

ASSESSING EFL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES: A PRCA-24 BASED DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The study aims to assess the level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Communication Apprehension among undergraduate students at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Employing a descriptive research design, data were collected from a sample of 363 students drawn from the four disciplines: Business Administration, Public Administration, Chemistry and Computer Science. The sample comprised 246 female and 117 male students. The PRCA-24 was utilized as the primary instrument to measure students' communication apprehension across different communicative contexts. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis including mean, and standard deviation. The findings of the study indicate that students, on average, experience a moderate level of communication apprehension in EFL contexts. A slight variation was observed across gender, with male students reporting marginally higher levels of communication apprehension compared to their female counterparts. Moreover, the results for all the four departments also revealed that the students from all the four disciplines reported moderate level of communication apprehension, with students of Business Administration reported the highest and the students of Public Administration reported the lowest level of communication apprehension. The results suggest that while communication apprehension is not extreme, it remains a persistent factor influencing students' willingness to engage in English communication. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a contextualized descriptive profile of EFL communication apprehension in a Pakistani public sector university. It also highlights the need for pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering a more supportive and confidence-enhancing language learning environment.

Key Words: *English as a Foreign Language, Communication Apprehension, University Undergraduates.*

1.1 Introduction

English has become the dominant medium of communication in social, professional, and academic domains worldwide. In Pakistan, English is often employed as the medium of instruction in higher education, which replaces a significant demand on learners' oral communication skills (Mesti, 2020). Despite formal instruction, many undergraduate students experience difficulties in expressing themselves effectively in English, often due to anxiety or reluctance in communication situations. This phenomenon is widely conceptualized as Communication Apprehension, defined as individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others (McCroskey, 1977; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021; Schulenberg, Goldberg, Kreps & Oh, 2014).

Research reveals that communication apprehension can significantly influence learners' classroom participation, willingness to engage in discussions, and overall communicative competence (Ulfah, 2024; Mugaddam & Aljohani, 2025). Even students with adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge may hesitate in communication, which can limit their language development and academic performance (Muftah, 2023). Furthermore, CA has been found to be closely linked with learners' self-perceived communication competence, where higher levels of apprehension correspond to lower confidence in oral communication (Muftah, 2023; Schulenberg et al., 2024).

Several empirical studies have investigated the prevalence of communication apprehension in EFL contexts. For instance, Ulfah (2024) reported moderate to high levels of CA among undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students in Indonesia, Zakaria and Hassan (2015) highlighted that business students in Malaysian universities also experience significant communication anxiety. Similarly, Mugaddam and Aljohani (2025) found that foreign language anxiety negatively affects learners' speech production in Saudi EFL classrooms. These findings demonstrate that communication apprehension is a widespread phenomenon across different educational and cultural contexts.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) has been widely employed as a reliable and validated instrument to measure CA across multiple communication contexts, including group discussion, meetings, interpersonal conversations and public speaking (Souza et al., 2022; Schulenberg et al., 2025). The continued use of PRCA-24 in recent studies emphasizes its relevance and effectiveness in capturing learners' apprehension levels in diverse educational settings.

Despite the growing body of research, there remains a relative scarcity of descriptive studies examining communication apprehension among Pakistani university students, particularly in public sector institutions. The socio-cultural and educational environment of Pakistan, where English functions as a foreign language, may influence students' participation and confidence in communicative activities (Mesti, 2020; Rahman & Umar, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to assess the level of EFL communication apprehension in this particular context to provide insights for the educators and policymakers aiming to foster more supportive and confidence-enhancing environment.

In light of this, the present study aims to assess the level of EFL communication apprehension among undergraduate students at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, using the PRCA-24 instrument. Employing a descriptive research design and statistical measures including mean, median and standard deviation, the study provides a contextualized profile of communication apprehension across different academic disciplines and gender groups. By doing so, it contributes empirical evidence from an underexplored Pakistani context and highlights the ongoing challenges of fostering confident English communication in higher education.

1.2 Study Purposes

The purpose of this study is to assess the level of EFL communication apprehension among undergraduate students at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Specifically, it aims to provide a descriptive profile of communication apprehension across different academic departments, Business Administration, Public Administration, Chemistry and Computer Science, and to examine potential differences between male and female students. The study seeks to offer insights into students' communication confidence and apprehension levels, thereby contributing empirical evidence from a Pakistani university context and informing strategies to support effective English communication in higher education.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Understanding the phenomenon of communication apprehension among EFL learners is critical for enhancing confidence and participation in academic settings. The present study provides valuable insights into the levels of communication apprehension among undergraduates at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, across multiple disciplines and gender groups, highlighting potential areas of support needed for students. By using the PRCA-24 instrument and descriptive analysis, the study offers empirical evidence specific to Pakistani public sector university context, where English functions as a foreign language. The findings can inform educators, curriculum designers and policymakers in developing strategies, instructional approaches and interventions that foster effective communication, reduce anxiety

and promote active engagement in English learning, ultimately contributing to students' academic success and professional preparedness.

1.4 Problem Statement

Despite years of English instruction in Pakistani higher education institutions, many undergraduate students continue to experience anxiety and reluctance when required to communicate orally in English, negatively affecting their classroom participation and language development (Mesti, 2020; Muftah, 2023). Communication apprehension (CA), defined by McCroskey (1977) as an individual's fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication, has been identified as a key factor inhibiting effective engagement in EFL contexts (Schulenberg, Goldberg, Kreps & Oh, 2014). Research in diverse EFL settings reports moderate to high levels of CA among students, which correlate with lower self-perceived communication apprehension and reduced willingness to participate in communicative activities (Ulfah, 2024; Muftah, 2023). However, there remains a paucity of descriptive studies profiling the extent of communication apprehension among Pakistani university students, particularly across different academic disciplines and gender groups, limiting educators' ability to understand and address the persistent challenge (Rahman and Umar, 2023). Consequently, there is a need to empirically assess the level of EFL communication apprehension among undergraduates at the University of Sindh to inform instructional practices and support strategies that foster greater confidence and participation in English communication.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered in the present study:

1. What is the level of EFL Communication Apprehension among undergraduate students at University of Sindh as measured by PRCA-24?
2. How does EFL Communication Apprehension vary across gender among university undergraduate students at University of Sindh?
3. How does EFL Communication Apprehension vary across academic departments among university undergraduate students at University of Sindh?

2.0 Review of Literature

The concept of communication apprehension (CA), was systematically developed by James C. McCroskey, who defined it as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others (McCroskey, 1977, 1984). Over the period of time, CA evolved from a situational construct into a more stable, trait-like predisposition influencing communication across contexts. To measure the construct, McCroskey introduced the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), later refined into PRCA-24, which assesses apprehension across public speaking, meetings, interpersonal conversations and group discussions (McCroskey, 1984; Bux et al., 2019; Gopang et al., 2015).

The PRCA-24 has remained one of the most reliable and widely used instruments in communication research, demonstrating strong psychometric properties across diverse cultural and educational contexts (de Araujo et al., 2021). McCroskey's framework further conceptualizes CA as involving cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions where individuals experience negative expectations, fear and avoidance tendencies in communication situations.

Recent empirical studies continue to highlight communication apprehension as a persistent barrier in EFL learning environment. For instance, Ulfah (2024) reported moderate to high levels of CA among the students across different academic levels, while Mugaddam and Mugaddam and Aljohani (2025) found that foreign language anxiety significantly constraints speech production among Saudi learners. Similarly, research by Li ((2025) emphasizes the emotional variables including anxiety, play a central role in shaping learners' willingness to communicate in a second language.

Additional studies also reinforce this pattern. Teimouri, Goetze and Plonsky (2020) demonstrated through meta-analysis that language anxiety consistently correlates with reduced performance in speaking tasks. Likewise, Botes, Dewaele and Grieff (2020) found that anxiety negatively influences communication engagement across EFL contexts. These findings collectively suggest that communication apprehension is not an isolated issue but widespread barrier affecting language learning globally.

A substantial body of research has explored the relationship between communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence. (Muftah (2023) found that students with higher level of CA tend to report lower confidence in their communication abilities. Similarly, Schulenberg et al. (2024) demonstrated that communication self-efficacy is inversely related to apprehension, indicating the students' beliefs about their communicative competence significantly influence their participation.

Supporting this, research by Peng and Woodrow (2010) suggests that willingness to communicate in EFL contexts is strongly mediated by learners' confidence and anxiety levels. Additionally, Saka and Merc (2021) reported that students with higher self-perceived competence exhibit greater engagement in communication tasks despite linguistic limitations. These finding align with McCroskey's original assertion that CA is deeply intertwined with self-perception and psychological disposition.

Communication apprehension has been widely studied across different cultural contexts, reveling both universal trends and context-specific variations. Studies conducted in Malaysia (Zakaria & Hassan, 2015), Indonesia (Ulfah, 2024) and Saudi Arabia (Mugaddam & Aljohani, 2025) consistently report moderate to high levels of CA among university students.

In the Pakistani context, English serves as a second or foreign language and is frequently used as the medium of instruction in higher education (Mesti, 2020). However, socio-cultural factors such as fear of negative evaluations, limited opportunities for authentic communication and traditional teacher-centered pedagogies contribute to communication apprehension among students (Rahman & Umar, 2023).

For supporting this, research by Griffiths and Soruc (2021) highlights that classroom environment and cultural expectations significantly shape learners' communication behaviour. Similarly, Al-Khotaba et al. (2020) found that students in EFL contexts often avoid speaking due to fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers. These findings underscore the importance of examining CA within socio-cultural and institutional contexts.

The PRCA-24 continues to be the most widely used instrument for assessing communication apprehension. Its ability to measure anxiety across multiple communication contexts makes it particularly suitable for both descriptive and comparative studies (Schulenberg et al., 2023). Recent studies have reaffirmed its reliability and validity across diverse populations (Schulenberg et al., 2024).

Moreover, contemporary research emphasizes the importance of using standardized instruments such as PRCA-24 to ensure comparability across studies and contexts (Botes et al., 2020). The instrument's multidimensional structure allows the researchers to identify not only overall levels of apprehension but also context-specific variations, which are critical for understanding learners' communication challenges.

The literature clearly establishes communication apprehension as a significant factor affecting learners' communication behavior, supported by both classical and contemporary research. While recent studies have increasingly focused on examining relationship between CA and variables such self-efficacy, motivation and performance, there remains a lack of descriptive studies that provide a detailed profile of communication apprehension in specific educational contexts.

In particular, limited research has examined CA among Pakistani undergraduate students across different academic disciplines and gender groups using standardized instruments such as PRCA-24. Therefore, the present study addresses the gap by offering a descriptive analysis of EFL communication apprehension at the University of Sindh, contributing context-specific empirical evidence to the broader field of communication apprehension research.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to assess the level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communication apprehension among undergraduate students at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. A descriptive approach was considered appropriate as the study aimed to measure and presents the existing levels of communication apprehension without manipulating variables or establishing causal relationships. The data were collected using PRCA-24, a standardized and widely validated instrument designed to assess communication apprehension. The target population comprised 363 students selected from four academic disciplines: Business Administration, Public Administration, Chemistry and Computer Science including both male and female participants. The collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically mean, and standard deviation, to determine the overall level of distribution of communication apprehension among the participants both gender-wise and department-wise. This design enabled the study to generate a clear and systematic profile of EFL communication apprehension within the selected context, providing a reliable empirical basis for understanding students' communicative tendencies without extending into inferential and predictive analysis.

4.0 Results and Estimation

4.1 Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the internal consistency of the instrument, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. The PRCA-24 is widely recognized for its strong reliability across diverse contexts; however, it is essential to establish reliability within the current sample. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the consistency of the responses across the items, with values above 0.70 generally considered acceptable for research purposes. The results of the reliability analysis are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Reliability Statistics

Variable	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)	24	.813

The PRCA has 24 items and it demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .813. This indicates that the instrument is reliable and suitable for measuring communication apprehension among the participants.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive Statistical Analysis was conducted to examine the levels of communication apprehension among the participants. Measures including mean, median and standard deviation were used to provide an overall profile of EFL communication apprehension, followed by comparison across gender and academic disciplines.

Table 4.2
Descriptive Analysis

No of Participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Moderate Level CA
363	1	5	.322	.440	

The results indicate a mean communication apprehension score among the participants as .322 (1-2.5, Low, 2.6-3.5, Moderate and 3.6-5, High), which falls under the moderate level of communication apprehension. It reveals that the students experience noticeable but not extreme level of apprehension while coming across communication situations.

Table 4.3
Descriptive Analysis (Gender-wise)

Gender	No	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Level
Female	217	1	5	3.14	.388	Moderate
Male	146	1	5	3.34	.469	Moderate

The results of the gender-wise descriptive analysis revealed that both male and female students reported moderate level of communication apprehension. However, male students reported slightly higher CA level as in comparison to female counterparts. Although, the variation between the two genders is not huge but it can further be explored in future analysis.

Table 4.4
Descriptive Analysis (Department-wise)

Department	No	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Level
Business Admn	95	1	5	3.36	.539	Moderate
Public Admn	84	1	5	3.16	.399	Moderate
Chemistry	96	1	5	3.24	.370	Moderate
Comp Science	88	1	5	3.20	.428	Moderate
Total	363	1	5	3.22	.440	Moderate

The results of the department-wise descriptive analysis show that communication apprehension (CA) across all the departments falls within the moderate range. Among the four departments, students from Business Administration reported the highest level of communication apprehension (M=3.36, SD=0.539) whereas the students from Public Administration department reported the lowest level of communication apprehension (M=3.16, SD=0.399). Although, slight variations are observed across all the departments, the overall pattern suggests a relatively consistent level of moderate communication apprehension across disciplines, with no substantial differences in dispersion as indicated by comparable standard deviation values.

5.1 Discussion and Interpretations of the Findings

The findings of the study reveal that undergraduate students at the University of Sindh experience a moderate level of communication apprehension in EFL contexts, a pattern that aligns with a growing body of international research reporting similar trends among university learners (Ulfah, 2024; Muftah, 2023; Bux et al., 2019; Gopang et al., 2015). This suggests that communication anxiety is not an isolated or context-specific issue but a persistent feature of EFL learning environments, where students often possess adequate linguistic knowledge yet struggle to express themselves confidently. The consistency of moderate communication apprehension across departments further indicates that communication anxiety is less influenced by disciplinary differences and more reflective of broader educational and socio-cultural dynamics, such as limited opportunities for authentic communication, fear of negative evaluation and reliance on teacher-centered instructional practices (Alshammari, 2025). Although, Business Administration students reported slightly higher level of communication apprehension compared to other groups, the variations remain marginal, reinforcing the notion

that communication apprehension is a shared experience among learners rather than a department-specific phenomenon. Additionally, the relatively low variability in scores suggests a uniform distribution of apprehension levels, highlighting the systematic nature of the issue. These findings underscore the need for pedagogical interventions that prioritize communicative competence, confidence-building and supportive classroom environments to reduce apprehension and enhance students' willingness to engage in English communication settings.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The use of descriptive research design restricts the study to reporting levels of communication apprehension without establishing causal relationship or identifying underlying factors. The data were collected from a single public sector University, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or cultural contexts. The reliance on self-reported responses through the PRCA-24 may introduce response bias, as participants' perceptions may not fully reflect their actual communication behaviour. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable baseline insights into EFL communication apprehension within the selected context.

5.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study set out to assess the level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Communication Apprehension among undergraduate students at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The findings indicate that students experience a moderate level of communication apprehension across all departments and gender groups, with only slight variations observed among both disciplines and gender groups. This suggests that communication apprehension is a shared and persistent feature of the EFL learning experience rather than a problem confined to specific academic fields and gender group. The overall consistency in the results highlights the need to address communication anxiety at a broader institutional and pedagogical level.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, educators should incorporate more student-centered and communicative teaching practices that encourage active participation and reduce fear of evaluation. Second, creating a supportive classroom environment where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process can help build students' confidence in using English. Third, universities should consider organizing workshops, speaking activities and interactive sessions aimed at enhancing students' communication skills and reducing apprehension. Finally, future research may extend this study by exploring the psychological, instructional and socio-cultural factors contributing to communication apprehension or by employing inferential statistical methods to examine differences more rigorously across different groups.

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