

ARAB STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION ANXIETY, SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION, AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH: A STUDY ABROAD CONTEXT

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Abstract: This research paper investigated the predictive relationship of two variables, language communication anxiety and self-perceived communicative competence that are related to willingness to communicate (WTC) in a study abroad context. The respondents were 180 Arab students who were studying in the International Islamic university in Malaysia (both undergraduate and postgraduate). Multiple regressions were conducted to date. The results showed that Language communication anxiety and self-perceived communicative competence were influential factors. ($\beta = 155, P < .05$; $\beta = .487, P < .01$, respectively). The b oth factors had significant positive effect on WTC ($R^2 = 58.5, P < .01$).

Keywords: A study abroad context, Anxiety, Communication Competence, WTC

INTRODUCTION

The number of students studying abroad has been on the rise every year. The importance of studying abroad can be described as an experience that is related to other countries and the increased opportunities for international activity that provide cultural awareness that invites students to understand the world from entirely different perspectives (Paige et al., 2002; cited in Jackson, 2007). Patricia (2004) reviewed several aspects of study abroad programs. Three categories were identified; academic, residential, and social. In terms of academics, students can be instructed in English and they attend classes with other students from the host community as well as with other foreign students. Residential situations play a significant role too because it is where they live with fellow nationals, as well as other foreign students, and host families. Socially, students may participate in community activities and travelling that can give students the insights into the world culture and values of the host countries (Particia, 2004).

Willingness to communicate is a key construct to initiate speaking in the target language learning. The ultimate goal of language learning was recently defined as "...authentic communication between persons of different language and cultural background" (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Therefore, learning a new language is not just learning its grammatical and lexical components. It requires an understanding of when and how to use the language in actual daily conversation. Willingness in a study abroad context is an essential factor to help students using their second language. Students' WTC could be change as the students move to a different learning context. Ortega (2009) suggested that "...the shape of WTC may change as learners move from one learning context to another" or as they gain substantial competence as a result of a myriad of voluntary or involuntary changes in their life circumstances that are related to work, study, marriage, and so on." (p.204). Thus, WTC is not independent of what happens in such contexts. In other words, WTC in a study abroad context does not exist as a single variable in itself, but rather as the result of numerous underlying predictors.

WTC has been influenced by number of variables. An essential reason for not being willing to communicate is the fear or lack of willingness to communicate with others. Richmond and

McCroskey (1995) stated that lack of communication results from “an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p.41). Possessing a lack of communication has typically been seen in one's reluctance to speak, and is generally subsumed in the construct of communication apprehension (Clark, 1989). Communication competence is related to an individual’s willingness to communicate. When individuals do not perceive themselves as competent, they would be more likely to be anxious about communicating. They may withdraw from communicating, indicating them to be less willing to engage in communicative behaviour (Barracough et al., 1988). “A person’s self-perceived communication competence, as oppose to their actual behavioural competence, will greatly affect that person’s willingness to initiate and engage in communication. It is what a person thinks s/he can do, not what s/he actually could do, which impacts the individual’s behavioural choice” (Barracough et al., 1988, p.188). Communication anxiety and communication competence have been found to be significantly related to each other, thus producing self-confidence among individuals. Communication self-confidence can be defined in terms of self-perception of second language communication competence and a low level of communication anxiety (Clement, 1980, 1986; Yashima, 2002; Yahima et al., 2004). Therefore, this paper investigated the influence of language communication anxiety, self-perceived communicative competence as independent variables on WTC as dependent variable.

METHOD

Participants and Setting

The respondents in the research were 180 students studying at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in academic year 2010-2011 The number of female participants was 17 students (9.4 %) while the number of male participants was 156 students (86.7%). The educational level was bachelor, master, and PhD, 116(65%), 43(23.9%) , and 17(9.4%) respectively.

Data Collection Instruments

The instrument of this study is a questionnaire in ESL communication anxiety, self-perceived communicative competence, and willingness to communicate in English scales. This questionnaire was adapted from Yashima (2002), 12 items measuring English communication anxiety(CA) (Cronbach’s alpha = .91). MacIntyre and Charos (1996), 12 items measuring Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) (Cronbach’s alpha = .80), and McCroskey (1992), 12 items measuring Willingness to communicate (WTC) (Cronbach’s alpha = .74).

Data Analysis

In the study, the variables of data were entered to the Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and were used to analyse the data quantitatively. The data gained from the survey factors were analysed through descriptive statistics and multiple regressions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A descriptive analysis showed out the mean and SD of factors. Table 1 illustrates these findings. The analysed data revealed that learners possessed moderate levels in all three factors, CA, SPCC, and WTC (3.33/.82, 3.34/80, 3.33/.75) respectively.

Factor	Mean	SD
Communication Anxiety(CA)	3.33	0.82

Self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC)	3.34	0.8
Willingness to communicate(WTC)	3.33	0.75

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis

However, given that L2 communication anxiety and L2 perceived communicative competence were found to have significant effect on willingness to communicate. Therefore, checking the predictive power of these communication variables would provide an insight into the reasons that might cause Arab students in Malaysia to remain silent and unwilling to initiate communication; multiple regressions was performed to test whether these two variables can actually predict L2 WTC. Both variables were found to be good predictors of L2 WTC and their standardized regression coefficients (Beta) were tested for significance. . The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

factor	Dependent = WTC Standardized Beta
communication anxiety	.155*
Self-perceived communicative competence	.487**
R ²	58.5
Adjusted R ²	.342
F Value	45.55**

Note: **p<.01 , *P<.05

Table 2: The Relationship Between SC, SPCC and WTC

According to the results shown in the table above, the influences of the two factors, communication anxiety and self-perceived communication competence on a willingness to communicate in English are supported. The extent of the variance in willingness to communicate is explained by the score for both variables (58.5% (R² = 58.5, P<.01), indicated by the F value of 45.36, which is significant at (p< .01). It is found that communication anxiety and self-perceived communication competence in English are significantly related to the willingness to communicate in English among participants ($\beta = 155$, P<.05; $\beta = .487$, P<.01, respectively). The value of R in this model (58.5%) explains the clear relationship with WTC. The remaining 41.5 % of this effect can be explained by other factors. In other words, this finding indicates that both factors were significant positive predictors on students’ willingness to communicate in English.

Arab learners’ self-perceived communication competence has a positive direct impact on their WTC that was consistency with previous studies. Besides, it should be considered that students’ communication anxiety level effect on their WTC, thus it is vital to ensure students’ Communication anxiety at low level to initiate communication using target language. Learner’s communication competence accompanied with a low level of anxiety leads to stronger willingness to communicate in a SL context. High apprehension corresponded with a low level of willingness to communicate. Furthermore, it can be assumed that high level of anxiety display lower WTC. However, in this study, the learners’ communication anxiety was not in low level and influenced their willingness positively.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the result, it can be concluded that WTC of Arab students in abroad context has a strong impact on studied variables (SPCC & CA). Results point out that WTC is no simple construct and scholars need to carefully choose different variables to develop an understanding of this topic in study abroad contexts.

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