

Predicting Japanese Students' English Communication Apprehension through Learning Motivation and Willingness to Communicate

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Abstract. Japanese students exhibit the highest levels of communication apprehension compared to other Asian countries, struggling with the worry and fear of using English. This quantitative descriptive-correlational study investigated how communication apprehension when speaking English is influenced by students' English learning motivation and willingness to communicate. Conducted in two public high schools in Ehime Prefecture involving 230 students, the research employed purposive-quota sampling and utilized three adapted questionnaires. The findings revealed that students exhibit moderate to high motivation to learn English, driven mainly by a desire to engage with the international community. They also demonstrated different willingness to communicate in the target language, which was which was affected mainly by the level of familiarity with other participants in the conversation. They show moderate communication apprehension when speaking in English, exhibiting high apprehension in public speaking settings. Further, a significant negative correlation was found between willingness to communicate and communication apprehension. This indicates increased willingness to communicate is associated with reduced English speaking apprehension. At the same time, English learning motivation alone does not significantly impact apprehension. The study concludes that fostering willingness to communicate is crucial for reducing communication apprehension, suggesting further research to explore additional variables impacting communication apprehension.

Keywords: Communication apprehension; English learning motivation; Willingness to communicate.

1.0 Introduction

The recent changes in the Japanese educational scheme of English education resulted in an ongoing movement of English learning and teaching geared towards more communicative-centered approaches (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). This means that elementary, secondary, and higher education teachers currently implement more communication-oriented coursework involving increased classroom speaking activities. This is a massive leap from traditional classrooms utilizing rote memory and parroting activities, focused on test performances, to higher education (Masutani, 2021). Unfortunately, Japanese students struggle with an aversion to the unfamiliarity of English and other negative dispositions related to teaching it (Sato, 2020). This expected or current level of worry and fear of communication in the English language with others is considered communication apprehension (Hussain et al., 2021).

With reports showing the highest levels of communication apprehension among Japanese students compared to other countries in Asia (Wang et al., 2024), students continue to struggle with an aversion to the unfamiliarity of the English language and other negative dispositions related to teaching it (Sato, 2020). More than 50 percent of Japanese English language learners exhibit a lack of confidence and apprehension in voluntary oral presentations (Toyoda et al., 2021). Those with higher levels of apprehension would consider reticence at the slightest uncertainty in the correctness of their utterance, ultimately leading to isolation from actively participating peers and resorting to guessing unfamiliar linguistic forms (Alnuzaili & Uddin, 2020). In effect, little to no language use takes place in the classroom.

Numerous studies have affirmed the relationship between language learning motivations and communication apprehension. Wang and Guan (2020) revealed that communication apprehension is conversely related to English learning motivation, implying that learners who are highly motivated to learn English are less likely to be nervous in actual communicative situations. Additionally, quantitative data results from 173 Chinese English language students attested to the link between motivation and apprehension, suggesting future research that explores the contributory factors leading to the latter (Luo et al., 2020). Another study by Aqeel et al. (2021) also showed that motivation levels influenced 200 graduate students' communication apprehension in Pakistan, along with other variables such as the manner of feedback, utilization of language teaching strategies, and class peers.

Further, various studies revealed the linkages between communication apprehension and examined learners' willingness to communicate. A study among Chinese students shows that oral communication apprehension concerning correct second language expression, public speaking, and speaking proficiency stunted respondents' willingness to communicate (Liu, 2018). In Belgium, Zhou et al. (2020) explored the effect of communication apprehension on second language competence and willingness to communicate among 129 study-abroad Chinese students. Accordingly, communication apprehension regulated the effect between willingness to communicate and reading, writing, and second language proficiency. Specifically, communication apprehension negatively moderates willingness to communicate and second language competence.

However, these studies have rarely taken these variables together to examine communication apprehension in English-speaking individuals critically. Furthermore, as most studies utilized data from participants or respondents from higher education, there is still much research to be done for participants at the basic education level. As such, this study undertook these variables conjointly and gathered information among senior high school students. Specifically, it described their English language learning motivations, accounted for their willingness to communicate, and investigated how these variables relate to and predict communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive-correlational research design. Guthrie (2023) defines it as a non-experimental quantitative design in which the researcher applies correlational statistics to measure and describe the degree of association among variables or sets of scores. It examined the degree of association between English learning motivation, willingness to communicate, and communication apprehension among respondents. It also determined the significant influence of the independent variables, English learning motivation and willingness to communicate, on the dependent variable, communication apprehension, when speaking English using a multiple regression analysis.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was carried out in Niihama City, Ehime Prefecture, Japan. The research area included two public high schools under the Ehime Prefectural Board of Education. These academic institutions followed the same Course of Study approved by the Board of Education, used the same references by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and utilized the same communicative teaching strategies in the classroom, which focused on oral presentations and collaborative dialogue in English. These high schools were chosen because their English classrooms allowed their respondents to provide significant data for the study.

2.3 Research Participants

The study used purposeful-quota sampling to gather data from 230 respondents – 163 students from School A and 67 from School B. Only General English Communication classes that utilized communicative activities such as oral presentations and collaborative dialogue were included in the study. Students were chosen regardless of their year level and course strands.

2.4 Research Instrument

The study adapted and modified three questionnaires to align with its objectives - the English Learning Motivation questionnaire adapted from Gonzales (2016), the Willingness to Communicate questionnaire adapted from McCroskey (1992), and the Communication Apprehension when Speaking English questionnaire adapted from McCroskey (1978). The instruments were chosen to assess students' motivations, predisposition to initiate communication in another language, and communication apprehension across various settings. After pilot testing, all questionnaires demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.95).

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher followed a series of steps to collect the necessary data for the study. The data gathering procedure commenced with obtaining a Compliance Certificate for Research Ethics Protocol Review from the University of Immaculate Conception's Research Ethics Review Committee. Following that, clearance from the institution's Dean of the Graduate School was obtained to undertake the study. After receiving authorization, the researcher submitted letters to the school principals, requesting formal permission to conduct the study in the targeted senior high school within Ehime Prefecture. Once the approval was granted, the researcher administered the questionnaires following the policy of the research locales regarding their underage students' data privacy and protection. The data gathered was tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted as part of the research.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical conduct, the researcher submitted the proposed study to the UIC Research Ethics Committee (UIC REC) for assessment and approval. The researcher clarified that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, offering a general outline of the study's background and objectives. Supervising teachers, along with the researcher, ensured adherence to the prefectural school policy, which protected respondents from all forms of harm during the research and prohibited the provision of personal information outside official school documents, overseeing ethical data collection during the survey.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 English Learning Motivation

Table 1 pertains to the level of English learning motivation among Japanese students. The overall mean score for the English learning motivation of Japanese high school students is 3.39, described as moderate and sometimes manifested. Among the six indicators of English learning motivation, the desire to become a global citizen has the highest category mean of 3.84. In contrast, the desire for self-satisfaction in learning has the lowest category mean of 2.88.

The findings suggest that Japanese high school students are moderately motivated to learn English, particularly inclined to global citizenship. Their high motivation to become a global citizen ($M=3.84$) indicates that students acknowledge the importance of the English language, which aligns with the efforts to improve English education in Japan. On the other hand, the low mean for self-satisfaction in learning ($M=2.88$) suggests Japanese students may be affected by other factors outside of personal enjoyment or hobbies. This information presents an opportunity for English teachers to integrate the language and introduce students to an audience through community and school-led activities, such as local tours or forums, to enhance their sense of self-satisfaction in learning and strengthen their motivation to become global citizens.

The results affirm those of Saragih and Subekti (2024), who note that English learning motivation is personal and unique to each student, shaped by their needs and personalities. The variability in the category means supports this notion, demonstrating that motivation is not uniform across all aspects of English learning. Similarly, Yung (2023) emphasizes that motivation in English learning often manifests differently among learners, consistent with our findings showing varying levels of motivation across different indicators.

Table 1. *Level of English Learning Motivation among Japanese Students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Desire for Career and Economic Enhancement			
1. I want to improve my chances of getting a good job.	3.40	1.02	High
2. I want to get a high paying job.	3.30	1.02	Moderate
3. English proficiency will have financial benefits for me.	3.62	1.01	High
4. ...of training in my future job.	3.73	1.08	High
5. I have better job opportunities after graduation.	3.95	1.02	High
6. English gives me more opportunities after graduation.	3.81	1.04	High
7. English gives me an edge over other applicants for a job.	3.83	1.03	High
8. English is another way of enriching me for my future career.	3.86	1.01	High
Category Mean	3.69	0.82	High
Desire to Become a Global Citizen			
9. English allows me to understand other cultures.	3.87	1.05	High
10. English is one way of learning another culture.	3.92	0.99	High
11. English broadens my view of other cultures.	3.87	1.03	High
12. I can appreciate foreign people more if I know their language.	3.84	1.03	High
13. English will allow me to understand other cultures.	3.90	0.99	High
14. English is important for me to understand other cultures.	3.89	1.01	High
15. English gives me self-confidence to understand other cultures.	3.73	0.99	High
16. I want to be more educated about other cultures.	3.71	1.04	High
Category Mean	3.84	0.86	High
Desire to Communicate Affiliate with Foreigners			
17. I want to communicate with foreigners in their native language.	3.69	1.09	High
18. I want to speak to foreigners using their own language.	3.77	1.09	High
19. It is easier for me to relate with foreigners.	3.96	1.03	High
20. I am fascinated when I hear a foreigner speaking	3.77	1.16	High
21. I want to go to the country where it is spoken.	3.47	1.29	High
22. It is useful when I travel abroad.	3.86	1.16	High
Category Mean	3.75	0.90	High
Desire for Self-Satisfaction in Learning			
23. I enjoy learning English when my friend gives me some English books.	2.70	1.04	Moderate
24. I enjoy browsing websites that deal with English on the Internet.	2.74	1.10	Moderate
25. I like learning English because I have friends who have enjoyed studying it.	2.80	1.12	Moderate
26. I enjoy watching movies on TVs and DVD especially if they are in English.	2.87	1.18	Moderate
27. My classmates are having a good time learning with me.	3.14	1.05	Moderate
28. I enjoy learning English in order to pass an entrance examination.	3.03	1.07	Moderate
Category Mean	2.88	0.88	Moderate
Self-Efficacy			
29. I can relate well in my English class.	3.23	1.06	Moderate
30. I enjoy learning English because I feel I am good at it.	2.66	1.20	Moderate
31. I feel comfortable speaking in my English classes.	2.77	1.14	Moderate
32. I enjoy learning English even if it is difficult.	3.41	1.10	High
33. I am delighted when my teacher notices how I am progressing in my English class.	3.36	1.16	Moderate
34. I believe I have the ability in learning it.	2.96	1.23	Moderate
Category Mean	3.07	0.90	Moderate
Desire to be Integrated with Other Cultures			
35. I want to live in a foreign land.	2.65	1.39	Moderate
36. I want to be able to interact with foreigners well.	3.26	1.31	Moderate
37. I am also interested in foreign cultures.	3.57	1.20	High
38. English will prepare me to live in foreign country.	3.33	1.23	Moderate
39. I want to live with another culture.	2.72	1.39	Moderate
40. I want to be able to socialize with foreigners.	3.31	1.22	Moderate
Category Mean	3.14	1.03	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.39	0.75	Moderate

3.2 Willingness to Communicate

The information in Table 2 reveals the students' willingness to communicate in English. The overall mean score for willingness to communicate in English among Japanese high school students is 3.01, which is described as moderate and is interpreted as sometimes observed. Among the seven indicators, the willingness to communicate with friends obtained the highest mean score at 3.42, and with strangers, the lowest mean score at 2.50. This indicates that familiarity and comfort are crucial to students' readiness to converse in English.

Table 2. *Level of Willingness to Communicate among Japanese Students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Context-Group			
1. Talk in a small group of strangers.	2.70	1.17	Moderate
2. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	2.96	1.21	Moderate
3. Talk in a small group of friends.	3.43	1.19	High
Category Mean	3.03	0.97	Moderate
Context-Meeting			
4. Talk in a large meeting of friends.	3.34	1.26	Moderate
5. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	3.07	1.28	Moderate
6. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	2.47	1.23	Low
Category Mean	2.96	1.00	Moderate
Context-Interpersonal Conversation			
7. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.	3.10	1.25	Moderate
8. Talk with a friend while standing in line.	3.38	1.25	Moderate
9. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.	2.27	1.17	Low
Category Mean	2.92	0.99	Moderate
Context-Public Speaking			
10. Present a talk to a group of friends.	2.54	1.18	Low
11. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.	3.53	1.25	High
12. Present a talk to a group of strangers.	3.33	1.28	Moderate
Category Mean	3.13	0.97	Moderate
Receiver-Stranger			
13. Present a talk to a group of strangers.	2.54	1.18	Low
14. Talk in a small group of strangers.	2.70	1.17	Moderate
15. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.	2.27	1.17	Low
16. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	2.47	1.23	Low
Category Mean	2.50	1.05	Low
Receiver-Acquaintance			
17. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.	3.10	1.25	Moderate
18. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	3.07	1.28	Moderate
19. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	2.96	1.20	Moderate
20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.	3.33	1.28	Moderate
Category Mean	3.11	1.03	Moderate
Receiver-Friends			
21. Talk in a large meeting with friends.	3.34	1.26	Moderate
22. Talk with a friend while standing in line.	3.38	1.25	Moderate
23. Present a talk to a group of friends.	3.53	1.25	High
24. Talk in a small group of friends.	3.43	1.19	High
Category Mean	3.42	1.11	High
Overall Mean	3.01	0.91	Moderate

The findings align with previous research on willingness to communicate by Lee et al. (2019), Kim et al. (2022), and Ito (2022), whose studies reveal that familiarity and trust are factors that contribute to willingness to communicate in various contexts. Similarly, Waluyo (2020) noted that students showed increased WTC in situations allowing for preparation and structured turn-taking, which explains the preference to talk with friends where both are predictable. As such, schools can consider conducting regular English conversation practices through their resource pool. By engaging with unfamiliar native or non-native speakers, students can gradually increase their willingness to communicate in English with anyone, helping them overcome the initial hesitation of speaking with unfamiliar participants.

3.3 Communication Apprehension when Speaking English

The information in Table 3 shows the students' willingness to communicate in English. The overall mean score for communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese high school students is 3.36, which is described as moderate and interpreted as sometimes manifested. Among the four indicators, public speaking showed the highest mean score ($M=3.73$) and group discussion the lowest ($M=3.08$). This indicates that students experience higher apprehension when speaking to the public than when being part of a group discussion.

These findings are supported by Endahati (2023) and Abdul Majid et al. (2022), who noted that speaking in English causes the most anxiety among students when addressing larger audiences. This is consistent with the general trend of public speaking as a potent stressor in communication contexts. Rahman and Pinky (2024), whose results state that group discussion causes the lowest levels of communication apprehension among students, support a

pattern of students' ease of communication in smaller, more collaborative settings compared to formal, highly organized settings. This presents an opportunity for teachers to provide more opportunities for students to practice English communication through peer conversations, group discussions, and formal presentations to build greater language confidence.

Table 3. *Level of Communication Apprehension when Speaking English among Japanese Students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Interpersonal			
1. While conversing with a new acquaintance using English, I feel very nervous.	3.70	1.25	High
2. I am nervous to speak up in conversations with my teachers using the English language.	3.47	1.34	High
3. Ordinarily, I am agitated in conversations with my classmates using English.	2.96	1.29	Moderate
4. Ordinarily, I am very anxious in conversations with my friends using English.	3.15	1.30	Moderate
5. I feel agitated while conversing with a new acquaintance online using English.	3.43	1.35	High
6. I am afraid to speak up in conversations in class using the English language.	3.08	1.28	Moderate
Category Mean	3.30	1.13	Moderate
Group Discussion			
7. I dislike participating in group discussions using the English language.	2.86	1.23	Moderate
8. Generally, I am uncomfortable participating in group discussions using English.	2.70	1.19	Moderate
9. I am tense and nervous while participating in classroom group discussions using English.	3.23	1.27	Moderate
10. I dislike getting involved in group discussions using the English language.	2.86	1.27	Moderate
11. Engaging in a group discussion with new people using the English language makes me tense and nervous.	3.45	1.31	High
12. I am tense and anxious while participating in online group discussions using English.	3.36	1.28	Moderate
Category Mean	3.08	1.06	Moderate
Meeting			
13. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting using the English language.	3.45	1.22	High
14. Usually, I am uncomfortable when I have to participate in a meeting using the English language.	2.97	1.24	Moderate
15. I am agitated and anxious when called upon to express an opinion at a meeting using English.	3.68	1.19	High
16. I am afraid to express myself at meetings using the English language.	3.37	1.25	Moderate
17. Communicating at meetings using the English language usually makes me uncomfortable.	2.90	1.22	Moderate
18. I am agitated when answering questions at a meeting using the English language.	3.70	1.25	High
Category Mean	3.35	1.01	Moderate
Public Speaking			
19. I am afraid of giving a speech in English.	3.75	1.25	High
20. Certain parts of my body feel tense and rigid while speaking in a big crowd using the English language.	3.73	1.24	High
21. I feel tense while speaking in the classroom using the English language.	3.94	1.18	High
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech using the English language.	3.77	1.23	High
23. I face the prospect of speaking with fear, using the English language.	3.65	1.29	High
24. While giving a speech using the English language, I get so nervous that I forget facts I know.	3.58	1.18	High
Category Mean	3.73	1.10	High
Overall Mean	3.36	0.96	Moderate

3.4 Relationship between English Learning Motivation and Willingness to Communicate

The correlation analysis between variables is presented in Table 4. The data shows that only one variable is significantly and negatively correlated with communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students. The willingness to communicate with a correlation coefficient ($r = -0.314$) demonstrates a moderate negative relationship with communication apprehension when speaking English and reaches statistical significance of a p-value less than 0.005. The negative r-value signifies that higher levels of the willingness to communicate correspond to lower levels of communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students. This suggests that changes in willingness to communicate are associated with variations in communication apprehension when speaking English. The result aligns with Gharibi (2023), demonstrating that willingness to communicate and communication apprehension in English are inversely related.

Table 4. *Correlation of Variables*

Variables Correlated	r	p	Interpretation
English Learning Motivation	-.08	.191	Not Significant
Willingness to Communicate	-.31	<.001	Significant

*Significant at 0.05

On the other hand, no significant relationship was found between English learning motivation and communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students. Although the correlation

coefficient (r-value) of -0.086 suggests a weak, negative correlation, this association does not reach statistical significance with a *p*-value of more than 0.005 (*p* = 0.191). Therefore, it can be inferred that other factors beyond motivation may substantially influence communication apprehension among Japanese students learning English. These results contradict the findings of Welesilassie and Nikolov (2022), who asserted a positive relationship between English learning motivation and communication apprehension when speaking English. Similarly, they diverge from the conclusions drawn by Aqeel et al. (2021), whose study yielded similar results. In contrast, the findings echo the inverse relationship reported in the study by Samad et al. (2023).

3.5 Regression Analysis of Variables

The analysis on the influencers of communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students, as presented in Table 5, underscores the significant impact of both individual and combined predictors. A regression analysis on individual predictors shows that only willingness to communicate significantly affects communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students, with a standardized coefficient beta of -0.357 and a significant *t*-value of -4.882 (*p* < 0.05). This implies that the decrease in willingness to communicate is associated with an increase in the level of communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students by approximately 35.70%. Hence, willingness to communicate is considered as the best predictor of Japanese students' communication apprehension when speaking English. The finding supports previous research showing that willingness to communicate affects communication apprehension among students. Fathi et al. (2021) found that students' willingness to communicate had a significant impact on their speaking anxiety. Similarly, Liu (2018) observed that Chinese students' willingness to communicate was negatively affected by their anxiety about speaking, public speaking, and language proficiency. Highly anxious students displayed lower willingness to communicate, underscoring the crucial role of willingness to communicate in shaping communication apprehension among language learners.

Table 5. *Influencers of Communication Apprehension when Speaking English among Japanese Students*

Individual Predictors	Standard Coefficient Beta	t	p-value	Remarks
English Learning Motivation	0.07	0.87	.383	Not Significant
Willingness to Communicate	-0.35	-4.88	<.001	Significant
Holistic Model				
Predictors Combined	R²	F	p-value	Remarks
	0.10	12.9	<.001	Significant

*Significant at 0.05

On the other hand, English learning motivation, with a standardized coefficient beta of 0.078 and a *t*-value of 0.874 (*p*=0.383), does not significantly affect communication apprehension when speaking English. This indicates that changes in English learning motivation do not correspond to significant changes in communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students. This contradicts the findings of Luo et al. (2020) and Samad et al. (2023), which show that motivation affects communication apprehension among students learning English. These differences suggest that cultural or contextual factors may influence how motivation impacts communication apprehension and indicate that relationships between these variables can vary across diverse groups.

Moreover, the holistic model shows that the combined predictors –English learning motivation and willingness to communicate– elucidate approximately 10.20% only of the variance in the communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students, as indicated by the model's *R*² value of 0.102. Although this is typically considered a small effect, the model exhibits statistical significance (*F* = 12.9, *p* < 0.05), affirming the predictive power of the combined predictors. Hence, while English learning motivation and willingness to communicate collectively contribute significantly to the communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students, there are other combined factors, equivalent to 89.80% that could significantly influence the communication apprehension when speaking English among Japanese students that are not covered in this study.

4.0 Conclusion

To gain a deeper understanding of communication apprehension among language students in the Japanese context, the study examined learning motivation and willingness to communicate as key variables. The findings

showed a significant negative correlation between students' willingness to communicate and their communication apprehension, which implies that the more willing Japanese students are to initiate communication in English, the less anxious they tend to be. On the other hand, no significant correlation was found between English learning motivation and communication apprehension. However, when combined, willingness to communicate and learning motivation account for 10.20 percent of the variance in students' communication apprehension when speaking English.

The findings affirm the importance of student participation in authentic, low-pressure communication with unfamiliar participants to boost students' willingness to speak English and reduce communication apprehension. As such, it emphasizes strengthening collaboration with Assistant Language Teachers, utilizing sister-school partnerships, and integrating English language learning into school activities or community initiatives to achieve more favorable language learning conditions. It also underscores applying rhetorical techniques and effective speech structures to help students organize their thoughts, reinforce preparation, and reduce anxiety in classroom settings. Providing more opportunities for students to practice English communication, through peer conversations, group discussions, and formal presentations, diminishes communication anxiety and develops communication confidence.

Though significant, the combined variables' modest predictive value demands further investigation that could delve into a broader range of linguistic, behavioral, or sociocultural factors, such as language cognitive load and processing, self-perceived communication competence, or the avoidance of self-promotion. Conducting studies with larger and more diverse participant groups would also contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of communication confidence and competence among English language learners in Japan.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author is solely responsible for all aspects of this research paper, including the conception, design, data collection, writing, and revisions.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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