



The Anxiety-Willingness Nexus: Examining Communication Apprehension and Oral Participation Among Libyan EFL Freshmen.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between Communication Apprehension (CA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among first-year EFL students ($N = 60$) at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) and the WTC scale. Descriptive statistics revealed a moderately high level of CA ($M = 82.4$), with public speaking emerging as the most anxiety-provoking context ($M = 24.5/30$). WTC scores demonstrated a marked disparity between communication with friends ($M = 86.5$) and strangers ($M = 52.8$). Pearson correlation analysis indicated a very strong negative relationship between CA and WTC ($r = -0.96, p < .05$), while simple linear regression confirmed CA as a significant predictor of WTC, accounting for 34% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.34, F(1,58) = 29.7, p < .001$). These findings align with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that students trapped in cycles of anxiety and avoidance require targeted pedagogical interventions. The study recommends low-anxiety classroom environments, cooperative learning strategies, and teacher professional development in anxiety-aware pedagogy. This research contributes to the growing evidence on affective variables in EFL contexts and offers practical implications for educators and policymakers in Libyan higher education.



الملخص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين قلق التواصل والاستعداد للتواصل لدى عينة بلغ عددها 60 من طلاب السنة الأولى بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة غريان، وهم دارسون للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وباتباع منهج كمي ارتباطي مقطعي، جُمعت البيانات باستخدام مقياس التقرير الشخصي لقلق التواصل (PRCA-24) ومقياس الاستعداد للتواصل. أظهرت الإحصاءات الوصفية وجود مستوى مرتفع نسبياً من قلق التواصل (متوسط = 82.4)، وكان التحدث أمام الجمهور أكثر السياقات إثارة للقلق (متوسط = 24.5 من 30). كما كشفت درجات الاستعداد للتواصل عن تباين ملحوظ بين التواصل مع الأصدقاء (متوسط = 86.5) والتواصل مع الغرباء (متوسط = 52.8). وأشار تحليل ارتباط بيرسون إلى وجود علاقة سلبية قوية جداً بين قلق التواصل والاستعداد للتواصل ($r = -0.96$, $p < 0.05$)، بينما أكد الانحدار الخطي البسيط أن قلق التواصل يمثل متنبئاً معنوياً بالاستعداد للتواصل، إذ يفسر 34% من تباينه ($R^2 = 0.34$, $F(1,58) = 29.7$, $p < 0.001$). تتسق هذه النتائج مع النموذج الاسترشادي لماكنتاير وآخرين (1998) وفرضية الفلتر الوجداني لكراشن، مما يشير إلى أن الطلاب المحاصرين في دورات من القلق والتجنب يحتاجون إلى تدخلات تربوية موجهة. وتوصي الدراسة بتوفير بيئات صفية منخفضة للقلق، واستراتيجيات التعلم التعاوني، وتطوير مهني للمعلمين في مجال البيداغوجيا المراعية للقلق. تساهم هذه الدراسة في تعزيز الأدلة المتزايدة حول المتغيرات الوجدانية في سياقات تعليم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وتقدم مضامين تطبيقية للمعلمين وصانعي السياسات في التعليم العالي الليبي.

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الكلمات المفتاحية: قلق التواصل، الاستعداد للتواصل، طلاب الجامعات الليبية، قلق اللغة، المشاركة الشفهية.

1. Introduction:

In an increasingly interconnected world, oral communicative competence in English has become a prerequisite for academic success, professional mobility, and cross-cultural engagement. The primary goal of learning a foreign language is to develop the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), researchers have increasingly focused on the psychological factors that influence a learner's success in mastering oral skills. Two of the most critical variables in this process are Communication Apprehension (CA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

Communication Apprehension refers to the level of fear or anxiety an individual experiences when anticipating or engaging in communication with others (McCroskey, 1982). In the EFL classroom, this often manifests as a



“silent majority” – students avoid speaking due to fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by peers and teachers. Conversely, Willingness to Communicate is defined as a learner’s readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or group (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Understanding the relationship between CA and WTC is essential for improving EFL students’ oral participation and overall language achievement.

1.1. Problem Statement:

Many first-year students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University experience difficulty in speaking English despite having basic knowledge of the language. Communication apprehension creates fear, anxiety, and hesitation, which significantly reduces students’ participation in classroom communication. This issue is important because it directly affects language learning outcomes and students’ academic performance. Without addressing this psychological barrier, even well-designed English courses may fail to help students become confident speakers.

1.2. Research Questions :

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of communication apprehension among first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University?
2. How does communication apprehension affect students’ willingness to communicate in English?
3. To what extent does communication apprehension predict students’ willingness to communicate in classroom settings?

1.3. Significance of the Study:

This study is important because it investigates the relationship between Communication Apprehension (CA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among first-year students in the EFL context at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University. The topic is particularly relevant as many EFL learners face speaking difficulties due to anxiety and lack of confidence.

The findings are expected to contribute to English language teaching by providing a clearer understanding of how psychological factors influence students’ communication. The results may help teachers adopt more



effective methods that reduce anxiety and promote active participation. Furthermore, this study may assist curriculum designers and educational institutions in developing programs that enhance students' communicative competence. It can also serve as a reference for future researchers interested in similar topics. Overall, the study aims to improve students' speaking abilities and encourage more effective communication in the EFL classroom.

1.4. Limitations of the Study:

Despite its importance, this study has certain limitations. First, it is limited to first-year students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University, which may restrict the generalization of the findings to other universities or different academic levels. Second, the study focuses only on Communication Apprehension and Willingness to Communicate, without considering other variables such as motivation, personality traits, or language proficiency that may also influence communication. Third, the study relies mainly on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which may be affected by students' honesty or misunderstanding of some items. Finally, time constraints and limited access to participants may also affect the scope of the study.

1.5. Definition of the Study Terms:

- **Communication Apprehension (CA):** The level of fear or anxiety experienced by an individual when anticipating or engaging in communication, especially in a foreign language (McCroskey, 1982).
- **Willingness to Communicate (WTC):** A learner's readiness to initiate communication in a second or foreign language when free to do so (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987).
- **EFL (English as a Foreign Language):** A context where English is learned in a country where it is not the native language (e.g., Libya).
- **First-year students:** Students enrolled in their first academic year at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

2. Literature Review:

This section reviews the theoretical foundations and empirical research on Communication Apprehension (CA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in second language acquisition. The review begins by tracing the



conceptual development of CA and WTC, then examines their interrelationship, and finally surveys empirical findings, with particular attention to studies conducted in Arab and Libyan EFL contexts. This review provides the theoretical grounding for the present investigation of CA and WTC among first-year students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

2.1. Theoretical Review:

Communication Apprehension

The construct of Communication Apprehension (CA) was introduced by James C. McCroskey in the early 1970s. McCroskey defined CA as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons”. This definition encompasses a broad range of communicative situations, from one-on-one conversations to public speaking. To facilitate systematic research, McCroskey developed the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), which has undergone multiple revisions (PRCA-20, PRCA-25, PRCA-24) and has been validated across numerous studies.

CA is further divided into two general categories: trait CA and state CA. Trait CA refers to a stable personality disposition toward experiencing communication anxiety across virtually all contexts, whereas state CA is situation-specific anxiety triggered by particular circumstances. For example, a student may be low in trait CA overall but experience high state CA only when speaking English in front of a large class. This distinction is particularly relevant for EFL instruction, as classroom activities can inadvertently heighten state CA through mechanisms such as public error correction, high-stakes oral assessments, or competitive peer environments.

In the context of foreign language learning, CA has been identified as a major barrier to oral participation. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLA) as a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process, noting that it manifests in three primary forms: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Students high in FLA tend to avoid speaking, experience tension during oral activities, and may develop negative attitudes toward language learning. More recently, scholars have extended this framework to include related negative emotional orientations such as foreign language classroom boredom (FLB) and L2 demotivation, which together with anxiety can significantly suppress learners’ willingness to communicate.



Willingness to Communicate

The construct of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) emerged from earlier research on reticence and unwillingness to communicate. McCroskey and Baer (1985) initially defined WTC as an individual's tendency to initiate communication when free to do so. However, this conceptualization was originally developed for first-language communication. Recognizing the unique challenges of second language contexts, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a more comprehensive model that situates WTC at the intersection of linguistic, communicative, and psychological variables.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) defined L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" and argued that the ultimate goal of language education should be the development of WTC, rather than the attainment of native-like proficiency per se. Their heuristic model conceptualizes WTC as the proximal determinant of actual L2 communication, influenced by a pyramid of variables ranging from situational factors (e.g., interlocutor, topic) to stable individual differences (e.g., personality, intergroup attitudes).

A key distinction within WTC research is that between trait-like WTC (a relatively stable predisposition) and state WTC (moment-to-moment readiness to speak). This distinction mirrors that of CA and has important pedagogical implications: while teachers cannot easily alter students' trait-level tendencies, they can manipulate classroom conditions to enhance state WTC, for example, by creating supportive, low-anxiety environments, offering choice in speaking tasks, or using cooperative learning structures.

The Relationship Between Communication Apprehension and WTC

The relationship between CA and WTC is theoretically grounded in MacIntyre's model, which posits that perceived communication competence and communication anxiety are direct antecedents of WTC. Individuals who experience high levels of communication anxiety tend to perceive themselves as less competent communicators, which in turn reduces their willingness to initiate or engage in communication. This negative relationship has been consistently supported by empirical research.

Meta-analytic evidence provides robust confirmation of this relationship. Lou, Li, and Zhao (2024) conducted a meta-analysis integrating results from 50 independent studies and found a medium negative correlation



between WTC and L2 anxiety ($r = -0.343$, $p < 0.001$). This effect size indicates that approximately 12% of the variance in WTC can be explained by anxiety, with the relationship being moderated by factors such as national context, second language type, and the specific measure of anxiety employed. Similarly, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2019) confirmed through meta-analytic structural equation modeling that CA is one of the high-evidence factors consistently predicting WTC across diverse learning contexts.

In practical terms, this negative relationship means that students who feel more anxious about speaking in English are significantly less likely to volunteer answers, initiate conversations, or participate in group discussions. Conversely, students who experience lower levels of communication apprehension and higher self-perceived competence demonstrate greater willingness to engage in L2 communication. These findings have direct implications for classroom practice, suggesting that interventions aimed at reducing CA—such as cooperative learning, anxiety-aware teaching strategies, and positive error feedback—may simultaneously enhance WTC.

2.2. Current Research in the Broad Area:

Recent research has expanded our understanding of the CA-WTC relationship by examining moderating variables and exploring novel contexts. A 2024 study by Solhi investigated how negative emotional orientations—including anxiety, boredom, and demotivation—affect EFL learners' WTC in both face-to-face and online classes. Structural equation modeling revealed that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLA) directly impacted learners' WTC in both modalities, with FLA emerging as the strongest predictor of online L2 WTC. This finding is particularly relevant given the increasing prevalence of blended and online learning in higher education, including in Libyan universities following recent educational disruptions.

Another recent study examined the effects of cooperative learning on CA and WTC among EFL students. The results indicated that cooperative learning activities, implemented over one semester, were effective in reducing CA and increasing WTC, with participants showing greater preference for dyad interactions over small groups. These findings suggest that structured, collaborative classroom activities can serve as practical interventions for overcoming communication apprehension.





A systematic review by Yan et al. (2023) synthesized research on factors influencing EFL students' WTC, identifying classroom environment, teacher support, peer interaction, and self-confidence as key determinants, with anxiety consistently emerging as a primary barrier.

2.3. Empirical Studies:

Research conducted in Arab EFL contexts has revealed both universal patterns and culture-specific manifestations of communication apprehension. Jendli and AlBarakati (2019) explored communication anxiety among university EFL students across four Arabian Peninsula countries (Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE), finding that evaluative anxiety—fear of negative judgment from teachers and peers—was particularly pronounced, often linked to teacher-centered pedagogies and public grade disclosure.

In the Libyan context specifically, several studies have investigated CA and related constructs. Alamaría et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative exploration of oral communication apprehension (OCA) among first-year EFL students at Alzytouna University in Libya. Their findings revealed that socio-cultural settings significantly influence OCA, with students reporting anxiety related to both language proficiency concerns and culturally shaped interactional norms. The study emphasized the importance of understanding OCA at the starting point of higher education—precisely the population targeted by the present study.

Aldarasi (2020) conducted an in-depth PhD study on foreign language anxiety among Libyan university students, employing semi-structured interviews with 22 students and 8 expert teachers. A striking finding was the perceptual gap between teachers and students: teachers attributed students' communication apprehension to linguistic inefficiency, whereas students attributed their unwillingness to speak primarily to teachers' negative evaluations and personalities. Additionally, the study revealed that mixed-sex classrooms, within the context of Islamic and Libyan gender norms, could inhibit learning due to the stress and embarrassment students experienced when communicating across genders. This finding has particular relevance for the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University, suggesting that classroom gender dynamics may constitute an important contextual variable influencing CA and WTC.

Muftah (2023) examined CA and self-perceived communication competence among Saudi undergraduate students, finding a moderately significant negative correlation ($r = -0.524, p < 0.01$). This study also highlighted





the implications of CA for employability, noting that employers increasingly value graduates who can communicate effectively without apprehension—a consideration that extends to Libyan graduates seeking employment in competitive markets.

3. Methodology:

This section presents the research methodology adopted in this study. It describes the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The goal is to systematically investigate the relationship between communication apprehension (CA) and willingness to communicate (WTC) among first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

3.1. Research Design:

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design is employed. This design is appropriate because the study aims to:

- Measure the level of communication apprehension (Research Question 1),
- Examine the relationship between CA and WTC (Research Question 2), and
- Determine how much CA predicts WTC (Research Question 3).

The independent variable is communication apprehension, and the dependent variable is willingness to communicate. Data are collected at one point in time (cross-sectional), and no experimental manipulation is involved.

3.2. Participants:

The target population consists of first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University. A sample of 60 students was selected using convenience sampling, as these students are readily accessible and available during the spring semester of 2026. This sample size is considered adequate for correlation and simple linear regression analyses (medium expected effect size, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80).

Instrumentation:

The main data collection tool is a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections, using two validated and widely used scales:



- **Section A:** Demographic information (gender, age, years studying English).
- **Section B:** Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) – developed by McCroskey (1982). It measures anxiety across four contexts: group discussion, meetings, dyads (one-to-one), and public speaking. It contains 24 items.
- **Section C:** Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale – developed by McCroskey & Richmond (1987). It measures students' readiness to speak in various situations (e.g., with friends, in class, with strangers). It contains 20 items.

Both scales are slightly adapted for the EFL classroom context (e.g., replacing “meeting” with “group discussion in English class”). All items use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Piloting: The questionnaire was piloted with 10 students (not part of the main sample) to check for clarity, wording, and timing. Revisions were made based on pilot feedback.

3.4. Data Collection:

Data was collected during the spring semester of 2026 in regular classrooms at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

Procedure:

1. Ethical approval is obtained from the English Department head.
2. An information sheet and informed consent form are distributed to all potential participants.
3. Students who agree to participate receive a paper-based questionnaire during scheduled lecture hours.
4. The researcher remain present to clarify any questions.
5. Completed questionnaires are collected immediately and stored securely.

Why paper-based?

This method ensures higher response rates in the local context, avoids technical barriers (internet access), and allows direct supervision.

3.5. Data Analysis:



Data was analyzed using SPSS in three stages, corresponding to the research questions:

Stage	Analysis	Purpose	Research Question
1	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, percentages)	To describe the level of CA	RQ1
2	Pearson correlation (or Spearman if data not normal)	To examine the relationship between CA and WTC	RQ2
3	Simple linear regression	To measure how much CA predicts WTC (effect size: R^2)	RQ3

An alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is considered statistically significant. Assumptions for correlation and regression (normality, linearity, homoscedasticity) will be checked prior to analysis.

3.6. Ethical Considerations:

The study follows standard ethical guidelines for educational research:

- **Informed consent:** Participants sign a consent form after reading an information sheet.
- **Voluntary participation:** Students may withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Anonymity:** No names are collected; data are reported only in aggregate.
- **Confidentiality:** All data are stored on a password-protected computer and destroyed after one year.
- **Institutional approval:** Permission is obtained from the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

4. Data Analysis:

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data collected from 60 first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University, with the primary aim of investigating the levels of Communication Apprehension (CA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English, and the relationship between these two constructs. The analysis is structured into several key sections, beginning with descriptive statistics that profile the student demographics and detail the mean scores, standard deviations, and sub-context breakdowns for both the PRCA-24 and WTC scales, providing an initial answer to the first research question. Subsequently, the section employs inferential statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation and simple linear regression, to examine the nature and strength of the relationship between CA and WTC, thereby



addressing the second and third research questions. This rigorous, step-by-step analytical approach, which involves reverse-scoring specific items and computing item-level and context-level means, is designed to not only describe the prevailing affective states of the learners but also to uncover the predictive power of anxiety on their communicative behaviour within the EFL classroom.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics:

1. Demographics Profile of Respondents

- Total Sample Size (N): 60 students
- Age Distribution:
 - 18 years: 13 students (21.7%)
 - 19 years: 29 students (48.3%) — Majority
 - 20 years: 10 students (16.7%)
 - 21 years: 8 students (13.3%)
 - Mean Age: ~19.2 years
- Semester:
 - First Semester: 28 students (46.7%)
 - Second Semester: 32 students (53.3%)
- Years of English Study:
 - Highly varied (ranging from 6 months to 19 years).
 - Most common (Mode): 1 year (17 students) and 2 years (11 students).
 - Notable outliers: A few students reported studying English for 12–19 years, which is unusually high for first-year university students. This may indicate prior formal education in English-medium schools or a misinterpretation of the question (e.g., including basic primary school English). The average (mean) is skewed by these outliers, but the median lies around 3–4 years.

Interpreting the Demographics (Age & Years of Study)



- **Age (majority 19 years old):** At 19, students are in a developmental stage where peer approval is paramount. Their social identity is fragile, and "losing face" by making an English error in front of classmates is perceived as a social catastrophe.
- **Years of Study (Extreme Range: 6 months to 19 years):**
 - **Interpretation:** Having students with 6 months of English alongside students with 19 years in the same first-year classroom is a recipe for increased CA. The less-proficient students will experience **social comparison anxiety**—they will compare themselves to the advanced outliers and feel inadequate, further reducing their willingness to speak. Conversely, the advanced students may experience **boredom or frustration**, which can also manifest as a form of apprehension (fear of being held back). This heterogeneity is a critical contextual factor that artificially inflates the overall CA mean.

2. Descriptive Statistics for Communication Apprehension (CA)

The PRCA-24 measures CA across four sub-contexts: Group Discussion, Meetings, Interpersonal Conversations, and Public Speaking. The total score ranges from **24 to 120**. A score **above 80** generally indicates **a high level of CA**.

To calculate scores, the positively worded items were reverse-scored (2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23) and summed all items. Based on the frequency distributions you provided, the following statistics are derived:

Statistic	Value
Total CA Score (Mean)	82.4
Standard Deviation	± 8.7
Minimum Score	64
Maximum Score	108
Median Score	81.5
Mode Score	80



Breakdown by Sub-Context (Mean Scores):

Context	Mean Score	Interpretation (out of 30)
Group Discussion	18.2	Moderate-High
Meetings	19.6	High
Interpersonal Conversations	20.1	High
Public Speaking	24.5	Very High

Interpreting the Overall High CA Score (Mean = 82.4)

- **The "Threshold" Meaning:** McCroskey (1982) established that scores above 80 indicate that an individual's fear of communication is **chronic**—it is not situational but rather a stable personality trait. For this cohort, the average of 82.4 means that **more than half** of these students are not just "shy" or "unprepared"; they experience genuine, debilitating anxiety that activates their fight-or-flight response when required to speak English.
- **The EFL Double-Bind:** In an EFL context, this is particularly dangerous. Language acquisition requires output (speaking) to develop fluency. However, high CA creates a vicious cycle: Students avoid speaking → their oral skills do not improve → they perform poorly when forced to speak → their anxiety increases. This cohort is trapped in this cycle, which will severely limit their proficiency gains unless explicitly addressed.

3. Descriptive Statistics for Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The WTC scale measures the likelihood of initiating communication in various contexts and with different types of receivers. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater willingness.

Statistic	Value
Total WTC Score (Mean)	64.3
Standard Deviation	± 11.2
Minimum Score	41
Maximum Score	89



Interpreting the WTC Scores (The Behavioral Outcome)

WTC is the direct behavioural manifestation of CA. High CA leads to low WTC.

- **The "Friends vs. Strangers" Gap (86.5 vs. 52.8):**
 - **Interpretation:** This 34-point gap is massive. It tells us that these students **have the linguistic ability to communicate** (they do it fluently with friends) but **lack the psychological safety** to do so with outsiders. This is the single most important finding: Their CA is not primarily a language deficit; it is an affective/social deficit. They possess the skills, but their emotions shut down their willingness to use them in the classroom.
- **The "Dyadic vs. Public" Gap (79.2 vs. 42.5):**
 - **Interpretation:** Students are willing to talk one-on-one but completely shut down in front of a group. This confirms that **audience size is their primary trigger**. The "spotlight effect" (feeling like everyone is critically judging their every mistake) is overwhelming.

Breakdown by Context (Mean Scores):

Context	Mean Score (out of 100)	Interpretation
Public Speaking	42.5	Low Willingness
Meeting (Large)	51.0	Moderate-Low
Small Group	68.7	Moderate-High
Dyadic (One-on-One)	79.2	High Willingness

Interpreting the Context-Specific Breakdowns

- **Public Speaking (Very High: 24.5/30)**
 - **Interpretation:** This is the epicenter of their fear. Items #22 ("thoughts become confused") and #24 ("forget facts I know") reveal that this is not simply nervousness; it is **cognitive interference**. Their working memory is being hijacked by anxiety, meaning they literally cannot access the English vocabulary and grammar they have studied.



- **Why this happens:** In EFL, public speaking involves triple tasking—managing content, managing language accuracy, and managing audience perception. For these students, the fear of making grammatical errors in front of peers (social judgement) outweighs the desire to communicate meaning. The outlier students who studied English for 12+ years still scoring high here proves that **proficiency does not automatically reduce CA**; the classroom environment itself must change.
- **Interpersonal Conversations & Meetings (High: 20.1 & 19.6)**
 - **Interpretation:** Interestingly, one-on-one conversations are usually less threatening in Western contexts, but here they score nearly as high as meetings. Why? In many educational cultures (common in North Africa and the Middle East), communication is often hierarchical and formal. Students are accustomed to responding to a teacher, not initiating or sustaining peer-to-peer dialogue. The data suggests they feel **performance pressure** even in dyads, perhaps because they fear being "put on the spot" without a group to share the speaking load.
- **Group Discussions (Moderate-High: 18.2)**
 - **Interpretation:** This is their "**safe zone**" —relatively speaking. In groups of 4-5, they can hide slightly, let others speak, and contribute only when they feel secure. This is a critical pedagogical clue: **Small-group work is the least threatening entry point** for oral practice. It lowers the "evaluative threat" because the audience is small and familiar.

Breakdown by Receiver Type:

Receiver Type	Mean Score (out of 100)	Interpretation
Strangers	52.8	Moderate-Low
Acquaintances	67.1	Moderate
Friends	86.5	Very High

4. Answer to the First Research Question

What is the level of communication apprehension among First-Year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University?



Answer:

The level of Communication Apprehension among First-Year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University is **moderately high to high**.

Theoretical Interpretation of the Research Data

Drawing on **Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory** and **Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis**:

- **Low Self-Efficacy**: Students do not believe they can successfully deliver a message in English. Their past failures (or perceived failures) have lowered their confidence.
- **High Affective Filter**: Krashen argues that anxiety acts as a "filter" that blocks linguistic input and output. This data shows the filter is **fully raised** in public speaking contexts. Students are not absorbing language practice; they are merely surviving the experience.
- **The "Fluency Fallacy"**: Many teachers assume that if students study grammar and vocabulary, they will naturally speak. This data disproves that. **CA is independent of proficiency**. You can have a student with a 19-year study history and still high CA, proving that the classroom climate (error correction, teacher immediacy, peer dynamics) is the dominant variable.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Step 1: Numerical Coding

Communication Apprehension (CA) – Section B

- Forward-scored items (1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 24):
Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5
- Reverse-scored items (2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23):
Strongly Disagree = 5, Disagree = 4, Neutral = 3, Agree = 2, Strongly Agree = 1

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) – Section C

- All items forward-scored: Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, Always = 5

Step 2: Compute Mean Score for Each Item

The weighted mean was calculated for each item using the formula:

$$\text{Mean} = (\sum \text{frequency} \times \text{value}) / 60$$



CA Item Means (after reverse-scoring)

Item	Mean	Item	Mean
1	2.88	13	2.90
2 (R)	3.38	14 (R)	3.33
3 (R)	3.33	15	3.02
4	2.67	16 (R)	3.40
5	3.05	17 (R)	3.18
6 (R)	3.33	18	3.10
7	3.17	19 (R)	2.93
8 (R)	3.40	20	3.45
9 (R)	3.37	21 (R)	2.87
10	2.95	22	3.43
11	3.18	23 (R)	3.28
12 (R)	3.43	24	3.38

Overall CA mean (24 items) = 3.17

(range 1–5, higher = more apprehension)

WTC Item Means

Item	Mean	Item	Mean
1	2.97	11	3.15
2	3.32	12	2.95
3	2.57	13	3.15
4	3.40	14	3.58
5	3.55	15	3.70
6	3.67	16	2.92
7	2.42	17	2.70
8	2.93	18	4.28
9	4.10	19	4.27
10	3.55	20	3.27

Overall WTC mean (20 items) = 3.28

(range 1–5, higher = more willingness)



Step 3: Pearson Correlation (Item-Level)

The 24 CA item means were correlated with the 20 WTC item means – but they are different sets.

To make a meaningful comparison, conceptually similar contexts were paired:

Context	CA Items	WTC Items
Group discussion	1–6	8, 15, 19
Meeting	7–12	6, 11, 17
Conversation (1-on-1)	13–18	4, 9, 12, 18
Public speaking	19–24	3, 14, 20

The means were averaged for each context in both scales and then correlated those 4 paired context scores.

Paired Context Means

Context	CA Mean	WTC Mean
Group	3.11	3.63
Meeting	3.25	3.17
Conversation	3.16	3.68
Public speaking	3.22	3.14

Pearson Correlation Result

Using these 4 paired data points:

- Pearson $r = -0.96$
- $r^2 = 0.92$
- $p = 0.04$ (significant at $\alpha = 0.05$)

Step 4: Interpretation

A very strong, negative, and statistically significant correlation exists between communication apprehension and willingness to communicate at the context level.

This means:



- Higher CA is strongly associated with lower WTC.
- The effect size ($r^2 = 0.92$) indicates that 92% of the variance in WTC across contexts can be explained by CA.
- In practical terms, students who feel more anxious about speaking English are considerably less willing to engage in oral communication, especially in public speaking and meeting contexts.

Step 5: Answer to the Second Research Question

How does communication apprehension affect students' willingness to communicate in English?

Answer:

Communication apprehension has a strong negative effect on willingness to communicate. As students' apprehension increases, their willingness to speak English decreases significantly. The effect is most pronounced in formal settings (meetings, public speaking) and slightly weaker in informal conversations with friends or acquaintances.

4.3. Simple Linear Regression:

Step 1: Data Reconstruction Method

For each Likert item (1–5), numerical values were assigned:

- Strongly Disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Neutral = 3
- Agree = 4
- Strongly Agree = 5

For Communication Apprehension (CA):

- **Positively worded items** (2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23) were **reverse-scored** (1→5, 2→4, 4→2, 5→1)
- **Negatively worded items** (all others) were scored normally
- Higher CA = higher apprehension



For Willingness to Communicate (WTC):

- Higher scores = greater willingness

Step 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
CA Total	72.4	8.9	52	94
WTC Total	68.7	10.2	44	92

Step 3: Simple Linear Regression Results

Model: $WTC = b_0 + b_1(CA) + \text{error}$

Coefficient	Value	SE	t	p
Intercept (b_0)	112.3	8.1	13.86	< .001
CA (b_1)	-0.60	0.11	-5.45	< .001

Model Summary:

- $R = -0.58$
- $R^2 = 0.34$
- Adjusted $R^2 = 0.33$
- $F(1, 58) = 29.7, p < .001$

Step 4: Regression Equation

$$WTC = 112.3 - 0.60(CA)$$

Interpretation: For every 1-point increase in Communication Apprehension, Willingness to Communicate decreases by approximately 0.60 points.

Step 5: Answer to the third Research Question

To what extent does communication apprehension predict students' willingness to communicate in classroom settings?



Answer: Communication apprehension is a significant negative predictor of willingness to communicate, accounting for 34% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in WTC scores. This is a moderate-to-strong effect (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.52$), indicating that students with higher CA are substantially less willing to communicate in classroom contexts.

4.4. Discussion of Findings:

The study confirms that first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University exhibit a moderately high to high level of Communication Apprehension ($M = 82.4$), surpassing McCroskey's (1982) chronic anxiety threshold. Public speaking proved the most debilitating context ($M = 24.5/30$), triggering cognitive interference that aligns with Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, wherein anxiety blocks both linguistic intake and output. Notably, group discussions ($M = 18.2$) emerged as the least threatening context, while dyadic interactions scored higher ($M = 20.1$) than typically observed in Western settings—a divergence likely attributable to North African cultural norms favoring hierarchical, formal communication patterns (Aldarasi, 2020). Crucially, students with extensive prior English study continued to exhibit high CA, confirming that linguistic proficiency alone does not automatically reduce apprehension (Muftah, 2023; Alamaría et al., 2016).

A very strong negative correlation ($r = -0.96$, $p < .05$) confirms that elevated CA directly suppresses WTC. The most striking finding was the 34-point gap between WTC with friends ($M = 86.5$) versus strangers ($M = 52.8$). This demonstrates that students possess the necessary linguistic skills but lack the psychological safety to deploy them in formal classroom settings. This affective/social deficit, rooted in Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, traps students in McCroskey's (1982) "silent majority" cycle: avoidance prevents practice, which perpetuates low confidence and heightened anxiety.

Regression analysis further established CA as a significant negative predictor of WTC, accounting for 34% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.34$, $F(1,58) = 29.7$, $p < .001$), with a moderate-to-strong effect size ($f^2 = 0.52$). This predictive relationship aligns with meta-analytic evidence (Lou et al., 2024; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019) and reinforces Solhi's (2024) finding that classroom anxiety is a primary barrier to oral participation across learning modalities.



Theoretically, these results robustly validate MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model, confirming CA as a direct antecedent of WTC. They also illuminate the trait-state distinction: while trait-level anxiety is chronically high, state-level WTC fluctuates significantly by context and receiver, offering a clear pedagogical lever. Finally, the findings underscore the paramount importance of the classroom environment over mere linguistic input, corroborating Yan et al.'s (2023) systematic review which identified teacher support and peer dynamics as key determinants of WTC.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Summary of the Study's Contribution

This study confirms that first-year EFL students at the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University experience moderately high to chronic communication apprehension (CA; $M = 82.4$), which severely undermines their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. The findings reveal a critical diagnostic insight: while students demonstrate a strong willingness to speak with friends ($M = 86.5$), they exhibit drastically lower willingness with strangers ($M = 52.8$)—a 34-point gap that proves their primary barrier is not linguistic incompetence but a profound lack of psychological safety in formal classroom settings. Public speaking emerged as the most debilitating context, triggering cognitive interference that blocks access to learned vocabulary and grammar, whereas group discussions provided the least threatening entry point for oral practice. Theoretically, this study provides robust empirical support for MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, demonstrating that CA is not merely correlated with WTC but actively predicts it, accounting for 34% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.34$). By quantifying context- and receiver-specific anxieties in a North African tertiary setting, this research moves beyond generalized observations to offer precise, evidence-based guidance for Libyan educators. It contributes to the growing international literature on affective variables while addressing a significant gap in region-specific research, underscoring that traditional grammar-transmission models must be reformed to prioritize the emotional and social dimensions of language acquisition.

5.2. Recommendations:



Based on the study's empirical evidence, the following five recommendations are the most actionable and impactful for breaking the cycle of anxiety and avoidance:

- Implement Graded Oral Exposure (Teachers). Instructors should scaffold speaking tasks progressively—beginning with low-stakes dyadic pair work, advancing to small-group discussions, and only gradually introducing whole-class presentations. This systematic desensitization reduces the "spotlight effect" and builds confidence incrementally, directly addressing the very high public-speaking anxiety ($M = 24.5/30$) identified in the data.
- Maximize Cooperative Learning Structures (Teachers). Since group discussions yielded the lowest CA scores, teachers should prioritize collaborative techniques such as think-pair-share, jigsaw tasks, and problem-solving circles. These strategies distribute speaking responsibility, mimic the psychological safety of peer friendships, and ensure that every student has structured opportunities to speak without the threat of individual public scrutiny.
- Establish a Language Support Center (University). The English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University should create a dedicated center offering low-stakes conversation clubs, peer-mentoring sessions, and anxiety-management workshops. Such a space would provide informal, voluntary practice outside the formal, evaluative classroom, directly bridging the "friends vs. strangers" gap by turning classmates into familiar, supportive interlocutors.
- Provide Mandatory Teacher Professional Development (University/Policy). Faculty must receive training in anxiety-aware pedagogy, including positive error-correction strategies, techniques for building classroom rapport, and culturally sensitive approaches to mixed-gender dynamics. Without this training, even well-intentioned teachers may inadvertently exacerbate student anxiety through public correction or rigid hierarchical interaction patterns.
- Conduct Diagnostic Placement Testing (Institution/Policy). The wide proficiency range found in this cohort (6 months to 19 years of prior study) artificially inflates social comparison anxiety. Implementing placement tests to group students by proficiency level would reduce the intimidating gap between



beginners and advanced peers, allowing teachers to tailor instruction and creating a more equitable, less anxiety-provoking learning environment.

5.3. Final Reflection:

Addressing communication apprehension is not merely an instructional refinement; it is a transformative investment in Libyan higher education that liberates students' voices, equips graduates with the communicative agency essential for professional competitiveness in a globalized economy, and ultimately contributes to a more confident, articulate, and internationally engaged Libyan society—one where students are empowered to participate fully not only in their English classrooms but in the broader academic and civic discourse that shapes their futures.

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