THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHERS' CONFIRMING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Teacher confirmation research has suggested that a teacher's confirming behaviours can reduce students' apprehension towards communicating and participating in the classroom. However, more emphasis has been given to the use of observation to measure teacher confirmation when compared to the receivers' perceptions. The core objective of this study was to determine the relationship between teacher confirmation and communication apprehension. Four separate lessons were conducted by a total of four English language teachers, where a total of 100 Form 4 students were used as samples of the study. After the lesson, students completed a set of questionnaires, which consists of the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS) and Classroom Apprehension Participation Scale (CAPS), on the level of students' apprehension in participating in classroom discussion and the frequency of a teacher exhibiting confirming behaviours in the classroom. Collectively, the results indicated a "Somewhat Confirming" level of teacher confirmation and a medium level of communication apprehension among students in the classroom. The findings also indicated a strong negative correlation between teacher confirmation and communication apprehension, which means that when the teacher confirmation level as perceived by the students is high, the communication apprehension among students will be low and vice versa. Teacher confirmation appears to be a salient behaviour to promote students' communication and participation in the classroom.

Keywords: Teacher confirmation; Communication Apprehension; Private School;

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The construct of communication apprehension is a serious problem that affects a significant percentage of the population, 10 to 20 percents of the population suffers from communicative apprehension to the point that their lives are some way handicapped by the condition (Graca, 2004). Hence, exploring communication apprehension within the population of teenagers could help professionals to better understand and diagnose the apprehension and provide intervention to individuals who suffer from communication apprehension at the early stage. Students' fear of communicating with teachers and peers in the classroom can lead to poor performance on standardized tests, which results in achieving lower grade point averages (Krol-Jersevic, 2004). These students will attract less attention from their teachers and peers, appearing less intelligent and less capable than other students who do not suffer from a high level of communication apprehension (Graca, 2004). Communication apprehension will not only affect the students' ability to communicate

when they are in schools but also negatively affect them when they go to the universities. A study conducted on communication apprehension among public university students in Malaysia revealed that a majority of students involved in the study recorded an average level of communication apprehension, where 18.4% of them recorded a high level of communication apprehension (Kaur, Raja Suleiman & Sidhu, 2012). Kaur, Raja Suleiman and Sidhu (2012) also reported that many students expressed a dislike for oral communication, involving English in particular, and they would utilise communication avoidance and withdrawal strategies to avoid being engaged in communication.

There are a lot of variables that can affect the level of communication apprehension among the population such as biological gender, age, personality, and self-esteem (Krol-Jersevic, 2004). This study, however, focused on teacher confirmation in the classroom as the independent variable because studies have shown that when a teacher portrays confirming behaviours in the classroom, the students' apprehension to communicate and participate in the classroom will be reduced (Ellis, 2004). This can lead to a positive relationship between the teacher and the students, which not only will encourage students to communicate in the classroom but also to promote cognitive and affective learning as well as students' state motivation and satisfaction (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Literature have shown that more emphasis has been given to the use of observation in order to measure teacher confirmation when compared to receiver perception (Ellis, 2000; Edwards et al., 2011). This study utilised the receiver perception perspective to measure teacher confirmation because it is deemed more suitable to investigate the effect of confirmation towards outcome variables as compared to the observation perspective (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Hence, the researcher aimed to replicate and further investigate the relationship between teacher confirmation based on the students' perceptions and students' apprehension towards communicating and participating in the classroom.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Teacher Confirmation

Teacher confirmation can be defined as the process where the teacher communicates to the students that they are recognised and acknowledged as valuable and significant individuals (Ellis, 2000). Specifically, in the context of instructional communication, Ellis (2000, 2004) stated that students' perceptions of teacher confirmation can be measured across three different constructs: 1) responding to student's questions or comments through verbal and nonverbal responses, 2) demonstrating interest and concern towards the students learning process and 3) employing various teaching styles and checking up on the students to ensure students' understanding of the material using the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS). Previous studies have shown that teachers' confirming behaviours can reduce students' fear to participate in classroom activities and discussions (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), improve students' perceived learning (Ellis, 2004) and facilitate understanding of the teaching content (Hsu, 2004). Hsu and Huang (2017) further elaborated that teachers who exhibit interest towards the students' learning progress and opinions through the use of praises, smiles and eye contact will encourage students to communicate and express their thoughts more in class because students will feel more valued and confident, hence leading to lesser communication apprehension. This finding is supported by Goodboy and Myers (2008), who stated that teacher confirmation can reduce student communication apprehension in the classroom-learning environment, which in turn can lead to increase student learning and motivation.

Researchers have also noted the existence of opposite behaviours to confirmation as disconfirmation, which can be a variety of behaviours that impact an individual's self-experience and feeling of self-worth negatively (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). Turman and Soliz (2006) stated in their study that teachers' disconfirming behaviours could lead to lower perceived understanding and motivation among the students. Hsu and Huang (2017) also stated that teachers' disconfirmation which include name-calling, sarcastic criticism, blame and hostile attack can discourage students from participating in classroom activities, which can lead to higher communication apprehension. Students who are

exposed to teachers' disconfirming behaviours will have problems communicating with others in the classroom due to increase amount of fear and unwillingness to talk (Ellis, 2004)

2.2   Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) can be defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1977). This form of apprehension refers only to oral communication (McCroskey, 1982), which means that other aspects of communication that is not oral such as writing, listening, gesturing and illustrating are not taken into consideration in the study of communication apprehension (Graca, 2004). Graca (2004) further explained that this anxiety and its accompanying reticence are due to biological and sociological factor, meaning that it can be caused by nature and nurture. Wrench, Rinchmond and Gorhan (2009) estimated that 20% of the student population in a school may be apprehensive towards communicating with their teachers and peers, and they tend to be less inclined to talk and most of the time, they would communicate only when they are forced to do so. Students, who are highly apprehensive towards communication tend to suffer from anxiety with little tolerance of uncertainty, poor self-control, not adventurous, introvert, lack of self-esteem and unassertive (Daly, 1991; Wrench, Richmond & Gorhan, 2009). Scores of studies have found that these students will also be perceived to be less competent, less attractive and less intelligent by their teachers and peers, (Walker, 1997; Wrench, Richmond & Gorhan, 2009) and this inclination to remove themselves from situations that would require them to communicate will have a direct effect on the students' grades and academic social success (Walker, 1997).

2.3   Previous Studies Related to Teacher Confirmation and Communication Apprehension

To establish the validity of TCS as an instrument to measure teacher confirmation based on the students' perceptions, Ellis (2000, 2004) conducted several studies on the effect of teachers' displaying confirming behaviours towards students' communication apprehension and learning motivation as well as cognitive and affective learning based on the students' perceptions. In her studies, she found that there is a negative relationship between perceived teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom. There is however a positive relationship between perceived teacher confirmation with perceived cognitive and affective learning as well as learning motivation. She further stated that when teacher portrays confirming behaviours, students' communication apprehension will be reduced which in turn, leads to improve students' learning and motivation (Ellis, 2004). A study conducted by Goodboy and Myers (2008) further explored the impact of perceived teacher confirmation on students' communication and learning outcomes. Results from the study indicated that teacher confirming behaviour promotes students' participation in the classroom and reduce challenge behaviour among them. This study also proved that teacher confirmation improves upon students' cognitive and affective learning, state motivation and learning satisfaction (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Similar results have been obtained by Hsui and Huang (2017) in their study to investigate the effect of teachers displaying confirming behaviour on students' apprehension towards communication and their willingness to talk. The study reported a positive relationship between teachers' confirming behaviour and students' willingness to talk and a negative relationship between teachers' confirming behaviour with students' apprehension to communicate in the classroom environment.
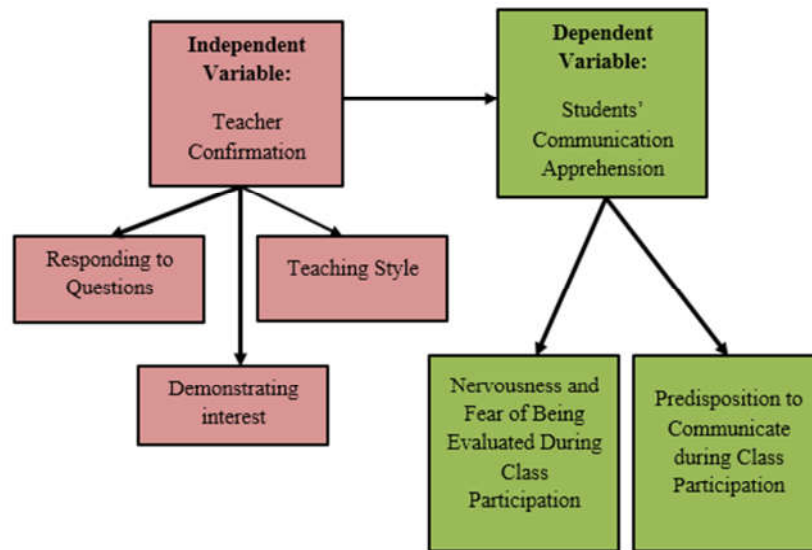
2.4   Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 Proposed Theoretical Framework

Figure 2.1 shows the proposed theoretical framework used in this study. According to literature, students' apprehension towards communicating and participating in the classroom is affected by teachers' confirming behaviour (Ellis, 2000 & 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Hsui & Huang, 2017). Teacher confirmation, which acts as the independent variable of this study, will be measured based on three constructs: 1) responding to student's questions or comments, 2) demonstrating interest and concern towards the students learning process and 3) the use of various teaching styles (Ellis, 2000). Students' communication apprehension, which acts as the dependent variable of this study, will be measured based on two dimensions: 1) nervousness and fear of being evaluated during class participation and 2) predisposition to communicate during class participation (Neer, 1987).

3.0   METHODOLOGY

3.1   Research Design

This study utilised the quantitative approach and descriptive survey. This design was selected because descriptive survey or questionnaire is an effective way to measure the behaviour, preferences, opinions and intentions of a large number of populations when face-to-face interview would be impractical (McLeod, 2014). Aside from that, McLeod (2014) further added that it is a suitable method to be used when determining correlation between variables, where mean and standard deviation of the variable can be obtained efficiently. It is also economical and data can be obtained quickly because the survey can be collected without requiring the researcher to be present. Questionnaire was used to collect data on the level of students' apprehension to participate in classroom discussion and the frequency a teacher exhibits confirming behaviours in the classroom. Michael R. Neer (1987) measured students' level of apprehension towards classroom participation, which acts as the dependent variable, using the Class Apprehension Participation Scale (CAPS). Kathleeen Ellis (2000) measured the independent variable, teacher's confirming behaviour, using the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS). These instruments are used to answer the following research question: "What is the relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom?" The following hypotheses were derived:

H$_1$: There is a negative relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom.

H$_0$: There is no relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom.

The data in this study was analysed using Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 20.0 for mean, standard deviation and Pearson correlation. The r-value obtained was then used to accept or reject the hypothesis.

3.2   Sampling

This research was conducted at two private secondary schools in Subang. Both schools are currently offering the national and international curriculum for admission and uses English as the primary language for teaching and learning purposes. These schools were selected based on convenience sampling, where the researcher was able to negotiate access through existing contacts available in both schools. The homogenous purposive sampling method was then utilised in this study when selecting the sample. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), purposive sampling is a technique which relies on the researcher's own judgement to choose the participants among the members of the population. In this study, all of the participants share similar characteristic. The population was selected among all of the Form 4 students in the two schools. This is to ensure that all of the sample selected are of the same chronological age since literature has proven that age can affect an individual's communication apprehension, where younger people tend to be more apprehensive to communication than older people (Bowers, et al., 1986; Parks, 1980). Other than that, purposive sampling is one of the most effective sampling methods available in terms of cost and time requirement (Saunders et al., 2012). The overall number of form four students in both schools was 130 students. A total sample size of 100 students (50 students from each school) was selected using sample size formula for finite population by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The participants were then selected through simple random sampling. A list of students' names (one list for each school) was made and arranged according to alphabetical order. A random number generator was then used to select participants from each school.

3.3   Instrumentation

Two instruments were utilised in this study. Kathleen Ellis (2000) developed the first instrument, Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS). It is used to measure the frequency of a teacher exhibiting confirming behaviours during lessons in the classroom as perceived by the students. It consists of 16 items in total across three dimensions: 1) responding to questions (5 items), 2) demonstrating interest (6 items) and 3) teaching style (5 items). This instrument utilises a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 1 as "Strongly disagree" to 5 as "Strongly agree". A higher score obtained from the TCS indicates a higher frequency of teacher confirming behaviours in the classroom while a lower score indicates a lower frequency of teacher portraying confirming behaviours during lesson in the classroom. TCS has reported reliability coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.87 using Cronbach's alpha (Ellis, 2004; Truman & Schrodt, 2006). A pilot study was also conducted by the researcher, which reported a reliability coefficient of 0.978 based on Cronbach's alpha.

The second instrument used in this study was the Communication Apprehension Participation Scale (CAPS) by Michael R. Neer (1987). The instrument was used to measure the students' apprehension level towards communicating and participating in a classroom discussion. The instrument contains 20 items and utilises a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as "Strongly disagree" to 5 as "Strongly agree". Students' apprehension was measured based on two dimensions: 1) Nervousness and fear of being evaluated during class participation (10 items) and 2) Predisposition to communicate during

class participation (10 items). Five questions (numbered 5, 8, 13, 16 and 19) were subjected to reverse-scoring. A higher score indicates a higher level of apprehension towards classroom communication and participation and vice versa. CAPS has a reliability coefficient of 0.94 as measured using Cronbach's alpha as reported by Neer (1987). The validity of the instrument was also established by its correlation (r = 0.78) with McCroskey's Personal Report Communication Apprehension, PRCA-24 (1987). A pilot study was conducted by the researcher, which reported a reliability coefficient of 0.743 based on Cronbach's alpha.

3.4 Research Procedure

As mentioned earlier, this research was conducted at two private secondary schools in Subang. The schools were approached by the researcher through existing contacts available in both schools via face-to-face interactions and phone calls. A name list of all form four students for each school was made and arranged according to the alphabetical order. The participants were then selected through simple random sampling. A random number generator was then used to select participants from each school. The selected students were then given parents' consent letters. The students were only allowed to participate if parents sign the consent form. The students are then placed into their respective groups based on the odd or even number selection. Two English language teachers in each respective school conducted the 1 hour and 30 minutes lesson. Each teacher was given an equal number of students (25 students per group). The questionnaire was then distributed to the students after the lesson has been conducted. The students answered the questionnaire while referencing the teacher, who taught them prior to the answering session, within 30 minutes. The students were then thanked for their participation.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

As mentioned earlier, the data in this study was analysed using Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 20.0 for mean, standard deviation and Pearson correlation. The r-value obtained was then used to accept or reject the hypothesis. Inspection of data-entry accuracy showed no out-of range anomalies, omitted or missing items. The mean and standard deviation of teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension obtained from the study are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Teacher Confirmation and Students' Communication Apprehension

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teacher Confirmation	100	2.7712	1.20625
Students' Communication Apprehension	100	3.2560	1.18420

Table 1 shows the mean level of teacher confirmation as perceived by the Form 4 students in private secondary schools. The mean score of teacher confirmation obtained from this study is 2.7712 with a standard deviation of 1.20625, which indicates a "Somewhat Confirming" level as perceived by the students. Table 1 also shows the mean level of students' communication apprehension. The mean score obtained from the study is 3.2560 with a standard deviation of 1.18420, which signifies a medium level of communication apprehension among the students in the classroom.

The relationship between students' apprehension level towards classroom participation and teacher confirmation was measured using Pearson correlation. The following hypotheses were derived for the third research question:

H_1: There is a negative relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom.

H_0: There is no relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom.

Table 2 Correlation between Students' Communication Apprehension and Teacher Confirmation

		CA	TC
Communication Apprehension (CA)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.833[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Teacher Confirmation (TC)	Pearson Correlation	-.833[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows a strong negative correlation (r = -0.833) and this association is significant at the p <0.05 levels This simply means that when the teacher confirmation level as perceived by the students is high, the communication apprehension among students will be low and vice versa. The coefficient determination, r^2 obtained from this study is 0.693, which means that the level of teacher confirmation as perceived by the students explains 69.3% of students' communication apprehension in the classroom. Therefore, the research hypothesis, H_1 is accepted, which indicates a negative relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom and the null hypothesis is rejected.

4.2 Discussion

The main purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between teacher confirmation and students' apprehension to communicate and participate in the classroom. Based on the results obtained from this research, the level of teacher confirmation as perceived by private secondary school students is at a "Somewhat Confirming" (M = 2.7712; SD = 1.20625), which can be attributed to the medium level (M = 3.2560; SD = 1.18420) of students' communication apprehension in the classroom. According to Goodboy and Myers (2008), teachers who portray somewhat confirming or confirming behaviour will be able to create a more positive environment to encourage students' communication and participation in the classroom and better students' learning outcome than the not confirming behaviour. Students are also more likely to speak and have a conversation with an instructor for functional, sycophancy, participatory and relational reasons than for the excuse-making motive (Myers, Mottet and Martin, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, the findings show that the level of students' apprehension towards communication is at a medium level (M = 3.2560; SD = 1.18420), which proved that the students are somewhat anxious towards communicating with their teachers in the classroom. According to McCroskey (1977), students, who suffer from communication apprehension, may desire to communicate with their peers and teachers but they are hindered by their own fear to communicate. The students will also tend to suffer from general anxiety, low tolerance of uncertainty, poor self-control, less adventurous than their peers, introvert, having poor self-esteem and unassertive (Daly, 1991; Wrench, Richmond & Gorhan, 2009). This inclination to remove themselves from situations that require them to communicate will have a direct impact on the students' grades and academic

social success (Walker, 1997). In the classroom, students who suffer from communication apprehension are seen to be less capable, less striking and less intelligent by both their teachers and peers, which in turn will increase the withdrawal and avoidance effect on the students (Walker, 1997; Wrench, Richmond & Gorhan, 2009).

The data obtained from this study shows a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.833$) and this association is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, which means that when the teacher confirmation level as perceived by the students is high, the communication apprehension among students will be low and vice versa. The research hypothesis, H_1 that stated that there is a negative relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension is accepted. This finding is supported by several past studies, which include the ones by Kathleen Ellis (2000, 2004). In her research, she found that there is a negative relationship between perceived teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension in the classroom. She further stated that when the teacher portrays confirming behaviours, students' communication apprehension will be reduced which in turn, leads to improve students' learning and motivation (Ellis, 2004).

The findings of a study conducted by Goodboy and Myers (2008) further explored the impact of perceived teacher confirmation on students' communication and learning outcomes. Results from the study indicated that when a teacher is perceived to be confirming by the students, it would promote students to actively participate in the classroom and reduce challenge behaviour among them. Goodboy and Myers (2008) further explained that teacher confirmation can also improve upon students' cognitive and affective learning, state motivation and learning satisfaction. They also said that teachers who fail to employ confirming behaviours in the classroom might discourage students' desire to communicate, promote misbehaviours and hinder students' learning. Similar results have been obtained by Hsui and Huang (2017) in their study to investigate the effect of teachers' confirming behaviour on classroom communication apprehension and students' willingness to talk. The study reported a positive relationship between teacher's confirming behaviour with students' willingness to talk and a negative relationship between teacher's confirming behaviour with classroom communication apprehension.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The result in this study shows that there is a medium level of communication apprehension among students in private secondary schools. Hence, exploring communication apprehension within the population of teenagers, in particular, could help professionals to better understand and diagnose the apprehension and provide intervention to the individuals who suffer from communication apprehension at the early stage. There are a lot of variables that can affect the level of communication apprehension among teenagers and one of them is teachers' confirming behaviour. The findings obtained from this study have proven that there is a negative relationship between teacher confirmation and students' communication apprehension.

In other words, when a teacher portrays confirming behaviours in the classroom, the students' apprehension to communicate and participate in the classroom will be reduced. Hence, the importance of effective instructional communication behaviours in the classroom towards students' outcomes is undeniable (Waldeck, Kearney & Plax, 2001). When developing teacher-training programs, school instructional leaders should take into account the importance of teacher confirmation and how it affects students' communication and participation in the classroom. The findings of this data and constructs available in the instruments used in this study should provide valuable insight on what should be included in the teacher-training program. It is hoped that further research will be conducted to examine how teachers' interpersonal behaviours in the classroom environment can affect teacher-student relationship and thus, achieving the instructional goal of promoting students' learning.

The present study was limited by the smaller number of samples selected among students from private secondary schools. Therefore, the use of a larger number of samples as well as making a comparison between students in private and public schools to determine if there is a significant difference between the two should help to increase confidence in the present findings. The researchers suggest that future research should investigate on the effect of teacher confirmation towards students' communication apprehension based on other external factors such as the teacher's and students' biological genders, ethnicity and language used during teaching. Current research available suggests very little about how students' perception on teacher behaviours may also be affected by these factors. Hence, investigating these variables is imperative to determine i5f they directly affect students' perceptions of their teachers or not.

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