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Communication Apprehension among Students of Bangladesh: A Comparative Study between Online and Offline Classes

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ABSTRACT

This research study looks at students' communication apprehension (CA) in online and offline classes. We wanted to comprehend whether their concern has changed about CA during online classes or not. In this quantitative research, we completed two surveys that asked them demographic questions. Four hundred and ninety-nine (499) students of public universities took part in online classes in August 2021 by completing the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). Another survey was conducted on 438 students during the offline classes in February 2022. We then analyzed the data in SPSS. The PRCA-24 scores of students in both studies determine that most of the students have high communication apprehension. They suffer from general anxiety, do not want to involve in any discussion during class, and have less self-esteem. It has been found that students' fears of communication in academic settings negatively affect their learning and performance. This study can be useful in communication disorder discipline to find out where is the actual problem to communicate. This study will pave the way for further research on what steps can be taken to overcome the problem of fear in communication or whether any changes in teaching methods can be made.

KEYWORDS

Communication apprehension, Online Education, PRCA-24, Fear of communication, Lower Self-esteem, Stage Fright.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication apprehension (CA) is the most significant barrier to effective communication. The level of anxiety or insecurity in a person's capacity to interact with others, whether genuine or imagined, is known as communication apprehension. Communication anxiety makes it difficult for people to communicate. As a result, people try to avoid communicating as much as possible (McCroskey & Richmond, 1980).

Because of the extensive use of information technology, communication has altered dramatically. We have become dynamic as a result of radio, television, print media, online media, social media, and internet-based communication. A society that lacks communication is one that is stagnant. Communication is necessary for all parts of our lives from the personal to the national level (Beck, 2007; Noor, 2022).

Our educational system has undergone significant changes because of COVID-19 (Meyer, 2006). We are currently attempting to adopt online education approaches to meet our needs. Before the COVID-19 issue, Bangladeshi students were not very familiar with online teaching methods. As a result, they have been afraid of technology from the outset. From teachers to pupils, this anxiety has endured (UN, 2020). We came up with a few ideas about this and received feedback from students.

We all have communication fears in certain aspects of our lives. We can quickly understand our friends' concerns when we communicate face to face. However, in the online education system, we are unable to comprehend the extent to which this concern has grown. Communication anxiety, according to McCroskey, is one of the most significant impediments to a person's mental and social development (Pierce, 2009). Communication anxiety is a socially acquired condition. As a result, it is critical to use various techniques and practices to effectively address the issues (Meyer, 2006; Hosen, Nur & Khatun, 2022).

While conducting this study on online and offline communication apprehension We delved into the students' anxieties. We tried to find out if information technology helps or hinders their ability to communicate. Our concern was to know if online is creating additional points of confusion about CA. In this study, we looked at how pupils are affected by communication apprehension in the overall learning process.

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We addressed a basic question in this study- What is the difference between students' levels of apprehension after participating in an online communication course? Specifically, does the medium of the class lead to reducing or increasing levels of communication apprehension in interpersonal, group discussion, meeting or public speaking levels? These would be important outcomes of the study. Retention of students in online classes is important, especially for those who have inflated apprehension levels and low skill levels.

RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH

There has been a lot of study on communication apprehension, but there have been few studies about the apprehension that shows the difference between online and offline education system. We investigated this matter to determine if the new technology has caused any new apprehensions among students, as COVID-19 has brought about a new transformation in our educational system.

Theorists like James C. McCroskey, P. Richmond, Virginia, Daly, Barbara, and Anderson have worked on communication apprehension in the Western world. These thinkers have been contributing to communication studies since the 1980s. McCroskey originated the concept with students from his Michigan State University faculty and published a paper in 1980 using the term ‘communication apprehension.’ Personality, socioeconomic situation, prior experience, and the capacity to articulate oneself all influence this degree.

Fears of communication have an impact on our academic performance as well as our interpersonal success (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). The greater a student's fear of communicating, the less interested he or she will be in speaking (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). McCroskey and Daly found that students who were underestimated were more likely to have communication anxiety in their study. Communication anxieties have a substantial impact on student learning, according to Scott, Yates, and Wheels' research, especially in today's standard-based, interactive, and instructional education system (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987).

Students express their opinions, dispute or agree with the teachers, and provide more information after listening to the lecturers. It is much more crucial in higher education for students to practice their own thoughts and expressions in the classroom or during lecture-debate. This is how a person's ability to critically think can grow. In the West, there has been a lot of research on CA.

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The combination of communication with the teaching process has given rise to a new profession known as "Instructional Communication" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Researchers in the West have studied the causes, nature, consequences, and ways to overcome communication apprehension under the "instructional communication" framework and have attempted to make the learning process more effective by applying the findings and recommendations that emerge from the research (McCroskey & Richmond, 1989). We have tried to apply the concept of CA to see how it works on Bangladeshi students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The technological origins and impact of virtual reality on communication have given rise to a variety of labels (Hammick & Lee, 2013). According to the technological literature, computer-controlled, multisensory communication technologies are a class of computer-controlled, multisensory communication systems (Hammick & Lee, 2013) or a method of delivering simulated experiences in a computer-generated environment via manipulations of the visual, auditory, and tactile senses (Hammick & Lee, 2013). Some have claimed that virtual reality is more psychological than technological from the perspective of the user (Biocca, 1992; Tamzid, 2022).

Scholars reveal certain differences in viewpoint when comparing virtual and real-world contexts for presence. According to Blascovich (2002), there are no significant differences in the level of presence experienced in virtual and real contexts because neither gives complete presence. Despite the digital environment's more immersive nature, people can tune out others even while they are physically present. Despite this, virtual worlds are perceived to have a lower social presence than face-to-face circumstances, allowing for a more comfortable talking environment, according to Joinson (2004). Interactants may feel less uncomfortable in virtual settings since nonverbal and demographic indicators are reduced (Hammick & Lee, 2013). Because the negative effects of failure are lessened, a lower sense of social presence in virtual reality, as perceived through the lens of mediation, may allow people to feel more at ease engaging with strangers. (Joinson, 2004).

Kiousis (2002) claims that interactivity is both a psychological and a media component that must be investigated in three main contexts: technology, context, and the user's perception. Secondly, the most popular virtual environment (Barnes et al., 2007), was employed in our study. Virtual

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worlds' potential has been recognized in the corporate and academic realms. The benefits of this virtual learning environment have recently been the focus of education and research (Bailenson et al., 2008).

Social shyness is characterized by self-consciousness, lack of confidence, and a sense of concern about negatively interpreted social interactions (McCroskey, 1982). Awkwardness, hesitancy, tension, discomfort, and gaze aversion are all exacerbated by this feature (Dennen, 1995). An interview with a potential employer, meetings with influential people, conversations with someone of the opposite sex, and being the center of attention in a small group are all scenarios that are reported to increase shyness, according to the study (McCroskey, 1982).

Ebeling-Witte, Frank, and Lester found in a study that shyness is frequently confused with introversion and neuroticism. CA has been mistaken for shyness, even though they are conceptual twins (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). In terms of how they predict the desire to speak less, the two notions are quite similar. Scholars contend that the reasons for shyness and communication apprehension should be differentiated when discussing them (McCroskey & Richmond, 1980). Fear or anxiety is the underlying cause of CA behavior. Social phobia and low self-esteem are other causes of shyness, while social anxiety and poor social skills are others (Hammick & Lee, 2013). Shy people prefer online communications over face-to-face communication as a means of socializing and alleviating their feeling of loneliness (Sheldon, 2008).

Communication apprehension (CA) is an example of one of the negative interaction outputs that might occur because of a breakdown in communication (Hammick & Lee, 2013). According to McCroskey, CA is the fear or anxiety a person feels upon making a connection with another person or persons, whether real or imagined. According to Buhr, CA might be triggered by the novelty or formality of a scenario, the submissive position, unfamiliarity, and dissimilarity with the communicative space (1988). CA can also be provoked by the overload of attention and feelings of conspicuity. According to experts, high CA levels have been shown to negatively affect people's psychological and social adjustment, leaving them feeling concerned and lonely and resulting in a lack of meaningful and personal contacts (Briggs, 1988).

To shed light on CA's possible connection to online communication, it has been hypothesized that CA affects motivation and behavior in interpersonal communication (Aggarwal & Krishna,

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2021). An online chat room was more conducive to the expression of opinions on legalizing same-sex marriage than a face-to-face meeting, according to a study by Ho and McLeod. CA was substantially associated with the desire to voice one's own thoughts, according to the survey's findings (Hammick & Lee, 2013).

Because online communication lacks the visible facial expressions and uncomfortable components of face-to-face communication, it empowers and relieves pressure on anxious communication participants (Christensen, 2012; Meyer, 2006). According to a qualitative study about how online communication might aid CA students, they were more comfortable communicating in online settings. Virtual reality may aid shy people in becoming more comfortable with conversation by removing visual and aural stimuli, according to a theory proposed previously in the description of shyness (Christensen, 2012).

Educational studies have revealed that pupils do better when they actively interact rather than passively listen (Webb et al., 2004). Bloom (1976) claims that more productive learning occurs when students participate actively in the process. About 20% of the diversity in a student's achievement is due to their participation in classroom learning (Webb et al., 2004). Active engagement in the learning process is a good measure of the quality of instruction when it comes to forecasting or accounting for individual student learning.

Theorists identified two types of active learning: self-directed learning and autonomous work. Self-directed learners are students who participate in classroom discussions in real-life classrooms and online threaded discussion forums (Wolters, Simons & Volet, 2000).

Orr (2009) found that self-directed learning in college leads to higher student achievement and a more positive attitude toward the educational process overall than lecture-based instruction.

Education can also have a huge impact on a person's personal life. Researchers have concluded that people with a high communication apprehension are perceived as being less believable and appealing and are therefore more likely to be rejected both in social situations and at work (Quiggins, 1972). Another study discovered a negative relationship between communication satisfaction and anxiety (Rubin, 1993). An individual's communication satisfaction can be judged by how happy they are in a communication situation. Communication apprehension is associated with dissatisfaction with one’s social situation, as they are uneasy with their social environment

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as well as their situation (Rubin, 1993). Given that CA can have a variety of mental, physical, and spiritual impacts, it would be beneficial to investigate what causes CA.

The term CA is used to describe both characteristics (Trait communication apprehension) and states State communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1966). Individuals with trait communication apprehension are regularly anxious when communicating, whereas those with state CA are typically anxious in isolated settings, such as speaking. While some people with state CA become nervous during a speech, most people are unaffected in other social situations (McCroskey, 1966). Many researchers have looked at why certain people are more nervous than others.

Whether nervous or not, most people prefer to speak to an audience that supports them. Despite the scarcity of studies on social support and CA, researchers have discovered that it appears to be able to alleviate anxiety and other detrimental impacts of stress. Adolescents with enough social support, according to Baqutayan (2011), experienced decreased stress. It was described as whether one thought that social assistance, whether from one person, two people, or many different people, was adequate for addressing one's needs. The quantity of help a person perceives has a greater impact on their lives than the amount of support they really receive (Baqutayan, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

During PRCA-24, we administered (McCroskey, 1982) form to 1000 students via different online mediums. 499 of them responded there during the first week of online classes in August 2021 who are from different public universities in Bangladesh. Furthermore, we requested information on the students' credit hours, gender, and other demographics. We again emailed these 499 students to know about their offline CA experience in February 2022. This time 438 students responded to us. We then compared the information of these 438 students. The info of the rest 61 students was eradicated as we did not get their offline classes experiences.

Instrumentation

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)

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Assessment of CA was conducted using the PRCA-24. This questionnaire contains 24 Likert-type statements concerning how you feel when communicating with others in four contexts: in a dyad, a group, a meeting, and in public. In addition to the overall score based on the 24 items, sub-scores can be calculated in each of the four contexts. Many studies have used the instrument, which has shown sufficient internal consistency and reliability when tested again (Rubin, 1993). Scores on the PRCA-24 can range from 24 to 120.

RESULTS

Principal-components analysis

Varimax rotation was used to analyze the PRCA-24 by principal components. The factor model of rotation did not include factors with eigenvalues of less than one. The default setting in SPSS has always been to eliminate factors with eigenvalues lower than one. The PRCA-24 revealed a structure with about four dimensions using principal component analysis, consisting of the four contexts of the PRCA-24: group discussion (questions 1–6), meetings (questions 7–12), dyad/interpersonal (questions 13–18), and public speaking (questions 19 to 24).

Central tendency and dispersion measures

Both PRCA-24 and its corresponding subdimension were calculated (Table 1) to determine the means and standard deviations. Fear of public speaking was the most prevalent among participants (online- mean = 21.16, *SD* = 2.26, offline- mean = 18.10, *SD* = 2.485), followed by the meetings context (online- mean = 19.50, *SD* = 4.02, offline- mean = 16.42, *SD =3.1*), followed closely by group discussion (online- mean = 19.27, *SD* = 3.89, offline- mean = 16.65, *SD* = 3.04), and dyads or interpersonal (online- mean = 16.81, *SD* = 2.87, offline- mean = 16.36, *SD* = 2.51).

Table 1:

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the PRCA-24's internal consistency. The PRCA of offline studies in internal consistency is $\alpha = 0.72$, online $\alpha = 0.67$.

	Online		Offline	
Instrument/ Subscale	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
group discussion	19.27	3.896	16.65	3.038

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Meeting	19.50	4.024	16.42	3.100
Interpersonal	16.81	2.875	16.36	2.506
Public speaking	21.16	2.263	18.10	2.485
Total subscores	76.74	7.255	67.52	7.197

Difference Analysis of Gender

To determine the statistical significance of the gender gap, two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used. Males and females showed a statistically significant difference in these studies. The data revealed a considerable difference between the subdimensions of group discussion and public speaking. Females scored (mean = 20.07, SD = 3.89) and (mean = 20.92, SD = 2.51) in online group discussion and online public speaking, respectively.

Table 2.1:

Descriptive statistics of offline learning data

	gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
group discussion	1	16.08	3.008	222
	2	17.23	2.964	216
	Total	16.65	3.038	438
Meeting	1	16.41	3.005	222
	2	16.43	3.202	216
	Total	16.42	3.100	438
Interpersonal	1	16.35	2.134	222
	2	16.37	2.843	216
	Total	16.36	2.506	438
Public speaking	1	17.94	2.396	222
	2	18.26	2.569	216
	Total	18.10	2.485	438
total subscore	1	66.77	6.412	222
	2	68.28	7.865	216
	Total	67.52	7.197	438

Table 2.2:

Descriptive statistics of online learning data

Descriptive Statistics

	gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
group discussion	1	18.49	3.740	222

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	2	20.07	3.899	216
	Total	19.27	3.896	438
Meeting	1	19.87	3.913	222
	2	19.12	4.109	216
	Total	19.50	4.024	438
Interpersonal	1	16.76	2.746	222
	2	16.86	3.007	216
	Total	16.81	2.875	438
Public speaking	1	21.40	1.932	222
	2	20.92	2.541	216
	Total	21.16	2.263	438
total subscore	1	76.52	5.747	222
	2	76.97	8.541	216
	Total	76.74	7.255	438

Correlation Matrix

The PRCA-24 correlation coefficients are shown in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. PRCA-24's subdimensions are all related to the overall score in a meaningful way. The score on the offline dimensions, a = 0.42, had the strongest subdimension total correlations.

Table 3.1:

Correlation Matrix of offline learning

Correlation Matrix[a]

		group discussion	Meeting	Interpersonal	Public speaking
Correlation	group discussion	1.000	.662	.089	.114
	Meeting	.662	1.000	.101	-.105
	Interpersonal	.089	.101	1.000	.401
	Public speaking	.114	-.105	.401	1.000

a. Determinant = .424

Table 3.2:

Correlation Matrix of online learning

Correlation Matrix[a]

		group discussion	Meeting	Interpersonal	Public speaking
Correlation	group discussion	1.000	.591	-.179	-.078
	Meeting	.591	1.000	-.188	.013
	Interpersonal	-.179	-.188	1.000	-.088
	Public speaking	-.078	.013	-.088	1.000

a. Determinant = .610

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DISCUSSION

The PRCA-24 and the subdimensions of online classes were higher than those of offline classes. In online learning, students have shown the highest levels of fear of public speaking. Students from offline classrooms, on the other hand, report the most fear in the identical situation. Statistically, in online learning, there was a significant difference between genders in public-speaking and group discussion ratings. In the online category, however, male students have shown increased fear of public speaking. Result in gender variations in communication apprehension levels are "inconsistent and inconclusive," according to Leary and Kowalski (1995). (p. 123).

According to PRCA-24, there is some overlap between the group-discussion and meetings subdimensions. The data analysis discovered in this study suggests that it is difficult for students to distinguish between the notions of a meeting and a group discussion, especially in an offline setting. In general, 'group discussion' and meetings may generate a range of different meanings among Bangladeshi students. Our culture's "high-context character" may explain the disparities in feelings (Hall, 1976). In interpersonal interactions, students are perceived as less anxious.

Online is a new communication field for students, so it is creating a level of apprehension. As we addressed a basic question in the introduction, our data here suggests that participation in online communication courses differentiates students' levels of apprehension. The medium of the class leads to increasing levels of communication apprehension in interpersonal, group discussion, meeting, or public speaking levels more than offline classes. The learning process includes identifying issues, taking positions, debating those views, reflecting on those positions, and re-evaluating those viewpoints (Bragg, 2017). This can be done in both online threaded discussion forums and face-to-face conversations. Wever, Schellens and Valcke (2009) advocate using threaded discussion boards online to "promote discourse and empower individuals to comprehend" (p- 958).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are also some limitations of this study. We cannot dig out the demographical situations of the students who have high communication apprehension as well as low communication

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apprehension. In the future, we can find out if Communication apprehension has any effects on getting a good CGPA in the academic arena.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we discovered that the majority of students scored above 80 on the PRCA-24, indicating a high level of CA. We can state that someone suffers from trait-like apprehension if they score higher on all four sub dimensions. High CA people are more likely to have overall anxiety, lack self-control, be unadventurous, lack emotional maturity, be introverted, have low self-esteem, be non-innovative, have a limited tolerance for dispute, and be non-aggressive (McCrosky and Richmond, 1980). Our findings imply that in the offline setting of public speaking, females feel more nervous than males, but in the online context, the roles are reversed. In online male & female students are more fearful of public speaking than their counterparts in the classroom. In conclusion, the findings reported in this study suggest that the PRCA-24-measured online contexts are causing some additional concern in students' academic processes.

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