Improving Malaysian Working Adults' Confidence Concerning Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English using OCS Module

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Abstract: This study was aimed to improve Malaysian working adults' confidence in terms of willingness to communicate (WTC) in English using Oral Communication Skill (OCS) module. A qualitative study was employed involving Malaysian working adults. To achieve the objective, their task performances were observed and evaluated. Their views and experiences were uncovered through in-depth interviews and narrative journals. The findings show that using OCS module as a tool, Malaysian working adults' confidence in terms of WTC to speak English could be improved. This study is significant as it shares with the readers the progress and the improvement if Malaysian working adults' confidence in speaking English. Bu utilising the newly developed module, Malaysian working adults are anticipated to speak English. This is especially due to the design and the arrangement of the task in the module.

Keywords: Communication skills, Malaysian adult workers, willingness to communicate, OCS module.

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I.   Introduction

Self-confidence can be regarded as a personal factor which plays a supportive role in the achievement of oral performance especially in working environment. One of the factors which may cause poor oral performance is self-confidence [1]. In the context of this study, the element of self-confidence is linked to one's willingness to communicate. This is because willingness to communicate can be defined as the probability of involving in communication [2]. The willingness to speak in the second or foreign language is deemed strong [2]. Moreover, one's confidence in English communication strongly influences their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English [2].

Therefore, the ones who were confident to communicate in English were the ones who were more willing to communicate in English [3]. To reflect a level of success in language learning and language training, learners should be observed on their willingness to take advantage of opportunities to use a second language [4]. In this study, the usefulness of the Oral Communicative Skill (OCS) module on ensuring maximal WTC and improving confidence among working adults is explored.

These days, the ability to speak in English is a fundamental aspect which employers focus on when hiring employees [5]. English is rapidly growing and evolving. Its existence as the official language in the working world could not be denied. Interestingly, in work industries, businesses and institutions, the importance of English communication is seen as a tool required for the growth of business, image building and sometimes as survival matter in the era of globalisation nowadays where local businesses are constantly facing intense competition both from local and foreign companies. Apparently, in Malaysian

context, the role of English in the employment is both obvious and dominant.

There is no doubt about the importance of English in Malaysia especially in business industries. Due to this matter, there are employers and government agencies in Malaysia which conduct trainings in English courses related to job requirements for their employees **[6]**. This is to help the employees to be more competent in communicating in English while working. Nowadays, employers require communication skills besides academic qualification **[7]**. There are ten main skills which are greatly emphasized by organisation when hiring employees and one of the skills is communication skill. It is at this point that not only the technical knowledge being considered, but so is the communication skills in English.

Some institutions offer courses which have conventionally been called "business English" and "English for specific purposes" have mainly focused on developing future workers' skills in the classic business tasks of formal presentations, letter and email writing, formal negotiations, etc **[8]**. However, recent studies portray the importance of English for informal interaction and socializing in workforce settings. English learners urgently required to be sensitized to communicative strategies for establishing relationships and maintaining rapport in the workplace **[6], [9]**. In meetings, the ability to take part in discussions is considered much more important than carrying out formal presentations.

In general, employers are searching for potential candidates who are, while fulfilling certain requirements, able to speak and write in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. Therefore, it can be concluded that English plays a vital role in the working environment in Malaysia **[10]** and the pressures of improving English communication skills among Malaysian workers involve more than one party to work hand in hand, but above all, these pressures have also forced certain parties to work on finding the root and the solutions of the problems.

A number of studies have been conducted to find out the effects of willingness to communicate (WTC) to improve English leaners' confidence to speak in English. One study shows that confidence of the English learners experiences some improvements, such as they do not look shy to speak up in English in their classroom **[11]**. Another study conducted in China shows a similar result that WTC has positive effects to students' confidence in speaking English **[12]**. Considering the above discussion, this study considers the need to maximal WTC, which is believed to have strong influence on one's confidence to speak English using a newly developed Oral Communication (OCS) Module.

II. Literature Review

English can be regarded as a vital language in connecting employees and employers. This language is used in a medium of communication in the Malaysian workplace. As a multiracial country having international and global companies collaborating and investing into Malaysia's economy, it is an advantage for working adults if they can communicate in English because Bahasa Malaysia is not commonly used **[13]**. Malaysians especially the working adults need to be very aware of this reality and work hard towards making it possible for them to be able to communicate in English as English plays a vital role in attaining Malaysia' status to be in line with other countries in the aspect of economic development **[14], [15]**. English is not only an essential international language, it also used as a medium of communication inside and outside an organization in Malaysian setting **[16]**.

It is very important to notice the remarkable fact about the importance of English and it is becoming more obvious **[17]**. One of the reasons is due to the democratic change. This democratic change also plays in placing the English language debate in a new political context which has re-energised the push for greater capability and use of English in Malaysia's institutions **[18], [19], [20]**. Our so called 'New Malaysia' is now adding weight to the evolving of the usage and competency of English **[21].**

The declining standard of English in Malaysia has drawn public attention. Malaysia's prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said top government officials would have to take English competency

tests. Announced on June 6, the prime minister mentioned that senior civil servants must have a good command of English to enable them to negotiate effectively with foreign parties. Following to this, on June 9, Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik said that the decision to make it compulsory for senior government officials to take English proficiency test will boost their self-esteem when communicating with foreigners. Being proficient and competent in English not only helps future workers in dealing foreigners but also helps them to break the cultural and international boundaries to become world renowned workers. There are individuals who pointed out the success of Japan and China even when they are use one-language policy [17]. It would be unwise to argue and dwell on that issue in the Malaysia context as Malaysia is a country which has people of different races and we are not used to using interpreters as Japan and China. Therefore, it is very necessary for Malaysians to focus on improving our English communication skill starting by focusing on improving the level of confidence.

In order to find out more information and the needs of working adults, a process called needs analysis can be done. This process can assist in collecting information [22]. The information usually emphasis on getting to know a learner of certain languages and the usage of task in communication in developing a syllabus [23]. Needs analysis also includes the elements to be considered and the steps in carrying out a course or programme conducted by the educators and the developers of the course [24].

Some Factors of Willingness to Communicate in Second Language (L2)

1. Second language self-confidence of communication

Second language self-confidence of communication is explained as a composite of perceived competence of communication in L2 and lack of anxiety using or learning the language) [25]. Self-confidence is able to enhance and inspire one's willingness to communicate [26] and the capacity to obtain goals through communication [27]. Self-confidence perception has been discovered to affect L2 learning) [28]. Furthermore, Clement suggests that compared to their self-confident peers, learners

with low levels of self-confidence are likely to be less motivated to learn L2. Moreover, a number of researchers have conducted research which shows that self-confidence is related to willingness to communicate [29], [30], [31].

2. Motivation

Motivation, as a main individual factor, irrefutably plays a vital role in foreign or second learning, and has been becoming a popular topic for research worldwide [32], [33].

A motivation concept is a composite of effort and desire to attain the learning goal [34]. Further, Gardner argues that in his social education model of second language acquisition, he claims that when ones are talking about learning motivation of L2, they should consider both educational context and cultural context, which are noticed as attitudes and integrativeness toward the learning situation, successively. He then defines integrativeness as an original interest in learning the L2. Eventually, motivation as the major point of the integrative motive is then broken down to the following respects; attitudes toward the learning language, desire to learn the language and the effort given to learn the language.

III. Research Methodology

The Procedure And The OCS Module

The existing modules used in many institutions and workplaces are mainly focusing on the speaking skills only. None of the module relates speaking and confidence. Therefore, this study involved the usage of a newly developed module called OCS module. The elements in the module were guided by a well-known public speaking programme, Toastmasters International. This module's goal is to offer "learn-by-doing" concept learning environment in which each participant has the chance to build up oral communication skill, which in turn improves self-confidence. In this study, participants learn by doing and by watching fellow participants as the others who are there for the same purpose which is to improve communication. Sections in the module were arranged step by step so the participants can improve gradually. Some participants are shy and anxious to communicate in English which can be considered as one of the most important factors affecting their confidence and

WTC. Therefore, this module is designed to help them be on track by performing pair work tasks and small group discussion before doing individual oral presentations. Based on the experts' recommendation, the topics chosen for pair and group discussions were taken from International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Speaking Test.

This study using OCS Module is very significant as it applies the L2 Linguistic Confidence of Clement model (1980). Based on the model, the quality and quantity of interaction influence self-confidence. For example, if the quality and quantity of interaction with the L2 community are relatively frequent and pleasant, self-confidence and competence in using the L2 would improve **[35]**, **[36]**.
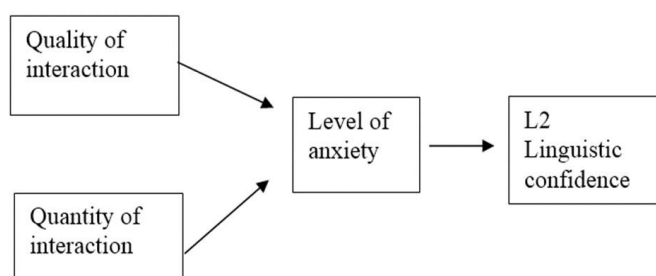

Fig. 1: Second Language (L2) Linguistic Confidence

From the figure above, it can be concluded that, the level of confidence in oneself is directly related to the quantity of the interaction. One can be more confident to communicate in English if he or she practices communicating frequently. This module consists of three sections which comprise of 12 oral tasks (four tasks for each section) for participants to practise weekly for 12 weeks.

OCS Module is designed specifically to improve Malaysian working adults' confidence in English Oral Communication Skill. In this module, there are three sections involved which are pair work, small-group discussion and oral presentation. The three sections have been arranged one after another. There are 4 tasks under each section. The first section would be pair-work, followed by small-group discussion and oral presentation. Sections in the module were arranged step by step so the participants can improve gradually. Some participants are very shy and not well-exposed in

English communication. Therefore, this the first section which is the pair-work section is designed to help them "warming-up" followed by small group discussion before doing individual oral presentations.

The Participants

For the selection of the participants, they were selected based on the level of their communication skill and the level of their English proficiency. They were chosen to represent the learners from the low, moderate and high English proficiency levels based on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) speaking score and possess at least Bachelor's degree in any course. Therefore, all the participants of this study were between 25-35 years old Malaysian working adults. Three participants were evaluated in this study. Due to ethical reasons, pseudonyms were used for participants such as participant A, B and C for the participants from the low, moderate and high English proficiency level respectively.

Data Collection And Instruments

Data collection for the study involved interview, observation, evaluation and narrative journal. In pair-work section, the subjects were evaluated by observing how frequent they ask questions and give feedback in their conversation with their partner and in group discussion, the subjects were evaluated based on how frequent they take turn to speak and contribute idea while discussing.

Besides interview, observation and evaluation, the subjects were also required to write narrative journal. The journal templates were checked and validated by three in-service educators. It is important for the templates to be checked and validated to ensure that the journals serve as the guidance for the participants to record what is needed to be recorded down. Participants were given freedom to record what they wanted to reflect, no restrictions or demand on what the participants should or should not write. Participants were given the freedom to write down what they wanted to write. This is to ensure the participants were writing their true feelings and reflections in using OCS Module and how their feelings were when preparing for the tasks.

NARRATIVE JOURNAL

Write about your experience after using OCS Module for 12 weeks. Your journal must not be less than 150 words.

This journal is to help the researcher in getting in-depth understanding to what extent can OCS Module help in improving Malaysian working adults' willingness to speak English.

You may include these points in your journal:

* To what extent OCS Module has helped you in improving

I. Sharing experience and give few examples of events to show your improvement

II. Comparing your willingness to speak English before/while/after using OCS Module e.g. How frequent you talk in English to your friends/ strangers/ small group of people; how frequent you try to avoid talking with foreigners before and after using OCS Module.

Your response is very much appreciated and thank you in advance for your cooperation.

IV. Findings

Interview question 5b: Would you avoid situations where you could be called upon to speak English?

Participant A

In the first interview in week one, participant A mentioned that she would feel nervous and she would avoid situations where she could be called upon to speak English. In the second interview in week four, she said she can but just a little bit. After completing the first four weeks of pair-work tasks, she showed gradual improvement, as she was willing to speak even just for a little.

"I will feel nervous. So, I would avoid."
[Interview week 1]
"I think I can but just a little a bit."
[Interview week 4]

Following on to week five, she stated that she will not avoid speaking English and in the interview in week eight, she said she will just respond spontaneously if there is any situation where she could be called upon to speak English.

"I think I can and I will not avoid."
[Interview week 5]
"I will just respond spontaneously."

[Interview week 8]
In week 9, participant A indicated that she would not avoid and will just spontaneously speak English and in week ten, she mentioned that managed to reply in English when somebody asked her something in English.

"I will just spontaneously speak English."
[Interview week 9]
"Yes of course. For example, when my officemate talked to me suddenly I can reply."
[Interview week 12]

Participant B

In week one interview, participant B stated that he would avoid situation where he could be called to speak English. He was not willing to do it because he will feel nervous. However, after completing the first four tasks of pair-work, in the second interview in week four, he said he would not avoid and willing to try.

"I'm not willing to do because I will feel nervous"
[Interview week 1]
"I would just give it a try"
[Interview week 4]

Proceeding to week five, in the interview, participant B stated that he will not avoid as he does not have any problem to speak. In week eight interview, after completing four group discussion tasks, he said he can speak and will not avoid as it is not a big problem for him to speak English.

"I do not have any problem to speak"
[Interview week 5]
"I can. It is not a big problem for me"
[Interview week 8]

In the interview in week nine, participant B mentioned that he will just speak whenever he is needed to speak and in the last interview in week twelve, he stated that he has been speaking English every week for around 3 months and he can already get used to it, so it is fine for him to speak English.

"Whenever needed I will just speak"
[Interview week 9]
"Every week, I have to speak English in front of people. So, I get used to speak. It is fine for me"
[Interview week 12]

Participant C

In the first and second interview in week one and four, participant C stated that she would avoid due to grammatical mistakes and lack of vocabulary.

"I would avoid because my grammar is not so good, and I feel blank because I do not know what words to use"
[Interview week 1]

"I would avoid if I were called to speak English because my vocabulary is not good" [Interview week 4]

On the fifth- and eighth-week's interviews, participant C mentioned about her nervousness. Besides, knowledge about certain issues is also her concerned when speaking English.

"I would be nervous. It depends on topic. If I know about the topic, I will be confident. If I do not know about the topics, there are terms that I am not and less knowledge about the topic, I will be less confident"
[Interview week 5]

"I'll be ok but depends on topics. If I have info on the topic, I'll be fine. Same goes to the people that I'm talking with"
[Interview week 8]

After completing eight tasks from the module, participant C still concerned about nervousness and knowledge on certain topics when speaking. However, after completing 11 tasks from the module, participant C stated that she will be ok to be called to speak English and she will not avoid the situation.

"Depends on the crowd. If the crowd have more knowledge on that topic, I will feel nervous"
[Interview week 9]

"I'll be okay. I will not avoid. I do not mind, and I am willing to speak"
[Interview week 12]

Narrative Journal

Besides using interview to answer the research question in the aspect of willingness to communicate, researcher used narrative journal to obtain more data on their willingness to communicate in English. The elements covered from the narrative journal are, sharing of their experience and providing examples of events to show their improvement. Other than that, they were also required to compare their willingness to communicate in English before/ while/ after using OCS Module.

From the narrative journal, it was found that all three participants expressed their improvement after using the module. They also stated that, before using the module, they avoided speaking in English but after using the module, they were willing to speak in English with friends and strangers.

Participant A

Among the examples I can share here is I was a bit embarrassed for communicator in English with my friends. However, following the OCS module I can reduce the shame. This is because, in the OCS module, I need to communicate in English in the presence of other participants who are also following the class.

Worked as a research assistant and became a tour guide at the archaeological gallery. If before, I would avoid if there was a tour that required me to give an explanation in English. However, following this program I am more confident and braver to communicate in English. Because I was working on archaeological excavations before that I needed to communicate in English. So, I am willing to give an explanation in English if visitors who came to the archaeological gallery needed a description in English. If before, I will often ovoid it.

From the data above, participant A's willingness to communicate in English improved due to the involvement of other participants. This is aligned with the idea displayed in some other studies [4], [33], [35]. It was stated that a person's willingness to communicate depends on few factors and one of them is the others people's involvement. According to her, practicing with other participants makes her eliminate her shyness. One of the factors that influence one's willingness to communicate is shyness. If a person is very shy, they would not be willing to communicate. This is similar to a literature review found in other research [37]. Shyness is classified as unwillingness to communicate with others [38].

Participant B

The Level 1 basically is an Ice Breaker Level which allowed the participant to express their point of view in a 'more relax' without being comment or criticized by other participants (though this requires a pair work). Personally, this level has increased my confident level to converse in English. After this level, the OCS participants should go through Level 2 which they were needed to talk about certain (given) issues and had to express their point of view in the group. This has encouraged me to be more 'creative' and 'informative' to convince my ideas my group's

members. In doing so, I had to gather as much information and evidence from sources like website and newspaper before presenting to my colleagues in the group. Not only ideas, in the same times I also need to use my body language (including gesture, eyes contact and face expression) and my voice intonation to influence others' thinking.

The final level (Level 3) requires me to do public speaking. This is toughest task (especially the last week – Impromptu speech) as I have to [had to] combine the previous skills from the previous level I gained in a bigger audience. As, I had to standing in front of people to present (and support) my point of view about certain issue, this has trained me to be more confident and being ready to talk in the public as much as with the foreigners or strangers.

According to participant B, each section (pair-work, group discussion and individual oral presentation) of the module has its own advantages. Each section helps in gradually improving his confidence in diverse ways. Therefore, it can be concluded that the sections in the OCS module are important in many ways. Therefore, module user should use the module according to the arrangement that has been set.

Participant C

For the first four weeks where we were conducted to do a pair-up conversation, it requires us to speak spontaneously. At the end of the class, an evaluator, will evaluate our performance, let us know the result. That way, I know my mistakes and weaknesses that I have made throughout the conversation and take note on that. Therefore, I will try not to repeat the same mistakes for the next task. For the group discussion session, we discuss on certain topic and give our opinion about it. It helps me to be a good listener while listening to another members' opinion. Each of us were evaluate and we try to improve for the next task.

Individual Oral Presentation was conducted on the last four weeks of the program. I think that this session made me a little nervous because we were required to speak alone in front of others. This has become a good practice for me because it makes me speak in English often - something I do not usually do in my daily life.

One of my job scopes is being a guider for a guided tour at Gallery. There were times when we have non-Malay visitors and prefer to be guided using English language. I usually get nervous while guiding the tour in English. However, throughout the period of participating in OCS session, I feel that my confidence has boost a little and it got better week by week. I feel a big difference on myself while conversing in English with others before and after participating in OCS program. During and after the OCS program, I also started to speak in English with my Chinese and Indian colleagues at the centre and still doing it until today as I am already got myself used to it.

Participant C shared the same idea as participant B on the advantage of each section. Besides pointing out about the sections, she also added that the evaluation given by the evaluator helped her in improving her performance weekly. Therefore, it can be said the concept of having evaluator in the module helped in improving participants' level of confidence as participants received constructive feedback from the evaluator. Feedback is considered as one of the powerful tools to improve the quality in learning process. Therefore, in this study, it is proven that the concept of giving feedback to the participants is very helpful in improving their oral performance.

Evaluator's Report

Besides narrative journal, researcher also used the evaluator's report. From the evaluator's evaluation and observation, the researcher used evaluator's report to analyse participants' willingness to ask questions and give feedback during pair work task and willingness to contribute ideas and take turn to speak during group discussion.

Participant A

During pair-work tasks, participant A frequently asked questions and gave feedback to her partner on all four weeks. Proceeding to the next section, which is the small group discussion, she frequently contributed ideas and took turns to speak. In week five, she shared lots of idea of hungry ghost festival. She shared her experience asking her Chinese friend about the festival. She also shared the do's and don'ts. In week six, she focused on Malaysia. Sharing her experience talking to foreigners about Malaysia and she also mentioned, from her observation, she is amazed when some foreigners can speak Malay language. In week seven, the task was about travelling. She shared her

experience travelling t Medan, Indonesia. She expressed her happiness through the events that happened during her travelling period and in week eight, she focused on the advantages of Internet. This shows that, she was willing to communicate with the other participants even though in the interview, she mentioned that she was nervous and would avoid situation where she could be called to speak English.

Participant B

As for participant B, he showed gradual improvement on the first three weeks of pair-work section. In the first two weeks, throughout the task, he asked questions and gave feedback and in week three, she frequently asked questions and gave feedback. However, in week four, she did not ask question and give feedback as frequent as the previous weeks. Following the next section, in the small group discussion, he managed to frequently take turn to speak and contribute idea. During discussion in week five, when they were required to talk about festival and they chose Hungry Ghost Festival. Participant B shared his experience watching a hungry ghost movie and explained the sequence of events in the movie to relate to the topic. Similar to the discussion in week six, he expressed his feelings being a Malaysian. He mentioned about the biodiversity, minerals and fertile soil in Malaysia. In week seven, he shared his experience travelling to Korea, Pakistan and Aceh for working purposes and in week eight, he listed down the advantages of internet such as the applications of WhatsApp and e-book which are very useful and cheaper. When other group members talked about the convenience of using Internet, he added about online banking and how convenient it is for people. This shows that, participant B's willingness to communicate in English improved after few weeks of practising as he can frequently spoke and shared lots of idea in discussion.

Participant C

In the first week in pair-work section, participant C seldom asked questions and gave feedback to her partner. She only listened attentively but she asked more questions and gave more feedback in week two. Continuing to week three and four, she started to frequently ask questions and give feedback.

During small-group discussion, she managed to frequently take turn to speak and contribute idea. In week 5, she revealed in detail about the taboo of Hungry Ghost month. In week 6, she shared her feelings about being a Malaysian. She also said, when she was small, she wanted to be non-Malaysian and wished Malaysia has four seasons and snow. However, as she grows older, she started to appreciate our sunny weather and beautiful tourist attractions. Proceeding to week seven, participant C shared her travelling experience to Makkah for pilgrimage and her experience visiting all the places with Islamic history. In week 8, when discussing about Internet, she admitted that internet has lots of benefits and one of them is about finding information. She stated that Internet is a useful source of information. Towards the end of the discussion, she added on the disadvantage of Internet. She expressed her worries towards the virus from the Internet. This shows that, participant C's willingness to communicate in English improved gradually throughout eight weeks as she managed to speak and contribute idea throughout discussions for four weeks.

VI. Discussion

From the findings, it is obvious, the OCS Module can help improving Malaysian working adults' non-verbal cues in speaking English. Therefore, it can be said that, after using the module for 12 weeks, the confidence level and willingness to communicate of the research participants has improved. Based on the data in this study, the most essential element, which contributes to the improvement of the research participants, is the practices. The activities in the module requires the participants to practise weekly for 12 weeks and due to the continuous practises, the participants managed to improve on their non-verbal cues.

Besides, having to know what to talk about also play significant role in one's confidence level. If a person has topical knowledge on what they are going to talk, their confidence level might be higher. From the findings, it was found that, one's non-verbal cues especially eye contact and facial expressions can get affected when one has no idea about what to talk. One's speaking performance can also be influenced by topical knowledge and preparation **[39]**. In a research by Nguyen and Tran (2015), it was found that, speaking performance

was affected by topical knowledge. Topical knowledge can be defined as the speakers' knowledge of relevant topical information. For those who have topical knowledge, the speaking performance is much better than for those who have none.

VII. Conclusion

Based on the study findings, it can be summarised that the OCS Module has achieved its objectives in improving the confidence level of Malaysian working adults in terms of non-verbal cues. It has been proven that the use of this module can help to improve non-verbal cues and confidence to speak English.

The arrangement of the tasks in the module is proven to be helpful for Malaysian working adults to improve their confidence level in speaking English. They can slowly warm themselves up by doing pair-work activities for the first four weeks and moving on to group discussion followed by individual oral presentation. In conclusion, the use of OCS Module to improve Malaysian working adults' confidence level in speaking English and maximal WTC is proven to be beneficial and well-accepted by the working adults as a training materials and tool.

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