



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***RELATIONSHIPS AMONG TESL TRAINEE PRACTITIONERS'
COMMUNICATION SKILLS, USE OF SPEECH ACTS AND
PERSONALITY TRAITS***

ABDUL RASHID BIN ABDUL SITRA

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By

ABDUL RASHID BIN ABDUL SITRA

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

November 2016

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DEDICATED

TO:

**My parents, my wife, my children and my sister
Love you guys always...**



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2016

Chairman : Associate. Professor. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This study primarily aims to find out the level of communication skills among the Teaching of English as Second Language (TESL) trainee practitioners (TPs). TESL TPs are required to be competent in the English language. Their verbal and nonverbal communication skills are the main variables in this study. The study involves two groups, namely, TPs (277) and TESL lecturers (48) from four teacher training institutions. Communication skills data administered on both groups of respondents are collected through questionnaires. The TPs and the lecturers evaluate themselves and each other. This addresses the first research question.

TPs' use of 12 speech acts are analysed to determine their level of appropriateness in their use with six interlocutors from three different power distances. The use of the 12 speech acts include acceptance, apology, agreement, condolence, complaint, compliment, disagreement, gratitude, persuasion, request, refusal, and sympathy which are tested for their appropriateness using the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The DCT investigates the second research question.

TPs' personality traits relationship with their communication skills is investigated in this study by answering the third research question. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is used to investigate the five personality traits of the TPs. The Big Five dominance and their relationship to communication skills are known through this study.

The results indicate that the TPs' perception of their own verbal communication is lower than the perception of their lecturers. Conversely, the lecturers' perception of their own verbal communication skills is higher than the perception the TPs have of them. Applying the t-test, a significant difference is found. As for the nonverbal communication, there is a significant difference in the TPs' self perception and the

lecturers' perception of the TPs' nonverbal communication skills. Similarly, the TPs assess the lecturers' nonverbal communication skills while the lecturers' assess themselves. The results indicate that there is no difference in the use of nonverbal communication skills.

The next test investigates the level of appropriateness shown by the TPs in using the speech acts and the appropriateness is found to be average. On the whole, the results show that the TPs do not show any significant difference in the use of speech acts when communicating with different interlocutors at different power distances. However, comparatively, there is a higher level of appropriateness when they communicate with the interlocutors in the lower power distance hierarchy.

The result also indicates that the openness trait has significant relationship with the verbal communication. TPs with agreeableness, openness and neuroticism as their dominant personality traits show a significant relationship to their nonverbal communication. The fourth research question is answered by hierarchical regression which shows that personality traits have significant relationship to communication skills when compared to speech acts.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KAJIAN MENGENAI HUBUNGAN ANTARA KEMAHIRAN KOMUNIKASI
PENGAMAL PELATIH TESL, PENGGUNAAN LAKUAN DAN
KETRAMPILAN DIRI**

Oleh

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tahap kemahiran komunikasi dalam kalangan guru pelatih terhadap pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (TESL). Guru pelatih TESL dikehendaki menjadi mahir dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kemahiran komunikasi lisan dan bukan lisan adalah pemboleh ubah utama dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini melibatkan dua kumpulan iaitu guru pelatih seramai 277 orang dan pensyarah TESL seramai 48 orang dari empat institusi latihan guru. Data dikumpul melalui borang soal selidik mengenai kemahiran komunikasi lisan dan bukan lisan di mana kedua kumpulan responden perlu menilai diri sendiri dan membuat penilaian terhadap satu sama lain. Ini menjawab persoalan kajian yang pertama.

Penggunaan 12 lakuan pertuturan oleh guru pelatih dianalisis untuk menentukan tahap kesesuaian penggunaannya dengan enam interlokutor daripada tiga kumpulan yang berbeza hierarki. Dua belas lakuan pertuturan yang diuji termasuk menerima, meminta maaf, bersetuju, perselisihan, ucapan terima kasih, takziah, membuat aduan, memuji, pujukan, permintaan, keenganan dan menunjuk simpati telah diuji bagi mencapai kesesuaian penggunaan mereka dengan menggunakan kaedah ujian melengkapkan wacana. Ujian melengkapkan wacana menjawab persoalan kajian yang kedua.

Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa persepsi guru pelatih terhadap komunikasi lisan mereka sendiri adalah lebih rendah berbanding persepsi pensyarah terhadap mereka. Sebaliknya, persepsi pensyarah terhadap kemahiran komunikasi lisan mereka sendiri adalah lebih tinggi daripada persepsi guru pelatih. Dengan menggunakan ujian-t, perbezaan ketara telah ditemui dalam analisa di atas. Manakala dalam komunikasi bukan lisan, perbezaan yang signifikan dapat dilihat dalam persepsi sendiri guru pelatih dan persepsi pensyarah dalam kemahiran komunikasi bukan lisan guru

pelatih. Begitu juga apabila guru pelatih menilai kemahiran komunikasi bukan lisan para pensyarah dan pensyarah menilai diri mereka sendiri. Keputusan menunjukkan tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam penggunaan kemahiran komunikasi bukan lisan.

Ini kemudiannya diikuti dengan analisis personaliti guru pelatih dan korelasi dengan komunikasi lisan dan bukan lisan yang sekaligus menjawab persoalan kajian yang ketiga. “Big Five Inventory” digunakan untuk menganalisa personaliti guru pelatih. Analisa ini mengenal pasti dominasi dan korelasi komunikasi dan personaliti.

Ujian seterusnya menguji tahap kesesuaian yang ditunjukkan oleh guru pelatih menggunakan lakuan pertuturan dan kesesuaiannya didapati sederhana. Secara keseluruhannya, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru pelatih tidak menunjukkan sebarang perbezaan yang signifikan dalam penggunaan lakuan pertuturan apabila berkomunikasi dengan interlokutor yang berbeza hierarki tugas. Walau bagaimanapun, perbandingan tahap kesesuaian adalah lebih tinggi apabila guru pelatih berkomunikasi dengan interlokutor yang lebih rendah.

Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa antara personaliti, hanya sifat keterbukaan menunjukkan hubungan yang bererti dalam komunikasi lisan, manakala keterbukaan dan neoritisme, menunjukkan hubungan signifikan dengan kemahiran komunikasi bukan lisan. Regresi hierarki yang digunakan untuk menjawab soalan akhir penyelidikan menunjukkan bahawa personaliti mempunyai pengaruh besar ke atas komunikasi berbanding dengan lakuan pertuturan.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 22 November 2016 to conduct the final examination of Abdul Rashid bin Abdul Sitra on his thesis entitled "Relationships among TESL Trainee Practitioners' Communication Skills, Use of Speech Acts and Personality Traits" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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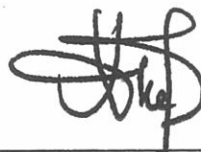
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the background of the study with regards to communication skills, speech acts and personality traits are briefly explained. This is followed by the research problems that motivated the researcher to undertake the present study. This has led to the research objectives as well as the research questions. This chapter also presents the significance, the scope and the definitions of important terms in the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has defined soft skills as the generic skills of positive values, leadership, teamwork, lifelong learning and effective communications (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). The Malaysian government, in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006 – 2010), had also announced that soft skills would be introduced to all undergraduates in the country and had directed all institutions of higher learning in Malaysia to include the following seven soft skills in their curriculum:

- a) Communication skills
- b) Critical thinking and problem solving skills
- c) Team work
- d) Lifelong learning and information management skills
- e) Entrepreneurship skills
- f) Ethics and professional moral
- g) Leadership skills (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006)

In a globalised world where job markets have become borderless, mere academic qualifications are insufficient. While students are required to showcase their hard skills such as technical or functional know-how related to their specific fields of study, those who have soft skills, especially good communication skills, will have greater advantage over those who do not. There have been many criticisms by employers that graduates are generally academically competent but lack soft skills (Shakir, 2009). A survey carried out by Harvard University confirms that 80% of achievements in one's career are determined by soft skills while only 20% by hard skills (Sharma, 2009).

In line with the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006) which emphasised the need for soft skills, particularly, communicative skills in the curriculum of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), HEIs have embedded soft skills into their curriculum. Hariati

(2007) stated that the lack of good communication skills seems to be an affliction among local graduates in obtaining jobs. This is further supported by Hairi, Nazuir, and Razzaly (2011) who found that local graduates in Malaysia were not able to find jobs in local and multinational companies because of their lack of soft skills such as communication skills. Sim (2016) also reported that a survey by JobStreet.com found that lack of proficiency in the English language, poor communication skills and poor personality are among the top five reasons for graduates' unemployability in Malaysia. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) also emphasises the need for English proficiency among English language teachers through professional up-skilling courses (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013, p. 32).

Good communication skills would mean that graduates must be able to work comfortably with people from other cultures and write and speak well (Gewertz, 2007). Educational institutions play an integral role in preparing graduates for professional careers and in discharging their responsibilities effectively through the teaching of communication skills. These institutions include teacher training institutes, locally known as IPGs, which are responsible for training teachers. Generally, Trainee Practitioners (henceforth TPs), especially those involved in the Teaching of English as Second Language (henceforth TESL) programme, face problems in communicating effectively in English as the language is not their mother tongue. TPs have to acquire good communicative competence which includes organisational competence and pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990). This not only means that TPs have to understand the fundamentals of the language but they also need to identify and understand the intended messages conveyed by the interlocutors during the communication process. The communication process inevitably includes the mastery of speech acts. Wrong or inappropriate use of speech acts during interaction may cause miscommunication.

Speech acts play an integral part in communication. Bachman (1990) asserts that speech acts are related to both the functional and pragmatic dimensions of the language. In other words, TPs not only must acquire the language but must have the ability to use the language appropriately in order to communicate effectively (Bayat, 2013). Therefore, TPs must understand the existing situation they are in when communicating, as each situation requires them to deliver their message either directly or indirectly to the listener. In doing so, the use of speech acts is vital. There are many speech acts that a person can use when communicating. Each speech act brings about a different meaning, thus messages can be understood differently if the wrong speech acts are used.

Thus, this study looks at the appropriateness of TPs' usage of speech acts in different situations and in different power distance hierarchies, such as when dealing with students and parents (low power distance), colleagues and friends (equal power distance) and principals, officials and professionals (high power distance). In this study, students and parents are regarded as having low power distance when compared to a teacher. This is because in schools teachers hold higher authority as they are masters in their trade, teachers are a point of reference for parents and students when it comes to education.

On the other hand, principals, officials and professionals are placed in a higher power distance in this study as they are the point of reference for the teachers in carrying out their duties. Teachers always have to consult their principals for any decision making and for any approval related to the execution of their duties as a principal is the highest decision making authority within the school environment. Officials are also persons in authority in the education departments or the education ministry that teachers might need to refer to, where necessary, in carrying out their duties.

In addition, this study investigates the correlation between personality traits and communication skills. Though it is acknowledged that good communication skills are imperative for success in jobs and academic achievement, Kuntze, van der Molen and Born (2016) found that research on the relationship between personality traits and communication skills was scarce. However, the researches that have been done in this area have found mixed results. Kuntze et al (2016) and Smit & Van (1996) in their studies found that personality traits were not significantly related to the mastery of communication skills. On the other hand, research by Mayr and Neuweg (2006) found that among the Big Five tested on experienced teachers only two of the Big Five correlated positively with communication skills.

The Big Five is the model used in this study to test the personality traits of the TPs. Though there are many models and theories of personalities, the Big Five personality trait is a tried and tested personality trait and according to Muck, Hell and Gosling (2007) the Big Five is the predominant model in the study of personality traits. This study adopts the Big Five Inventory (BFI) which consists of 44 items. These items are comprehensive in testing the personalities of the TPs.

Appropriate personality traits are imperative factors for communication to be successful in the teaching and learning contexts. As each TP has a different personality, this may affect his or her ability to communicate effectively as his/her personality may influence the choice and manner of expressing speech acts (Dewaele, & Furnham, 2000). A teacher's job is very complex as it involves more than mere teaching. Thus, good communication skills are a must for teachers (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

It is generally perceived that teachers' personality traits influence students' learning. Garcia (2011) found this fact to be significant when she did her studies on secondary students and found that the students' success was influenced by their teachers' personality. Davis (1995) came to the conclusion that commitment, compassion and positive attitudes of teachers in carrying out their lessons affect students' learning and achievement. Thus, personality traits affect teachers' mode of teaching and the approach they take to interact with their students in the classroom. Preliminary work in the teaching field has found associations between teachers' beliefs, attitudes and effectiveness in their interactions with students (Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008). Chu (2003) has also opined that personality traits affect a teacher's behaviour, attitude and classroom management as personality is central to behaviour, attitude and thinking. Cloninger (2000) defines personality traits as characteristics that distinguish one person from the other and cause a person

to behave more or less consistently. Keeping this in mind, it is noted that although all teachers are trained identically using the same methods and resources, they may not teach the same way, as their approaches could vary due to differences in individual personality traits.

Today, soft skills are essential for all employees, especially for fresh graduates. Currently, available literature refers to soft skills by different terms such as “process skills” (Woods, Felder, Rugarcia, & Stice, 2000), “social skills” (Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van der, 2008), “generic skills” (Hager, Holland & Beckett, 2002) and even “employability skills” (Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2009). All the above terms simply mean work readiness (Mason et al., 2009). Whatever terms are employed, the descriptions are similar and include communication skills, interpersonal skills, creative thinking, team work and numerous other essential skills (Pauw et al., 2008; Woods, et al., 2000). Teachers are no different; they too need soft skills other than the skills and knowledge that they acquired in the process of qualifying to teach. Furthermore, communication skills help teachers to improve their teaching skills (Cooper, 2013 and Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Good soft skills in the form of effective communication skills minimise any unwanted and unwarranted issues such as misunderstandings between TPs and their colleagues, students, superiors and parents, which may be a result of poor communication skills.

Since 2012, the Malaysian Education Ministry has taken proactive steps to improve the quality of teachers and to uphold the image of the teaching profession by introducing the open market for new graduates in the teaching profession. With the implementation of this system, graduate teachers from universities as well as those from teacher training institutes, will no longer be posted directly to government aided schools. In other words, graduate teachers with various specialisations are no longer assured that they will automatically be absorbed into the teaching profession after graduation. Instead, these trainee teachers will have to perform very well in their examinations to be considered for teaching posts. They will also have to go through a series of interviews and examinations where their soft skills will be tested before they can be considered for teaching posts. Furthermore, graduates from the teacher training institutes will have to compete for the same teaching posts with graduates from government aided universities, private universities, private colleges and also with those returning from foreign universities with teaching qualifications. As there are far too many graduates vying for the limited teaching posts in government aided schools, ultimately, the deciding factor may well be the candidates’ soft skills such as communication skills. Thus, the ability of the TPs’ communication skills, specifically uttering appropriate words and understanding other people correctly makes this a pragmatic study.

Quality Teachers

TESL TPs are expected to have a good mastery of the language and possess excellent communication skills for them to be considered as quality teachers (Maharana, 2013). Maharana added that English language teachers must be proficient in the language, have good interpersonal skills, effective body language and be able to

motivate. Given the emphasis on the need for soft skills for teachers, it can be seen that academic skills are not enough to ensure success in the working world. While hard skills are abilities required in performing functions such as developing and delivering services or products, soft skills are needed to facilitate, smoothen or even enhance the performance of the hard skills.

The attributes of quality teaching in the teaching profession are; (1) having up-to-date contents (Altan 1997), (2) being able to adapt those contents to various audiences and their learning styles (Eisner,1985), (3) timely delivery of those contents in a manner suited to the learners (Berliner,1987), (4) delivery of those contents in a non-threatening, receptive manner (Quay & Quaglia, 2004), and (5) motivating the learners to be proactive and “pull” the knowledge and skills from the teacher (Glasser, 1990; Altan, 1997; Beishuizen, Hof, van Putten, Bouwmeester, & Asscher, 2001).

While the first three attributes fall into hard skills category, the rest are clearly attributes of soft skills. The hard skills can be said to be significantly standardised and procedural, and can be consistent across a broad range of teachers. Standardised manuals have been produced for hard skill referencing whereas the soft skills attributes are dependent on initiative, attitude and behavioural skills of individual teachers and can vary widely among teachers. Diamond (2008) affirms soft skills as encompassing a cluster of personality traits, language abilities, values and attitudes. In other words, we can say that a set of values develops an attitude, and a set of attitudes in turn develops a personal habit or behaviour, and this set of behaviour coupled with language abilities form personality. This is further supported by Schulz (2008) who says that soft skills shape an individual’s personality.

However, effective communication skills are central to success, as the teacher engages in the learning process. In interpersonal communication, a teacher’s style of presentation (nonverbal), choice of words (verbal) and the ability to make the students understand the topic taught to them is very important. These skills will then largely determine between effective and non-effective delivery of teaching. It can therefore be concluded that communication skills form a significant part of our repertoire of teaching skills.

1.3 Statement of Problem

In the teaching profession class management, delivery of lessons and interaction with students are key communication skills (Saunders & Mills, 1999). Teachers with effective communication skills are able to work better as they have great impact on their job (Majid, Jelas, Azman, & Rahman, 2010). Of central concern in this study are communication skills among TPs.

Teachers have to communicate with different groups of people from different walks of life. In the context of teaching and learning in Malaysia, teachers have to take into consideration students’ different ethnicities and note that each race has its own

beliefs and cultural perception which may interfere with the learning and communication process. Teachers have to consciously choose their words properly so as not to be misunderstood. Therefore, it is clear that communication for teachers has a bigger function than mere exchange of words between two parties.

In addition, society at large looks up to TESL teachers to be proficient in English as they would have gone through rigorous training in the use of the language. These teachers are the point of reference for students in language matters. This study, therefore, seeks to establish their communicative ability through the use of speech acts. In relation to TESL teachers' English language proficiency, the appropriate use of speech acts are analysed to determine their relationship to communication skills. The ability to use the appropriate speech acts for the correct scenarios may be a challenge for TPs. Proper use of speech acts is fundamental as it provides clear meaning of the intended message that is being conveyed. Training of TPs is done vigorously but whether the TPs are appropriately trained to communicate in the English language is the concern of this study. Thus, the trainers or lecturers who train these TPs play a very important role, especially in their ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and nonverbally, as the trainers or lecturers are the benchmark and role models for the TPs. Therefore, having the right lecturers to guide these future teachers is essential as appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication skills show a positive relationship between educators and students (Williams, 2009). Educators, therefore, need to be more proficient when sending and receiving inputs (Negi, 2009). Similarly, TESL TPs need to be proficient in the language when communicating with different people from different power distance because the intended meaning may be compromised if the TPs are not able to deliver their message appropriately.

Thus, TPs need to use appropriate communication skills to reach out to communicate effectively with many groups of people. TESL TPs not only impart knowledge of the language but can also motivate all those around them. TPs need to use proper communication with different students as different students have different abilities and intellectual levels. Besides students, TPs need to communicate with their superiors, colleagues, friends, parents as well as officials who are from different power distance. This study looks at different power distances which may influence the use of speech acts. Thus, speech act performance among TPs is a concern and should be investigated to gauge their language ability and manner of expression in various interactions with different groups of people.

In assessing and addressing the issue of communication skills, there is also convincing evidence that such skills are also linked to and influenced by personality traits (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Joinson, 2004; Saunders & Chester, 2008). Taking this view into consideration, this study looks at the correlation between TPs' use of speech acts and their personality traits.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify TESL trainee practitioners' perception of their own communication skills and that of their TESL lecturers' communication skills, and vice versa.
2. To evaluate the TESL trainee practitioners' use of speech acts in situations of different power distance.
3. To identify TESL trainee practitioners' personality traits.
4. To determine the relationship between personality traits, speech acts and communication skills of the TESL trainee practitioners.

To achieve the above objectives, four research questions were formulated. Each research objective was matched with the research questions. The research questions would be the guideline in conducting this study. In addition to the research questions, a few sets of hypotheses were created for statistical verification as the approach taken was also quantitative.

In quantitative research, predictions or conjectures are made on the possible outcome(s) in a relationship among components or attributes (Creswell, 2012). Testable statements are called hypothesis. In this research, verbal and nonverbal communication skills are tested in relation to the variables, namely, personality traits and speech acts. This is to determine the relationship between personality traits and communication skills, and also between speech acts and communication skills. Speech acts, on the other hand, are not tested in the form of a hypothesis. This is because the data is collected through open ended questions where respondents have to write their responses before the results are scored to show their level of ability. Thus, only research questions one and three are supported by hypotheses to give clarity in achieving the objective of the study.

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study addresses the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: How do TESL trainee practitioners' perceive their own levels of communication skills and the levels of communication skills of their lecturers and vice versa?

Hypothesis 1

Alternate $\rightarrow H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (There are differences in the mean score of the TPs' verbal communication skills as assessed by the TPs themselves and by their lecturers.)

Hypothesis 2

Alternate $\rightarrow H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (There are differences in the mean score of the TPs' nonverbal communication skills as assessed by the TPs themselves and by their lecturers.)

Hypothesis 3

Alternate $\rightarrow H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (There are differences in the mean score of the lecturers' verbal communication skills as assessed by the lecturers themselves and by the TPs.)

Hypothesis 4

Alternate $\rightarrow H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (There are differences in the mean score of the lecturers' nonverbal communication skills as assessed by the lecturers themselves and by the TPs.)

Research question one is complex as it examines two distinct levels with the support of the hypotheses. This research question supports the first objective of this study. The first level of the research question refers to the TPs' self evaluation of their verbal and nonverbal skills. This is followed by TPs' evaluation of their lecturers' verbal and nonverbal communication. The second level covers the lecturers' self evaluation of their own verbal and nonverbal communication. This is followed by the lecturers' evaluation of the TPs verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The two levels will help provide a clear distinction between the level of communication possessed by the TPs and the lecturers. Since the TPs are the main participants of this study, it is important to obtain their self evaluation and their lecturers' evaluation of them. This will give an insight into their communication readiness. It is also deemed important to have the second stage of analysis which will provide an insight into those responsible for transferring the language and communication skills to the TPs. This will help to determine whether the TPs in their own perception are being trained by the right people. As the lecturers are the benchmark and the role models for the TPs, the language proficiency and communication ability of the lecturers will rub off on the TPs. Murray, Rushton and Paunonen (1990), in their study of college and university students, found that students' ratings of their lecturers have gained acceptance and that the students ratings can provide reliable and valid information. In addition it is also pertinent that the lecturers' evaluation of themselves and the TPs evaluation be analysed. This form of analysis is important to see whether the lecturers and the TPs view the lecturers' communication skills to be the same. This is to understand whether the lecturers have confidence in their own communication ability. This is important because lecturers who are confident with their communication ability can create and establish a proper learning environment.

RQ2. What is the level of appropriateness shown by the trainee practitioners when using the speech acts in different power distances?

RQ3. Which of the Big Five personality traits show relationship with the Trainee practitioners' communication skills?

Hypothesis 1

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between openness and verbal communication)

Hypothesis 2

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between agreeableness and verbal communication).

Hypothesis 3

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between conscientiousness and verbal communication)

Hypothesis 4

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between extraversion and verbal communication)

Hypothesis 5

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between neuroticism and verbal communication)

Hypothesis 6

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between openness and nonverbal communication)

Hypothesis 7

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between agreeableness and nonverbal communication).

Hypothesis 8

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between conscientiousness and nonverbal communication)

Hypothesis 9

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A$: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between extraversion and nonverbal communication)

Hypothesis 10

Alternate $\rightarrow H_A: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (There is a relationship between neuroticism and nonverbal communication)

RQ 4: Which of the two- personality traits and use of speech acts- has a stronger relationship with communication skills?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the body of knowledge that focuses on communication skills of TPs. Communication skills in teachers are vital as these skills prepare them to handle the many interactive situations they will encounter in their profession. TESL teachers need to be able to communicate well with their superiors, colleagues, students and parents. Problems arise when these teachers are not able to do this effectively in the English Language. This research hopes to shed some light on the current state of communication skills among TESL TPs so that educators become more aware of the importance of communication skills especially in relation to speech acts which are concrete manifestations of communicative events in the lives of teachers. This area of investigation, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been exhaustively researched. It is hoped that this study will also contribute specifically to the Malaysian ESL teacher training programme.

The research will also investigate the association between the TPs' personality traits and their communication skills. This study aims to establish whether there is a relationship between the type of personality traits the participants possess and their ability in the intended communication skills. Heineck and Anger, 2010; Mueller and Plug, 2006; Nyhus and Pons, 2005 in their empirical studies found that adult personalities are fixed. However, Cobb and Schurer, (2012); Matthews and Whiteman (2003) found that personality traits are stable instead of fixed during adulthood. The difference in the mean in their research however was found to be small. Hence, it is important to understand that TPs come into the training institutes with a fixed set of personality traits which Almlund et al. (2011) found to have developed earlier, influenced by their individual background and education. As these TPs come from all walks of life and they bring their own individual personality traits into the teaching profession which could either be fixed or stable. In the teaching environment, other than teachers' skills and knowledge, their personalities are also important elements. The practicality of this can be seen by comparing different teachers' personalities. If a teacher has openness as a trait, this would indicate that he or she is friendly and warm and therefore students would not feel intimidated or scared to approach such them. On the other hand, teachers who are angry, unfriendly or hot tempered may have a wall around them which may make it difficult for students to approach them, thus, leaving students unsatisfied in the process of obtaining knowledge. The teaching profession is very much associated with social and interpersonal skills which are part of communication skills (Murray, Rushton & Paunonen, 1990). Teachers' communication skills are the core essence of their job, thus, investigating elements or factors that show relationship to communication skills of teachers are significant in any study. Practically, communication skills whether

verbal or nonverbal, do affect everyone's action and reaction. Teachers' personality traits may influence the way they communicate with every member of the teaching fraternity. This is because the verbal drivers play a significant role in the reasons for communication between individuals and in this case, between TPs and all the other interlocutors who are connected to the teaching fraternity such as students, parents, principals and colleagues to name a few.

The study adopts the Big Five personality trait. The Big Five personality trait is widely used (Costa & McRea, 1992). The Big Five Inventory has 44 items and is suitable for this study as it covers the five dimensions of the Big Five. In addition, Langford (2003) supported the use of short instrument such as the BFI as it is reliable.

Other than personality traits, the study also investigates the relationship between the TPs use of speech acts and their communication skills. The study will examine whether in learning the English Language, the TPs are able to use the speech acts as part of communication skills appropriately. The results thus obtained, could give valuable information about specific strengths and weaknesses in speech act ability. For this study 12 speech acts were selected. These 12 speech acts were selected based on the researcher's own experience as a teacher, the relevance to the study, suggestions from expert teachers and on literature reviews. Further elaboration on the selection of speech acts can be read in section 3.5.

The outcome of the study will help decision-makers to arrive at better informed decisions on the communication skills' curriculum in teacher training programmes.

1.7 Scope

This study focuses on TESL TPs who are in their 3rd year of studies. The third year students are ideal for this study as they have completed their core subjects and are, therefore, ready to embark on their teaching career. The TESL TPs were selected from only four out of the 27 IPGs nationwide through convenient sampling. While the number is small and may not be considered as representative, the researcher holds the view that the institutions are not very different in approach as the curriculum is standard and the intake is centralised by the ministry.

TESL lecturers are also participants in this study. However, their participation is only limited to the communication skills questionnaire and not to personality traits and speech acts analysis. Their participation is to provide insights into their own communication skills as well as confirming the level of the TPs' communication skills.

This study looks at the relationship between the appropriate used of speech acts in communications skills. Only the TESL TPs are investigated for the use of their speech acts in communication. Although the TPs' are still undergoing training in

their respective institutes, they have already done their practicum in schools for two weeks in the first year, one month in the second year and two and a half months in their third year. These practicum sessions have given the TPs an insight into the real school environment where they would have been exposed to communication situations with different groups of interlocutors from the different power distances. These practicum sessions are just not limited to teaching and learning processes, but have also exposed the TPs to everyday situations that teachers would have to face, in their workplace. The experience gained from the practicum will help the TPs in responding to the DCTs. Consequently, this answers the second research question.

The personality traits investigated for this study are limited to the Big Five personality traits. The investigation of the personality traits is only for the TESL TPs. The purpose is to establish the relationship between the TESL TPs' personality traits and their communication skills. Specifically, it looks at which of the Big Five personality traits has any significant relationship with the TPs communication skills.

The study does not specifically look at whether the personality traits, speech acts and communication skills of the TPS influence the results or the pedagogical aspects of the students as this is beyond the scope of the study.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Some of the terms used in the study are defined to establish their relevance in the interpretation for the study.

Communication Skills - Communication skills underpin almost all personal, social, learning, and working activities. They are essential in clarifying one's thoughts in interacting and conversing effectively with others and in conveying information, feelings, and opinions (SQA, 2008). Communication skills of the participants are measured analytically through questionnaires.

Speech Acts –are communication utterances that have performative functions which include three aspects: 1) the real utterance and the intended meaning. 2) The intended meaning which is socially accepted. 3) The act of getting someone to realise or do something. Speech acts of the trainee practitioners (TPs) are analysed with the use of different power distances and different interlocutors (Austin, 1962). The words and phrases that are used by TPs to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a manner appropriate to the target interlocutors. Speech acts will typically differ when used with different interlocutors at different power distances. Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is used to assess the participants' appropriateness in the use of the speech acts.

Personality Trait - Inherent personality characteristics predispose an individual to interpret events in a particular manner which supports or hinders adaptive and psychologically healthy behaviours and interactions (Kokkinos, 2007). The Big Five

personality traits questionnaire is used to assess the personality traits of the participants.

Power Distance - The degree of inequality in power between a less powerful individual (I) and a more powerful other (O), in which I and O belong to the same (loosely or tightly knit) social system (Mulder, 1977). Power distance is used in the DCT to assess the participants' use of appropriate speech acts.

PISMP - Bachelor of Teaching English - TESL programme, locally known as "Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan Bahasa Inggeris" (PISMP-TESL).

Teacher Trainee Practitioners (TPs) - Students from the selected government teacher training institutes and who are currently in the sixth semester of their PISMP TESL programme. They would typically be between 22 to 24 years of age.

Verbal Communication – This is the oral transfer of information in the course of the teaching and learning process that is made up of two components; information and style. Verbal communication is investigated through the Communication Skills Questionnaire in this study.

Nonverbal Communication – This is usually the unconscious display of body language that manifests itself during the course of interactions. Nonverbal communication is investigated through the Communication Skills Questionnaire in this study.

Interlocutors – These are the three groups of people whom TPs' communicate mostly with in the course of their work.

DCT- For the purpose of this study, in the Transactional Model, the DCT is represented by the scenarios (Interlocutor A) while the written responses from the TPs represents Interlocutor B.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.2 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study showing the relationship between TPs' communication skills, personality traits and speech acts.

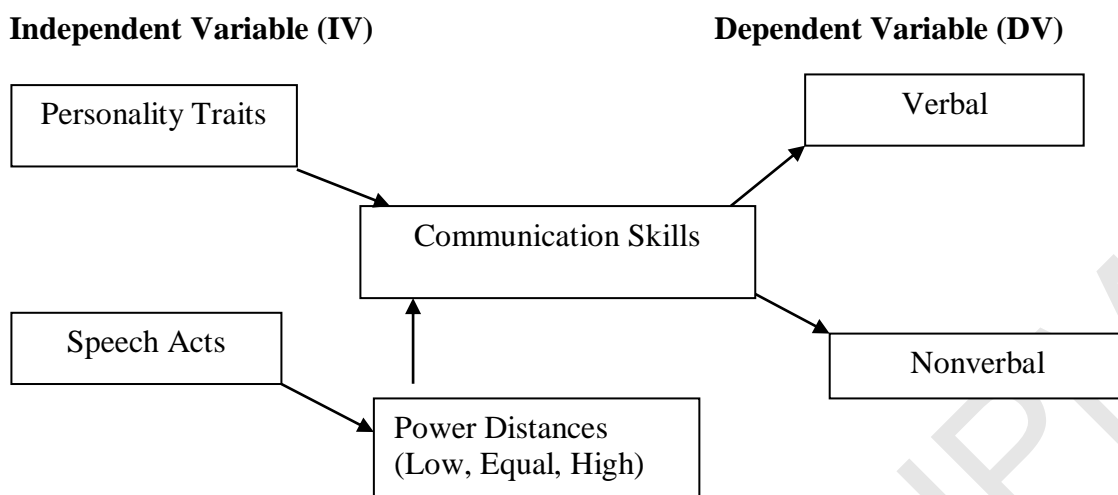


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The transactional model helps to explain the communicative act in general and provide the drivers and components which are then translated into a questionnaire survey on communication skills. The model also helps in giving the basis for speech act occurrence as messages are encoded by the initiating communicator in various communicative events. Embedded in the communicative acts is the power distance hierarchy which is a characteristic that affects the manifestation of the speech acts.

The other independent variable tested in this interactive communication model is personality traits. The personality traits in this study are tested to establish a relationship with the communication skills of the TPs. The personality traits used in this study are the Big Five. Both these independent variables are tested to find the relationship between them and the verbal and nonverbal communication skills of the TPs.

1.9.1 Models and Theories

Models and theories are the backbone of any research in helping to explain relevant concepts and variables that can be used in the research. Models and theories help to set the direction and momentum for any research. In this research, the dependent variable, which is communication skills, is derived from the transactional communication model. The Big Five Theory is used to evaluate the personality traits of the TPs. Of major significance is the Speech Act Theory. These models and theories are discussed further in the next section.

Though there are numerous theories and models, the selected theories and models are deemed to be suitable for this study. There is no single theory that dominates the language learning arena (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, pp. ix-x) as new theories develop from time to time and the act that language learning is diversified in different domains.

1.9.2 The Transactional Communication Model

The scope of communication is quite wide, encompassing a variety of elements, such as verbal, nonverbal, writing, and listening skills. For the purpose of this study we limit ourselves mainly to verbal communication and a small area of nonverbal communication which is tested only in the questionnaire. The challenges of this or any other form of communication lies in the sender and receiver understanding one another. This connection is crucial in any successful communication. Thus, as a measure of this success, this study investigates speech acts as a crucial element of communicative ability while the receivers are interpreted as being situated in varying degrees of power distance. Barnlund (1970) describes a model as a physical or symbolic relationship that is supposed to exist between the variables that are investigated. In this study, the transactional model is realised with Speaker A who is symbolically represented by the scenarios of the DCT while Speaker B is the TP. Hence, the transactional model combines with the speech act theory to investigate the variables in this study. However, the speech act events are limited to a written response based on a stimulus as a method of gathering data. The scenarios testing the speech acts take the place of the first communicator while the responses from the TPs represent the second communicator.

Teacher-student communication can be authoritarian, paternalistic, distant, uncaring or uninvolved, among others. Recent research demonstrates there is significant association between teacher-student communication (Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008). Irrespective of whatever it may be, an opportunity is necessary for both parties to communicate with one another frequently to facilitate understanding. The transactional model (Figure 1.1) allows for simultaneous communication that reflects more accurately the teacher-interlocutor environment (students, parents, friends, colleagues, principals and officers). In other words, the sender and the receiver interchange their roles (Businessstopia, 2016).

It is recognised in the theory that communication is a dynamic process (Barnlund, 1970), where all its elements are interdependent and humans have managed to perform this involuntarily most of the time. This model, unlike earlier models of communication, appreciates that changes take place among all communicators as well as observers and audience. It also recognises that each element of a communication is interdependent with other elements of the communication. There can be no message without a source and, for the source to function, there has to be a receiver. How the people involved in the communication, whether it is the source, receiver or audience, respond or react, will depend on other elements such as their background, previous experience, cultural beliefs, societal norms, self-esteem and, by extension, their personalities. In addition Businessstopia (2016) also found that communication is not only for exchanging messages but also to create and establish relationships in helping people within a community. Therefore, communication between the TPs and the interlocutor is not only for teaching and learning or just merely work related but it is also for social interaction. As such the communication between the TPs and the interlocutors can increase and establish their relationships.

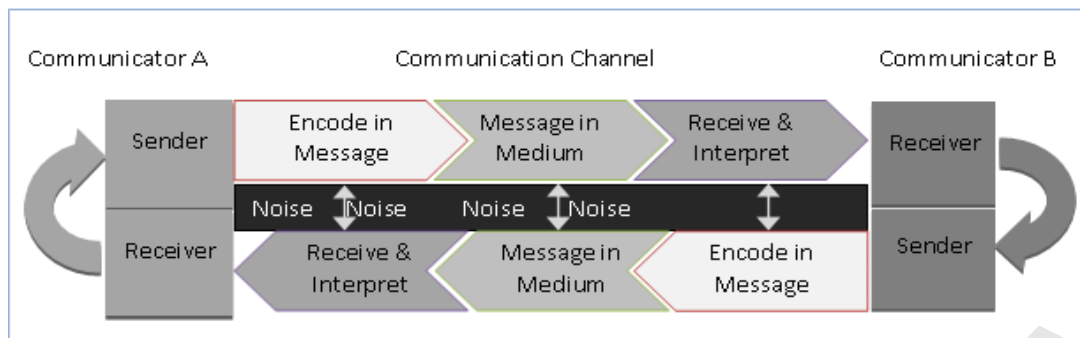


Figure 1.2: Transactional Model- Communication Model
(From Barndlund, 1970)

In this study, the communicators are the TPs and the interlocutors. They can send and receive messages simultaneously, acting as senders and receivers within the campus, hometown, family, society, etc. Noises in such forms as distractions, interruptions, bias or fear that could influence the communication are also given importance. Noise, which is relevant to the study, is interpreted as different levels of ability and power distance. It must also be appreciated that the message communicated by a sender is not necessarily understood in the same way by the receiver because of their different communication abilities and power relationship.

The transactional model provides an important basis to explain successful communication. This model includes verbal and nonverbal communication (Businessstopia, 2016), which is not found in some other communication model. It can be used to explain the teacher-interlocutor situation where both parties share information and data, driven by the need to bring about development and success in the interlocutors to understand the message well. The ‘drivers’ that enable the teachers to communicate to achieve message success could be their own motivation, the altruism they bring to the teaching environment, self-regulation in their role, interpersonal intelligence in their interactions with the interlocutors, the use of appropriate verbal linguistics, and personality traits. These are included in this study.

1.9.2.1 Verbal Drivers and Nonverbal Communication Categories

The verbal part of communication in this teacher-interlocutor environment is determined by the ‘drivers’: (1) motivation, (2) altruism, (3) self-regulation, (4) interpersonal intelligence, and (5) verbal linguistics. Since the performance of a teacher is largely determined by his or her verbal communication, these drivers are crucial for its effectiveness.

Accompanying the verbal communication are the nonverbal messages that are involuntarily displayed and communicated. There are people who consciously manage their nonverbal communications, often called body language, which complement the meaning of the verbal messages, though this is not the thrust of the study. In this research, we assume that the nonverbal component of the

communication takes place unconsciously and involuntarily; for this study, these have been categorised into (1) clothing, which is the major part of a person's attire, (2) posture, which shows control, energy and health, (3) gestures, that accentuate verbal communication, (4) facial expressions, that further emphasise verbal communications, (5) chronemics, that stresses on the importance of time in a relationship, (6) eye contact, that expresses confidence and honesty, (7) proxemics, that respects a person's privacy, (8) touching, to express empathy and closeness, and (9) paralanguage, to further add meaning to spoken words. Though there are many nonverbal categories, those selected for this study are relevant for teachers in performing their duties. Numerous studies have found positive relationships between teachers' nonverbal communication competencies and students' learning (Chesebro and McCroskey, 2001; Kelley and Gorham, 1998). To further strengthen the choice of these nonverbal categories, literature reviews have been used to support these categories (see section 2.8). These literature reviews have shown the relevance of these categories in a teaching profession. In addition, the researcher's experience in teaching also helped to determine the selection of these nonverbal categories.

The "drivers" chosen for this study are among the many existing "drivers" that determine the ESL teachers' need to communicate with different interlocutors. These "drivers" have been chosen based on the researchers experience and also from the recommendations of experienced ESL teachers. Further, it is supported by literature reviews. The nonverbal communication categories selected for this study are those that are frequently used in nonverbal studies. The categories have been applied here with the support of the literature reviews too. Identification of the drivers helps in the construction of the communication skills questionnaire that is administered to the lecturers and TPs to gauge their perception of their level of communication skills.

In this study communication skill is operationalised as the dependent variable through verbal and nonverbal communication. Communication skills are studied through the use of transactional communication model which in turn is tested through the use of the DCT which analyses TPs' use of speech acts in different power distances. In addition, communication skills are analysed through the use of the questionnaire. This questionnaire investigates the communication skills ability of the TPs and their lecturers.

1.9.3 Big Five Personality Traits Theory

The Big Five Personality Theory by Costa and McCrea's (1980) forms the first independent variable that covers a significant aspect of this study. All the five elements in the theory are applied in this study. The personalities of the TPs are classified according to this theory. It looks at the personalities of the TPs which are then correlated to their communication skills performance.

Openness is the first element in this theory. It refers to a teacher's intellectual curiosity, creativity and awareness of feelings. Poropat (2009) also added imaginativeness, broad-mindedness and artistic sensibility to the domain of

openness. This is related to what teachers are expected to be. Those with these traits are able to appreciate art and science and connect with students' feelings.

Conscientiousness is the next element and it is said to exhibit a tendency for self-discipline, to act dutifully and aim for achievement against measures or outside expectations. The trait shows a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behaviour. It influences the way in which we control, regulate and direct our impulses. Teachers with this trait are able to perform their jobs with a great deal of dedication, while being disciplined in performing their jobs.

Extraversion is characterised by positive emotions, a sense of urgency and the tendency to seek out stimulation in the company of others. Extroverts enjoy being with people and are often perceived as being full of energy. Teachers with this trait are able to enjoy their jobs positively. They enjoy being with their students.

The fourth element is *agreeableness*. Individuals with this characteristic have a tendency to be compassionate and co-operative rather than being suspicious and antagonistic towards others. This trait reflects preference for social harmony and individuals with this value get along well with others. They are generally considerate, friendly, generous, helpful and willing to compromise their interests for the benefit of others. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. Teachers with this trait are able to work well with their colleague and students to achieve their objectives. To sum up the above, John and Srivastava (1999) labelled agreeableness to be social adaptability, likability, friendly compliance, agreeableness, and love.

The final trait is *neuroticism*. Individuals with this trait have a tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety or depression. It is sometimes called emotional instability. Those who score high in neuroticism are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. Their negative emotional reactions tend to persist for unusually long periods of time, which means that they are often in a bad mood. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish the ability of such a person to think clearly, make rational decisions or cope effectively with stress. Teachers with these traits need to be identified early and assisted with appropriate support to overcome their neurotic tendencies.

All the traits in the theory help to identify the emotional make-up of teachers which may enhance or interfere in the effective performance of their duties. Investigating the domain of personality with regard to the Big Five model is pertinent. Thomason (2011) opined that the traits will help the education regulators to understand those who are attracted to the teaching profession. As such, this theory is found to be suitable for use in this study. The next theory applied in this study is the Speech Act Theory, which accounts for the use of speech acts as manifestations of communicative ability.

1.9.4 Speech Act Theory

This research looks at the context in which words are uttered during communication and how they contribute to meaning. The Speech Act Theory was first developed by J. L. Austin in 1962 and later elaborated by Searle in 1969. Generally, a speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication. According to The Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA, 2011) speech acts occur in our everyday interactions and require not only knowledge of the language but also the appropriate use of that language within a given context. The Speech Act Theory looks at the function of a sentence, the intended meaning and the perceived meaning, without focussing only on the grammatical aspects of the language (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). According to Searle, speech acts can be performed directly and indirectly. Direct speech acts refer to the performance of certain acts, in which the speaker means what he literally says, while indirect speech acts refer to performative acts in which the speaker means more or something other than what is uttered. Searle proposed that all speech acts, except explicit performatives, are indirect to some degree (Mofidi & Shoushtari, 2012).

Although TESL TPs are supposed to have a good proficiency level in English communication, the English language is still, undeniably, a second language for them. As a result, they may still face difficulties in performing speech acts appropriately. CARLA (2011) states that it is a natural tendency for language learners to fall back on what they know to be appropriate in their first language and transfer this to the second language. The Speech Act Theory enables the researcher to construct the communicative events and also to situate them according to power distance, as teachers will have to communicate with interlocutors in various power dimensions. The applied instrument is the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which will be explained later in the chapter on methodology.

The various relevant elements that impinge on this study are then captured in a conceptual framework which will help in the final design of this study for data management and collection.

1.10 Conclusion

In the past, societies were mostly concerned with acquiring hard skills which were needed for functional purposes with very little emphasis on soft skills. In the process, there was less emphasis given to the training of interactive or interpersonal skills. Industrialisation also fragmented work into small components for quick and easy assimilation, and application which also lessened the use of soft skills. The lack of soft skills is also evident in the field of education especially in the context of using English as a second language. Much has been said in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 about the need for good English communicative skills. English teachers need to be evaluated or monitored as they are the role models for the learning of communication skills. As such, this study is conceptualised to investigate the state of communication skills among the TESL TPs with reference to the use of speech acts when communicating with different interlocutors in different power

distances. In addition, the study seeks to relate the TPs' personality traits to their communication skills. It is hoped that the outcomes will enrich the collective knowledge on communication skills in the use of English language among the TESL TPs. It is also hoped that this study will contribute to the decision making process in the development of English language in Malaysia. The next chapter will review related literature to give further input in terms of theories, design and methodology applied in this study.



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Educational Background:

Abdul Rashid b. Abdul Sitra received his Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from University Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia in 1999. He received his Master of Business Administration (MBA) from University Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR), Malaysia in 2005. His MBA thesis focused on the competency of students involve in Co-curricular activities. He is a certified English language teacher in the Malaysian Education Ministry.

Experience:

Abdul Rashid b. Abdul Sitra was lecturing in a private college before he started teaching in SMK Taman Medan. He has been teaching high school students for the last 17 years. He has taught English to students and prepares them for their final high school leaving exam. He is also an examiner for the oral Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET) since it was first introduced in the early 2000. Over the last 10 years he has also taught English and soft skills subjects to undergraduates students in a university.

Publications:

Abdul Rashid b. Abdul Sitra has presented papers at international conferences. He has submitted two others to high indexed journals for publications.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Abdul Rashid, A.S, & Abdullah, A.N (2017). Personality traits and nonverbal communication skills of Malaysian TESL trainee practitioners. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 4(1), 12-24.

Papers Presented

Abdul Rashid, A. S, & Abdullah, A.N. (August, 2016). The Relationship between Malaysian TESL Trainee Teachers' Personality Traits and Their Verbal Communication Skills. Paper presented at 9th Malaysia International Conference On Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (MICOLLAC), Tanjung Bungah, Penang, MALAYSIA

Abdul Rashid A.S, & Abdullah, A.N. (March, 2016). The Relationship between Personality Traits and Nonverbal Communication Skills of TESL Trainee Practitioners in Malaysia. Paper presented at the 11th Malaysia International Conference on English Language Teaching (MICELT), Damai Laut Lumut, Perak, MALAYSIA.

Abdul Rashid A.S.; Abdullah, A.N & Chan, S.H. (March, 2015). Connecting Personality Traits to Communication Skills of TESL Trainee Practitioners in Malaysia. Paper presented at the 13th ASIA Teaching English as Foreign Language International Conference (ASIA TEFL), Nanjing, CHINA.

Abdul Rashid A.S., Abdullah, A.N & Chan, S.H. (May, 2013). Use of Soft Skills in Communication among TESL Trainee Practitioners. Paper presented at the 22nd International Conference of Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (MELTA), Persada, Johor Bahru, MALAYSIA.



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