

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN VIETNAM

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**ABSTRACT:** With the data gathered from 1198 business students, the authors has employed the quantitative method to assess their communication skills. The research findings have shown that their communication skills is not high with organizational skills and linguistic communication skills. There is the difference in communication skills of business students by their school year in university. This has led to the suggestions with universities to enhance the business students' communication skills.

**Keywords:** Communication, Communication Skills, Skill Development, Business Students.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In people's daily lives, communication exists as an indispensable need. The expansion of social relationships always accompanies a human's development process. By communicating with others, people can observe, learn, and assess different phenomena in society. A person's needs for information exchange and coordination activities are undeniably a human trait. This is done through communication between people so it is an indispensable activity in life.

Individual competency is considered as a collection of related knowledge, skills and attitudes, which can greatly affect an individual's ability to accomplish a job or performance (Parry, 1996). Regarding competency, skills are applying one's own knowledge and experience into practice in specific situations. Skills are shaped from the activities of people in life. They show the level of proficiency in work, life. Skills can be divided into different levels based on the effectiveness of using relevant knowledge. Communication skills are no exception. They are defined as the ability to apply knowledge of the process of communicating, factors involved and impacted by the process as well as the effective and harmonious use of communication tools, both verbal, non-verbal, and technical means to achieve the intended purpose in communication (Nguyen Van Dong, 2011).

Communication skills are extremely important regarding their contribution to the success of every human being. Studies have shown that attention should be paid to developing interpersonal skills of teenagers, because this is when their personality is formed. At higher education level, good communication skills help students become excellent individuals and form their adapting ability. Businesses always uphold the role of soft skills, in which the most important is the communication skills of candidates. Given the characteristics of collectivism in teamwork, the ability to socialize, build relationships and be creative in problem solving is very essential.

In the process of economic integration, university students are facing fiercer and fiercer competition in the job market. To overcome this challenge, they must be careful picking a career and studiously equipping themselves with the relevant knowledge, job skills and professional working attitudes. Business and management students who want to succeed right from college need to have positive personal attributes. Students must possess high-level individual skills with specific characteristics that reflects the requirements of their chosen career fields. Therefore, research on communication skills of students is important, especially those of economics students. The development of individual skills in students should be considered at the higher education level. The research questions of this study are:

- What observational variables can be used to measure students' communication skills (focusing on direct communication)?
- What communication skills of students are underdeveloped?
- Are there differences in communication skills of students according to personal characteristics?

This study will provide some discussions based on analyzing surveyed data of students currently studying Business Administration (BA) in Vietnam. Then, the study will give some recommendations for higher education institutions with the aim of further improving students' communication skills.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Instrument

To collect the necessary data for this study, a survey instrument about communication skills and general information of respondents who are business students. The main content of questionnaire concentrate linguistic communication skills, non-linguistic communication skills and inter-personality communication skills. The study used these three dimensions

which included 22 statements of Nguyen Van Dong (2011). The authors synthesized and edited to ensure logic and appropriateness. The respondents were asked to respond to the different items on their communication skills using a five-point Likert scale, i.e.: (1) = *Strongly disagree*, (2) = *Disagree*, (3) = *Neutral*, (4) = *Agree*, (5) = *Strongly agree*. Questions about the business students' demographic characteristics such as gender, school year and their learning outcomes.

### **B. Participants**

The survey was conducted with students studying Business Administration at universities in Vietnam with regular training system. The study received 1198 responses from students. After the collection is complete, the collected questionnaires are checked for completeness of information and data have been entered for analysis by SPSS statistical software (version 25).

### **C. Data Analysis Method**

Descriptive statistical analyses were used to describe the student-respondents in basic information of the sample. The proposed measurement items are considered in terms of reliability and conformity in the scales. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) aims to identify the most appropriate scales in the research model from the collected data. To examine the differences in communication skills of business students, Test of mean of two independent samples (Independent-samples T-test) and One way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA test) were used.

## **III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **A. Information about Sample**

Information about the sample is presented in Table 1. With 1198 respondents, female accounted for 77.3 %, the rest were male. With the data of the sample, students in the first year are 335 people (accounting for 28.0 %); students in the second year are 344 people (accounting for 28.7 %), students in the third year are 289 people (accounting for only 24.1 %), the rest are students in the fourth year. Information about academic results (cumulative grade point average of modules) is presented in the table.

**Table 1.** Description of Respondents  
(Source: Calculated from Author's Survey Data, 2020)

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	272	22.7
Female	926	77.3
<b>School year of Students</b>		
First year	335	28.0
Second year	344	28.7
Third year	289	24.1
Fourt year	230	19.2
<b>Academic Results</b>		
<2.00	143	11.9
2.00-2.49	481	40.2
2.50-2.99	427	35.6
3.00-3.19	94	7.8
>=3.20	53	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>	<b>100</b>

### **B. Reliability Test of Scales**

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated to see how the items explain the research concepts. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is a statistical test to see whether items in a scale are inter-correlated (table 2). The results of Reliability Test showed that all scales have the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient which is greater than 0.6. The highest one is "None

language communication skills” with the coefficient of 0.843, and the lowest one is “Language communication skills” with the coefficient of 0.806. All 17 items have Corrected Item-Total Correlation greater than 0.3. So, all scales meet the reliable requirement for further analysis.

**Table 2.** Summary of Items and Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient of the Initial Scales  
(Source: Calculated from Author’s Survey Data, 2020)

Abbreviation	Scales/Items	Coefficient of Corrected Item-Total Correlation
<b>Linguistic communication skills</b> <b>(Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.806)</b>		
CS1	I have the ability to listen and capture all information of the speaker	0.588
CS2	I have the ability to organize input well (sorting, organizing information to remember)	0.647
CS3	I have the ability to organize the output well (selectively organize information, organize the information presented)	0.671
CS4	I can speak well (speak fluently, use correct words)	0.587
<b>Non-linguistic communication skills</b> <b>(Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.843)</b>		
CS5	I have the ability to control my voice	0.493
CS6	I have the ability to control the expression of emotions on the face	0.523
CS7	I have the ability to control the expression of emotions through posture, gestures, gait	0.594
CS8	I have the ability to control the expression of emotions through costume style	0.581
CS9	I have the ability to recognize the speaker’s emotions through their voice	0.634
CS10	I have the ability to recognize the speaker’s emotions on the speaker’s face	0.640
CS11	I have the ability to recognize the expression of the speaker’s emotions through the postures, gestures, walks	0.607
CS12	I have the ability to recognize emotions and the speaker’s emotions through their clothing style	0.557
<b>Inter-personality communication skills</b> <b>(Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.826)</b>		
CS13	I have skills in analyzing situations in communication (analyzing information to correctly identify the object of communication, anticipating their response plan...)	0.577
CS14	I can adjust the balance in communication (adjust language, non-language...)	0.633
CS15	I can control myself (flexibility, flexibility, emotional control, action, gestures ...)	0.600
CS16	I can create a proactive, positive role in communication	0.648
CS17	I can set up the context of the communication (timing, duration, space for communications ...)	0.651

### ***C. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis***

The first EFA showed that the observed variables were loaded into factors with the results with the significance of tests. Among the items, the CS8, CS13 and CS14 measurement variables have the coefficients of binding factors less than 0.5. Therefore, they are disqualified in the next EFA. The fourth factor analysis (with the remaining 14 items) have results: KMO coefficient = 0.907; Bartlett test with statistical significance Sig. = 0.000. Cumulative coefficient = 66.1 %. The analysis results by Principal Components Analysis and Varimax rotation method showed that there are three factors drawn from the 14 observed variables. The results of factor rotation matrix (Table 3) show that the factor load factor of the variables are greater than 0.5, so the observed variables are important in the factors and have practical significance.

**Table 3.** The Results of the Fourth Rotation Matrix  
(Source: Calculated from Author's Survey Data, 2020)

Items	Factor			
	F1	F2	F3	F4
CS1	0.717			
CS2	0.771			
CS3	0.731			
CS4	0.647			
CS5				0.711
CS6				0.817
CS7				0.710
CS9			0.779	
CS10			0.798	
CS11			0.786	
CS12			0.681	
CS15				0.572
CS16		0.762		
CS17		0.792		

Four factors are formed based on the results of EFA:

- The first factor consists of 4 observed variables: CS1; CS2; CS3 and CS4.
- The second factor consists of 2 observed variables: CS16 and CS17.
- The third factor includes 4 observed variables: CS9; CS10; CS11 and CS12.
- The fourth factor consists of 4 observed variables: CS5; CS6; CS7 and CS15.

#### ***D. Explanation for the Scales of Communication Skills after EFA***

The EFA results show that communication skills are grouped into three subgroups. The four observed variables in the first component are unchanged from the original proposal, that is, Linguistic Communication Skills. The two observed variables in the second group mention construction and initiative in communication situations. This scale is named Organizational Skills. The four observed variables in the third component include the skills of recognizing emotions, emotions of the speaker through voice, face, costume, gestures .... This scale is named Skills to identify communicating partners. The remaining four observed variables in the fourth component refer to the student's control skills in direct communication so this scale is named Control Skills. The three scales are tested for reliability (except Linguistic Communication Skills without changing component variables). These results indicate that all three new scales of communication skills are suitable for subsequent analyzes.

**Table 4.** Summary of Number of Items and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of Three New Scales  
(Source: Calculated from Author's Survey Data, 2020)

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Organizational Skills	0.763	2
Skills to Identify Communicating Partners	0.828	4
Control Skills	0.801	4

**E. Descriptive Statistics of the Students' Communication Skills**

Analyzing the communication skills of business students, the authors performed descriptive statistics from collected data according to four measurement variables from EFA results: Linguistic communication skills, Organizational skills, Skills identify communicating partners and Control skills. The author has calculated the average value and determined the standard deviation of the scales. The results obtained are presented in Table 5. Regarding the level of variation and dispersion of the data, the deviation from the average of all four variables is low, indicating that the average value is representative. Students self-assessed their organizational skills in communication with the lowest average score with 3.3034, followed by Language communication skills with 3.3836. The control skill has the average score of 3.420 and the highest is the Partners recognition skills with the level of 3.5302. Thus, the communication skills of students are still only above average and the lowest are communication planning skills.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of the Students' Communication Skills  
(Source: Calculated from Author's Survey Data, 2020)

Scales	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation
Linguistic Communication Skills	1198	3.3836	0.6471
Organizational Skills	1198	3.3034	0.8137
Skills to Identify Communicating Partners	1198	3.5302	0.7136
Control Skills	1198	3.4920	0.7194

**F. Differences in Business Students' Communication by their Individual Characteristics****Table 6.** Mean Communication Skills Score by Business Students' Characteristics  
(Source: Calculated from Author's Survey Data, 2020)

Characteristics	Communication Skills		
	Mean Score	F/T Value	Sig.
<b>Gender</b>		<b>0.786</b>	<b>0.432</b>
Male	3.4527		
Female	3.4198		
<b>School year of Students</b>		<b>6.831</b>	<b>0.000</b>
First year	3.3169		
Second year	3.4282		
Third year	3.4793		
Fourth year	3.5065		
<b>Academic Results</b>		<b>0.576</b>	<b>0.680</b>
<2.00	3.4496		
2.00-2.49	3.4093		
2.50-2.99	3.4321		
3.00-3.19	3.4087		
>=3.20	3.5248		

To examine the difference in communication skills of students by individual characteristics, the authors conducted the Independent-samples T-test with Gender and One-way ANOVA test with the remaining features. The results obtained are presented in Table 6.

From the results of T-test and ANOVA analysis, we see a statistically significant difference when considering the communication skills of business students according to the school year. Students in the first year, the second year have limited communication skills than the third year, the fourth year. The longer students study in university lectures, the better their communication skills are. However, continuing to conduct a number of tests shows that there is no difference in communication skills between fifth and fourth year students.

The average score for male communication skills is 3.4527 while female students are 3.4198. However, this difference is not statistically significant when ANOVA analysis results with F-test value are significant at 0.432 ( $> 0.05$ ). At the same time, the test results show that there is no difference in their communication skills according to the learning result groups (the test has Sig. = 0.680).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Students analyze sustainability case studies and move developmentally through six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation with increasing skill (Pappas E. et al.). Based on the discussion presented above, it can be seen that BA students self-assessed their organizational skills in communication as the lowest. Currently, some universities offer courses in business communication or individual skill development modules. Therefore, students gain the knowledge of communication and become more confident in identifying their communication partners and controlling the communicating process. However, students have yet to be faced with abundant practical situations. Students are not confident in their ability to build effective communication contexts and their ability to be proactive in direct communication. At the same time, basic communication skills such as linguistic skills are considered of low-level. Activities to improve communication skills for students should focus on individual aspects so that each student can practice on their own common skills such as listening, speaking and memorizing.

Mastering communication skills is often emphasized as an important aspect of job or academic performance (Jeroen K. et al.). At secondary school level, attention has been paid to building learners' communication skills. Higher education institutions and students' unions need to provide freshmen support and get them used to the new learning environment. In fact, freshmen and second year students are very active in social activities. Therefore, clubs and teams need to create opportunities for them to train their communication skills right from the beginning of their university life. This is not early occupational communications as they have chosen their field of study with specific personality traits and characteristics. Working closely with senior students will be a good training environment for first and second year students. Therefore, higher education institutions need to form a learning community for economic students not only in each school but also connected to other universities.

As analyzed above, economic students are often motivated and have appropriate managerial qualities. Unsurprisingly, research results show that there is no difference in communication skills between boys and girls. Both female and male BA students have a passion for business, a desire to prove themselves in academic and career activities. Besides, students with higher academic results have not shown superiority in communication skills. A study showed that there is also no significant relationship between demographic characteristics of the subjects and learning outcomes (Petra Garnjost & Stephen M. Brown). Students with good communication skills can also achieve low academic results. Therefore, in academic activities, lecturers need to pay equal attention to students' comprehensive development. Educational institutions need to diversify forms of student assessment (not just writing) to assess students in a more comprehensive way and to create incentives for economic students to develop their competencies including communication skills.

A graduated BA student is not only equipped with in-depth professional knowledge but also requires good soft skills. Surveyed results from BA students point out what needs to be improved in students' communication skills. Higher education institutions must aim to provide the workforce with workers capable of communicating and performing in an international environment. Economics students are always motivated and able to learn well, but being equipped with basic skills in language and organization of communication should still be valued. It is these skills that will contribute to improving the communication capacity in particular and the soft skills of students in general, meeting the increasing needs for high quality human resources in the context of integration.

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