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***A Phenomenological Study of Communication Apprehensions Experience of the Business Students***  
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**ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of communication apprehension exists among all individuals. The students experience it in the classroom and also in their academic careers. The anxiety and nervousness students' experience and the fear to ask questions from the teachers during the lectures in the classrooms affect their overall performance and personality. This phenomenon is very common in collectivist societies. This study aims to explore the phenomena of communication apprehension among business students of Peshawar University students. The main objective of the study is to find out the communication apprehension from students' perspective and to examine the influences of communication apprehension on students and to suggest the techniques mitigating it. In this phenomenological study, the participants were conveniently selected and interviewed to find out the communication apprehension experienced by them and their effects on students' personalities and academic achievements. The results indicate that communication apprehension is experienced by the students as fear and anxiety, which affects their halts their communication and that further affects students: academically, psychologically and personally. Classroom learning is affected by communication apprehension.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Humans are communicating since the beginning of time, however, while communicating they have faced the problem of communication apprehension. Every individual is somehow affected by communication apprehension (Beatty et al., 1986). The phenomenon of communication apprehension is defined as the anticipated fear and anxiety associated with communication with other people (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). The anxiety can be experienced in any of the five forms of communication: interpersonal, intrapersonal, group, mass communication, and public. Apprehension is exaggerated by the general personality traits, such as shy and introvert personalities experience apprehension during communication (Bahadori & Hashemizadeh, 2018). Moreover, culture also plays a role in furthering communication apprehension. People in high context societies generally are implicit in communication and rely on others for information (Hall, 1976). Similarly, in collectivist cultures, people tend to listen more and

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challenge less, are less inquisitive and tend to be more complacent with others. Good communication works as a bridge that diachronically and synchronically connects the individual with a resource of information and knowledge (Rodrigues & Upadhyay, 2018). Most people feel fear and anxiety, because of being judged by the audience (Wombacher, 2018). As in the classroom environment, students fear and are nervous, thus fails to ask questions from the teacher, similarly, the teacher feels anxious and does not deliver the lecture up to the expectations of the students. This creates a gap between teacher and student relationship, which restrict the learning process within the classroom (Ammara, 2018).

The classroom environment plays an important role in building up student's personalities (Lie, 2018). The students that do not or participate less in the classroom face more communication apprehension. Communication apprehension results in forgetting information, sweating, nausea, and stomach butterflies. Many studies prove that students with high communication apprehension are less participative in the class and are low achievers academically as compared to students with low communication apprehension that achieve higher academic grades (Wombacher et al., 2018). Communication apprehension affected students' academic performance and leadership skills. Communication apprehension hinders the learning and understanding of the students. It affects the students' academic grades as well as their behavioral choices (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2018). Communication apprehension is furthered with the cultural and societal factors, and that affects the students' communication skills. Pakistan is a collective society, where direct communication is considered rude while indirect and implicit communication is valued (Rodriguez, 1996). People are generally interdependent on their family members or friends for the decisions that affect their personalities. Thus, mostly the students are interdependent and lack the independent skills and carry communication apprehensions. Moreover, the strict and orthodox style of teaching in government schools and some private schools influences the communication skills of the students and the students start carrying many apprehensions. Many students in Pakistani schools are afraid of their teachers and face communication apprehension, which affects their personalities.

Furthermore, communication apprehension affects the students socially, cognitively and academically (Mahdi, 2015). The previous studies inform about the communication apprehension phenomena from the cultural and personality perspective in a wider context, moreover, other studies quantify the problem of communication apprehension and the correlation, but it gives us a limited description and understanding of the phenomena. Additional research is required to study the communication apprehension from its very core and to understand the phenomena from the individual's perspective. Thus, this study is aimed to explore the phenomenon of communication apprehension as experienced by individuals and to bring an in-depth analysis of communication apprehension, and its effects on students from a student's perspective. The study answers the research questions: How do students describe communication apprehension and how does communication apprehension affect students?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

McCrosky (1984), in his study, describes the various types of communication apprehension such as trait anxiety, context anxiety, audience anxiety, and situation anxiety. McCrosky defined that the construct of communication is important for the understanding of communication. He defined three patterns for communication, which are communication competence, communication skill, and positive communication effect. Mahdi (2015) conducted his study on finding the relationship between oral

communication apprehension and communication competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students. He elaborates that Communication Competence (CC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) among English learners play a major role through grammatical construction, teaching techniques, and student's motivation. The problems faced by students are anxiety, stress, fear and other difficulties hindering their learning process. These obstacles do not only affect their performance and behavior but impact their social life as they are unable to express or interact. The study shows that teachers can play an important role in reducing the problems faced by students in learning the English language and other foreign languages. Thus, a teacher can play a vital role in motivating the student to participate in the discussions and can be inquisitive in the classroom.

Petry (2016), found the effects of communication apprehension on employee's performance. Petry's pointed out that communication is an important element that affects the performance of employees, and have a positive or negative influence on their ability to work. The study found that employees in sales jobs have significantly lower communication apprehension than employees working in other fields. Thus, the phenomena of communication apprehension affect numerous areas of life including, social and personal life. Bragg (2017), in his qualitative study, finds the communication apprehension among community college students in Tennessee. The investigation aimed to understand the lived experiences of students enrolled in the introductory communication course. The phenomenon was explored by conducting an in-depth study of five students. The researcher finds out that the current curricula of communication provide limited opportunities for oral presentation and techniques to improve the student's communication process. Students with communication apprehension are under immense pressure and are unable to express their points of view. Moreover, the study found that students with high communication apprehension feel the same fear and dread not only in the classroom, but in the cafeteria, and campus. Thus, these students try to avoid most of the interactions or social events.

Van Eemeren (2017) the study illustrates the development of argumentative theory. The paper identifies the argumentative patterns in communication. The various communication activity types and their domains are explained in the paper. The critical discussion model helps to explain how to answer the crucial and critical questions asked by practitioners, lawyers, and academicians. Medaille & Usinger (2019) in their study described that quiet students in the classroom are quiet for some reasons related to learned behaviors, personality traits, or situational factors, which is sometimes, perceive as their lack of interest in their courses. Moreover, it is also evident that silent students are more engaged in the learning process but they need more space to express themselves. The study shows that some students are misunderstood because of their silence and less responsive nature. So the instructor needs to understand the level of understanding of students in the classroom. Hameleers et al., (2019) develop a comprehensive model to find out the individual level of populist messages. The model was derived using social identity theory and stereotyping theory and blame attribution theory. These several theories and concepts are integrated to explain the elements of populist message effect on emotional level, attitudes, behavior. Bhatti et al., (2016) in their study reveal the causes of foreign language anxiety in learners and their impact on their level of understanding. The fear of negative evaluation and nervousness are causes of anxiety among Pakistani students. The paper suggests that there should be more studies conducted on Pakistani students in a classroom context to explore this phenomenon of communication apprehension.

The literature indicates the work of several scholars on the studies related to causes, and impacts of communication apprehension and has linked the phenomenon with various theories, however, exploring a more direct and in-depth perspective of the individual experiencing the communication apprehension is still desired by the literature. Thus, the phenomenological approach of data collection and interpretation has been selected to understand the phenomenon as a lived experience.

## METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology is conducted to understand the essence of the phenomenon by examining the views of people who have experienced the phenomenon. The phenomenological study seeks to better understand the essence and enables to explore the solutions. The underlying concept behind the essence is to understand uniform reasons for why people act in a certain way in response to certain phenomena. A phenomenologist attempts to understand the uniform patterns to describe and explain the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon here is the apprehensions students experience while communicating in the classroom. The method of phenomenology is applied when the researcher is interested in the experiences of the people, that how a certain phenomenon has occurred in the life of that individual and what is his opinion about it (Patton, 1990). The phenomenological method is suitable to study classroom communication apprehensions because of its technique of bracketing. Through bracketing, the researcher keeps aside: all the previous studies conducted about the phenomenon, his own experiences, and biases, and only concentrate on the views of the subjects of the study. Since there are many studies and theories available on the communication apprehension, thus phenomenological approach will bracket all the available studies and theories and will understand the phenomenon from the subjects' viewpoint. The researchers conducted all three steps of bracketing or epoche: the researchers through dialogue with the fellow researchers bracketed the existing studies and biases about the communication apprehension in the classroom, the researchers through memo writing bracket the preconceived notions or biases throughout the research process, and finally the biases have been bracketed in the analysis and discussion of the study.

The phenomenological study attempts to provide a big picture that helps to understand the trends that emerge from the content of the data. To conduct a phenomenological study, to get accurate data, the subjects should be well informed and can articulate the phenomenon. Thus, students of the University are selected for studying the communication apprehensions in the classroom, as they are experiencing it and also they can appropriately express it. The phenomenological method is suitable for this study as it provides a rich and detailed description of the human experiences. The in-depth focus group discussions conducted with the students provide detail descriptions of the experiences of the students that why the students are shy or experience anxiety in exchanging their views or asking a question from their teachers. To conduct a phenomenological study, long in-depth interviews were conducted through the focus group discussion method. In this study, the business students of the University of Peshawar were selected to find out their views about the communication apprehensions they experience during the classroom. The convenience sampling technique was used to induct the subjects, as though this technique the readily available subjects can be inducted. To avoid any bias, and to get the diverse views, the researchers visited the university on three different days and selected the students sitting in the big lawns inside the campus premises during their breaks between the lectures. The students were selected upon their willingness and availability. They belong to various schools of the university, including science, arts, and business. The variety of students provided diverse views and experiences.

Five focus groups of ten students each were conducted using the semi-structured in-depth interview guide. All the focus groups' discussion was recorded using a Samsung galaxy voice recorder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to analyze and interpret. The data collected was open coded, and axial coding for finding the patterns and themes about the experiences of the students, their views and

how they cope with the communication apprehensions, as phenomenological study looks for the universal nature of the experience. To ensure interpretation validity, the researchers avoid imposing their meanings and mostly applied NVivo coding to better represent the viewpoints of the students rather than process coding.

## **Findings, Discussion, and Analysis**

This phenomenological study aims to understand the communication apprehension from the students' perspective and to explore how they have experienced it. The study explores the perspectives of the University of Peshawar business students about communication apprehension experienced within the classroom environment. The trends that appeared in the focus group discussions are categorized in the themes: communication apprehension, personality traits, social norms, people judges, teacher's attitudes and fight with the fear.

Communication Apprehension: The students were asked how they define communication apprehension? The students expressed that apprehension is anxiety, fear, and nervousness before or while talking or discussing their views in the classroom.

*"I define communication apprehension as fear or anxiety or maybe the fear of being judged by others. FG 2 Participant 2*

Personality traits and social norms: The study finds that the students experience apprehension because of their personality traits. The students mentioned their personalities: shy, introvert, quiet, reserved, and timid. However, some students mentioned that they do not have shy or introvert personalities but because of social norms and respect of teacher they do not communicate in the classroom.

*I always fear while speaking in public I always think of myself as a very good student. I got almost B grades in all my subjects, but still, there are so many questions in my mind, which are unanswered. I fear to ask the questions because I perceive I may ask the right question at a wrong time and the fact is I respect my teachers a lot I don't want them to think me wrong so I restricted myself from asking questions." FG 1 Participant 3*

The students expressed that due to their personality traits, they refrain from asking questions although they want to inquire. They admit that not asking questions affects their grades, as concepts are not clear. The students with high communication apprehension avoid communication situations and get fewer opportunities to develop their skills and performance in a classroom as they are shy and hesitate to communicate with others. Therefore, this high level of communication apprehension creates a negative attitude in students, which affects their personal growth and academic success and learning.

*"I do not ask questions in a class because I am by personality an introvert and I do not like talking to others and show up what I am feeling. What teacher writes on the board, I straightly write it in my notebook and write it in a paper? Honestly, it affected my grades and I got two C grades this semester. Though I wanted to be a part of my teacher discussion, I cannot overcome my communication barriers and fear." FG 3 Participant 10*

Physical changes: Students expressed that there are physical changes while they communicate in the classroom. They mentioned that there are pre-communication symptoms in their body that they experience: their heartbeat increases even if they think of asking a question from the teacher, their hands and legs shiver while they are presenting in the class or sharing their point of view.

*I still remember when I was doing a presentation for the very first time my hands were shivering and the body starts sweating.* FG 5 Participant 7

People are judgmental: The students expressed that they experience fear and anxiety while communicating orally during the classroom. They further mentioned that they feel that their peers or the teacher judge them while they are speaking in the classroom.

*“Communication apprehension is fear or anxiety in oral communication. I cannot communicate properly in small or large groups. The fear of being judged while I speak in public always makes me feel that I maybe not being able to deliver my message properly.* FG 3 Participant 5

Damaging self-esteem: Communication is an important element not only for learning but also for a good performance. Students do not develop communication skills due to communication apprehensions. Students expressed that they develop apprehensions because their self-esteem is damaged as their peers make fun of their communication skills.

*“I still remember the first time when I was doing a group study, one of my friends told me that your level of understanding is wrong. So, I got confused and I stop talking. After that, I do not go for group study and discussions. I think it’s about my self-esteem when people laugh at me. I feel guilty and insulted. It makes me feel I should not ask and should not discuss anything, until and unless I am sure about it”.* FG 1 Participant 7

Teacher Attitude: The problem of communication apprehension occurs when students and teachers do not coordinate their ideas appropriately. Sometimes the attitude of the teacher makes it difficult for students to ask questions from teachers. The gap is created which affects the classroom environment and instead of learning student are always under pressure and feels difficulty.

*“Communication apprehension is the nervousness, fear, and shyness due to which student does not express him. My teacher hates me for asking too many questions. Sometimes I feel I should not ask him, but on the other hand, I do not ask a question, how I will clear the points which I do not understand during a lecture.”* FG 4 Participant 8

Communication Gap between teacher and student: The essence of the teacher and student relationship is learning and their interaction with each other. Sometimes a student does not pose a question to the teacher and at times the teacher does not deliver properly. The young teachers usually do not interact effectively with their students. Especially the young female teachers feel shy when students ask her something. There is a communication gap between teacher and student communication which not only affects students learning but also their grades and academic career.

*“Young teacher's communication skills are not very good, also young female teachers are reserve that further increases our apprehensions”.* FG 4 Participant 8

Learning is stopped: The students indicated a direct relationship between classroom learning and communication apprehension. The participants mentioned that their learning process halts if they do not communicate or ask questions in the class. The students indicated a direct relationship between learning and communication during the classroom.

*“I am an inquisitive student, I ask questions frequently from my teacher, sometimes gets annoyed by my questions he thinks am annoying him though it is not the reality. I want to learn and to make some points clear, I ask my teacher to explain it again so he gets annoyed so now is trying to be silent though even I do not understand anything.”* FG 2 Participant 4

In every university class, it is essential for students to interact with teachers, if they do not interact they do not learn anything. For a learning process interaction is important. I think the communication barrier is the greatest barrier students face during their academic careers. Many students do not ask a question due to fear and anxiety and it eventually leads towards the weak relationship between teachers and students and it restricts the learning process.

*“I was the topper of Peshawar board when I came to the university, the environment was very changed from college and school. In college, the teacher provided all notes and we write down every single question in Class. In University, it became difficult for me to prepare all notes and note down every single point in class. Slowly and gradually my grades affected and once called a very intelligent boy of my colleagues who topped the college are now an average student. I feel fear while interacting with my teachers because the environment is not very friendly and the teachers are very old it is difficult for me to make a bond with them.”* FG 5 Participant 1

Fighting with fears: Some of the students expressed that they are fighting with the fear of communication. They are participating in various competitions or forcing themselves to speak in the class and participate in discussions to deal with fear and anxiety.

*Well! We all have fears and I want to mention here that I am now working on it and I am trying to speak up and now taking part in different competitions to overcome this problem.”* FG 5 Participant 9

The study finds out that communication apprehension is a phenomenon experienced by every student. The feeling of nervousness and anxiety creates a fear of speaking publicly. This anxiety created interpersonal problems and restrict the learning of students. The classroom environment tends to be a challenge for students with a high level of communication apprehension. The fear of poor communication affects student life. The student’s confidence level decreases that reduce their inquisition even while asking informative questions.

The study emphasizes the importance of a good teacher because there is a direct influence of a teacher on a student’s life and learning. Teachers matter more to student achievement because they play an important role in learning and research. The students sometimes feel fear in expressing themselves due to the gap between teacher and students and the teacher’s intimidating behavior in the classroom. This affects the classroom-learning environment and students’ grades.

## CONCLUSION

Communication apprehension is the fear and anxiety associated with anticipated communication with other persons in public speaking or expressing views (McCroskey & Anderson, 1976). In a classroom setting, communication apprehension is a problem, which is restricting the learning process inside a classroom. The self-perceived competence and communication anxiety result in weak learning and fewer achievements of students. The consequences of communication apprehension are social, personal and academic which affect the student’s life in one way or the other. The phenomenon of communication apprehension exists among many people. Usually, students experience communication apprehension during the classroom and their academic career (Bahadori & Hashemizadeh, 2018). The fear of speaking publicly, nervousness, accompanies the feelings of reticence and anxiety affects the students psychologically and academically. Creating easy learning and a warm climate in a classroom helps students to be high achievers and quick learners (Wombacher et al., 2019). The role of teachers varies in the learning process. The phenomenon of the classroom environment plays an important role in the learning and academic success of the student. Sometimes the teachers regard the silent student as ‘perfect’ although he may not be a good student (McCrosky & Anderson, 1976). The students sometimes

do not ask questions due to the shyness, fear or due communication anxiety. The studies indicate a direct relationship between communication apprehension and the classroom environment.

The study concludes that the problem of communication apprehension restricts learning in the classroom, and the student does not learn or understand due to the fear of being judged. The communication apprehension causes nervousness and anxiety that further creates interpersonal communication, academics and professional problems (Molnar & Crnjak, 2018). Most individuals in job interviews and public speeches experiences communication apprehensions, while among students, the apprehensions mostly occur during class presentations and learning. Most of the university students face difficulty in understanding the courses, although many communication courses are available, it is still not enough to mitigate the effects of communication apprehension (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2018). An individual with poor communication, experience the feelings of anxiety during public speaking and communication encounters (Amiri & Puteh, 2018). Teachers play an important role in a classroom to mitigate the problem of communication apprehension. The negative attitude of teachers towards students restricts the learning environment in the classroom and affects the student's grades and interest in the studies.

The inquisitive students always learn more than a silent student. If the student is facing a high level of communication apprehension, he will feel fear and anxiety in asking questions and he will not learn anything new. Communication apprehension leads to the weak relationship between student and teacher, which eventually affects the learning environment of a classroom. Thus, communication apprehension creates communication anxiety, which affects students' intelligence and confidence. The student with high communication apprehension shows poor class performance and less confidence. The study concludes that the phenomena of communication apprehension are associated with poor academic achievement of students in the classroom.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study is subject to limitations. The factors such as student's backgrounds and their learning interest were not fully understood due to the multiple cultural adaptabilities. The study was also limited to the sample because only students from one university were interviewed. Future research may be done on communication apprehension effects on personality, leadership and cultural appreciation and communication apprehension among the traditional graduate students of the university.

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