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Causal Relationship between Oral Performance and Communication Apprehension

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Abstract

This study investigates the causal relationship between the form students who have passed in School-Based Oral Evaluation (SBOE) with communication apprehension. The participants are 302 of form four male and female students from the government secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory, Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of SBOE and its relationship with communication apprehension. This study is an explanatory sequential mixed method design in which quantitative and qualitative [11] data were collected in sequential, analyzed separately, and then explained. The quantitative data were collected by using FLCAS, SBOE results and the qualitative data were collected from the semi-structured interviews with the English teachers. The quantitative data were analysed by descriptive analysis (SPSS) and the qualitative data were analysed by content analysis. The results revealed that the students had scored high results in SBOE in the mid-term examination 2017. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative methods showed that students experience low level of communication apprehension. High oral performance affects communication apprehension. This study recommends a new oral-based English curriculum for the secondary schools.

Keywords: causal relationship, oral performance, language anxiety, communication apprehension, male and female students.

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1. Introduction

Eigthy percents of the students have passed in English subject in *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) or SPM in Malaysia but most of them cannot communicate well in English [24]. Previous studies revealed that most language teachers and instructors agreed that many students in Malaysia face problems communicating in English because it is not their native language [36]. Perhaps, they also mentioned that even at the university level, students feel shy, apprehensive, insecure, and awkward

when they were asked to speak English in the classroom. This includes those who managed good grades in SPM and scored well in written purposes. Students are lack of skills and confidence to speak in English. Many students are still struggling to communicate in English for academic purposes. They are apprehensive when asked to speak in public. The feeling of communication apprehension affects their self-esteem. Students who exhibit communication apprehension do not feel comfortable communicating in the target language in front of others, due to their limited knowledge of the language, especially in relation to speaking and listening skills. It is believed that communication apprehension is related to lack of practice and lack of proficiency in oral and speaking. Those factors cause communication apprehension in second and foreign language.

Previous studies in language anxiety demonstrated inconsistency results and findings. Some studies had shown that there was no relationship between language anxiety and English performance [12]. However, several studies had consistently revealed that language anxiety can impede foreign/second language production and English performance ([2], Zhang, 2014). Based on the previous studies, there is no clear-cut relationship between language anxiety and English performance.

So far, there has been little discussion about language anxiety in the secondary school in Malaysian context. A few studies have been done in Malaysian schools up to this point. Based on the researcher critical investigating of the literatures at the time of this study, there are still gaps to investigate the causal relationship between oral performance and communication apprehension in the schools that have scored the highest number of students passed in the English subject in SPM in Malaysia [24]. Normally studies investigated the effect of language anxiety on language performance, but this study investigated the causal relationship of oral performance among the students who have passed in SBOE from the schools that have the highest number of students passed in English subject in SPM in Malaysia since 2006 [24].

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of SBOE and its relationship with communication apprehension. It will provide a base for future research for the Ministry of Education Malaysia in the implementation of the SBOE and a new English curriculum. All the secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory are involved in this study.

The objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To determine the causal relationship between the form four students who have passed in SBOE with communication apprehension.

2. To discover how the students react during the SBOE in the English Language.

Oral or spoken or verbal or speech is the basic or primary thing in the process of acquiring and learning a language [13]. Before people learn to read and write, they speak and there are many languages without written forms. Therefore, oral is a language.

2. Operational Definition

2.1. Causal relationship

It is a cause and effect relationship between the form four students who have passed in the SBOE (independent variable) with communication apprehension (dependent variable). Causation indicates that one event is the result of the occurrence of the other event. The change in one event causes change in causation relationship between two events where one event is affected by the other. The events are considered as variables in statistics. When the value of one variable increases or decreases, as it is resulted of other variable, it is said as causal relationship.

In conclusion, the causation indicates that the mean level of communication apprehension is affected by the oral performance because of the high or low SBOE results in the mid-term English examinations 2017. The strength of the causal relationship is determined by the effect size in the analysis.

2.2. Oral performance

The oral performance for form four and form five students is known as School-Based Oral Evaluation (SBOE). SBOE measures students' proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension which comprises 30% of the marks in English subject. It is conducted twice a year, from April to June and from July to September [24]. Table 1 shows the bands for oral assessment.

TABLE 1: Bands for Oral Assessment.

Level	Band	Marks
Excellent	9 – 10	25 - 30
Good	6 – 8	20 - 24
Satisfactory	4 – 5	15 - 19
Weak	2 – 3	14-Oct
Very weak	1	9-Jan

2.3. Communication apprehension

This study employs the definition and theory from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). According to them language anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation) is negatively correlated with English performance. They defined communication apprehension as fear associated with communication with another person. Students feel shy, heart races, never feel quite sure of themselves, panic, nervous, self-conscious and confuse when they speak English in the classroom.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Communication apprehension (CA) among the students

Communication apprehension had been identified as a contributing factor for learners' inability to communicate well in English. In most of public schools in Turkey, English courses did not promote oral communication in the classroom and students do not utilize English in real life [30]. In Turkey, majority of the students learned English as part of the curriculum in the classroom and they did not speak English outside of the classroom [30]. Mestan (2017) agreed that language anxiety was the barrier in learning and teaching English because oral language was not promoted during the English language class. Students did not score good results in English. He mentioned that the students were not exposed to oral language as a result; their anxiety level in speaking the English language was high. Results revealed that negative feeling affected the students in speaking English. Results showed that when the anxiety of the students increased, their fluency level decreased. The study is in line with this study when it showed a negative relationship between language anxiety in speaking and the students' fluency in English. In Mestan's study the IV was language anxiety and the DV was students' fluency in speaking English. Uyanik, Cobek, Basturk & Ugur (2016) also revealed that anxiety was negatively correlated with GPA. Their findings are in line with this study when they discovered that students with high anxiety were those who had lower GPA. Azelin, et. al. (2015) also reported that the majority of the undergraduate students studying at a few public universities in Malaysia had high level of communication apprehension when learning English. The study suggested the language lecturers need to be aware of all the factors especially the fear of being evaluated. It is true because when the highest mean level in this study showed that male and female students feel self-conscious when speaking English in front of other students. Their studies were in line with Mahfuzah, et. al. (2014) when they found that students from

UiTM, Perak experienced high level of communication apprehension. Speaking was proven to be the most stressful since the direct output had been projected immediately and speaking activity was considered quite crucial in overall assessment. Students felt lost if without proper guidance from language instructors and speaking was the most anxiety-provoking activities in the classroom [23]. As a result, their speaking performance was low. Theoretically, their studies are in line with this study. They found that there is negative relationship between communication apprehension with speaking performance but their studies were looking at the effect of language anxiety in communication apprehension on speaking performance. McCroskey, Butterfield and Payne (2009) mentioned that communication apprehension was conceptualized as a causal agent in student success. It was implicated in interpersonal and academic success. They conducted a study on the impact of communication apprehension on grade point average and persistence at the university level. Results indicated high communication apprehension students were significantly attain lower grade point averages and more likely to drop out compared students with low communication apprehension. The impact of communication apprehension was the strongest for first and second year students.

However, some previous research findings revealed that communication apprehension was always the contributing factor for low English oral or speaking performance had been inconsistent and contradictory [3, 12, 25]. Mari (2016) found that students experience moderate level of language anxiety in communication apprehension but their oral grade was good. His study showed that language anxiety did not affect the students' grade in oral performance. In other words, his study revealed that there was a positive correlation between language anxiety and oral performance. Even though students experienced language anxiety in the classroom, it might not affect the oral performance because most of the students can speak English in real life. A study made by Debreli and Demirkan (2016) showed that majority of the Turkish students experience low level of language anxiety in speaking because the quantitative results showed that students with low level of speaking anxiety experienced low level of language proficiency. However, the semi-structured interviews revealed that six out ten students inform that speaking was the most provoking anxiety. They stated that they got nervous when they spoke English in the classroom. They thought that they did not speak English perfectly. They were also scared that their pronunciation was not good and their classmates will laugh at them. It reflected that majority of the students experienced communication apprehension. Debreli and Demirkan (2016) agreed that in qualitative method results showed that there was a negative relationship between

communication apprehension and oral performance. Al-Asmari (2015) found that students with high English language proficiency and low English proficiency from Taif University, Saudia Arabia experienced moderate level of communication apprehension. He also found that students with low level of English proficiency experienced low level of communication apprehension. The finding might be due to the fact that students with high English language proficiency were more conscious and careful about their performance as compared to students with low level of English proficiency. Al-Asmari's study was in line with Catagay (2015) from Turkey when they found that both male and female students experienced moderate level of communication apprehension.

This study is contradicting to the study made by Al-Shboul (2013) when he found that gifted learners from "PERMATA pintar National Gifted Center", National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor experienced moderate level of communication apprehension. Most of the gifted male and female form four students have scored excellent in the English language test. However, their oral language or communication skill did not display the same proficiency. Despite their good performance in tests, they experienced moderate level of communication apprehension. He concluded that the students experienced moderate level of communication apprehension might be because the gifted students contributed to less amount of communication and spent most of the time on their own.

Mestan (2017) and Uyanik, Cobek, Basturk & Ugur (2016) agreed that communication apprehension affected oral performance, but pointed out that the effects of communication apprehension may be different from those suggested by Azelin, et. al. (2015) and Mahfuzah, et. al. (2014). It was clear that communication apprehension was proven to be most stressful one. Mari (2016), Debreli and Demirkan (2016) and Al-Shboul (2013) agreed that students experienced communication apprehension but they disagreed that communication apprehension affected the students' grade in oral performance.

3.2. Oral language

Oral language is the foundation for the development of literacy skills and is considered to be a strong indicator of reading, writing, and overall academic achievement [7, 14]. They found that strong oral language skills pave the way for the development of literacy in a second language. One of the key influences in young people's reading and writing is their key influence of their oral language facility [7].

3.3. Hypothesis development

Based on the previous studies, the researcher outlined a hypothesis for this study. The development of the related hypothesis is as follows:

H_o: There is no significant causal relationship between the form four students who have passed the SBOE with communication apprehension.

4. Research Method

4.1. Research design
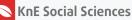
Table 2: Approach and Type of Mixed Methods.

Approach			Type
QUAN	qual	→	sequential
Source: Morse's (1991) Notation System			

This study is a mix-method approach, as illustrated in Table 2. The research plan proceeded in two phases. During the first phase, the researcher distributed the questionnaires (FLCAS) to the male and female students. During the second phase, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the English teachers. In other words, data in this study were collected sequentially, meaning that the researcher collected mixed form of data, including quantitative survey data and semi-structured interview data arranged in a sequence. It is called an explanatory sequential mixed method design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected in sequential, analyzed separately, and then explained.

4.2. Population

For the quantitative method, the population was the form four including male and female students who had passed the SBOE. For the qualitative method, this study is interviewing the English teachers. The participants were from government secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory. There are eleven government secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory.

4.3. Sampling method

This study employed a random sampling technique in order to generalize the population [10]. Cresswell (2012) recommended choosing a random sampling where each individual in population has the same chance of being selected.

4.4. Sample size

The sample size in this study is 30% from the number of students who have passed in SBOE in the mid-term examination 2017. Table 3 illustrates the sample size for quantitative data in this study. It is about the same rule of which has been proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2001)). They proposed that if the population size is 1,000, the sample size will be 278 [9].

TABLE 3: Sample Size for Quantitative Data.

Total No. of Schools	Total of Form	No. of Students 4 Students	Sample Size (Pass in SBOE)
11	1,250	1007	302

4.5. Research intrument

For quantitative method, the replicated, adapted and translated questionnaire (FLCAS by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986, 1991) is the main instrument to measure the language anxiety and the mid-term examination's results served as a secondary data. FLCAS consists of 33 items in a 5-point likert scale that range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The instrument consists of Part A and B. Part A is designed to obtain respondents' demographic information including age, gender, race and SBOE results. As for section B, 33 items are replicated and adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1991) FLCAS questionnaire. The IV in this study is male and female students who had passed in SBOE. Results of SBOE were collected from the English teachers. The DV in this study is communication apprehension (CA). It is measured by the following items: (1); (4); (9); (14); (15); (18); (24); (27); (29); (30) and (32). Data in quantitative method were anlysed by the descriptive analysis (SPSS). For qualitative method, semi-structured interviews were held with the four English Teachers. The interviews were recorded by video recording. Data were analyzed by using content analysis according to the theme and codes related to communication apprehension. Results from the semi-structured interview explained more on the findings from the quantitative method.

5. Discussion

5.1. Results and findings

The mid-term examination 2017 revealed that the students' results in SBOE were high. The mid-term examination is a national examination and the question papers are set by the examination syndicate, Ministry of Education Malaysia. Seventy four students had scored "excellence"; 171 students had scored "good"; 56 students had scored "satisfactory" and only one student had scored "weak". Findings from the quantitative method showed that the mean level of communication apprehension for male and female students is 1.77. The mean level of communication apprehension is low (Low: From 1.00 to 2.33). High results in SBOE had given effect to the communication apprehension. The effect size of oral performance on communication apprehension was quite large because the partial eta squared showed the value of 0.106. According to Whitehead, Julious, Cooper and Campbell (2015) the general rules of thumb on magnitudes of effect sizes used in statistical analyses recorded that the large effect size in Partial Eta is the value of 0.14 (in one-way MANOVA).

This study had successfully rejected the null hypothesis. The result of partial eta-squared is used to form a decision. The partial eta-squared is 0.106 and the effect size is considered quite large. The results are said to be statistically significant and support is inferred for the relationship [16] between the form four students who had passed the SBOE with communication apprehension. Therefore, there is a significant causal relationship between male and female students who had passed the SBOE with communication. The high performance of students in SBOE had caused low mean level of communication apprehension. The mean level of communication apprehension for male and female students is 1.77. In other words, there is negative relationship between male and female students who had passed the SBOE and WEE with communication apprehension.

Qualitative results revealed that all the teachers had agreed that students were confident, not worried, not nervous, not self-conscious, not panic, not upset and not forgetful during the SBOE. Teachers had created positive and conducive classroom environments because the exposure to use the English language in the classroom is very important. Students were free to express their views and feelings without having the fear of making mistakes. As a result, they were comfortable to use and converse in English effectively. Students did a lot of activities in the English class interaction such as presentations, pair works, group works and the activities were fun activities. Therefore, they felt at ease and confident. They were focused because the activities

were very specific. They also did brain storming in groups, discussing all the points and finally did the script. Teachers and students had close relationships so students were free to share their views and came out with brilliant ideas. Students were very active to ask and answer the questions during the English class interaction. The English teachers gave them the opportunity and chances to try. They never said wrong when students' answers were incorrect. They asked the students to keep-on trying. When the teachers never said wrong, the students were not scared to answer the questions. They gave more speaking activities in the classroom such as seminars, dialogues, questionnaires and radio calls at the station.

Majority of the students could answer the questions when they were asked during the SBOE. Students reacted positively during the SBOE. They understood the abstract, the passages and questions that had given to them. The teachers concluded that they were positive while communicating with the teachers and among themselves. They practiced among themselves and because of the preparation that they had made, they performed well in the SBOE.

5.2. Normality distributions

According to Awang (2014; 2015) data are considered normally distributed if the absolute value of its skewness fall within the range of -1.5 to 1.5 range. In this study, the minimum skewness is 0.411 and the maximum skewness is 1.322. Therefore, data in this study are distributed normally.

6. Conclusions

The current findings add substantially to our current understanding that the form four students in the government secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory experienced low mean level of language anxiety in communication apprehension. Results revealed that both male and female students had scored high results in SBOE in the mid-term examination 2017. Studies made by other researchers in the Malaysian school so far, had shown that students experienced moderate to high level of language anxiety. Studied had done in a few secondary schools in Perak [21, 22] had shown that students experienced moderate level of language anxiety. The percentage of students scored "excellence" in English subject in SPM in Perak was 17.32% in 2015 and 13.45% in 2014 [24]. Mohd. Hasrul, Noraini, Melor & Noriah (2013) had found that the students from PERMATA pintar (UKM) in Selangor experienced moderate level of language anxiety. In 2013, the percentage of students scored "excellence" in SPM in Selangor was

21.99% [24]. Wong (2012) also found that students from schools in Sarawak experienced language anxiety. The percentage of students scored "excellence" in SPM in Sarawak was 12.61% [24]. Haryati (2007) revealed that students from schools in Kelantan experienced moderate to high level of language anxiety. The percentage of students scored "excellence" in SPM in Kelantan was only 7.27% [24]. The percentage of students scored "excellence" in SPM 2016 in Putrajaya Federal Territory was 33.96% and "good" was 38.79% [24]. In other words, 72.75% of students in the secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory had scored "excellence" and "good" in their SPM.

Reports from the teachers showed that a conducive English class environment was very important in order for the students to speak freely, with confident and feel at ease. The students felt comfortable in the English class. The students also had shown positive attitude in speaking English. They were free to give their views without having fear of making mistakes. As a result, students scored high results in the SBOE. High results had lowered down the level of communication apprehension. Therefore, it can be concluded that high results decrease the mean level of communication apprehension.

According to the theory of Krashen (1982) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), language anxiety acts an affective filter which impede language learning ([20]. It prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device (LAD) in the brain. Krashen (1982) had found that those who were not proficient in language had the language anxiety which prevented input from reaching the language acquisition device (LAD) in the brain. Language anxiety existed because the students were not proficient enough in the English language [20]. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) had supported the theory by produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work by Krashen in this field. Based on the theory language anxiety and language performance was negatively related to each other. This study revealed that students with high performance in SBOE had not affected by language anxiety (communication apprehension). This study is in agreement with the theory of Krashen (1982) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986).

6.1. Contributions to the body of knowledge

This study suggests the followings:

1. The government secondary schools in Putrajaya Federal Territory could be the model in English subject for all secondary schools in Malaysia. According to the

statistic from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, secondary schools in Putra-jaya Federal Territory have scored the highest number of students passed in the English subject in SPM in Malaysia for the last ten years.

2. This finding will give contributions to the Ministry of Education Malaysia and language teachers on the significance of environment of the English language classroom in order to prevent the gap between the English test performance and the actual students' language competence outside of the classroom.

3. The English language curriculum for the secondary schools might be reviewed and a new oral-based English curriculum should be studied and developed.
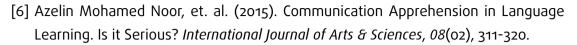
7. Future Research

For future research, this study suggests the followings:

1. To investigate whether the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are sufficient enough for students. SBOE needs to be made carefully, namely with regard to whether it is enough to make a judgment on just a few times in a year and whether the models are given to students are commensurate with the level of teaching given in classroom. Floden (1997) emphasized the need for teachers to investigate how is their teaching of speaking and writing. He advocated for content and methodology that would help students to learn English in a target environment, such as outside of the classroom, in which language has to be used accordingly.

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