



# BRIDGING MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION: A UNIVERSITY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures is vital, particularly for English Foreign Language (EFL) learners navigating diverse communicative contexts. To be able to communicate effectively, one should have proper multicultural awareness-based competence. This study investigates the relationship between university-level EFL students Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and their Communication Apprehension (CA). Drawing on a sample of 120 learners, the study employs quantitative methods, including descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis, to examine how cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of MCC relate to various forms of CA, such as interpersonal, group, public speaking, and meeting-related anxiety. The results reveal a significant negative correlation between MCC and CA in which it suggests that students with higher multicultural awareness and adaptive communication behaviors are less likely to experience anxiety in cross-cultural interactions. The study underscores the need to integrate intercultural competence training into EFL curricula to reduce communicative barriers and foster greater linguistic and cultural confidence. Implications for pedagogy and future research directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** multicultural communication competence, communication apprehension, English foreign language learners

## INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by globalization and cultural mobility, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries has become essential for

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English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the demand for multicultural communication competence (MCC)—the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for appropriate and effective intercultural interaction (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2006)—continues to grow. MCC is particularly vital in educational contexts where communication can either facilitate collaboration or contribute to misunderstanding.

A foundational component of MCC is multicultural awareness, which enables learners to recognize and navigate diverse cultural norms and communicative practices (Baker, 2015). Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context cultures illustrates how misinterpretation can occur when learners lack sensitivity to implicit meaning. Beyond awareness, MCC encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions that help individuals interpret messages, manage ambiguity, and respond appropriately across cultural boundaries (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Lustig & Koester, 2017). These dimensions highlight that multicultural communication is not simply an extension of language proficiency, but a broader set of competencies essential for meaningful interaction.

At the same time, intercultural exchanges are often accompanied by psychological barriers, particularly communication apprehension (CA)—the fear or anxiety associated with actual or anticipated communication (McCroskey, 1977). CA tends to intensify in intercultural settings due to uncertainty and fear of negative evaluation, a phenomenon conceptualized as intercultural communication apprehension (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). While existing studies report that individuals with higher MCC generally experience lower CA (Chen, 2010; Neuliep, 2005), these findings are mostly presented in broad intercultural contexts rather than EFL learning environments. Moreover, prior research often treats MCC as a single construct, offering limited theoretical explanation for why and how its components might differentially influence CA—despite evidence that knowledge, empathy, sensitivity, and adaptive behaviors each play distinct roles in intercultural interaction (Sato, 2017; Arasaratnam, 2016; Zhang, 2019; Zhai, 2019).

In EFL education, this gap is consequential. Learners must navigate both linguistic forms and the sociocultural frameworks embedded in English (Seidlhofer, 2011), and insufficient MCC can heighten CA, suppress willingness to communicate, and hinder communicative participation (Yashima, 2002; Lee, 2019; Liu, 2017). Although Yashima (2002) and others have shown that intercultural readiness supports willingness to communicate, these studies do not examine which components of MCC drive these outcomes. The issue becomes more pressing in linguistically homogeneous contexts such as Indonesia, where students may have limited intercultural exposure despite increasing global demands (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Al-Qahtani & Alshammari, 2021; Akbarov et al., 2023). Additionally, although demographic variables such as gender and academic year appear to influence MCC and CA (Park & Kim, 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2023), their moderating roles remain underexplored in EFL settings.

Recent educational frameworks reinforce the importance of integrating intercultural competence into language curricula (Council of Europe, 2020; UNESCO, 2021), and studies highlight the benefits of experiential MCC instruction for confidence and oral communication (Yang & Liu, 2025). Yet, despite these developments, the literature still lacks a multidimensional, empirically grounded investigation into how cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of MCC relate uniquely to communication apprehension among EFL learners.

To address these limitations, the present study examines MCC and CA within an Indonesian EFL context by adopting a multidimensional MCC

framework and analyzing demographic variations across gender and year of study. By moving beyond unidimensional models and demonstrating how specific components of MCC relate to CA, this study responds to documented gaps in both theoretical explanation and empirical evidence. The findings aim to provide a clearer understanding of how cultural competence can be cultivated to reduce anxiety and promote confident, globally oriented English communication.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. A correlational approach was chosen not only for its ability to identify statistical associations without manipulating the research environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Queirós et al., 2020), but also because it aligns with the study's aim of determining whether variations in MCC meaningfully predict differences in CA. Given that both MCC and CA are latent psychological constructs typically measured through validated self-report instruments, a quantitative correlational design provides an appropriate framework for estimating the strength and direction of their relationship across a naturally occurring EFL population. This design is particularly suited to contexts where theoretical models—such as those proposed in intercultural communication research (Neuliep, 2020)—suggest directional tendencies but require empirical verification through numerical data rather than experimental manipulation.

The participants were 120 university students enrolled in English language programs at UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq (UIN KHAS) Jember. The institution was selected because its student body reflects considerable cultural and regional diversity, with learners originating from provinces such as Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi and representing varied socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. To ensure regional representation, the sample included 50 students from Java, 30 from Sumatra, 20 from Kalimantan, and 20 from Sulawesi. This diversity aligns with the study's aim of examining how multicultural communication competence (MCC) relates to communication apprehension (CA) in contexts where intercultural contact occurs naturally. To ensure that the sample's diversity was not merely assumed based on institutional characteristics, demographic information—including region of origin and cultural background—was collected through the questionnaire to verify the heterogeneity of the participants. This enabled the study to more accurately situate MCC and CA within a culturally diverse EFL learning environment.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling with clearly defined criteria to ensure that those included had substantial and consistent exposure to intercultural experiences during their university studies. To be included in the sample, students were required to (a) be enrolled in an English-related program, (b) have participated in at least one intercultural activity—such as online webinars, English Language Teaching seminars, multicultural campus events—and (c) have completed a minimum of three months within university study to ensure adequate social interaction within multicultural settings. Students who had not engaged in any form of intercultural exposure or who were absent during the data collection period were excluded. A total of 120 students met these criteria and were recruited to ensure sufficient statistical power for the correlational analyses while maintaining demographic variability. The final sample included balanced representation across academic levels (from first-year to senior students) and genders, allowing for deeper insights into how MCC and

CA vary across stages of academic and intercultural development.

Data were collected using two adopted standardized instruments. The Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) Scale by Chen and Starosta (2000) was employed to measure cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural competence, while communication apprehension (CA) was assessed using McCroskey's PRCA-24 (1982), which evaluates anxiety across interpersonal, group, public speaking, and meeting contexts (McCroskey et al., 2021). A pilot test with 30 students was conducted to evaluate clarity and cultural appropriateness. Internal consistency was also verified, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 for all subscales. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which has been shown to effectively capture participant attitudes and perceptions (Taherdoost, 2021).

The data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to summarize participants' MCC and CA scores. To examine the relationship between the two variables, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. The statistical procedures were carried out using SPSS version 26, a widely recognized tool for quantitative analysis in educational and social research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Reliability testing of the instruments yielded high Cronbach's alpha values ( $\alpha > 0.85$ ), confirming the internal consistency of the scales used.

Finally, the study strictly adhered to ethical research principles. Participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose and scope of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved throughout the process, and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used solely for academic purposes, in line with standard ethical guidelines (Queirós et al., 2020)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

#### Descriptive Statistics of Collected Data

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) among English Foreign Language (EFL) learners in a multicultural academic environment. Data were gathered from 120 university students using validated questionnaires: the Multicultural Communication Competence Scale (Chen & Starosta, 1996) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982). The following results present descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and comparisons based on demographic variables.

The Descriptive statistics of the research focus in this study can be seen in the following table:

**TABLE 1 / Descriptive Statistics of Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) Variables**

No.	Variable	Mean	SD
1	Overall MCC	3.87	0.54
2	Cognitive MCC	3.82	0.65
3	Affective MCC	3.78	0.60
4	Behavioral MCC	4.01	0.58
5	Overall CA	65.23	10.84
6	Interpersonal CA	17.45	3.12
7	Public Speaking CA	16.02	3.91
8	Group Discussion CA	15.61	3.45
9	Meetings CA	16.15	3.70

The results show that students report moderately high Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC), with behavioral MCC ( $M = 4.01$ ) emerging as the strongest dimension, indicating confidence in adapting communication behaviors. Affective MCC is the lowest ( $M = 3.78$ ), suggesting comparatively weaker intercultural empathy or openness. In contrast, Communication Apprehension (CA) displays moderate overall levels ( $M = 65.23$ ), but with notable variation across contexts. Interpersonal CA is highest ( $M = 17.45$ ), indicating that one-on-one interactions provoke more anxiety than public speaking or group discussions. Group discussion CA is lowest ( $M = 15.61$ ), reflecting comfort with collaborative academic tasks. Overall, the pattern suggests a meaningful mismatch: students demonstrate strong behavioral competence in multicultural settings but still experience heightened anxiety in interpersonal communication, underscoring the relevance of exploring how MCC relates to CA.

In details, the students' response for Multicultural Communication Competence can be seen in the following Table 2:

**TABLE 2 / The Recapitulation of Student's Response for Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC)**

Item	Aspect	Statement	Average Score in percentage
1	Cognitive	I understand how cultural values influence communication.	84 %
2	Cognitive	I can identify cultural differences in verbal communication.	80 %
3	Cognitive	I am aware of how non-verbal cues differ across cultures.	82 %
4	Cognitive	I understand how different cultures manage conflict.	78 %
5	Cognitive	I can explain how language use varies across cultural groups.	86 %
6	Affective	I am open to new cultural experiences.	90 %
7	Affective	I respect people from cultures different from mine.	88 %
8	Affective	I am patient when interacting with people from other cultures.	82 %
9	Affective	I enjoy learning about other cultures.	92 %

Item	Aspect	Statement	Average Score in percentage
10	Affective	I am not easily frustrated in intercultural situations.	80 %
11	Affective	I feel empathy toward people from other cultures.	84 %
12	Affective	I appreciate cultural diversity in daily life.	86 %
13	Behavioral	I adjust my speaking style depending on the cultural context.	78 %
14	Behavioral	I make an effort to avoid culturally inappropriate expressions.	80 %
15	Behavioral	I use gestures and body language suited to different cultures.	82 %
16	Behavioral	I avoid making assumptions based on cultural stereotypes.	80 %
17	Behavioral	I actively listen in intercultural conversations.	84 %
18	Behavioral	I clarify misunderstandings during intercultural communication.	82 %
19	Behavioral	I express ideas clearly to people from different cultures.	76 %
20	Behavioral	I check for understanding when I communicate interculturally.	80 %
21	Behavioral	I adapt my behavior when in a multicultural environment.	82 %

The results of the MCC questionnaire indicate that students demonstrate a high level of multicultural communication competence across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In the cognitive aspect, students show strong awareness of cultural differences and the impact of culture on communication. Affective responses reflect openness, empathy, and respect toward people from diverse cultural backgrounds, suggesting emotional readiness for intercultural interaction. In the behavioral dimension, students report the ability to adapt their verbal and non-verbal communication appropriately in multicultural contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that students are well-equipped with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for effective and respectful communication across cultures.

Moreover, the following table displays the results of students' response for Communication Apprehension (CA) questionnaire.

**Table 3 / Recapitulation of Communication Apprehension (CA) Questionnaire Responses by Aspect**

Aspect	Item	Item Statement	% Agree
Interpersonal CA	CA1	I dislike participating in conversations.	65.8%
	CA2	I have difficulty speaking with others in informal settings.	60.0%
	CA3	I feel nervous when talking to one person.	58.3%

Aspect	Item	Item Statement	% Agree
Group CA	CA4	I find it hard to keep a conversation going.	63.3%
	CA5	I feel anxious even during friendly interactions.	66.7%
	CA6	I avoid talking to people I don't know well.	68.3%
	CA7	I get nervous when I have to speak in a group discussion.	70.0%
	CA8	I find it difficult to express my ideas in group conversations.	67.5%
	CA9	I feel uncomfortable participating in group tasks.	62.5%
	CA10	I often remain silent in group settings.	64.2%
	CA11	I fear being judged by others in a group discussion.	69.2%
	CA12	I hesitate to contribute ideas in group work.	71.7%
	CA13	I feel nervous when I have to speak in a formal meeting.	72.5%
Meeting CA	CA14	I find it stressful to present information in meetings.	68.3%
	CA15	I worry that others will not understand me in meetings.	65.0%
	CA16	I feel insecure about expressing opinions in meetings.	66.7%
	CA17	I prefer to listen rather than speak in meetings.	70.8%
	CA18	I often feel unprepared when asked to talk in meetings.	74.2%
	CA19	I get anxious when giving a speech or oral presentation.	76.7%
	CA20	I fear forgetting what to say during a presentation.	73.3%
	CA21	I feel my hands shake when I speak in front of an audience.	71.7%
Public Speaking CA	CA22	I feel overwhelmed when required to speak publicly in English.	78.3%
	CA23	I worry about making mistakes when giving a public speech.	75.0%
	CA24	I feel embarrassed when others focus their attention on me.	79.2%

The results of the Communication Apprehension (CA) questionnaire indicate that students experience varying levels of anxiety across different communication contexts, with the highest apprehension observed in public speaking situations, where over 75% of students reported nervousness, fear of mistakes, and discomfort under audience attention. Meeting-related communication also evoked significant anxiety, particularly in expressing opinions and feeling unprepared, while group communication showed high apprehension linked to fear of judgment and reluctance to contribute ideas. Although interpersonal communication scored slightly lower, a majority of students still reported unease in one-on-one interactions, especially with unfamiliar individuals. These findings suggest that while all communication contexts pose challenges, structured and public scenarios elicit the most pronounced apprehension, highlighting the need for targeted support in helping students build confidence and competence in formal and high-stakes communication settings.

#### **Correlation between students' Multicultural Communication Competence and Communication Apprehension**

To assess the correlation between students' Multicultural Communication Competence and Communication Apprehension, Pearson Product-Moment analysis was done. The result is as following:

**Table 4/ Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Multicultural Communication Competence and Communication Apprehension**

		Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC)	Communication Apprehension (CA)
Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC)	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>-.572**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		(.000)
	N		N = 120
Communication Apprehension (CA)	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.572**</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	(.000)	
	N	N = 120	

Note: Correlation coefficients are Pearson product-moment correlation values.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 displays the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA). The correlation value of  $r = -.572$  indicates a moderate negative relationship, meaning that higher levels of MCC are associated with lower levels of CA. The correlation is statistically significant at  $p < .01$ , based on data from 120 participants.

Further analysis of the subscales showed significant negative correlations between each MCC dimension and CA. The result can be seen in the following table:

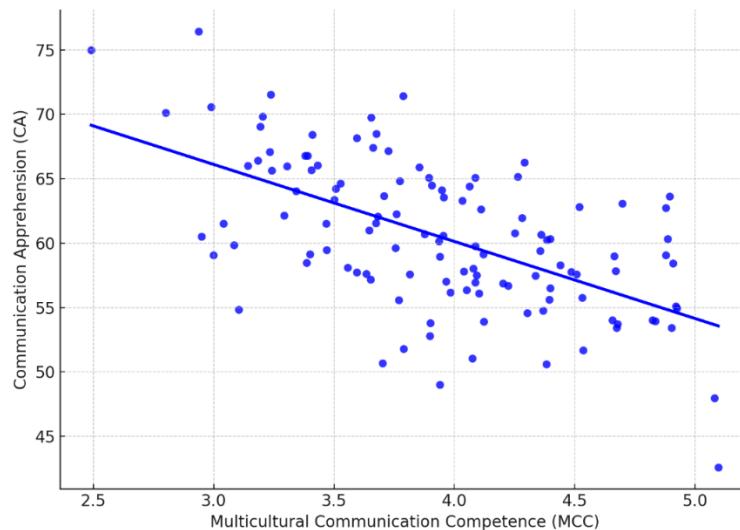
**Table 5. Correlation Between MCC and Communication Apprehension**

No	MCC Dimension	r (Correlation with CA)	p-value
1	Overall MCC	-0.62	< .001
2	Cognitive MCC	-0.55	< .001
3	Affective MCC	-0.49	< .001
4	Behavioral MCC	-0.59	< .001

The table presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the dimensions of Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA), all of which show statistically significant negative correlations at  $p < .001$ . The overall MCC score is strongly and negatively correlated with CA ( $r = -0.62$ ), indicating that students with higher multicultural communication competence tend to experience lower communication apprehension. Among the MCC dimensions, the behavioral component shows a relatively strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.59$ ), followed by the cognitive ( $r = -0.55$ ) and affective ( $r = -0.49$ ) components. These findings suggest that students who are more behaviourally adaptable, cognitively aware of cultural differences, and emotionally open in multicultural contexts are less likely to feel anxious or apprehensive in intercultural communication situations.

Likewise, to have better understanding and visualization, the figure of the scatterplot of the relationship between students' Multicultural Communication Competence and their Communication Apprehension can be seen as follow:

**Figure 1.** Scatterplot for Multicultural Communication Competence and Communication Apprehension



The scatterplot presented illustrates the negative correlation between Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Each data point represents an individual participant's scores on the two variables, showing that as students' MCC scores increase, their CA scores tend to decrease. This pattern suggests that learners with higher levels of cultural awareness, emotional openness, and behavioural adaptability are generally more confident and less anxious when communicating across cultures. The downward trend of the points supports the study's hypothesis that enhanced multicultural competence can mitigate the anxiety associated with intercultural communication, thereby promoting more effective engagement in diverse language-learning contexts.

#### **Analysis of MCC and CA based on Gender and Year of Study**

Additional independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore possible differences in MCC and CA based on gender and year of study. The following table explains the differences between MCC and AC on students' gender:

**Table 6 / Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in MCC and CA**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
MCC	Male	5	78.35	8.24	1.21	118	.23	No significant difference
	Female	2	80.02	7.91				
CA	Male	5	67.15	9.12	-0.94	118	.35	No significant difference
	Female	2	68.74	8.65				
		6						
		8						

The independent samples t-test results presented in the table indicate that there are no significant gender differences in either Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) or Communication Apprehension (CA) among the participants. Male students ( $M = 78.35$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ) and female students ( $M = 80.02$ ,  $SD = 7.91$ ) did not differ significantly in their MCC scores,  $t(118) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .23$ . Similarly, no significant difference was found in CA scores between male students ( $M = 67.15$ ,  $SD = 9.12$ ) and female students ( $M = 68.74$ ,  $SD = 8.65$ ),  $t(118) = -0.94$ ,  $p = .35$ . These findings suggest that gender does not play a significant role in influencing students' multicultural communication competence or their level of communication apprehension in the EFL context studied.

Meanwhile, for the academic year, it also suggests that there is no significant difference among students' MCC as can be seen in table 7:

**Table 6 / Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in MCC and CA**

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Interpretation
MCC	Between Groups	408.56	3	136.19	1.87	.14	No significant difference
	Within Groups	8451.72	116	72.84			
CA	Between Groups	843.87	3	281.29	4.21	.008**	Significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) 1st year significantly higher than 4th
	Within Groups	7746.12	116	66.77			

*x*

The ANOVA test results presented in table 7 indicate no significant difference in Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) scores across different academic years,  $F(3,116) = 1.87$ ,  $p = .14$ , suggesting that students' levels of MCC remain relatively consistent throughout their academic progression. However, a significant difference was found in Communication Apprehension (CA) based on year of study,  $F(3,116) = 4.21$ ,  $p = .008$ , indicating that academic level influences students' communication anxiety. Further analysis reveals that first-year students exhibit significantly higher levels of CA compared to fourth-year students, suggesting that communication apprehension tends to decrease as students gain more experience and exposure over time. The detail can be seen in the following table:

**Table 8** Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for CA by Year of Study

Comparison	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Interpretation
Year 1 vs Year 2	4.54	2.18	.151	-1.01	10.08	Not significant
Year 1 vs Year 3	5.43	2.21	.079	-0.34	11.21	Not significant (trend toward significance)
Year 1 vs Year 4	9.60	2.15	.002	3.94	15.25	<b>Significant difference</b>
Year 2 vs Year 3	0.89	2.17	.976	-4.70	6.48	Not significant
Year 2 vs Year 4	5.06	2.10	.087	-0.40	10.53	Not significant (approaching significance)
Year 3 vs Year 4	4.17	2.14	.247	-1.25	9.60	Not significant

The post hoc comparison results reveal that a significant difference in communication apprehension (CA) exists between first-year and fourth-year students, with first-year students reporting significantly higher CA levels (Mean Difference = 9.60,  $p = .002$ ). This suggests that students become more confident and less apprehensive in communication as they progress through their academic years. Although the comparisons between Year 1 vs Year 3 ( $p = .079$ ) and Year 2 vs Year 4 ( $p = .087$ ) show trends approaching significance, these differences are not statistically significant at the .05 level. All other comparisons among academic years show no meaningful differences, indicating that the most notable change in CA occurs between the earliest and final years of study.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) significantly reduces Communication Apprehension (CA) among English Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The negative correlations between overall MCC and CA, as well as across all MCC sub-dimensions, confirm previous findings that highlight the anxiety-reducing effects of cultural awareness and communication adaptability (Chen, 2010; Neuliep, 2005).

Among the MCC subdimensions, the behavioral component demonstrated the strongest inverse relationship with CA. This suggests that students who are skilled at adjusting their communication behaviors—such as modifying tone, managing non-verbal cues, or selecting culturally appropriate expressions—tend to experience lower anxiety in intercultural encounters. One plausible explanation is that behavioral adaptability provides students with a concrete repertoire of observable strategies that can be enacted during real-time interactions, thereby reducing uncertainty and perceived communicative risk, both of which are central triggers of anxiety. This interpretation is consistent with Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) view that behavioral adaptability not only reflects competence but also enhances individuals' sense of control and predictability in intercultural communication, ultimately mitigating apprehension.

Additionally, the cognitive and affective aspects of MCC also demonstrated moderate negative correlations with CA. Students who possess a solid understanding of cultural norms and who approach intercultural interactions with empathy and openness appear to feel less threatened and more secure in communicative settings. This observation supports the idea that CA is not only a product of language deficiency but

also a psychological response to cultural uncertainty (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). The descriptive findings further reveal that students experienced the highest levels of CA in interpersonal and public speaking contexts—two domains heavily reliant on spontaneous, face-to-face communication. This insight highlights the importance of integrating intercultural and interpersonal communication training in EFL instruction, especially early in the academic journey. Notably, first-year students exhibited significantly higher CA compared to their senior counterparts, indicating that experience and exposure to diverse interactions may help reduce anxiety over time (Zhai, 2019).

Taken together, these results suggest that MCC development should be a core component of EFL pedagogy, not only to facilitate linguistic competence but also to empower students to engage confidently across cultures. Practical applications include incorporating intercultural simulations, group collaborations with multicultural peers, and explicit discussions about cultural expectations and communication styles. As Seidlhofer (2011) and Byram (2021) argue, English education in globalized settings must transcend grammatical accuracy and cultivate intercultural speakers capable of navigating complex social terrains.

Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of multicultural communication training in language education. The findings highlight the potential of such training to reduce communication apprehension, enhance multicultural awareness, and promote adaptive communication skills, thereby better preparing learners for real-world intercultural interactions. However, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution, as the study relied on self-report instruments, which may not fully capture actual communicative behavior. Additionally, the sample was drawn from a single university context, limiting generalizability to broader EFL populations. Future research incorporating longitudinal designs, multiple institutions, or observational data would help strengthen the applicability of these findings.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence for a significant negative relationship between Multicultural Communication Competence (MCC) and Communication Apprehension (CA) among EFL learners in a culturally diverse university context. Beyond confirming this association, the findings reinforce theoretical models that position behavioral adaptability as a core mechanism through which intercultural competence mitigates communicative anxiety. In line with intercultural communication theory, students who possess concrete behavioral strategies—such as effective nonverbal regulation or culturally attuned language choices—appear better equipped to manage uncertainty, thereby reducing apprehension in multicultural interactions. The observed differences in CA across academic levels further suggest that intercultural exposure and communicative experience accumulate over time, supporting developmental perspectives on competence acquisition.

Pedagogically, these insights underscore the need for EFL curricula to embed targeted intercultural communication training that goes beyond general cultural awareness. Actionable strategies may include structured intercultural simulations, guided reflection on communication breakdowns, and explicit instruction in adaptive behaviors such as code-switching, nonverbal sensitivity, and audience-based linguistic modulation. Such interventions can strengthen learners' behavioral competence while simultaneously reducing anxiety in diverse communicative settings.

Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn from this study should be considered within the scope of its methodological constraints. The use of self-report instruments may not fully capture students' actual communicative behaviors, and the single-site sampling limits the generalizability of the results to broader EFL populations. Future research should employ mixed methods or observational approaches, examine institutional differences, and explore longitudinal interventions that trace the development of MCC

and its sustained impact on CA, willingness to communicate, academic engagement, and intercultural adjustment.

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