

# Speaking Anxiety and Intercultural Competence as Predictors of Learner's Willingness to Communicate

## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To determine the predicting factors of Learner's Willingness to Communicate using Speaking Anxiety and Intercultural Competence as exogenous variables.

**Study design:** The study employed cross sectional, predictive study design.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted in selected public schools of Region 9 during the school year 2023-2024.

**Methodology:** The respondents are grade 12 students from public schools selected by Raosoft. Three adapted survey questionnaires were employed in the data collection process.

**Results:** The study revealed that students generally obtained a moderate level of speaking anxiety which shows a significant relationship to the learner's willingness to communicate. Additionally, the high level of intercultural competence shows the significant relationship also to the learner's willingness to communicate. Moreover, speaking anxiety manifests no significant influence on the learner's willingness to communicate in contrast to the finding of intercultural competence which manifests a strong significant influence on the endogenous variable but when combined, the model suggests significant in predicting the endogenous variable.

**Conclusion:** It is revealed that among two exogenous variables only Intercultural competence is considered to be a significant predictor of learner's willingness to Communicate. This means, a high level of intercultural competence increases the learner's willingness to engage in communication. A positive behavior towards communication and intercultural engagements play a significant role in communication impacting the desire to be engaged in a more complex communication. Teachers' provision of a positive classroom environment could help students reduce their anxiety. Similarly, the experiences related to live interactions to cultural diversity could in one way maintain the high level of competence in intercultural engagements.

*Keywords: Willingness to Communicate, Speaking Anxiety, Intercultural Competence, Cross Sectional Predictive Study, Oral Communication, Education, Philippines*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous decline in language and speaking skills of Filipinos is one of the pressing issues that confronts the Philippine education system. This is evidenced in Locus [1] and Morallo's [2] articles regarding the low proficiency of Filipinos in speaking.

The weakening of these skills can be linked to students' reluctance to engage in classroom discussions. Teachers still face the challenge of encouraging their students to speak, as students explicitly refuse to participate in class discussions [3-4], which results in limited language learning [5], and eventually weakens speaking proficiency [6].

Several studies have indicated that the willingness to communicate (WTC) positively impacts the development of self-confidence, which helps increase classroom participation [7]. It has also been identified that students' willingness to communicate aids in developing their personality, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, social situation, communicative competence, intergroup climate, intergroup behavior, and intergroup motivation [8].

The decision to engage in or avoid communication lies in the student's decision. This is aligned with MacIntyre et al. (1998) Heuristic Theory, which posits that students reach a deciding point whether to continue or withdraw in communication [9]. McIntyre's Heuristic or Pyramid Model (1998) shed light on the process involved in a student's willingness to communicate (WTC). The model outlines predictor factors or influences the willingness to communicate through different layers.

This is also based on the concepts that there are different variables that may influence the willingness to communicate. This includes psychological context which is a potential factor in the decision to engage or withdraw in communication in a particular person or level of confidence [9-10]. More so, positive interpersonal interaction between teachers and students increases the learner's willingness to communicate [11].

Meanwhile, speaking anxiety undermines a student's desire to communicate by decreasing their self-confidence [12]. Anxiety leads to self-doubt and negative self-evaluation resulting in the avoidance and rejection of opportunities to speak. Anxiety about speaking has long been recognized as a major impediment to effective communication among language learners. It refers to the anxiety or fear that people feel when they are required to speak or engage in oral communication in a second or foreign language. This anxiety can have a big impact on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), which is their motivation and desire to use the target language in real-life situations. The relationship between speaking anxiety and WTC in second language learners is complex and multifaceted, and has been the subject of extensive research in the field of second language acquisition [13].

The ability to interact and engage with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a valuable skill that can lead to enhanced personal, academic, and professional opportunities [14]. Wei & Xu emphasized the importance of the socio-cultural and classroom environment in fostering the desire to communicate. People with high intercultural competence equips individuals with the knowledge and strategies to navigate cultural differences and potential misunderstandings [15]. These people are more aware of potential cultural barriers and have the skills to bridge those gaps. This gives them more confidence when engaging in cross-cultural communication and reduces anxiety associated with potential misunderstandings or conflicts [16].

In recent years, various perspectives have been utilized to explore the factors underlying the learner's willingness to communicate. For example the complex interconnectedness of linguistic, psychological and contextual variables affecting desire to communicate [17]. Aomar cited by Mutar, Hmud& Mohammad [18], explored the relationship between classroom environments and the learner's willingness to communicate. However, gaps remain in the comprehensive understanding on other lenses that might influence WTC particularly in the Philippine context.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate the predicting factors of learner's wtc. it sought to address the following; determine the level of speaking anxiety, intercultural competence and learner's willingness to communicate. further, it sought to determine the relationship and influence of speaking anxiety and intercultural competence to the learner's willingness to communicate.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Research Design and Procedures**

The study employed a cross sectional, predictive study design. This design sought to predict or forecast some phenomena without regard for cause and effect and which data collection is done in a single time [19].

Meanwhile, statistical tools such as Regression analysis, Pearson r, and Mean were utilized to treat data. During the data collection process, the research strictly adhered to the ethical standards prescribed by the institution as evident in the ethics committee certification no. UMER-2024-065.

### **2.3 Research Instrument**

This study's population includes Grade 12 students who were enrolled in the public schools in Region IX. A total of 400 respondents from the population as per recommended size by the Raosoft sample size calculator [20] were selected to participate using stratified random sampling. Specifically, learners aged 17 years old and above were included in the study.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Speaking Anxiety of Students

Table 1 displays the levels of speaking anxiety. Levels are based on three indicators such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Upon examining each indicator, two indicators have obtained a moderate level of anxiety such as communication apprehension (3.16 mean) and fear of negative evaluation with the mean of 2.39. Meanwhile, test anxiety obtained the highest mean of 3.40 (SD 0.81).

**Table 1**  
*Level of Student's Speaking Anxiety*

Indicators	(SD)	Mean	Descriptive
Communication Apprehension	0.76	3.16	Moderate
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0.89	3.39	Moderate
Test Anxiety	0.81	3.40	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

In total, speaking anxiety has obtained a mean of 3.32 (SD 0.72), indicating a Moderate descriptive level which suggests that speaking anxiety among students in Region IX is sometimes observed on various occasions. The findings suggest that learners who are engaged in situations where they are tested causes them fear and that allows the feeling of self-doubt, low self-confidence and fear of being judged to exist that further leads to low engagement to communication. The results are consistent with Pontillas & Talaue [23] who have recorded the same level of speaking anxiety among students. Raja also confirmed the findings of McCain that most of the students manifest speaking anxiety in public [24]. Lall et., al asserted that some of the causes of anxiety are feeling nervous, low self-confidence and low language proficiency as well [25].

Upon examining the results, although it overall indicates moderate level of anxiety which means that such phenomena are sometimes observed among the learners in various situations. Test anxiety has recorded the highest mean which indicates that it is frequently observed. Rahmadani & Efitita assert that students are experiencing anxiety in speaking, especially in testing, it is due to the low self-confidence, unpreparedness, fear of being judged, nervous, and fear of getting low scores, forgetful, low proficiency in grammar, and weak vocabulary skills [26].

Students also experience occasional speaking anxiety due to communication apprehension. Problems in communication arise from the lack of motivation of the learners in learning the subjects such as Filipino and English [26]. Having the feeling of fear of negative evaluations affects the speaking of the learners in a way that they tend not to participate in open discussions [23].

#### 3.2 Speaking Anxiety of Students

Table 2 shows that the levels of all indicators of intercultural competence such as knowledge, attitude and Skills are high as evident in the obtained mean of 3.95, 3.85, and 3.51. The overall mean of 3.77 (0.67 SD) is described as High or frequently observed attributes among the learners.

**Table 2**  
*Level of Intercultural Competence*

Indicators	(SD)	Mean	Descriptive
Knowledge	0.74	3.95	High
Attitude	0.80	3.85	High
Skills	0.77	3.51	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>High</b>

Of the three indicators, Knowledge obtained the highest mean of 3.95 (SD 0.74), followed by attitude with a mean of 3.85 (SD 0.80), and skill obtained a mean of 3.51 (SD 0.77). This implies that when students have sufficient knowledge, attitude, and skills in intercultural matters, they have a higher opportunity to succeed in oral interactions especially when facing complex communication situations arising from cultural diversity. This result is consistent with the findings of Kuang et. al., cited in Chen [27]. The study of Günçavdi & Polat [28]; Miauw & Guo also confirmed the finding [22].

It is also important to note, although the overall level of intercultural competence was high, there were items in each indicator that scored at a moderate level. In terms of knowledge, items like students' awareness of the proper ways to communicate or interact in different cultures, revealed to have the lowest mean, which is also similar to the research of Miauw and Guo [22]. It is important to focus on this because awareness of proper methods for interacting with various cultures is a crucial factor in developing intercultural competence.

Two items among the indicators of Attitude such as their agreement with the saying "when in Rome, act like a Roman" and their interest to participate in cultural, social activities, and other gatherings involving people with different backgrounds obtained a moderate level. Chen [27] pointed out that among the reasons for non-participation includes financial problems or personal reasons. Meanwhile, in terms of Skill, the items "ability to communicate with people from other cultures using body language, adaptability in terms of attire, food, and the ability to maintain effective communication in a culturally diverse setting obtained a moderate level. Among its reasons is the lack of opportunity to interact with other cultures in daily lives. This shall be given focus to increase learners' intercultural competence [22].

### 3.3 Learner's Willingness to Communicate

Table 3 presents the level of learner's Willingness to communicate which shows that all the indicators have obtained High mean. This implies that learner's willingness to engage in communication with their teacher and the class, friends and the class, and strangers is always observed. Having this level of WTC means that learners are active interlocutors and this would allow an opportunity to develop their speaking and language proficiency. A high level of Learner's WTC was also evident in the study McIntyre & Wang [9]; Rastegar & Karami as cited in Yan, Ahmad & Nawi Che [29].

**Table 3**  
*Level of Learner's Willingness to Communicate*

Indicators	(SD)	Mean	Descriptive
Teacher and Class	0.68	3.48	High
Friends and Class	0.85	3.70	High
Strangers	0.79	3.44	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>High</b>

When examining each indicator, students in region IX show higher levels of willingness to communicate with their teacher and classmates, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.70 (SD 0.85). This is followed by communication with the teacher and classmates, which has a mean score of 3.48 (SD 0.68) and the lowest mean score of 3.44 (SD 0.64) is obtained by the willingness to communicate to strangers. All scores indicate a high level of willingness to communicate among the students.

Noted also were some items that were recorded as moderate level. For instance, in the willingness to communicate with teacher and the class, items namely: immediate response to the teacher's questions, spontaneous speaking in Filipino, presenting as a reporter in speaking related activities, and presenting oneself as reporter on behalf of the group. These items indicate that learners occasionally show willingness to communicate with their teacher and the class in the given context. This implies that learners are apprehended in communications involving their teacher and the whole class. This finding aligns with MacIntyre and Wang [9], which stated that positive teacher-student interaction and interactive teaching within the classroom contribute to increasing students' willingness to communicate.

### 3.4 Relationship of Speaking Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

The Findings in table 4 shows the results of correlational analysis between each indicator of speaking anxiety and of the WTC. The result reveals that communication apprehension shows a positive relationship to Teacher & class  $r=.218$ , moderately related to friends and class  $r=.100$  as well as to strangers  $r=.158$ , and obtaining an average mean of  $r=.186$ . Meanwhile, fear of negative evaluation shows a significant relationship to the Teacher & class  $r=.151$ , moderately related to friends and class, and not significantly related with strangers.

**Table 4***Relationship of Speaking Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate*

Speaking Anxiety	Willingness to Communicate			
	Teacher & Class	Friends & Class	Strangers	Total
Communication Apprehension	.218** .000	.100* .047	.158** .002	.186** .000
Fear of Negative evaluation	.151** .002	.126* .012	.052 .301	.131** .009
Test Anxiety	.189** .000	.131** .009	.105* .037	.167** .001
<b>Total</b>	<b>.210** .000</b>	<b>.136** .007</b>	<b>.117* .020</b>	<b>.182** .000</b>

However, when all the scores are combined, a significant relationship with  $r=.131$  was established. This implies that learners who wish to engage in communication would consider the situation and the people they interact with. The result conformed to the findings of Valadi et. al. [8] which highlighted the significant relationship of WTC and Speaking anxiety. They also pointed out that learners with high WTC often start conversations which improve their speaking and reduce their anxiety. Similarly, it is pointed out by Al-Mukdad that learner's WTC is associated with anxiety and the way learners perceive their competence in the sense that they might underestimate their abilities and thus, tend not to speak [30]. Palupi added that speaking anxiety in students can have serious consequences as anxiety can impair cognitive processes, making it difficult for students to think clearly and effectively express their ideas. As a result, students may struggle to convey their knowledge and demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter, which can lead to poor speaking performance [31].

### 3.5 Relationship between Intercultural Competence and Willingness to Communicate

In table 5, a significant relationship is observed between intercultural competence and learner's willingness to communicate with an overall  $r$ -value of .645 and corresponding p-value of 0.000 which is much lower than the .05 level of significance.

**Table 5***Relationship between Intercultural Competence and Willingness to Communicate*

Intercultural Competence	Willingness to Communicate			
	Teacher & Class	Friends & Class	Strangers	Total
Knowledge	.382** .000	.442** .000	.333** .000	.465** .000
Attitude	.438** .000	.551** .000	.444** .000	.579** .000
Skills	.527** .000	.507** .000	.485** .000	.608** .000
<b>Total</b>	<b>.526** .000</b>	<b>.586** .000</b>	<b>.493** .000</b>	<b>.645** .000</b>

The results suggest the rejection of the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative which states that there is significant relationships between intercultural competence and learner's willingness to communicate. It reinforces that the learner's intercultural knowledge, attitude and skill are significantly related to their willingness to communicate. Further, it shows that Intercultural Competence is significantly related to the learner's WTC on teacher and the class with  $r=.382$ , friends and the class with  $r=.442$ , and to the strangers with  $r=.333$ , obtaining an overall correlation of  $r=.465$ . Intercultural Attitude also shows a positive correlation to all indicators of WTC having an overall correlation of  $r=.579$ . There is a positive relationship with both the teacher and class  $r=.438$ , friends and the class  $r=.551$ , and talking to strangers with  $r=.444$ . Moreover, students' intercultural skills indicate positive relationships with WTC teachers and the class with  $r=.527$ , friends and the class with  $r=.507$ , strangers  $r=.485$ , with overall correlation of  $r=.608$ .

This finding implies that learners who are equipped with an adequate cultural knowledge, attitude and skills are most likely confident to engage in communications with people from diverse backgrounds. The positive correlation is confirmed by

Bosuwon[32] and islinked to the study of Miauw& Guo [22] in which the same positive relationship between WTC and Intercultural competence was highlighted. They further added that to increase learner's WTC Intercultural knowledge, attitude and skills must be applied.

### 3.6 Influence of Speaking Anxiety and Intercultural Competence to the Learner's Willingness to Communicate

Displayed in Table 6 is the unstandardized and standardized coefficients and the corresponding P-values of each exogenous to the endogenous variable. Looking at the individual score, speaking anxiety with  $B = .045$ ,  $\beta = .051$ ,  $t = 1.295$ , at  $p = .196$  reveals no significant influence on learner's willingness to communicate. Meanwhile, Intercultural competence ( $B = .608$ ,  $\beta = .635$ ,  $t = 16.213$ , at  $p = .000$ ) has been observed to have a positive influence on the learner's willingness to communicate. The study of McIntyre confirms the moderate influence of speaking anxiety. He further noted that communication in one context is not the predicting factor of willingness to communicate in other contexts, indicating that speaking anxiety does not significantly influence the willingness to communicate [33].

**Table 6**  
Influence of Speaking Anxiety and Intercultural Competence to the Learner's Willingness to Communicate

Willingness to Communicate				
Variables	B	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Constant	1.093		6.615	.000
Speaking Anxiety	.045	.051	1.295	.196
Intercultural Competence	.608	.635	16.213	.000
R	.647			
R <sup>2</sup>	.419			
$\Delta R$	.416			
F	142.715			
p	.000			

However, the overall model with  $F = 142.715$  and  $p = .000$  confirms the significant influence of the two predicting variables. It obtained  $R^2 = .419$  which connotes that 41.9% of the variance in willingness to communicate is explained by the predicting variables. Thus, 58.1% of the variance in WTC comes from other contributing factors besides speaking anxiety and intercultural competence. However, the model tells us that only one independent variable is a significant predictor. The results generally demonstrate that intercultural competence significantly influence learner's willingness to communicate and thus make it predictor of the latter.

Moreover, it suggests that smooth flow of communication is possible when the students possess high levels of Intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. This means also that students are better able to manage significant factors that would help them navigate through intercultural communication, thereby maintaining their interest in engaging in conversations. Bosuwon reinforces the interconnectedness between intercultural competence and learner's WTC [32]. Miauw& Guo also confirmed the finding of the study. They further emphasized that indicators on intercultural competence need to be applied to increase willingness to communicate [22].

The Heuristic Pyramid Model of McIntyre supports the findings of the study which state that willingness to communicate passes through various processes coming from different influencing factors which is categorized in six layers. The significant influence of speaking anxiety is covered by the layer III of the model which refers to the situated antecedents, and with Layer IV or the motivational propensities. Meanwhile intercultural falls in layer V that refers to the affective-cognitive context which includes intergroup behavior, social situation and communicative competence [33].

## 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, student's speaking anxiety appeared to be at a moderate level indicating that this attribute is occasionally observed in various situations. Intercultural competence and learner's willingness to communicate are generally high. Further, it is revealed that speaking anxiety and intercultural competence are significantly related to the learner's willingness to communicate. In addition, individual scores obtained by anxiety manifest no significant influence on a student's willingness to communicate. Intercultural competence consistently appears to have a significant influence on

student's willingness to communicate. However, when these variables are combined they signify influence to the willingness to communicate. Although, there is only one endogenous variable to be considered as significant predictor.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that among the two exogenous variable, only intercultural competence is a significant predictor of the learner's willingness to engage in communication. It is also highlighted that, higher intercultural competence increases the learner's willingness to communicate to people with different cultural backgrounds. It is also emphasized that positive behavior towards communication and intercultural engagements play a significant role in communication impacting the desire to be engaged in a more complex communication.

The results of this study leads to the following recommendations: teachers should establish open communication with students and provide opportunities for students to engage freely in class discussions to reduce anxiety such as creating a positive learning environment, giving enough time to prepare for the talks, practice public speaking, frequent interpersonal engagements, and other mechanisms that would increase learner's self-confidence. Moreover, activities such as team building, heterogeneous groupings, outreach programs, immersions, and other experiences related to live interactions to cultural diversity could in one way maintain the high level of competence in intercultural engagements. High level of competence translates to greater opportunities for success in the academic field. Therefore it is essential to further develop these skills.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research conducted ensured adherence to ethical standards evaluated by the University of Mindanao Review Ethics Committee (UMERC), such as voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent process, recruitment, risks, benefits, harm, fabrication, falsification, conflict of interest (COI), deception, permission from organization/location, and authorship.

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