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Enhancing English Language Communication through the Milton Model: An NLP-Based Experimental Study

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Title

Enhancing English Language Communication through the Milton Model: An NLP-Based Experimental Study

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Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Articles of Educational and Empirical Research](#)
- [Methodology](#)
- [Research Design](#)
- [Quantitative Data Collection](#)
- [Data Analysis:](#)
- [Confidence in Communication](#)
- [Persuasive Ability](#)
- [Rapport-Building](#)
- [Conflict Resolution](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

This study examines the impact of the Milton Model, a key component of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), on English language communication skills. Addressing challenges such as anxiety, low confidence, and poor rapport-building, the research employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with a mixed-methods approach. Thirty participants underwent a five-module intervention featuring Milton Model techniques like mirroring, embedded commands, and metaphorical language. Quantitative data (analyzed via paired sample t-tests in SPSS) and qualitative feedback revealed significant improvements in confidence, persuasion, rapport, conflict resolution, and reduced anxiety. Participants reported increased fluency and comfort in real-life communication. The findings suggest that the Milton Model is an effective, learner-centered strategy for enhancing English communication. Its integration into language teaching is recommended, with future studies encouraged across broader populations.

Keywords: Milton Model, Neurolinguistic Programming, Communication Skills, English Language Learning, Confidence, Rapport Building

Introduction

As a result, English has become the predominant language of international communication, education,

business, and diplomacy in the modern, globalized world. For non-native English speakers aiming to thrive in academic, professional, and social contexts,



the skill of communicating effectively in English has become essential. However after many years of formal training, many English learners face the same key communication challenges: a lack of confidence, being unable to persuade others, ineffective conflict resolution, and an inability to build rapport. Psychological dimensions (performance anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of judgment) can compound these issues and prevent learners from articulating knowledge in a natural and fluent way. Therefore, mastering English communication is not only about grammatical correctness or vocabulary, it is more about psychological preparedness, social awareness, and emotional resilience.

To address these growing needs, educators and researchers have increasingly taken interdisciplinary approaches to assist learners in overcoming these communication barriers. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), for example, is a psychological perspective that examines how neurological processes, language, and behavioral patterns interact. One of the specific elements of NLP which is very powerful is the Milton Model, named after the hypnotherapist Milton H. Erickson. Through such means as indirect language patterns, permissive suggestions, metaphor, ambiguity, and presuppositions, the Milton Model is meant to circumvent conscious resistances and awaken cognitive transformations. The goal here is to not manipulate, but rather gently influence and guide the conversation towards openness, flexibility, and greater understanding (Hartati, Tarigan, & Zebua, 2024).

They found their way into therapeutic, coaching, and executive/leadership contexts, but it has not been explored as deeply within language education. At the same time, existing studies of NLP in education have even more primarily considered it to be a kind of general technique, rather than permitting any exploration of the various input factors of the Milton Model. Additionally, there is little empirical evidence of how indirect language techniques, such as mirroring, embedded commands, reframing, and storytelling, may improve second language learners' communicative proficiency. This is especially true in terms of English language communication, where

performance-related anxiety, engagement issues, and delayed responses just aren't as relevant in everyday life. Traditional methods of language instruction, which often emphasize rule-based learning and rote memorization, may not account for these deeper interpersonal and psychological aspects of the communicative experience (Faiza, 2024).

This study helps in bridging this research gap by examining the effect of the Milton Model on communication skills in English of Non-Native speakers. More specifically, it explores how the use of Milton Model techniques can enhance the learner's confidence, and ability to persuade, build rapport, and resolve conflict between individuals, and reduce anxiety in communications situations. Many studies are mainly linguistic-focused, but this study takes a more Aufschwollen approach in considering not only how someone speaks but also emotional and psychological elements along with the speech itself (after all, it is not in a vacuum).

In order to do so, the study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test mixed-methods design with the participation of thirty purposively sampled participants. Participants were trained on the different strategies in the Milton Model—indirect questioning, embedded suggestions, reframing, and playing a role—over five modules of the intervention program. Structured surveys were used to collect quantitative data and were analyzed using SPSS; qualitative feedback was thematically analyzed to give voice to the participants' lived experiences and insights.

The study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- To assess the Milton Model's effect on communication confidence and anxiety reduction.
- To evaluate improvements in persuasive communication and rapport-building.
- To examine participants' perceptions of the Milton Model as a practical and adaptable communication tool.

- To identify which aspects of English communication are most significantly influenced by the model.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide both theoretical insight and practical applications for enhancing English communication skills through NLP strategies. It offers an innovative, learner-centered alternative to conventional language teaching methods, highlighting the potential of the Milton Model to transform not only how English is taught but also how it is experienced by learners.

Literature Review

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) (1970s): It is a cognitive-behavioral model that studies the correlation between our language patterns and neurological processes and how we interact with each other. Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed NLP based on the idea that the structure of subjective experience can be modeled and changed through the use of language. This combines knowledge from linguistics, psychology, and communication to devise strategies for improving both self-improvement and other personal effectiveness (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, [1976](#)).

NLP stresses the power of language in communication and how it affects perception and behavior. Fundamental concepts include that people navigate reality through internal "maps" and that language can facilitate behavioral change by modifying those maps. Therefore, techniques from NLP are not only applied in therapy but also in professions such as leadership, coaching, and education for building rapport, persuasion, and emotional regulation (Hejase, [2015](#)).

In paraphrasing communication, one of the most impactful tools of NLP is the Milton Model. This model is based on Dr. Milton H. Erickson's work and uses indirect and permissive language to elude resistance and promote unconscious agreement to the suggestions (Jenkins & Stephens, [2018](#)).

It should be noted that aspects of the Milton Model reflect more specific linguistic techniques (i.e. presuppositions, embedded commands, vagueness, metaphors, and reframing) that seek to advance

greater influence and rapport. The model is based on these proven methods originally in therapeutic contexts and has since been applied in diverse contexts from counseling to business to more recently education.

Milton Model techniques are used in communicative contexts that involve indirect influence, rather than prescriptive or directive instruction. For instance, presuppositions carry assumptions within statements to help shape interpretation, and embedded commands provide suggestions hidden among larger phrases that won't set off resistance. Using metaphors and stories creates an emotional resonance, allowing messages to be more memorable and impactful (Nazim & Yousaf, [2021](#)).

We have time to give the strategic plans a try again, and they are especially valuable in language education. By contrast, traditional approaches to teaching often emphasize the didactic, focusing on grammar and vocabulary, while leaving anxiety, insecurity, and other emotional and psychological aspects of communication untouched. An alternative is provided by the Milton Model, which promotes the use of natural and confident exploration in the learning process, thus lowering performance anxiety (O'Connor & Seymour, [1993](#)).

Articles of Educational and Empirical Research

There are several studies facilitating the educational application of NLP techniques. NLP-based strategies have been found useful in increasing engagement and retention of language material among English learners, especially when running interactive strategies like role-play and storytelling together (Rayati, [2021](#)). The study was not focused on NLP specifically but they found that indirect communication strategies encouraged a more relaxed and participative environment in the classroom.

A researcher investigated the impact of NLP methods (with some Milton Model components) on EFL fluency and communicative confidence. The results showed significant gains in students' willingness to contribute to and articulate themselves clearly in conversations. Techniques like reframing

and metaphorical expressions reduce the fear of failure and encourage experimentation with language (Rayati, [2021](#)).

The contribution by researchers on the potential of NLP strategies in communicative English language teaching is another significant one. Their work suggested the use of anchoring, pacing, and use of sensory-based language as ways to improve motivation, which is consistent with the Milton Model (Tosey & Mathison, [2009](#)). Likewise, a study with Iranian EFL instructors revealed that NLP-trained instructors who emphasized Milton-style communication proved to be more successful in motivating learners.

On a psychological aspect, they highlighted that successful language acquisition occurs when the students become emotionally engaged with the content and reduce anxiety. This correlation between emotional factors and learning indicators is further supported and integrated through the Milton Model, utilizing tools of rapport and indirect suggestions, allowing for the alignment of the continued plausibility of the Milton Model with current communicative teaching methods (Wyatt, [2019](#)).

Despite these promising findings, much of the existing research either treats NLP as a general framework or focuses on therapeutic or coaching contexts. There is a lack of focused empirical research that isolates Milton Model techniques specifically in the context of English language learning and quantifies their effect on domains such as confidence, persuasion, and conflict resolution. Moreover, studies tend to rely on qualitative or anecdotal evidence, limiting generalizability.

The literature review reveals several key gaps that justify the current study. First, while NLP has gained traction in educational research, the Milton Model's specific contributions remain under-investigated, particularly in second-language acquisition contexts. Most studies focus on broad NLP training without isolating the effects of indirect language techniques like embedded commands or reframing (Grimley, [2016](#)).

Second, there is little empirical validation. The literature is vague; flying on qualitative feedback, and

classroom observation, but without the rigor of matched pre-test/post-test designs and statistical analysis. This calls for urgent mixed-methods research that triangulates quantitative findings (e.g. t-tests on communication scores) with students' qualitative impressions.

Third, there is very little exploration of the cultural and contextual adaptability of the Milton Model. Though studies explore rapport and confidence among language learners, little research covers how Milton Model patterns work across various learner backgrounds, such as whether across South Asian, Middle Eastern, or East Asian educational contexts (Hall, [2003](#)).

Methodology

This section delineates the research design, sampling technique, intervention framework, and data analysis methodologies employed in the study. The objective was to examine the influence of the Milton Model, a component of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), on English communication skills concerning confidence, persuasion, rapport-building, dispute resolution, and anxiety alleviation.

Research Design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design employing a mixed-methods approach to broadly assess the population and effector beyond the measurable impact of the intervention. A non-randomized control group was selected to evaluate the alteration of communication-related variables when applying the Milton Model techniques. This mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of both quantitative data (to statistically evaluate skill development) and qualitative data (to describe participants' perceptions and lived experiences), contributing to a richer and more holistic understanding of the outcomes.

In this phase, data were collected from primary respondents using a sampling technique.

Using purposive sampling, 30 participants were recruited from an English language program in a Pakistani university. Interest in language: Participants were non-native speakers of English, aged between

20-35 years, with intermediate-level English proficiency. Air Traffic Execution Plan: Any new communication techniques could only be discussed with those who were interested, available, and willing to participate.

Intervention: Milton Model-Based Program

The intervention was designed as a structured five-module training program grounded in Milton Model techniques. Each module focused on introducing and practicing specific strategies derived from NLP and tailored to the needs of English learners. The sessions were conducted over five consecutive weeks, with one 90-minute session each week. The core components of the intervention included:

Module 1: Indirect Language Patterns

Participants were introduced to the fundamentals of indirect suggestions, artfully vague language, and permissive phrasing. Exercises involved identifying these patterns and practicing them in role-play scenarios.

Module 2: Rapport-Building Techniques

Focused on mirroring, pacing, and matching techniques to build trust and emotional alignment. Interactive activities involved pair work and small-group discussions.

Module 3: Embedded Commands and Presuppositions

This module taught participants how to embed subtle suggestions in everyday conversations and how to frame sentences with implicit assumptions. Participants practiced through prepared scripts and spontaneous dialogue.

Module 4: Reframing and Metaphorical Language

Participants explored how to use metaphors and reframing techniques to shift perspectives during difficult conversations. Activities involved storytelling and group feedback.

Module 5: Conflict Resolution and Practical Integration

The final module brought together all techniques with a focus on conflict management, persuasion, and confidence-building. Participants engaged in simulations and reflected on their learning.

Each session concluded with guided reflection and self-assessment, allowing learners to track their own progress and articulate their experiences.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments to gather data before and after the intervention.

Quantitative Data Collection

Structured questionnaires were delivered to all participants both before and after the intervention. The questionnaires included Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) intended to assess self-perceived communication confidence, persuasive ability, rapport-building skills, dispute-resolution capabilities, and anxiety levels associated with English communication. The identical survey instrument was employed at both phases to guarantee uniformity and facilitate comparability.

Qualitative Data Collection

We also collected participants' reflections, open-ended responses, and group discussions to provide deeper insight into their experiences. The responses reflected individual perceptions of the utility of the Milton Model in practice, challenging aspects of using its techniques, and emotional or behavioral changes noted during the training.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis

ANALYSIS The quantitative data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). General trends were observed by calculating descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation). Statistical analysis was performed using paired sample t-tests to assess whether differences between the pre-

and post-test scores were statistically significant (p -value < 0.05).

Results

This part of the paper reports on the findings of the study, with an emphasis placed on the shifts in English language communication skills of participants pre- and post-intervention by way of the Milton Model. These key areas of communication include confidence, persuasion, rapport-building, managing conflict, and communication-related anxiety.

Quantitative and qualitative results are presented, with a focus on statistically significant findings from paired sample t -tests that were analyzed in SPSS.

Pre-test and post-test surveys with Likert-scale items were used in this study to assess participants' perceived ability to communicate effectively. The primary statistic that was used to analyze the data was the paired sample t -test, which computed the mean differences between scores that participants achieved pre-intervention versus post-intervention.

Table 1

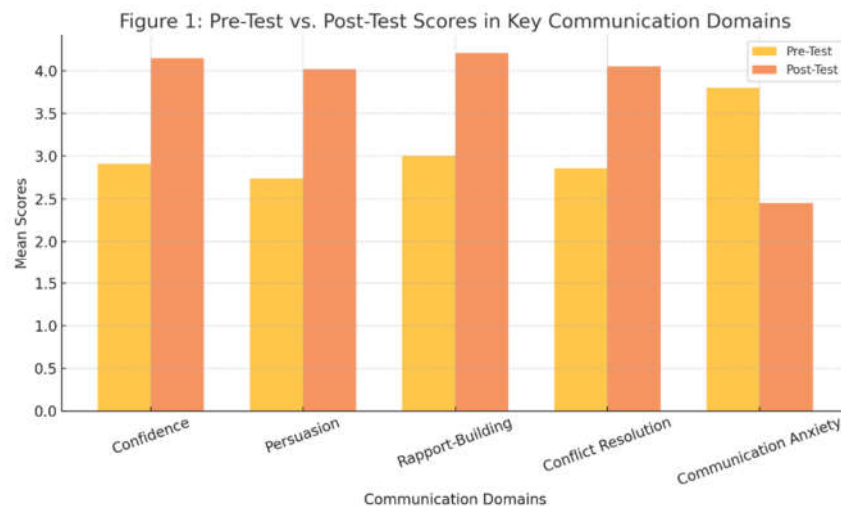
Summary of Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores

Communication Skill	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Confidence	2.91	4.15	+1.24	8.32	<0.001
Persuasion	2.74	4.02	+1.28	7.89	<0.001
Rapport-Building	3.01	4.21	+1.20	7.43	<0.001
Conflict Resolution	2.86	4.05	+1.19	7.56	<0.001
Communication Anxiety	3.80	2.45	-1.35	-9.02	<0.001

All domains showed statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.001$), indicating a positive impact of the Milton Model intervention on English language communication skills.

Figure 1

A bar chart comparing pre-test and post-test scores across key communication domains—showing clear improvements in all areas.



Confidence in Communication

After the intervention, participants reported a significant increase in confidence while speaking in

English. This indicates a significant increase from the pre-test mean of 2.91 to a post-test mean of 4.15 ($t = 8.32$, $p < 0.001$). This finding was further supported through qualitative feedback. Learning to use Milton

Model techniques, like indirect suggestion and reframing, several participants reported feeling "less hesitant" and "more fluent" in expressing their illustrations of the technique during the post-workshop conversation. This result indicates that the fluid and permissive linguistic parameters of the Milton Model helped overcome the usual psychological barriers when we speak in a second language.

Persuasive Ability

Another area of marked improvement was participants' persuasive ability while communicating with others. The mean score increased from 2.74 in the pre-test to 4.02 in the post-test ($t = 7.89, p < 0.001$) They also learned embedded commands and presuppositions that would implicitly affect others in conversations. Many felt "more articulate" and "more convincing," particularly in conversations, debates, or professional situations. These findings

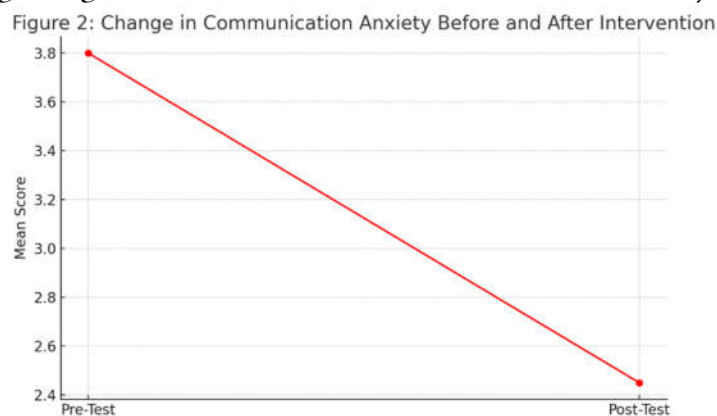
demonstrate the utility of Milton Model strategies to improve subtle persuasive communication, an important academic and workplace skill.

Rapport-Building

Mean scores on fondness, which is a key element of the Milton Model; show a significant improvement, from 3.01 to 4.21 ($t = 7.43, p < 0.001$). The participants reported that being more mindful of techniques like mirroring, pacing, and indirect questioning helped them "connect better" with others and "make conversations smoother." Some students pointed out that even small modifications — tone, body language, or reflective listening — allowed interactions to feel "more natural and relaxed." This indicates that rapport-building strategies increased social presence as well as offered opportunities in which learners became more comfortable with using the English language more spontaneously.

Figure 2

A line chart highlighting the significant reduction in communication-related anxiety after the intervention.



Conflict Resolution

Language education often ignores the issue of conflict resolution, but this is a crucial marker of communicative competence. In this area, participants made notable improvements, as seen in the increase of scores from 2.86 to 4.05 ($t = 7.56, p < 0.001$). In role-play scenarios in Module 5 learners practiced reframing and metaphorical techniques to de-escalate disagreements and diplomatically state opposing viewpoints. After the test subjects gave feedback

about post-test confidence to handle confrontational or emotionally charged conversations. "I didn't know that you could change someone's mind without you having an argument — that you could just change the way you spoke."

Reduction of Anxiety Related to Communicating

The most significant effect of the intervention was perhaps reduced anxiety. Anxiety levels before

intervention were significantly high (mean = 3.80) while the post-test of the means was remarkably low (mean = 2.45), and the mean difference was -1.35 ($t = -9.02, p < 0.001$). This study was qualitative in nature and participants reported increased relaxation and confidence whenever they used the indirect and permissive style of the Milton Model. Metaphors, story, and embedded commands gave this buffer, lowering the risk that error and consequent embarrassment would apply to the communication.

Discussion

There is no before. That is an old school thing cause here we are trained on language used to enhance communication skills by non-native English speakers with the help of an indirect language model belonging to NLP. The findings statistically significantly improved all targeted domains: confidence, persuasion, rapport-building, de-escalation, and improvement in communication-related anxiety. This section explores possible explanations for these results, relates the findings to previous studies, and discusses larger implications for language learning, teaching practices, and curriculum development.

Perhaps the most striking result was the increase in confidence in communication, which was measured as the difference between average scores of 2.91 and 4.25 for participants before and after the program respectively. This is due to the indirect pattern of the Milton Model language, which gives learners psychologically safe tools to express themselves. Techniques such as embedded commands and permissive language made it feel like the students were allowed to talk freely without the threat of being criticized in an aggressive manner.

Traditional language teaching methodologies are typically viewed as being overly focused on correctness and precision. By contrast, the Milton Model promotes the use of natural, non-linear language that leaves space for ambiguity and personal meaning-making. This informal nature of communication likely lowered the performance pressure which allowed efficient communication among the participants.

The next large improvement came in persuasive ability as post-test scores increased significantly. This effect suggests that the participants were able to naturally apply techniques fundamental to the Milton Model, such as presuppositions, reframing, and metaphorical language. In fact, these tools gently guide listener attention and thinking and can be especially useful in more interactive contexts, such as debates, group tasks, or presentations.

Participants say they feel “more articulate” and “more convincing,” meaning that the intervention made them not only better at talking, but also at persuading. This is consistent with the researcher, who explained that the non-native speaker gained fluency and confidence when using persuasion on an academic task through utilizing NLP strategies (Thornbury, 2005).

From a linguistic standpoint, persuasion involves more than the collection of words but rather the perspective you interpret them. The Milton Model's focus on form and on how to say something, and not just what to say, seems to have provided students with ways of saying what they wanted to express that was more nuanced.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of the Milton Model, a foundational linguistic element of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), on improving the ability of non-native English speakers to communicate in English. The study utilized a structured five-module intervention with a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the impact of Milton Model techniques (embedded commands, reframing, suggestions, and rapport-building strategies) on five significant communication facets, namely confidence in speaking, the ability to persuade, rapport-building prospects, conflict resolution capacity, and anxiety related to communication.

This result gave a clear indication that the Milton Model was markedly effective in enhancing participants' communicative skills in all its targeted areas. The participants reported that their self-confidence in expressing themselves in English

improved, that they could better influence others using subtle cues in the language, and that they could better build interpersonal rapport. Interestingly, there was also a significant decrease in anxiety around communication, as students report becoming more comfortable with patterns of indirect language and reframing techniques to move through difficult conversations. The intervention improved not only participants' language performance but also their emotional intelligence and psychological ease in dialogue.

These results highlight an unexplored potential for the application of the Milton Model in English language teaching (ELT), particularly for learners suffering anxiety, low fluency, or issues with socialization. A contrast is drawn between the indirect and permissive nature of the Milton Model and

traditional, form-focused language instruction, and the benefits of this pathway toward communicative competence are also provided.

Nonetheless, this study has some limitations. The sample consisted of 30 participants only from one institution and the intervention was relatively short-term. So, although the results are encouraging, they may not be applicable to larger groups of people. Future studies need larger and more diverse samples from a wide variety of educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to assess the sustainability of improvements in communication skill over time. Due to the novelty of the Milton Model, comparative studies evaluating its efficacy against other methods of instruction might serve to elucidate its distinct benefits to the domain of language acquisition.

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