

Developing and Validating a Perception Towards Communicative English Scale for Undergraduate Students

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Abstract. *The measurement of students' perceptions towards communicative English is essential for understanding language acquisition barriers and designing effective pedagogical interventions. This article presents the development and validation of a comprehensive Perception towards Communicative English (PCE) Scale for undergraduate students in West Bengal, India. The scale was constructed through a multi-stage process involving extensive literature review, expert validation, and statistical testing. Initially, 60 items across 11 dimensions—including attitude, context, skill enhancement, exposure, scholastic competence, self-confidence, employability, global competence, social support and pressure, socio-cultural factors, and language anxiety—were developed. Content validity was established through expert evaluation using Kappa statistics ($\kappa > 0.75$), indicating substantial inter-rater agreement. The scale was administered to 639 undergraduate students from 16 colleges across four districts of West Bengal. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.887, demonstrating good internal consistency. Split-half reliability showed a correlation of 0.776 between halves, with a Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.778. Factor analysis using principal component extraction with varimax rotation revealed a four-factor structure explaining 58.855% of total variance. The final 44-item scale comprises four dimensions: Cognitive Perception (17 items, $\alpha=0.759$), Affective Perception (13 items, $\alpha=0.752$), Behavioural Perception (9 items, $\alpha=0.834$), and Confidence in English Communication (5 items, $\alpha=0.834$). The validated PCE Scale offers researchers and educators a reliable instrument for assessing undergraduate students' perceptions towards communicative English in the Indian context, with implications for curriculum development and language policy formulation.*

Key words: *Communicative English, Scale Development, Validation, Undergraduate Students, Factor Analysis.*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary globalized era, English has emerged as the lingua franca for academic, professional, and socio-cultural interactions (Crystal, 2003). Communicative English, which emphasizes the practical use of language for real-life situations rather than mere grammatical knowledge, has become increasingly important in higher education and employment contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In India, particularly in states like West Bengal where English is often taught as a second language, understanding students' perceptions towards communicative English is crucial for designing effective language curricula and pedagogical approaches (Graddol, 2010).

Perception towards communicative English encompasses how students regard, understand, and interpret the importance of English communication skills in their academic and professional lives (Gardner, 1985). It includes their attitudes towards learning English, confidence in using the language, and awareness of its practical applications. While several standardized instruments exist for measuring language attitudes and motivation (e.g., Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery),

there is a paucity of culturally appropriate, comprehensive scales specifically designed for undergraduate students in the Indian context, particularly in West Bengal.

The present study addresses this gap by developing and validating a Perception towards Communicative English (PCE) Scale that captures the multidimensional nature of students' perceptions. The scale incorporates contemporary dimensions relevant to the 21st-century learner, including global competence, employability perceptions, and language anxiety—factors particularly pertinent in today's competitive job market where English proficiency often determines career trajectories (Aspiring Minds, 2013).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Communicative English

Communicative English draws upon theoretical frameworks including Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which extends beyond Chomsky's linguistic competence to include sociolinguistic and strategic competences. Canale and Swain (1980) further refined this model, identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences as essential components of language proficiency.

2.2 Dimensions of Perception in Language Learning

Research in language acquisition has identified multiple dimensions influencing learners' perceptions. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model emphasizes attitudes and motivation as critical factors. Horwitz et al. (1986) highlighted language anxiety as a significant affective variable. More recent studies have incorporated self-confidence (Clément et al., 1994), exposure (Dörnyei, 2005), and socio-cultural factors (Norton, 2013) as important determinants of language learning perceptions.

2.3 Need for Context-Specific Measurement

Existing scales often fail to capture the unique socio-cultural and economic realities of Indian undergraduate students, particularly those from semi-urban and rural areas of West Bengal. The linguistic diversity, varying exposure to English, and distinct career aspirations of this population necessitate a contextually appropriate measurement instrument.

3. Methodology

3.1 Scale Development Process

The development of the PCE Scale followed a systematic, multi-stage process:

Stage 1: Item Generation

Based on an extensive review of literature in communicative English, language attitudes, and educational psychology, 60 preliminary items were generated across 11 theoretical dimensions: Attitude (6 items), Context (4 items), Skill Enhancement (9 items), Exposure (6 items), Scholastic Competence (4 items), Self-confidence (6 items), Employability (5 items), Global Competence (7 items), Social Support and Pressure (5 items), Socio-cultural Factors (4 items), and Language Anxiety (4 items).

Stage 2: Expert Validation

The preliminary scale was submitted to a panel of four experts in education and language teaching. Content validity was assessed using Kappa statistics to measure inter-rater agreement.

Stage 3: Pilot Testing

The revised scale was administered to a pilot sample of 100 undergraduate students to identify ambiguities and assess initial reliability.

Stage 4: Final Administration

The refined scale was administered to 639 undergraduate students from 16 colleges across four districts of West Bengal (Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Purba Bardhaman, and Hooghly), selected through multi-stage random sampling.

3.2 Participants

The sample comprised 186 male and 453 female undergraduate students, aged 21-23 years, from Arts (n=513) and Science (n=126) streams. Participants were drawn from both rural (n=184) and urban (n=455) areas, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 6. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods. Construct validity was established through exploratory factor analysis using principal component extraction with varimax rotation.

4. Results

4.1 Content Validity

Kappa statistics for inter-rater agreement ranged from 0.752 to 0.812 ($p < 0.001$), indicating substantial agreement among experts and confirming content validity.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The initial 60-item scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.887. Item-total correlations ranged from 0.413 to 0.666, with no items substantially improving alpha if deleted.

Split-half reliability analysis revealed a correlation of 0.637 between the two 30-item halves, with a Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.778 and Guttman split-half coefficient of 0.776, confirming satisfactory internal consistency.

4.3 Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.874, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 15563.980$, $df = 1770$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of data for factor analysis.

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation yielded a four-factor solution explaining 58.855% of total variance:

Factor 1: Cognitive Perception (17 items, $\alpha = 0.759$) - Items related to exposure, scholastic competence, global competence, and socio-cultural understanding. This factor represents students' intellectual awareness and understanding of communicative English's role and importance.

Factor 2: Affective Perception (13 items, $\alpha = 0.752$) - Items concerning attitude, context, and motivation towards improving communication skills. This dimension captures the emotional and motivational aspects of perception.

Factor 3: Behavioural Perception (9 items, $\alpha = 0.834$) - Items reflecting actual engagement in English communication, including skill enhancement behaviours and responses to social support and pressure.

Factor 4: Confidence in English Communication (5 items, $\alpha = 0.834$) - Items assessing self-assurance in using English, including motivation and anxiety management.

4.4 Final Scale

The validated PCE Scale comprises 44 items, with 35 positive and 9 negative statements, scored on a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1) for positive items, with reverse scoring for negative items.

5. Discussion

The four-factor structure emerging from this study aligns with and extends existing theoretical frameworks of language attitudes. The cognitive-affective-behavioural trichotomy mirrors classic attitude theory (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), while the additional confidence dimension reflects the specific importance of self-assurance in oral communication contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

The high reliability coefficients across all dimensions indicate that the scale consistently measures the intended constructs. The cognitive dimension's focus on global competence and socio-cultural factors reflects the contemporary reality where English serves as a tool for international communication and cross-cultural interaction (Byram, 1997).

The affective dimension's inclusion of context and attitude acknowledges the situated nature of language learning perceptions, supporting Norton's (2013) emphasis on identity and investment in language learning. The behavioural dimension's coverage of skill enhancement and response to social pressures recognizes the social embeddedness of language practice opportunities.

The confidence dimension's emergence as a separate factor underscores the particular importance of self-assurance in communicative English, where spontaneous production requires overcoming anxiety and performance fears (Horwitz et al., 1986).

6. Implications

For Researchers: The validated PCE Scale provides a comprehensive, reliable instrument for investigating relationships between communicative English perceptions and variables such as academic achievement, career aspirations, and self-efficacy.

For Educators: The multidimensional nature of the scale allows identification of specific areas where students may need support—whether cognitive understanding, affective motivation, behavioural engagement, or confidence building.

For Curriculum Developers: The dimensions highlighted in the scale can inform curriculum design, ensuring that language programmes address not only linguistic competence but also attitudes, confidence, and cultural awareness.

For Policymakers: Understanding students' perceptions across different demographic groups can guide resource allocation and intervention strategies, particularly for disadvantaged populations.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The scale was developed and validated within a specific geographic and cultural context (West Bengal, India). While this ensures cultural appropriateness, it may limit generalizability to other regions. Future research should examine the scale's applicability in diverse Indian states and international contexts.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of perceptions at one point in time; longitudinal studies could examine how perceptions evolve with language instruction and exposure.

8. Conclusion

The Perception towards Communicative English Scale developed in this study represents a robust, theoretically grounded instrument for measuring undergraduate students' perceptions in the Indian context. Its four-dimensional structure captures the complexity of language learning perceptions, while its strong psychometric properties ensure reliable measurement. The scale holds promise for both research and practice, contributing to enhanced understanding and support of students' communicative English development.

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