

Communication Skills among Business Undergraduate Students: Evidence from Vietnamese Students

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ABSTRACT Communication skills are one of the components of university students' standard skills. Over the years they have spent at universities, students must use their communication skills in and outside of lecture halls. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the level of communication skills among Vietnamese business undergraduate students. A group of 390 Vietnamese business undergraduate students (275 females and 115 males) from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, participated in the survey. They completed a self-administered questionnaire and it assessed ten elements in communication skills. The results showed that the level of students' communication skills has not high, most students have communication skills at the ordinary level, and this has not yet met the requirements for future study and career. The result of this research emphasizes that in order to improve students' communication skills; they must impact all skill groups simultaneously.

INTRODUCTION

In the past several centuries, communication has been a complicated problem and the condition for survival and social development. Communication is the process of exchanging information between people in different ways to achieve a certain purpose. According to Seiler and Beall (2005), communication has also been defined as sharing and giving meaning occurring at the same time through symbolic interactions. Communication is conducted through linguistic communication systems (speech and writing) and non-verbal communication (facial expressions, voice, gestures, postures, etc.). Overall, communication is considered as people's specific activity and necessary when building relationships, sharing ideas, delegating responsibilities, managing a team and much more.

Communication skill is one of the elements of generic skills that are essential among university students (Iksan et al. 2012). Communication skill is the ability to quickly identify external manifes-

tations and predict the inner psychology of people (as the object of communication) and to use linguistic and nonverbal, know how to adjust the communication process to achieve a defined purpose. Communication skills are components of generic skills that have been identified as a focus at the universities (Malaysia 2006). In our globalized world, university students need to master communication skills in different cultural contexts (Penbek et al. 2009). In a comparison of two studies that investigated the importance of specific qualifications to recruiters of business graduates, communication skills increased from not being in the top five skills in 1975 to the top-ranking competency in 1983 (Buckley et al. 1989).

Moreover, it can be said that communication skills are extremely important to all students, especially business students. Regardless of specialty, employers of business graduates rank communication skills highly (Atkins and Kent 1988; Kane 1993; Maes et al. 1997). In a survey of employers of business graduates in the Gulf Coast area, Weldy and Icenogle (1997) reported that 354 managers judged communication skills to be the most important competency for new graduates entering the workforce. According to Hassall et al. (2000), UK employers have identified the possession of communication skills as one of the key considerations in deciding whether or

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not to employ a graduate. Besides, employers identify communication as one of the basic competencies every graduate should have, asserting that the ability to communicate is valuable for obtaining employment and maintaining successful job performance (Morreale et al. 2000). Previous research on communication skills among university students has been reported by Ihmeideh et al. (2010) and Cleland et al. (2005). They found that a positive communication environment provides opportunities for students to learn how to communicate, and thus, have better communication skills. Therefore, university students need to have opportunities to develop all skills, especially communication skills comprehensively.

In general, there have been many research topics on communication and communication skills of students, but all the subjects were researched on the object of students of education, military, technology. However, there has not been any scientific research topic on the communication skills of business students, especially, finance and marketing. For the University of Finance – Marketing, Vietnam, there has not been any scientific research topic on communication, communication skills or communication behavior of undergraduate students.

Aims and Objectives

The researchers' aim was conducted to explore the students' communication skills among business Vietnamese undergraduate students and to clarify the theoretical basis and the status of communication skills of Vietnamese students in general and students of the University of Finance – Marketing, Vietnam.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit students who volunteered to help with the study and administer the survey. The survey instrument was distributed to 420 Vietnamese students of the University of Finance – Marketing of which 390 questionnaires were returned, for a 92.9 percent return rate, which exceeds the 30 percent response rate most researchers require for analysis (Dillman 2000). The sample of this

study was drawn from 390 respondents who completed the survey instrument. There were more females (70.5%) than males (29.5%) among the 390 Vietnamese students who were surveyed. Of these, 137 (35.1%) freshmen, 134 (34.4%) sophomores, 85 (21.8%) juniors, and 34 (8.7%) seniors. 247 of these students were in business, 126 were in finance and 17 were in others. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants.

Table 1: An overview of survey participants

		<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	115	29.5
	Female	275	70.5
<i>School Year</i>	Freshman	137	35.1
	Sophomore	134	34.4
	Junior	85	21.8
	Senior	34	8.7
<i>Major</i>	Business	247	63.3
	Finance	126	32.3
	Others	17	4.4

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage

Measure

Questionnaires are designed to survey on Vietnamese students of the University of Finance – Marketing, Vietnam. At first, social-demographic items were introduced in the questionnaire. Then, Students' communication skills among business Vietnamese undergraduate students of participants were measured by a total of 10 items. All participants were instructed to read the questionnaire questions carefully and choose the responses that best described themselves. The responses of the participants were provided at 3 different levels based on a 3-point Likert scale (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011).

Analyses

All participants were provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. The Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 was used for data analyses. Scoring methods: Methods of scoring and summing test results. Each skill consists of 8 questions. Each question has 3 situations for scoring: 0, 1, 2.

0 point: No sign of the corresponding capacity
1 point: The capacity does not appear regularly

2 points: Corresponding capacity is frequently expressed in many cases.

The highest “ideal” theoretical score to be achieved is 16. The lowest possible score is 0. Based on the rules of processing the results as specified in the test, we conventionally rank each communication skills of students into 4 levels.

Very good level: 14 – 16

Good level: 11 – 13

Ordinary level: 8 – 10

Weak level: 0 – 7

Ten specific skills are divided into four groups: The point to identify the skills that play the positive and active role in communication (Group A) is the total score of self-control and checking others skills (skill 5); persuading skills for communicating objects (skill 8) and active skills, controlling communication process (skill 9). The point of determining the skills that show passivity in communication (Group B) is the sum of the points of listening skills objects of communication (skill 3) and the sensitivity in communication (skill 10). The point to identify the skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance (Group C) is the total number of points of contact skills, establishing relationships (skill 1); knowing how to balance personal and object needs during con-

tact (skill 2); skills of emotional and behavioral self-control (skill 4) and flexible skills, flexibility in communication (skill 7). The score for specific expression skills (Group D) is the total number of plain and easygoing express skills (skill 6).

First, descriptive statistics were calculated as a preliminary analysis. Second, a Pearson correlation was conducted to evaluate correlations between skill groups in communication. We used a statistical threshold of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The participants scored in the average range on the questionnaire. The mean score for the sample on the expression level of communication skills of the University of Finance – Marketing ‘s undergraduate students was 9.41. Mean, percentage values about these variables are shown in Table 2.

Among the ten items of the expression level of communication skills of University of Finance – Marketing’s undergraduate students, the top five indicators, listed from the highest to the lowest average point, are as below: Self-restraint skills, checking others (10.89), Flexible skills, flexibility in communication (10.54), Plain and easy-

Table 2: The expression level of communication skills of business undergraduate students

		<i>Level</i>				<i>M</i>	<i>Order</i>
		<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Ordinary</i>	<i>Weak/Poor</i>		
Contacting skills, establishing relationships	n	2	52	219	117	8.41	9
	%	0.5	13.3	56.2	30		
Knowing how to balance personal and object needs during contact	n	1	68	215	106	8.65	8
	%	0.3	17.4	55.1	27.2		
Listening skills objects of communication	n	10	98	211	71	9.37	5
	%	2.6	25.1	54.1	18.2		
Skills of emotional and behavioural self-control	n	2	46	183	159	8.04	10
	%	0.5	11.8	46.9	40.8		
Self-control and checking others skills	n	40	192	135	23	10.89	1
	%	10.3	49.2	34.6	5.9		
Plain and easygoing express skills	n	19	169	189	13	10.48	3
	%	4.9	43.3	48.5	3.3		
Flexible skills, flexibility in communication	n	19	183	168	20	10.54	2
	%	4.9	46.9	43.1	5.1		
Persuading skills for communicating objects	n	9	67	211	103	8.73	7
	%	2.3	17.2	54.1	26.4		
Active skills, controlling communication process	n	6	75	209	100	8.83	6
	%	1.5	19.2	53.6	25.6		
Sensitivity in communication	n	21	146	190	33	10.12	4
	%	5.4	37.4	48.7	8.5		
Total						9.41	

n: Number of participants; %: Percentage; M: Mean

going express skills (10.48), Sensitivity in communication (10.12), Listening skills objects of communication (9.37). The five indicators with the lowest average point are as below: Skills of emotional and behavioral self-control (8.04), Contacting skills, establish relationships (8.41), Knowing how to balance personal and objects needs during contact (8.65), Persuading skills for communicating objects (8.73), Active skills, controlling communication process (8.83).

Table 3: The correlations between skill groups in communication

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
Positiveness (A)	1.000			
Passivity (B)	.365**	1.000		
Adjustment (C)	.398**	.500**	1.000	
Expression (D)	.370**	.344**	.268**	1.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlations between groups. Pearson correlation coefficients demonstrated significantly strong positive correlations ($p > 0.05$) between skills show passivity in communication (B) and skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance (C) ($r = .500$, $p < .01$); and Specific expression skills (D) ($r = .344$, $p < .05$) (Krehbiel, 2004). The strongest correlation is between skills show passivity in communication (B) and skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance (C) ($r = .500$, $p < .01$). There was a positive correlation between skills play the positive and active role in communication (A) and skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance (C) ($r = .398$, $p < .05$); and specific expression skills (D) ($r = .370$, $p < .05$); and skills show passivity in communication (B) ($r = .365$, $p < .05$). There was a weak positive correlation between skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance (C) and specific expression skills (D) ($r = .268$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

The research examined the correlations between four groups of communication skills of the University of Finance – Marketing's undergraduate students. The main findings indicate that there was a positive relationship between four groups, especially, a positive and close relation-

ship between skills that show passivity in communication and skills adjust communication appropriateness and balance. This is a crucial conclusion for further upcoming researches regarding improving communication skills among business Vietnamese undergraduate students that need to be conducted as soon as possible with high efficiency.

This study reported that the level of students' communication skills has not high. This is not consistent with what has been found in the previous study that university students have achieved good communication skills (Iksan et al. 2012). Most students have communication skills at the ordinary level, and this has not yet met the requirements for future study and career. The highest average point is Self-control and checking other skills and the lowest is Skills of emotional and behavioral self-control. Students' cultural communication behaviors of University of Finance – Marketing are mostly positive ones, suitable to the school environment. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of students still do not have the skills of emotional and behavioral self-control leads to some negative communication behaviors. In summary, the survey of students' communication skills among business Vietnamese undergraduate students showed that: According to gender, the communication skills of students achieved at the ordinary level, in men and women almost not the difference. With the school year, juniors have better communication skills than freshmen, about major, finance students are higher than other majors. And each specific communication skills, there is not too much difference in each skill, the skills of interacting with the object of communication at a low level. Therefore, it is necessary to coordinate all the school and students in improving communication skills. This is an urgent need to make it immediately.

CONCLUSION

The communication skills groups of the University of Finance – Marketing's undergraduate students are related. Therefore, in order to improve students' communication skills, they must impact simultaneously on all four skill groups. Currently, in the recruitment process, in addition to the qualification of the candidate, the candidate's communication skills are very important as

a basis for employers to select the most suitable candidate. So, the school needs more subjects and the number of lessons as well as the number of practice sessions in communication skills will help students more confident with the communication skills that they have been trained. Lecturers always attach great importance to developing communication skills for students by helping students realize the importance of communication skills, encouraging students to have effective and creative learning methods, lead students to participate in group work and group work activities as well as actively raise personal opinions through classroom lessons and discussion time. Moreover, in the training process, it is necessary to create conditions for students of different disciplines to promote communication skills not only in the classroom but in different activities.

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