



The Relationship Between Anxiety, Identity and The Environment Towards the Willingness to Communicate in English For Non-Native Speakers.

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Abstract

The study aims to: (1) identify communication challenges among university students in English, (2) assess the frequency of English language usage among students, and (3) determine motivating factors for English language communication among university students. This study employed a quantitative approach utilizing SPSS for data analysis. Statistical techniques such as summary statistics, frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), transformation of variables, and correlation were utilized. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was chosen due to time and resource constraints, involving the collection of data from accessible members of the population. Questionnaires were utilized as the primary data collection instrument, comprising four sections of close-ended questions. A total of 23 questionnaires were distributed to 31 respondents. The data collected were then analyzed using SPSS to explore relationships and patterns within the dataset. Section I was constructed to identify the student's demographic information, which is related to their gender, age, race, previous school, and mode of study. Section A was constructed to identify the willingness of non-native speakers to speak English. Section B was constructed to identify attributes that cause anxiety among non-native speakers. The scale of the items used in this section is Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). Section C was constructed to identify what are the effects of environment among the non-native speakers towards their willingness to speak English. The scale of the items used in this section is Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5). Meanwhile, Section D was constructed to identify what are the effects of environment among the non-native speakers towards their willingness to speak English. The scale of the items used in this section is Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5). Descriptive analysis was used to identify, describe and explore the relationship between anxiety, identity and the environment towards the willingness to communicate in English for non-native speakers among the students. The analysis of the relationship between anxiety and willingness to speak English reveals a Pearson Correlation value of -0.320 . With this value being less than -0.1 , the research confirms the hypothesis. Consequently, it is concluded that there exists a negative relationship between anxiety and willingness to speak English. This implies that as anxiety decreases, the willingness to speak English increases [$r = -0.320$]. Similarly, when exploring the relationship between identity and willingness to speak English, a Pearson Correlation value of -0.046 was obtained. Despite being less than -0.1 , the hypothesis was accepted. As a result, it is concluded that there is a negative correlation between identity and willingness to speak English. This indicates that as identity decreases, the willingness to speak English increases [$r = -0.046$]. Furthermore, the investigation into the relationship between willingness to speak English and the environment revealed a Pearson Correlation of 0.38 . Since this value is less than 1 , the hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, it is concluded that there exists a positive correlation between the environment and willingness to speak English. This suggests that as the environment becomes more conducive, the willingness to speak English increases [$r = 0.38$]. This study reveals that anxiety significantly impacts students' willingness to speak English, often leading to decreased confidence and nervousness during communication. To support anxious individuals, fostering friendships and providing a supportive environment can

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mitigate communication fears. Additionally, identity plays a crucial role; their environment and cultural ties influence students' willingness to speak English. Lastly, the proficiency level of students in English is influenced by educational systems and teaching methods, suggesting a need for improvement in English language education to enhance students' language proficiency from an early age.

Keywords; Willingness to Speak English; Anxiety; Identity; Environment.

1. Introduction

The English language plays a vital role in society. We do agree that Malaysia's current curriculum system can produce students with good proficiency in reading and writing in the English language. Yet, speaking the language still needs attention even from undergraduates. We can see students who have spent over 11 years learning English but are still struggling to use it to communicate inside or outside of the classroom setting (Selan, 2021). According to Siva Selan 2021 'Due to the teaching and learning approach used in schools that focus more on writing compared to the need for speaking'. Teachers only emphasize the students' writing skills as it is crucial for the students to be able to perform well during their examinations. With not many opportunities given to speak English in class, students end up being reluctant to speak as they lack confidence. English is considered one of the most important languages in the world as it is spoken and written by many people around the globe. It has a wider distribution compared to other spoken languages and it is said to be the most useful language to learn for international travel and is in fact, the language of diplomacy (Rao, Parupalli, 2019).

Understanding anxiety, as one of the pervasive psychological emotions, is a prerequisite to providing the necessary support to anxious non-native speakers (Griesser, S. 2022). An understanding of language anxiety within different contexts provides a rationale for a careful investigation of English learners. According to Dr Gerald Louis, a counseling psychologist and a former principal of HELP International School, he stated that the ability and confidence to speak in English by non-native speakers is an issue faced by many people around the world. Types of anxiety that can occur where the English language is a concern are communication apprehension or rather a certain type of shyness that is manifested as being fearful or anxious when communicating with people (Rani Yulia Nuridzdzati & Suvi Akhriyah, 2023). This fear or anxiety may have been anchored from past experiences of being laughed at when saying the "wrong" thing. It is indeed acceptable that the fear of being negatively evaluated by others causes one to avoid any kind of evaluative situations for fear of being termed as not so intelligent. Identity is something very important for almost every individual because it brings out the individuality in a person. Identity to a person can mean self-esteem, self-image or how they label themselves. Language also plays an important role in the expression of identity. In today's generation, people tend to feel that the English language has become a must. People look up to you if you're fluent in English.

1.1 Problem Statement

The purpose of this research is to study what is the correlation concerning anxiety, identity, and the environment of the learning institute towards the willingness to communicate in English for non-native speakers among undergraduate students at North Borneo University College in 2024. The English language can be considered as an important requirement nowadays whether for job requirements, career advancement, education purposes, etc. As Malaysians, we are all very proud of our national and official language which is the Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Malaysia, however, it is also important for us to learn more languages, for example, the English language, especially as it was the most used language in the world. Malaysia is known as a plural society

as it consists of a few important races such as the Malay, Indian, Chinese, and other minority ethnic that can be found in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) such as the Kadazandusun, Murut, Iban, Sungai, etc.

As a plural society, the people come from different socio-economic statuses and educational backgrounds. This would influence how much exposure the students are given to learn and practice speaking English. Besides, there are quite several reasons for recognizing the students' willingness and unwillingness to speak English even though they are not native speakers. The rationale of this research is to assess what is the motivation and the challenges faced by non-native English speakers to speak English. Various research has been carried out to investigate how secondary school students and postgraduates can converse in English. There could be a lot of causes, such as a lack of support, unpleasant environments, or, even worse, educators who are not attentive to their use of language, or a limitation on students' ability to speak up in class (Coman et al., 2020).

This inevitably causes Malaysians' hesitation to learn English, even though the English language is widely used both domestically and internationally. The main purpose of this research is to create a theoretical model of the willingness to converse using the English language among university students who come from various backgrounds by using a questionnaire to collect the needed data. This research focuses on several categories. The first is to collect data and to come up with complete statistic graphs to study the correlation of the dependent and independent variables in determining the willingness of the students to speak English. Second, to identify what are the factors that affect the student's motivation to speak English. Some other factors can affect the student's willingness to speak English hence, several factors need to be taken into account when creating the survey question to ensure the data can portray Malaysia as a plural country. For the second category, there have been several studies that have been conducted to studies, what are the factors that affect the student's motivation to speak English.

2. Literature Review

English is a central language of international communication, dynamics of learning, and global job market. According to Rao and Parupalli (2019), English not only acts as a language for business travel and politics but also as a language that opens opportunities for better-paying jobs. In the Malaysian context, English is considered prestigious and beneficial as the use of a second language enables Malaysians to communicate with people of the rest of the world without compromising their ethnicity. Although the Malaysian curriculum emphasizes reading and writing, speaking skills are still undeveloped or weak even at an undergraduate level and there is a disconnection between the curriculum, which students are taught, and the real world (Selan, 2021).

2.1. Challenges in speaking English

Malaysia's education system and in particular the system in Malaysian colleges is a system that disadvantages free speaking skills at the expense of our writing skills. This is largely examination-oriented and in this practice, success in written tests is highly encouraged (Selan, 2021). Therefore, students have fewer chances of using English in the classroom by speaking, due to which they become reluctant or less confident in using English for communicating.

2.1.2 Language Anxiety

Speaking fluency is impaired by the existence of language anxiety. According to Griesser (2022), the factors that must be considered and can lead to anxiety are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and experience of ridicule. In Malaysia, it is compounded by social pressure and other issues such that, to speak English well is to be intelligent and of a decent social class (Rani Yulia Nuridzdzati & Suvi Akhriyah, 2023).

This is because this anxiety forms a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby fear of an error reduces chances of being entrusted with speaking roles hence hampering the kind of language a person develops.

2.1.2 Socio-Cultural Influences

The situation in Malaysia as a plural society with multicultural, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students affects students' experience with the English language. The English knowledge and practice chances are associated with socio-economic and educational differences. Some students may encounter extra difficulties due to low socioeconomic status and geographical accessibility to resources as well as limited chance to learn English in other settings (Coman et al., 2020).

2.2. Role of Motivation

Motivation is therefore an essential component that determines the language acquisition process. A literature review indicates that students' self-initiated and externally induced motivations like the stimulation for career, proclivity, and acknowledgment; can prompt their inclination for communication in English. Indeed, Dr. Gerald Louis's emphasis on the concept of wanting to be negatively evaluated provides us with a reason why the environment of support should be provided to encourage the use of the language to non-native-speaking persons. Though English is a fair focus, this can be at the loss of other indigenous languages and thus cultural divides which is a duality student, especially in the bilingual learning framework.

3. Methodology

Sampling is a method of selecting a group of people or a subset of the population to make statistical inferences and estimate population characteristics. Sample points, sampling units, and observations are all terms used to describe these aspects. Creating a sample is a time-effective way to conduct research. In most circumstances, researching the entire population is either impossible or too expensive and time-consuming. As a result, looking at the sample gives the researcher information that may be applied to the complete population. There are 2 major types of sampling: probability and non-probability sampling. In this research, non-probability sampling was used due to selective samples that have specific characteristics. According to Saunders 2009, non-sampling or non-random sampling techniques provide a range of alternative techniques for selecting samples, based on the researcher's subjective judgment. There are 4 distinct types of samples in non-probability; convenience and purposive sampling. For our study of research, we have used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling refers to the collection of information from a group of the population who can respond. When gathering feedback, this non-probability sampling method is applied because of time and expense constraints. The sample respondents are picked solely based on their proximity to the survey desk and willingness to engage in the study in this sampling approach. to be selected as research respondents. A questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts that aim to collect information from a respondent. A research questionnaire is typically a mix of close-ended questions and open-ended questions. The data collected from a data collection questionnaire can be both qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. A questionnaire may or may not be delivered in the form of a survey, but a survey always consists of a questionnaire.

4. Findings

		Anxiety	Identity	Environment	Willingness to speak in English
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	0.250	-0.254	-0.320
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.175	0.168	0.079
	N			31	
Identity	Pearson Correlation	0.250	1	-0.039	-0.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.175		0.835	0.808
	N			31	
Environment	Pearson Correlation	-0.254	-0.039	1	0.380
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.168	0.835		0.838
	N			31	
Willingness to speak in English	Pearson Correlation	-0.320	-0.046	0.038	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.079	0.808	0.838	
	N			31	

Table 1: Summary of data

4.1 Is there any relationship between anxiety and willingness to speak English?

This study's first research objective is to determine if anxiety has any influence on willingness to speak English. Based on this research study, we find that the Pearson Correlation value is -0.320 . Since the Pearson Correlation value is less than -1 we accepted the hypothesis. Therefore, we reported that there is a negative correlation relationship between anxiety and willingness to speak English. [$r = -0.320$]. This suggests that as anxiety levels increase, the willingness to speak in English decreases. This negative relationship is understandable, as individuals experiencing nervousness or stress may find it challenging to speak due to fear. Therefore, higher levels of anxiety are associated with lower levels of willingness to speak. This claim can be supported by previous research done by Khudobina et al (2019). According to the previous research, learners defined learning a foreign language (English) as hard, and difficult, and the learners relate the feeling of fear to learning English. Based on the research, the students displayed high indicators of anxiety because they were afraid of speaking a foreign language. According to the previous research, when learners feel anxious, they feel afraid when someone asks them to communicate using a foreign language and they much prefer to stay silent during the interaction.

To mitigate this issue, fostering supportive relationships and creating inclusive environments can help alleviate anxiety and encourage students to communicate more freely. By offering friendship and support, individuals experiencing communication anxiety can feel empowered to overcome their fears and participate actively in English-speaking activities. Aside from that, methods that foster internal tranquillity, self-awareness, and empathy towards oneself and others can yield beneficial outcomes. Scida and Jones (2017) discovered that engaging in ten contemplative practices, such as breath meditation, mindful movement, and gratitude journaling, resulted in a significant reduction in anxiety among university students in Spanish as a foreign language classes. Similarly, Galante (2018) observed a decrease in English classroom anxiety levels among 13 Brazilian adolescents following a four-month drama program. This suggests that educational initiatives that encourage language engagement may help alleviate anxiety among learners.

4.2 Does identity have any influence on willingness to speak English?

The second research objective is to examine if identity has any influence on willingness to speak English. Next, for this study, we find that the Pearson Correlation value is $-.046$. Since the Pearson Correlation Value is less than -1 we accepted the hypothesis. Therefore, we reported that there is a negative correlation relationship between identity and willingness to speak in English. [$r=-.046$] suggesting a negligible or nonexistent relationship. This moderate negative correlation signifies that as identity decreases, the willingness to speak in English will increase. It appears that identity has minimal influence on the decision to speak in English. There have been quite several research that have been conducted regarding how identity could impact the learners' learning experience, especially in the English language. Some of the highlights that students might face some difficulties are not the result of their weak linguistic competencies, but rather, it was the tension between a learner's current identities. Research done in Japan shows that the Japanese feel that their accent is not suitable and sounds weird when speaking the English language. The Japanese student in the research understands that the English language is important as it is used internationally, but it is just not suitable for them (Chevasco, 2019).

Therefore, to diminish this issue, previous research has suggested some ways to can be integrated by educators. According to Danzak (2011) implement culturally sustaining pedagogy, which seeks to perpetuate linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism in schooling, rather than focusing on creating a monocultural and monolingual society. This involves respecting and valuing students' cultures, languages, and backgrounds inside and outside of schooling. This will ensure the students' first languages are honored and integrated into the curriculum, regardless of the approach to educating English Learners (ELs). Provide opportunities for bilingual learning or expression to support language development and individual identity development. These are some of the strategies that can be integrated by educators to create effective teaching and learning experiences that will honor students' diverse identities while fostering English language proficiency and supporting overall academic success.

4.3 Does the environment have any influence on willingness to speak English?

The third research objective is to seek if the environment has any relationship to willingness to speak English. For this study, we find that the Pearson Correlation is 0.38 . Since the Pearson Correlation is less than 1 we accepted the hypothesis. Therefore, in this study, we reported that there is a positive correlation between environment and willingness to speak in English. [$r=0.38$] indicating a very weak relationship. This implies that environmental factors have little impact on the willingness to speak in English. According to previous research, some students actively participated in English conversations because they found the classroom environment conducive to comfortable speaking. Additionally, they highlighted their readiness to engage in English discourse when met with positive responses from their peers (Kozl Ramli et al., 2021). From the previous research, there are a few factors that can be seen affecting the learner's learning, such as external factors (education level, learning environment, teachers, etc.). To ensure the students can learn effectively, the students must be given good moral support (intrinsic motivation), and to ensure the students are given a conducive learning environment, as it plays an important role in encouraging students' learning.

4.5 Implication of findings

The findings highlight the significant influence of anxiety on students' willingness to speak English. When students experience anxiety, their confidence in English communication diminishes, leading to reluctance to engage with peers and teachers. Therefore, educators need to address this issue in the classroom to ensure the students feel protected and supported, and at the same time, promote language fluency and communication skills among the teacher and the students. Ensuring that the teachers are well-equipped with the skills and knowledge to reduce anxiety levels among English language learners, can create a supportive environment, and offer opportunities for students to practice in low-stress settings.

The study underscores the impact of identity on English language proficiency. Students' identities are shaped by various factors, including their environment and cultural background. While certain environments may facilitate English language acquisition, others may hinder it based on students' perceived roles and identities. Additionally, strong cultural ties may influence students' reluctance to adopt English-speaking practices, as they seek to preserve their cultural heritage. Educators and policymakers should recognize the complexity of identity dynamics and strive to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds while promoting English language proficiency. Educators should strive to create inclusive learning environments that respect and value students' diverse identities as it can encourage the students to express their identities and at the same time, promote a positive language learning environment.

The study reveals challenges in English language education, particularly concerning proficiency levels and instructional practices. Many students lack proficiency in English, highlighting the need for comprehensive language education programs that begin at an early age. Efforts to improve English language instruction should focus on systematic approaches and teacher training initiatives to ensure effective pedagogy. Additionally, integrating technology and innovative teaching methods can enhance student engagement and facilitate language learning. By addressing these challenges, educators can better prepare students to navigate the globalized world and succeed in an increasingly interconnected society.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study indicates that anxiety has a significant negative correlation with the willingness to speak English among non-native speakers. This suggests that as anxiety levels increase, students' confidence in English communication decreases, leading to reluctance to engage in English-speaking activities. While identity was found to have a negligible correlation with willingness to speak English in this study, it underscores the importance of understanding identity dynamics in language learning. Students' identities, shaped by factors such as cultural background and environment, can impact their language proficiency and willingness to engage in English communication. Aside from that, this research also highlights challenges in English language education, including low proficiency levels and ineffective instructional practices. This underscores the need for comprehensive language education programs, systematic approaches, and teacher training initiatives to enhance English language instruction and student engagement. Recognizing the complexity of identity dynamics, educators and policymakers should strive to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds while promoting English language proficiency. Such environments can encourage students to express their identities and foster a positive language learning environment. Moreover, to address anxiety and promote English language proficiency, educators should implement supportive measures such as providing opportunities for practice in low-stress settings, offering cultural sensitivity training, and integrating technology and innovative teaching methods into language instruction. In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of addressing anxiety, understanding identity dynamics, and improving instructional practices in English language education. By implementing supportive measures and creating inclusive learning environments, educators can better prepare students to communicate effectively in English and succeed in a globalized society.

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