



## ROLE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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### Abstract

Effective communication is vital for any business professional. Effective communication skills not only help to share ideas with others but they also foster good relationships among employees. Whether it is verbal or non-verbal communication both have equal importance. Therefore, keeping in mind the relevance of this subject for students, the present study was conducted. The study aimed to find management students' perceptions regarding the importance of business communication course. For this data was collected from 200 management students studying in both government as well as private institutions located in National Capital Region. The sample was selected using non-probability convenience sampling method. The research instrument used for the study included a questionnaire based on five-point Likert scale. The data was analyzed using SPSS ver. 23. The results of the study suggested that even though the students understood the importance of business communication course, they were still not making good use of it. They lacked in communication skills particularly in group activities like group discussion, role playing etc. One of the reasons for this is the usage of English in most of the business communication programs which is not the first language of the students. This shows that more concentration needs to be paid in these areas to help students improve their level of communication. This will help them in standing out at job interviews, business meetings, public speaking. Students should be encouraged to actively take part in all activities during business communication classes.

**Keywords:** *Communication skills, Management, Students*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 What Is Communication?

Communication can be both verbal or non-verbal as seen traditionally (Iksan *et al.*, 2012). However, based on a rapidly evolving field, people's understanding of communication suggests that it incorporates many different domains. These domains include face-to-face interactions (e.g. premium located meetings), digital literacy including, virtual environments for instance, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and ePortfolios, besides email, texting and social media. The protocols of communicating within each domain are different with regards to the spelling/grammar conventions, nomenclature, acceptable norms, intended audience, the texts used for specific communicative purposes, message length etc. Communication is "the act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules". The channel used for communication can be auditory, visual, tactile (such as in Braille) or haptic, kinesics, olfactory, electromagnetic, or biochemical. Because of its extensive use of abstract language, human communication is unique.

Since past many years, it has become extensively acceptable that the "lingua franca of international business is English" (Charles, 2007) with potentiality of communication driving dramatic changes in organizations alongwith their environments. In the present scenario, high significance has been assumed by business communication which is defined as communication used in conducting business (Reinsch and Shelby, 1996) has assumed. B-schools have materialized into hubs catering to communication requirements of the upcoming business elite in the basic principles of sustainable development. Still, there is difficulty in getting business students to take business education classes with seriousness as realized by most business communication instructors - thus concluding into the requirement of an effective business communication course, which challenges the students. In this scenario, it is of extreme importance to analyze how the management students perceive the course of business communication? What are the problems faced by the students? Do the skills of the students need to be improved? What is their present communication level? What are the benefits of studying business communication course?

## 1.2 Importance of Communication Skills

For the success of a student's future career, communication skills are indispensable. There is a demand for communication skills in today's competitive world of business and it is considered as the most sought-after quality of an educated person. The three most important communication skills for students are reading, writing and listening carefully. People take them for granted as these skills like most of the communication skills sounds too familiar. As regards reading and writing, the only thing that one needs to tackle is to adapt with one's concentration and increasing age. With these two characteristics, it is possible to develop writing skills, oral communication skills and reading (Khan, 2017).

Besides reading and writing presentations, speeches and reports are a part of curriculum in schools. For the overall development of students these activities have been introduced in schools and colleges. This makes managing skills and expressive skills also salient for a student. Attention needs to be given to the fact that students do not feel confident to make speeches and presentations. After comprehending the vitality of these skills in modern day life, many good schools have made it a part of their regular curriculum. Expressive skills are the ones which are used by people to express their thoughts, expressions and feelings, thus getting across their point successfully to the listener. For the development of expressive skills, students are required to learn how to get the complete attention of the listeners and communicate effectively. Next, for the success of the student, development of management skills is also important as management is an important part of a student's life. It is important to teach listening skills to a student. Besides normal conversation, listening skills should also be included in the classroom. Students should be taught the art of giving undivided attention to other person with whom a conversation is taking place. They should be taught the art of showing respect for the person who is speaking. Such etiquettes are a part of conversation in every sphere of life, either personal or professional. Group activities are the first step towards developing communication skills in students. Teachers should ask students to complete assignments in equally divided groups rather than just including group activities only in the classroom. Also, in order to increase the interaction among the students, teacher should continuously change the groups. In the long run this process helps a lot. The next step is the development of communication skills for students by putting in the habit of active listening. In order to achieve this, the teacher should continually read out articles from newspapers, magazines and other sources so that questions can be asked from that. Lastly, the teachers should make an effort to motivate students for active participation. By infusion of a healthy feeling of curiosity and competition in students, the development of communication skills will be possible among them (Khan, 2017).

## 2. Literature Review

The following literature has been reviewed to understand the importance of business communication skills in management courses.

Monks (1997) reported on writing skill development in University Business School (Dublin) particularly for first year students studying in undergraduate business courses. The author studied in detail the students' understanding of library information system, how they improve their writing skills through assignments and how they evaluate their own work. The author described a study module which was developed long ago and introduces students to both academic and business writing. Aly and Islam (2003) provided empirical evidence for level of communication apprehension in accounting programs. The study was conducted on two groups: those who were exiting the program and those who were entering the program. The results of the study showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups. This raised questions on the quality of the accounting program in removing communication apprehension. Arruda (2003) studied consultancy services and various web sites that discuss job seeking and career development. Within the self-help management movement, the phenomenon of personal branding has grown in parallel with self-marketing. Personal branding focuses on how an individual's sets of skills, motivations and interests are arranged, crystallised and labelled – i.e. branded – and offers a programmatic set of strategies for individuals to improve their chances at business success. Smith (2005) in his research stressed on the fact that communication skills are utmost important for succeeding as well as advancing in the complex and constantly changing international global market place. In practically every situation they encounter, auditors make use of communication skills. Nowadays with change in technology, auditors are becoming not just number crunchers but business partners. In order to make informed business decisions, auditors provide audits with information. Auditors must explain audit finding to various levels of audits and management in a way that creates an understanding of the subject. Knowles and Hensher (2005) emphasized that "the business education industry is in the midst of a war between two great powers: the market forces which are facilitating the widespread adoption of a customer-based approach to education and intransigent academics, determined to maintain professionalism in business education through a focus on research aimed at meeting the needs of a broad range of stakeholders, both now and in the future". It is always an essential aspect of professional skill to apply critical analysis in decision making through scientific approach from the given problem or issue. Challenges on the MBA curriculum design and development are essential part of innovation in integrating more practical approach in delivering instruction towards the achievement of student outcomes relevant to the needs of the global market. Belasen (2007) described two important cycles of criticism initiated by business schools for management education and subsequent responses in program delivery and curricular design. The initial cycle (1985-1995) weighed primarily on the lack of

accountability and relevance in management education. The second cycle (1995-2005) focused on the argument that for the most part MBA graduates were not well prepared to deal with multi-layered, complex issues faced by managers in global markets and that the practice of management is fundamentally "soft". The article described an architecture of a new MBA built from the basics in response to the first cycle of criticism and then it was redesigned in response to the second set of criticisms. Improvement of products and services may start indirectly from the academe where students are trained and taught to be more knowledgeable as well as skillful workers and professionals after graduation. Therefore, a holistic student development program must be formulated based on the employability and skills of the graduates to ensure that the program educational objectives and student outcomes of the MBA program would be evident among the students. Beals (2008) suggested that self-marketing may bestow students with a set of competitive tools and skills that can be utilized not only upon graduating or when applying for employment but also throughout a lifetime of career changes and business arrangements which are expanding. As a result, during the past two decades, self-marketing has become a widely popular subject in self-help. Agarwal and Chintrashi (2009) conducted an empirical study of faculty's perception of the business communication needs of students. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 93 faculty members of AICTE approved management institutions. The goal of the study was to reorient the academic system according to the findings of the study. It was found that the skills which were of more importance were less on the possession scale whereas the skills which were considered to be comparatively less important by the faculty were high on the possession scale. Ihmeideh *et al.* (2010) used the communication skill attitude scale (CSAS) to determine the positive and negative attitude of teachers in Jordanian public universities. The findings of the study showed that the mean of positive attitude was quite high as compared to negative attitude. Students with grade points above two had positive attitude towards communication skills as compared to students with grade points less than two. Senior students had higher positive attitude compared to sophomore and junior students. Abbasi *et al.* (2011) established the importance of communication skills for the development of entrepreneurial skills as well as education. Thus, setting a place in market and helping an entrepreneur in development of relations with his community. People often neglect the significance of the four communication skills that should be developed in any entrepreneurial setting, without effective communication between individuals it is difficult to accomplish the basic need for interaction. These skills are already present in individuals but it depends upon their own volition that what they make of these skills. A right amount of confidence is needed when each skill is used so that one can smoothly sail the flow of business. The way they convey their message and the way they communicate are the most important traits of the entrepreneurially-minded business students. So, to achieve this objective majority of the universities will have to work for developing better communication skills which will act as the base for the entrepreneurial skills. Evans and Cable (2011) said in their study that the proof of improving communication skills of students can be gathered from a variety of research methods which included: self-reporting of perceptions by students and staff (including both language-teaching and accounting staff); experimentation; analysing of writing skills using established diagnostic tests and readability indexes, as well as the expertise of language specialists; and the use of data available in the form of examination results. The strongest evidence came from programs when English language specialists worked in union with discipline-content specialists in an integrated approach – either single-subject programs or broader approaches across subjects and including single-year programs or those spanning a number of years. Hopkins *et al.* (2011) emphasized that personal branding had been practiced for decades by movie, sports and pop stars and has been taken up by a large number of leaders in politics and business. Branding, as such, is not a new concept or set of practices, but its use by persons transiting within the labour market or entering into it is relatively new. Thus far, it is surprising that more of this interest in self-marketing brand skills has not affected the discipline of marketing in terms of academic curricula or formal research, especially outside the UK and the USA. Some academic studies have focused on the substance-related skills needed by business and marketing majors and by MBA students prior to entering the work force. Hassall *et al.* (2013) established a link between communication self-efficacy and communication apprehension (CA) in accounting students. The authors used statistical tests in identification of the connection between the two concepts and indicated the existence of a strong relationship. This strong relationship was identified not only in the overall relationship between self-efficacy and CA but was found to be as strong in their constituent components. The actuality of this relationship is vital due to the possible development provided by it in terms of understanding the potential for redirecting efforts to alleviating and removing the barrier with ultimately leading to the development of communication skills. Heide and Simonsson (2014) examined the practices and roles of communication professionals in relation to internal aspects of crisis communication. The impudence and value of communication professionals becomes evident. But did it necessarily mean that crises were situations when communication professionals worked strategically and practiced managerial roles? The study indicated that this was not the case – especially when it came to internal communication. Hedman and Valo (2015) explored the communication challenges experienced by management teams (MTs) and suggested ideas for developing competent communication practices. Most of the communication challenges faced by MTs were related to the teams' meetings, where issues of participation, decision making and leadership were well intensified. The meetings were experienced as formal communication forums, where MT members did not always express their true opinions either because they were unable to do so or because other members of the team prevented it. Informal communication played a pivotal role in facilitating competent communication practices and trust. Ohnishi and Ford

(2015) revealed the way in which there was enhancement in the students' academic presentation skills and the limitations to improving it with or without the influences of students' language backgrounds. It was intriguing that Australian students improved from the second presentation onwards, while international students started improving later (from the third presentation). The delay in improvement of international students might be due to the process of student acculturation. While host-nation students may possess much of the cultural and academic knowledge advantageous within a particular university environment, international students encounter new cultures both in daily life and academic environments. McBain *et al.* (2016) researched the observances of tertiary students learning oral presentation skills from a wide variety of online and blended learning contexts across varied disciplines. It is this diversity of student experience which the instructors must consider if they are to support as many students in the overall cohort as possible in their learning. Understanding the fundamental aspects of what students think hinders or facilitates their learning means that the instructors are able to make multiple adjustments in their online teaching which address a range of both real and perceived issues. Oussi and Klibi (2017) examine the business communication skills that accounting students see as having the highest importance for career success. The authors used a questionnaire sent to 180 students from three business schools to provide insights into the development of communication skills perceived important for a successful accounting career. The results indicate that all students were aware of the significance held by communication skills for a successful career in the accounting profession. However, they feel that their aptitudes are sometimes poorly developed, especially when it comes to proficiency in French (as a language of business in Tunisia) and written skills.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze management students' perceptions regarding the importance of business communication course.
- To evaluate management students' perceptions regarding their communication skill level.
- To identify the reasons behind students not taking the required interest in communication classes.
- To suggest possible solutions to improve the communication skills of the management students.

### 4. Research Methodology

**Descriptive Research:** In it those studies are taken which are concerned with describing the characteristics of particular individual or a group. Descriptive research is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. In the present study descriptive research design was used.

#### 4.1 Sample Design

- 1) **Sample Area:** Management institutions of National Capital Region
- 2) **Sampling unit:** Single management student
- 3) **Sample Size:** 200 (100 students from Government management institutions and 100 students from Private management institutions)
- 4) **Sample Technique:** Non- probability sampling technique

#### 4.2 Data Collection Method

Primary and secondary methods **were used for data collection.**

**Primary data:** It refers to the data that is collected first hand by an individual specifically for the purpose of facilitating the study is known as primary data. So, in this research the data was collected directly from the respondents through structured questionnaire.

**Secondary data:** Secondary data is the data that is readily available from other sources and has been already collected by someone is called secondary data. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data and also may be available when primary data cannot be obtained at all.

#### 4.3 Research Instrument

Structured questionnaire was used as a research instrument for collecting the primary data.

#### 4.4 Analysis pattern

For the analysis mean and standard deviation were used along with other appropriate statistical tools.

### 5. Analysis and Interpretation

The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha which measures internal consistency of the items. In the current research, alpha coefficient was .791 (greater than the cut off value of 0.70) indicating good consistency among the items of the construct.



Statements	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
I focus on key point message at the beginning	2.65	.095	1.347
I consider oral communication important	2.84	.100	1.409
I give importance to the body language while I speak	2.50	.091	1.280
I try to hold the attention of audience while I speak	2.39	.096	1.355
Pitch variation is important to send my point across the audience	2.61	.089	1.263
At the time of presentation, I make sure that last row backbencher should hear my voice	2.81	.099	1.394
I speak at comfort level whether it involves write-up or not	2.80	.099	1.405
Beginning line and finishing line are important	2.62	.089	1.254
I start with light interest mode of conversation	2.67	.087	1.228
I have the ability to speak with competence and confidence	2.66	.089	1.265
I present a well-organized dynamic speech	2.58	.089	1.261
Business communication course is important in development of communication skills	2.51	.087	1.236
Business communication course enhances skills for participation in seminars	2.45	.092	1.302
Business communication course helps in development of public speaking skills	2.49	.075	1.056
Business communication course is important for career development	2.39	.089	1.255
I am able to participate in group discussion	2.41	.062	.880
Participating in a speaking oriented program helps to improve my oral communication	2.64	.076	1.080
Business communication course is a wastage of time	2.48	.073	1.032
Learning business communication skills requires too much effort	2.66	.075	1.067
Participating in group discussions leads to arguments	2.42	.075	1.058
Business communication class causes distraction in classroom	1.96	.070	.989
Students with poor communication skills may feel shy to come forward for presentations	2.01	.073	1.032
Classroom discussion creates too much noise causing disturbance	2.34	.082	1.162
There is too much pressure when students have to give presentations	2.44	.089	1.259
Total	2.51	.085	1.203

Source: Survey by authors

From table 1 it can be seen that the value of overall mean is 2.51 which suggests that the students are generally in disagreement of most of the statements. While in certain statements the disagreement showed positive responses in others it was highly disturbing. For example, the mean value of the statement that Business communication course is important in development of communication skills was 2.51 which suggests that students don't think positively about these courses. On the other hand, the disagreement towards the statement that business communication course is a wastage of time shows some amount of positivity that the students are learning something that is why they don't consider this course a complete waste of time.

The table also shows the weak points of students like lack of confidence in speaking publicly, ability to hold the audience's attention and feeling shy while giving presentations. The other problem that was highlighted included causing of disturbance while performing different activities in business communication classes.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, some contradiction existed between the perceived importance of communication skills for management students and the possession of these skills by them. The skills which were thought to be more important were possessed less by the students. In consistency with previous research (Pittenger, Miller and Allison, 2006) it was found that possession of written communication skills was lower than the possession of same components in the oral skills. Students were weak in possession of written skills as can be concluded from studies based on students across the globe, in India as well as abroad. In spite of the fact that most of the delivery of the business communication course is pre-dominated by written skills alone. In order to understand this fact and act accordingly there is a need to further conduct such studies.

The study also identified that the business management students feel that instead of teaching the course in just one semester, the course of business communication should be taught in either two or four semesters in Business Schools. Students also proposed that the business communication classes were not taken very seriously by them and the most important reasons for it as felt by them were that it takes a lot of time in improving communication skills

and that it is more important for students to concentrate upon their other classes. Some of the other very important reasons that emerged were that the business communication classes often transformed into English speaking classes in most B-schools and the course failed to appropriately challenge the heterogeneous batch of students. They lacked in communication skills particularly in group activities like group discussion, role playing etc. This appears to be a very significant feedback for the business communication course instructors across B-schools.

## 7. Suggestions

The following suggestions need to be implemented in order to improve communication skills among management students:

1. Students should actively take part in all activities during business communication classes.
2. Teachers should pay more attention to students who are shy and feel less confident.
3. Group activities should be organized so that the student learns to coordinate and cooperate with others.
4. Attention should be paid to oral communication as it is the first point of communication.

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