relationship between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension. Table 6 shows that neuroticism is significantly positively related to oral communication apprehension, therefore, H1 is accepted.

Table 7: Differences in Oral Communication Apprehension

	Mean	Sig.
OCA level by Course of study		
Accounting	65.74	0.978
Business	65.71	
OCA level by Types of institution		
Public university	66.03	0.444
Private university	65.39	

Table 7 presents the result from Independent Sample T-test. It is statistically proven that there is no significant difference in oral communication between course of study and types of institution. Therefore, H2 and H3 are rejected.

Discussion and Conclusion

The outcomes of the study validated prior researches on the relationship between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension. It also revealed that there is no variation in oral communication apprehension between courses of study and types of institution.

The level of oral communication apprehension of the university students in Malaysia is average, indicating that they are willing to communicate and can control their fear when communicating, based on Limbago et al. (2020). The students also have a moderate level of neuroticism showing that their emotions are stable whereby they do not easily feel anxiety, worry and upset, as described by MacIntyre et al. (1999).

The positive relationship between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension supports Tahir et al. (2017) who states that students with a high communication apprehension will appear to be more neurotic in disposition. Perhaps, their personality traits such as feeling anxiety, worry and embarrassment affect their interactions with others. Neurotic people tend to have higher oral communication apprehension either in public meetings or with friends as they always think others negative perceptions towards them. Furthermore, the result is also consistent with Dewaele (2013) and Kiany et al. (2012). Both researches evidenced a positive correlation between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension. It is due to the respondents themselves who suffer the emotional instability which lead to high neuroticism.

No significant difference was found in oral communication apprehension between courses of study and types of institution. In terms of courses of study, the result supports Ameen et al. (2010), Lee (2011) and Minai and Salleh (1998), whereby they found no significant difference in oral communication apprehension between accounting and business students. The result however does not support Loureiro et al. (2020) who evidenced a higher level of communication apprehension among students of technical, professionally oriented education paths. The current study contradicted from Aly and Islam (2003), Ameen et al. (2000), Gardner et al. (2005) and Meixner et al. (2009) who found that accounting major had higher oral communication apprehension scores compared to other business major. As for the types of institution, it is proven that there is no significant difference in oral communication apprehension between public and private university students, therefore does not support Gecer and Gumus (2010). It can be concluded that different courses and types of institution do not influence students' oral communication apprehension.

Theoretical, Practical and Social Implications

The significant relationship found between neuroticism and oral communication apprehension among Malaysian university students provides useful information for recommendations. High

neurotic students have greater oral communication apprehension, as these students always think others' perceptions on their actions. Lecturers, universities or professional bodies may play their roles by organising programs related to communication skills and personalities in order to develop the necessary abilities in communication and personalities so that they be able to communicate effectively in group discussions, classes as well as present arguments in meetings.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study used PRCA-24 as the measurement of communication apprehension. Future researchers may use other instruments, use wider samples (more universities and courses) and include other personality factors.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Universiti Tenaga Nasional for funding the research through the Pocket Grant.

References

- Aly, I. M., & Islam, M. (2003). Audit of accounting program on oral communications apprehension: A comparative study among accounting students. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 18(9), 751-760. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02686900310500514>
- Ameen, E. C., Guffey, D. M. & Jackson, C. M. (2000). Silence is not golden: Further evidence of oral communication apprehension in accounting majors. *Advances in Accounting Education: Teaching and Curriculum Innovations*, 3, 85-105.
- Ameen, E., Jackson, C., & Malgwi, C. (2010). Student perceptions of oral communication requirement in the accounting profession. *Global Perspective on Accounting Education*, 7, 31-49.
- Arquero, J. L., Hassall, T., Joyce, J., & Donoso, J. A. (2007). Accounting students and communication apprehension: A study of Spanish and UK students. *European Accounting Review*, 16(2), 299-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180701391337>
- Arquero, J. L., Polvillo, C. F., & García, D. V. (2017). Communication apprehension and students' educational choices: An exploratory analysis of Spanish secondary education students. *Education and Training*, 59(9), 946-956. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-04-2017-0049>
- Blanthorne, C., Bhamornsiri, S., & Guinn, R. E. (2005). Are technical skills still important? *The CPA Journal*, 75(3), 64-65.
- Burnett, S. (2003). The future of accounting education: A regional perspective. *Journal of Education for Business*, 78(3), 129-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832320309599709>
- Daly, J. A., & Miller, M. D. (1975). The empirical development of an instrument to measure writing apprehension. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9, 242-248.
- Eysenck, S. B. G., Eysenck, H. J., & Barrett, P. (1985). A revised version of the psychoticism scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 6(1), 21-29. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(85\)90026-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(85)90026-1)
- Gardner, C. T., M. J. Milne, C. P. Stringer, & R. H. Whiting. (2005). Oral and written communication apprehension in accounting students: Curriculum impacts and impacts on academic performance. *Accounting Education*, 14(3), 313-336. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/06939280500077269>
- Geçer, A. K., & Gümüş, A. E. (2010). Prediction of public and private university students' communication apprehension with lecturers. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 3008-3014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.456>

- Hassall, T., Joyce, J., Ottewill, R., Arquero, J., & Donoso, J. (2000). Communication apprehension in UK and Spanish business and accounting students. *Education & Training*, 42(2), 93-100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eum000000005351>
- Kiany, G. R., Mousavi, S. I., & Ghafar, S. R. (2012). The relationship between personality traits and gender and unwillingness to communicate in a foreign language. *Comparative Language and Literature Research*.
- Lee, A. F. T. (2011). Communication apprehension among Malaysian accounting students: A temperament perspective. *AKEPT's 1st Annual Young Researchers International Conference and Exhibition*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Limbago, J. L. B., Lacrete, F. R. G., Asok, G. F. & Arcilla, F. E. J. (2020). Personality Traits and Communication Apprehension. *SMCC Higher Education Research Journal*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.18868/cte.02.060120.07>
- Loureiro, M., Loureiro, N. & Silva, R. (2020). Differences of Gender in Oral and Written Communication Apprehension of University Students. *Education Sciences*, 10(12), 379. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10120379>
- McCroskey, J. C. (1977). Oral communication apprehension: A summary of recent theory and research. *Human Communication Research*, 4(1), 78–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1977.tb00599.x>
- McCroskey, J. C. (1982). An introduction to rhetorical communication, 4th Edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McCroskey, J. C. (1986). An introduction to rhetorical communication, 5th Edition, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Andersen, J. F. (1976). The relationship between communication apprehension and academic achievement among college students. *Human Communication Research*, 3(1), 73-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1976.tb00506.x>
- McCroskey, J. C., Simpson, T. J., & Richmond, V. P. (1982) Biological Sex and communication apprehension. *Communication Quarterly*, 30(2), 129-133. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463378209369439>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Babin, P. A., & Clément, R. (1999). Willingness to communicate: Antecedents and consequences. *Communication Quarterly*, 47(2), 215-229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379909370135>
- Meixner, W. F., D. Blin, D. R. Lowe, & H. Nouri. (2009). An Examination of Business Student Perceptions: The Effect of Math and Communication Skill Apprehension on Choice of Major. *Advances in Accounting Behavioral Research*, 12, 185-200. [https://doi.org/10.1108/s1475-1488\(2009\)0000012010](https://doi.org/10.1108/s1475-1488(2009)0000012010)
- Minai, B., & Salleh, A. (1998). Are accounting undergraduates apprehensive about oral communication? *Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 6(2), 81-90.
- Palmer, K. N., D. E. Ziegenfuss, & R. E. Pinsker. (2004). International Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of Auditors/Accountants. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 19(7), 889-896. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02686900410549411>
- Paret, M. & Martz, E. (2009). Understanding the Central Limit Theorem: Tumbling Dice & Birthdays. Quality Digest. <https://www.qualitydigest.com/inside/twitter-ed/understanding-central-limit-theorem.html>
- Rajagopal, S. N., & Shah, P. M. (2017). What are the causes of communication apprehension among esl classroom students?. *Symposium Pendidikan diPeribadikan: Perspektif Risalah An-Nur (SPRiN2017)*.
- Rebele, J. E. (1985). An examination of accounting students' perceptions of communication skills in public accounting. *Issues in Accounting Educations*, 3, 41-50.

- Roberts, S. B. & Kendler, K. S. (1999) Neuroticism and self-esteem as indices of the vulnerability to major depression in women. *Psychological Medicine*, 29(5), 1101– 1109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291799008739>
- Roscoe, J. T. (1975). *Fundamental Research Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*, (2nd ed). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Sekaran, U. (1992). *Research methods for business: A skill building approach*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., United States of America.
- Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. (2010). *Research methods for business: A skill building approach*, Wiley, London.
- Shanahan, D. (2011). *Communication apprehension among business and accounting students* Master's Dissertation. Dublin City University.
- Simons, K., Higgins, M., & Lowe, D. (1995). A profile of communication apprehension in accounting majors: Implications for teaching and curriculum revision. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 13, 159-176. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0748-5751\(95\)00001-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0748-5751(95)00001-3)
- Stanga, K. G., & Ladd, R.T. (1990). Oral communication apprehension in beginning accounting majors: An exploratory study. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 5, 180-194.
- Tahir, H., Khor, J., Mozaka, G. M., Kayode, B. K., & Mehmood Khan, T. (2017). Prevalence of communication apprehension among college and university students and its association with demographic factors: A systematic review and Meta-Analysis. *Arch Pharma Pract*, 8, 87-103.
- Tanyel, F., Mitchell, M. A., & McAlum, H. G. (1999). The skill set for success of new business school graduates: Do prospective employers and university faculty agree? *Journal of Education for Business*, 75(1), 33-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08832329909598987>
- Warnock, K., & Curtis, E. (1997). Oral communication apprehension: A preliminary study of accounting students, *Annual Conference Irish Accounting and Finance Association*, Dublin City University, 1-14.