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Self-Perceived Communication Competence and Its Relationship with Communication Apprehension

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Abstract

Individuals make decisions based on their self-perceived communication competence (SPCC). A person with a high and positive level of SPCC believes in their ability to engage in communication activities, adapt, and manage situations; that is, individuals perceive their communication competence as being dependent on self-awareness rather than on actual communicative ability. Meanwhile, communication apprehension is understood as the fear or anxiety an individual experiences in real or anticipated communication encounters with another person or persons.

The present study aims to investigate the following:

- 1. The level of self-perceived communication competence among gifted students.*
- 2. The level of communication apprehension among gifted students.*
- 3. The relationship between self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension.*
- 4. The extent to which self-perceived communication competence in its different contexts (talking to strangers, talking to friends, talking to acquaintances, and public speaking) contributes to the overall variance in communication apprehension.*

To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher developed a scale for measuring self-perceived communication competence and adopted the Communication Apprehension Scale developed by Al-Naqshbandi (2005). The study sample consisted of 300 male and female students from Gifted Secondary Schools, selected through stratified random sampling from the directorates of education in Baghdad (Al-Rusafa I, Al-Rusafa II, and Al-Karkh II). The researcher established the psychometric properties of the scales, including validity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale was 0.89; in the four contexts, the reliability coefficients were 0.76 for talking to strangers, 0.79 for talking to friends, 0.73 for talking to acquaintances, and 0.76 for public speaking. The Cronbach's alpha for the Communication Apprehension Scale was 0.86.

After analyzing the data using SPSS, the researcher arrived at the following findings:

- 1. The study sample exhibited self-perceived communication competence.*
- 2. Gifted students experienced communication apprehension.*
- 3. A relationship was found between self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension among gifted students.*
- 4. Self-perceived communication competence in the context of talking to acquaintances contributed negatively to the total variance in communication apprehension, while competence in public speaking contributed positively to the total variance in communication apprehension. No significant contribution was found in the contexts of talking to strangers or talking to friends.*

The researcher concluded with a set of recommendations and suggestions.

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Introduction

Chapter One: Research Overview

Research Problem

Students learning English as a second language often fall victim to a learning environment that is predominantly text-based. For them, the primary goal of learning English is not merely to pass an examination. Many factors and circumstances contribute to the failure of these learners to use English effectively in oral communication with others. Such factors may include an unsuitable curriculum design, a lack of appropriate instructional materials, ineffective teaching strategies and techniques, as well as social and economic problems, among others (Ghani, 2017, p.158).

Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) is essential in various contexts, such as speaking with strangers, speaking with friends, speaking with acquaintances, and public speaking. However, many individuals struggle to communicate effectively in these contexts, which can lead to misunderstandings, interpersonal conflicts, and reduced workplace productivity (Adeyemo, 2023, p.54). SPCC refers to “the belief individuals hold that their communication competence is based on self-awareness rather than their actual communication competence” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). In the context of second language learning, SPCC specifically refers to students’ perceptions of their ability to communicate in the second language (English) (Subekti, 2020, p.15). Clement (2003) noted that although actual competence may influence communication, it is ultimately SPCC that determines whether individuals are able to engage in communication (Clement, 2003, p.192).

A study by Cao (2011) revealed that when students perceive themselves as having undergone negative experiences—such as distressing, difficult, or stressful experiences using the second language—they are more likely to withdraw from future communication in that language. One participant in the study confessed feeling angry and frustrated whenever recalling a negative experience with the second language, which subsequently made her feel inadequate in her ability to communicate with others in that language (Cao, 2011, p.470). McCroskey (1977) argued that individuals exhibiting communication apprehension tend to fear engaging in any communicative interaction with others; they expect negative outcomes across communication situations, leading them to avoid communication whenever possible, withdraw from interactions, or display disruptive behaviors when forced to communicate (McCroskey, 1977, p.80).

Accordingly, the research problem can be summarized in answering the following questions:

- What is the level of self-perceived communication competence among gifted students in the four contexts (speaking with strangers, speaking with friends, speaking with acquaintances, and public speaking)?
- Do these students experience communication apprehension?
- Are there differences between male and female students?
- At what ages do these differences appear?

Research Significance

Communication is a multifaceted concept encompassing various aspects of interaction and information exchange among people. It involves the exchange of ideas, emotions, and information between individuals and groups. Communication has been defined as “the exchange

of experiences” (Goyer, 1970), a definition that emphasizes the importance of understanding the complex relationship between sender and receiver, as well as the critical role of context and stimuli in determining communication effectiveness (Goyer, 1970, p.8).

Studies have shown that students’ SPCC is significantly influenced by their prior experiences with second language use. Positive experiences are believed to be crucial for enhancing students’ SPCC (MacIntyre, 2011, p.155). For example, an experimental study by Joe (2017) in Korea revealed that students feel more confident in using the second language when they perceive that they have achieved some prior success in it—such as passing an English exam (Joe et al., 2017, p.138).

The findings of McQueen (2012) highlighted a strong relationship between SPCC and communication apprehension, showing that students with higher SPCC tend to experience lower communication apprehension (McQueen, 2012, p.39). Similarly, Shahbaz et al. (2016) found that high communication apprehension in one language can lead to higher SPCC in another language, thereby fostering greater willingness to communicate with others (Shahbaz et al., 2016, p.158).

Durak (2019) reported that participants expressed a moderate level of SPCC in English, feeling more competent communicating with friends and acquaintances while feeling less competent communicating with strangers or in public settings. This study revealed a strong inverse relationship between SPCC and communication apprehension (Durak, 2019, p.1).

Subekti (2020) also found that students exhibited moderate levels of both SPCC and communication apprehension, with a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The study encouraged educators to provide as many enjoyable learning opportunities as possible to enhance students’ perception of their communicative abilities and thereby increase their confidence in speaking English (Subekti, 2020, p.14).

Communication apprehension has received considerable attention in research, particularly verbal communication apprehension, which was identified as Americans’ greatest fear in a large-scale national study of adults. Findings indicated that 15–20% of individuals suffer from communication apprehension, a level of fear sufficient to inhibit them from engaging in verbal communication with others (McCroskey, 1977B, p.27).

Adella and Ilyas (2022) aimed to examine oral communication apprehension among students in an English language education program. The study revealed that 66% of participating students suffered from communication apprehension when interacting with others (Adella & Ilyas, 2022, p.97). Findings from Gee and Kho (2023) indicated that male students exhibited higher communication apprehension than female students, suggesting the need for intensive training to reduce or eliminate communication apprehension among males (Gee & Kho, 2023, p.55).

Research Objectives

The current study aims to:

1. Measure self-perceived communication competence among gifted students.
2. Measure communication apprehension among gifted students.
3. Explore the relationship between self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension among gifted students.

4. Determine the contribution of self-perceived communication competence in its various contexts (speaking with strangers, speaking with acquaintances, speaking with friends, and public speaking) to the overall variance in communication apprehension.

Research Boundaries

The present study is limited to a sample of gifted secondary school students in Baghdad (Al-Karkh and Al-Rusafa districts), enrolled in morning classes, both male and female, aged 15–16 and 17–18 years, during the 2024–2025 academic year.

Definition of Terms

1. Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC): Defined by McCroskey & Richmond (1987) as “the belief individuals hold that their communication competence is based on self-awareness rather than their actual communication competence” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, p.134).

2. Communication Apprehension: Defined by McCroskey (1977) as “an individual’s fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977, p.78).

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

First: Self-Perceived Communication Competence

McCroskey (1988) posits that individuals make choices based on their self-perceived communication competence. These perceptions essentially determine their communicative competence. He notes that a person with a high and positive level of self-perceived communication competence believes in their ability to engage in communication activities. Undoubtedly, individuals with a high level of self-perceived communication competence are more capable of managing unfamiliar situations (i.e., adaptability) and are more likely to engage in a wider range of relationships (McCroskey, 1988, p.109).

In this context, McCroskey & Richmond (1990) explain that communication is a cognitive matter; it involves an individual’s perception of competence, a perception with which they are typically more familiar than their actual communicative ability, of which they might be entirely unaware (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990, p.73). Furthermore, MacIntyre (2002) emphasizes that the influence of self-perceived competence may surpass that of actual communicative competence, particularly in communication contexts (MacIntyre, 2002, p.540).

To consistently behave in a communicatively competent manner, an individual must possess four skills:

1. Behavioral Skills: An individual must acquire some basic behavioral skills accessible to most ordinary members of society. While most, though not all, children will acquire these skills over time, they are foundational.
2. Cognitive Skills: One must gain a moderate level of cognitive understanding of the communication process and the situational constraints imposed on communicative behavior. Without systematic training, only a few individuals are likely to develop these cognitive skills.
3. Positive Affective Response: Individuals must develop a positive emotional response toward communication. For example, many children enter primary school with such a positive disposition, while others may never develop it throughout their lives.

4. **Competent Behavior:** Competent behavior should become a selective, habitual response, representing the skills learned. However, if these skills are not practiced, they are likely to be lost. Thus, communicative competence results from a learning environment that fosters the development of behavioral and cognitive skills, creates a positive effect on communication, and provides opportunities for the application and reinforcement of those skills (McCroskey, 1984, pp.266-267).

Four contexts of self-perceived communication competence exist:

1. **Talking with Strangers:** Individuals often avoid engaging in conversations with strangers, opting instead to engage with something else or use headphones to avoid interaction. Recent research indicates that one of the reasons behind this behavior is a general lack of trust in conversing with strangers (Kushlev, 2019, p.12).

2. **Talking to Friends:** Talking to friends is also vital for maintaining healthy relationships and can yield numerous benefits for individual well-being. Regular communication with friends is associated with increased feelings of social support and reduced levels of stress and depression (Perlman & Fehr, 1992, p.173).

3. **Talking with Acquaintances:** Conversing amicably with acquaintances is generally regarded as polite and respectful communication. This involves using appropriate greetings, polite language, and showing respect for others' feelings and opinions. It is also important to actively listen and demonstrate interest in what the other person says. Overall, clear and concise communication aimed at building a positive relationship is crucial. It is essential to consider how we communicate with acquaintances, as these relationships can play a significant role in one's social support network and overall well-being. Studies have shown that having a diverse social network—including close friends and acquaintances—can provide greater support and life satisfaction (Dean & Ensel, 1981, p.73).

4. **Talking in Public:** Public communication is the art of effective oral communication with an audience in public settings. Public communication may also be referred to as delivering a speech before a large audience in a public square or venue, requiring eloquence and persuasiveness (Adeyemo, 2022, p.133).

Second: Communication Apprehension

The term communication apprehension was coined by McCroskey (1970) and has since garnered significant scholarly attention, alongside related concepts such as *unwillingness to communicate* and *reticence* (McCroskey, 1970, p.271). McCroskey (1997) asserts that communication apprehension in general situations is defined by the notion that individuals may experience high apprehension in one type of communicative context while having little or no apprehension in another. While some individuals may feel anxious about face-to-face communication, others may feel less apprehensive about speaking over the phone or may even avoid communicating with individuals different from themselves. Similarity can also play a pivotal role in communication apprehension; some individuals feel more at ease conversing with peers or similar others, while others experience heightened anxiety and pressure due to fear of judgment or comparison (McCroskey, 1997, pp.85-86).

A study by Aomr et al. (2025) investigated communication apprehension among Arabic-speaking students in Malaysia when speaking English. The findings indicated that participants experienced communication apprehension when using English in various communicative

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedures

First: Research Method

The correlational method is a type of research that examines relationships between variables of the studied phenomenon through the analysis of collected data to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon for potential solutions (Al-Hariri et al., 2017, p.122). The current study employed a descriptive correlational approach for data collection and analysis.

Second: Research Sample

The study sample consisted of 300 male and female students from the "Distinguished Secondary Schools" in the educational directorates of Baghdad Governorate: *Al-Rusafa First*, *Al-Rusafa Second*, and *Al-Karkh Second* for the academic year 2024–2025. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique.

Third: Research Instruments

A. Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale To measure self-perceived communication competence, the researcher reviewed several instruments, including:

1. McCroskey's Scale (1988): Developed by James McCroskey in 1988, this instrument consisted of 12 items and was administered to university students. Respondents rate their perceived competence in each context on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 = completely incompetent and 100 = completely competent (McCroskey, 1988).

2. McCroskey's Adapted Scale by Subekti (2020): This adaptation included 15 items (Subekti, 2020) and was administered to Indonesian university students who speak English as a second language. The response options were: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

B. Communication Apprehension Scale The study adopted the Communication Apprehension Scale by McCroskey (1979), translated and validated by Al-Naqshbandi (2005). This instrument consisted of 24 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1, and was administered to students at the University of Baghdad.

Validity Indicators

1. Face Validity: The researcher established face validity by presenting both scales to a panel of psychology experts to evaluate the appropriateness of items, instructions, and response options. An agreement rate of 80% or higher was required for approval. Minor revisions were made based on expert feedback to finalize the instruments.

2. Construct Validity: The researcher assessed construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale. Results confirmed that the four contexts (talking with strangers, friends, acquaintances, and public communication) represent independent constructs. For the Communication Apprehension Scale, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed a unidimensional structure, indicating that the scale reflects a single overall score.

Reliability Indicators

1. Test-Retest Reliability: The researcher calculated test-retest reliability for the Self-Perceived

Communication Competence Scale across its four contexts, obtaining coefficients of 0.87 for the overall scale, 0.74 (talking with strangers), 0.77 (talking with friends), 0.71 (talking with acquaintances), and 0.74 (public communication). The Communication Apprehension Scale yielded a test-retest reliability of 0.84.

2. Cronbach's Alpha: Cronbach's alpha for the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale was 0.89 overall, with 0.76 (talking with strangers), 0.79 (talking with friends), 0.73 (talking with acquaintances), and 0.76 (public communication). The Communication Apprehension Scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Chapter Four: Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of Results

Objective One: Perceived Communication Competence (talking to strangers, talking to friends, talking to acquaintances, talking in public settings) among gifted students

The findings indicate that the research sample exhibits a statistically significant level of perceived communication competence across its four contexts. This suggests that gifted students possess perceived communication competence. According to McCroskey's theory, students have cognitive skills that enable them to cognitively understand the process of communication with others and comprehend the surrounding environmental circumstances. They also possess behavioral skills at a good level that are utilized in the communication process with others (McCroskey, 1984, pp. 266-267). This result aligns with the study by McCroskey et al. (1993) conducted on a sample of academically gifted students, which showed that these students had a high level of perceived communication competence and demonstrated higher competence in speaking across all contexts (McCroskey et al., 1993, p. 79).

Context of Perceived Communication Competence	Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Significance
Talking to strangers	300	20.0333	3.84293	17.5	11.418	1.96	Significant
Talking to friends	300	31.7333	4.23896	25	27.513	1.96	Significant
Talking to acquaintances	300	12.8833	1.92755	10	25.909	1.96	Significant
Talking in public settings	300	20.8933	3.12536	17.5	18.806	1.96	Significant
Overall variable	300	85.6233	11.22861	70	42.100	1.96	Significant

Table (1): One-sample t-test for Perceived Communication Competence Scale

Objective Two: Statistically significant differences in perceived communication competence (talking to strangers, talking to friends, talking to acquaintances, talking in

public settings) according to gender (male, female) and age (15–16, 17–18 years)

The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in perceived communication competence based on gender and age, as the tabular F-value is higher than the calculated F-value (the tabular F-value = 3.84 at the 0.05 significance level and degrees of freedom = 1/296). This result can be explained based on McCroskey's theory, which suggests that individuals of different ages acquire social communication skills through their life experiences, and that these experiences may be more significant than the factor of age. Age may not be clearly reflected in self-perceived communication competence if these experiences are reinforced over time.

Regarding gender, the result can also be interpreted according to McCroskey's theory, which does not focus on gender as a major influencing factor in perceived communication competence. The absence of significant differences between genders may be attributed to the possibility that self-assessments of communication abilities are more closely linked to acquired skills and personal experiences from various social situations rather than to gender. It is also possible that students practice similar patterns of communication skills regardless of gender, especially in educational environments that promote equality in communication between genders (McCroskey, 1984, p. 267).

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-value	Significance (0.05)
Gender	17.179	1	17.179	0.138	Not significant
Age	96.646	1	96.646	0.776	Not significant
Gender*Age	314.213	1	314.213	2.524	Not significant
Error	36852.215	296	124.501		
Total	37280.253	299			

Table (2): Results of Two-Way ANOVA For Differences in Perceived Communication Competence by Gender and Age

Objective Three: Communication Apprehension among gifted students

The findings indicate that gifted students exhibit communication apprehension. This result can be interpreted according to McCroskey's theory, which considers communication apprehension as a quasi-trait, representing a relatively stable personality orientation toward a specific form of communication (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998, p. 282).

Variable	Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Calculated t-value	Tabular t-value	Significance (0.05)

Communication Apprehension	300	57.4267	11.57979	52.5	7.319	1.96	Significant
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Table (3): t-test for the difference between the sample and the hypothetical mean on the Communication Apprehension Scale

Objective Four: Statistically significant differences in communication apprehension according to gender (male, female) and age (15–16, 17–18 years)

1. Gender: Significant difference in favor of males, as their mean (59.3267) is higher than the mean of females (55.5267).
2. Age: Significant difference in favor of the 17–18 age group, as their mean (58.9200) is higher than that of the 15–16 age group (55.9333).
3. Gender*Age interaction: Not significant.

The results presented in Table (4) can be interpreted according to gender in the sample of gifted students, indicating that males exhibit higher communication apprehension than females. According to the adopted theory, McCroskey (1977) argues that the sense of competence in performing communication skills is a key factor influencing the level of communication apprehension. A sense of low or absent competence, exposure to negative communication experiences, or encountering outcomes contrary to one's expectations can lead to increased apprehension about communicating with others (McCroskey, 1977, p. 82).

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-value	Significance (0.05)
Gender	957.216	1	957.216	7.388	Significant
Age	543.229	1	543.229	4.193	Significant
Gender*Age	118.270	1	118.270	0.913	Not significant
Error	38348.888	296	129.557		
Total	40093.387	299			

Table (4): Results of Two-Way ANOVA For Differences in Communication Apprehension By Gender and Age

Objective Five – The Correlational Relationship Between Self-Perceived Communication Competence and Communication Apprehension Among Gifted Students

The calculated Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.349, which exceeds the critical value of 0.088 at the 0.05 level of significance with 298 degrees of freedom. This indicates a significant positive correlation between self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) and communication apprehension (CA). Table (5) summarizes these results.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient between SPCC and CA	N	t-value (calculated)	t-value (critical)	Significance
0.349	300	6.428	1.96	Significant

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Coefficient and t-test for the Significance of the Correlation Between SPCC and CA

This result can be explained in light of McCroskey & Richmond (1998), who posited that an individual may experience communication apprehension even while perceiving themselves as communicatively competent. This is attributed to an internal conflict between approach and avoidance tendencies (McCroskey & Richmond, 1998, p. 221).

Similarly, the study by Blood et al. (2001) supported this finding, reporting a positive correlation between SPCC and CA, suggesting that communicative competence may be negatively impacted by certain stressors such as stuttering. Their research indicated that adolescents who were more confident in their SPCC still experienced apprehension in communication situations (Blood et al., 2001, p. 161).

However, this result contrasts with McQueen (2012), whose study found a strong inverse relationship between SPCC and CA, showing that students with higher SPCC tend to exhibit lower levels of communication apprehension (McQueen, 2012, p. 39).

Objective Six – The Extent to Which SPCC Contexts (Talking to Strangers, Friends, Acquaintances, Public Speaking) Contribute to Variance in CA Among Gifted Students

The results showed:

1. The variables “talking to strangers” and “talking to friends” did not significantly contribute to communication apprehension.
2. The variable “talking to acquaintances” had a negative contribution to communication apprehension among gifted students.
3. The variable “public speaking” had a positive contribution to communication apprehension among gifted students.

These findings can be interpreted as follows:

First, the non-significant effect of the contexts “talking to strangers” and “talking to friends” suggests that gifted students do not experience notable communication apprehension in these situations. According to McCroskey’s theory, SPCC depends on an individual’s evaluation of their communicative abilities in different situations. It is possible that these two contexts do not present a perceived communicative challenge for these students.

Second, the negative contribution of “talking to acquaintances” implies that students who frequently communicate with acquaintances tend to experience lower levels of communication apprehension. According to the adopted theoretical framework, individuals who engage in positive communicative experiences and perceive themselves as competent while interacting with acquaintances are likely to develop greater self-confidence and hence, lower apprehension.

Third, the positive contribution of “public speaking” indicates that gifted students who engage

more frequently in public speaking situations experience higher levels of communication apprehension. According to McCroskey, a low self-perceived competence in a particular context can lead to increased apprehension.

These results align with Dilbeck & McCroskey (2009), who found that Thai students reported higher SPCC when communicating with acquaintances and lower SPCC when speaking in public (Dilbeck & McCroskey, 2009, p. 2).

Variable	B Coefficient	Standard Error	Beta Coefficient	t-value	Significance (0.05)
Constant	24.386	4.854	—	5.024	Significant
Talking to Strangers	0.208	0.232	0.069	0.897	Not Significant
Talking to Friends	0.171	0.244	0.063	0.701	Not Significant
Talking to Acquaintances	-1.055	0.426	-0.176	-2.285	Significant
Public Speaking	1.773	0.248	0.479	7.145	Significant

Table 6 Beta Coefficients and Standard Errors for SPCC Variables Predicting Communication Apprehension

Recommendations

Based on the current study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Implement training programs to enhance gifted students' self-confidence in various communicative settings by encouraging participation in social and group activities to strengthen their perceived communication competence.
2. Educational supervisors at gifted secondary schools in Baghdad are advised to foster a rich academic environment with communicative activities that address students' psychological needs and promote effective communication skills.

Suggestions for Future Research

Building on the current study's findings, future research is recommended to:

1. Explore self-perceived communication competence across different cultures to understand cultural influences on communication behaviors.
2. Investigate the relationship between the current study's variables and other psychological constructs, such as communication willingness, personality traits (e.g., extraversion-introversion), leadership skills, self-motivation, shyness, social anxiety, and self-confidence.

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