

Communication Skills of Selected Omani College Students: Implications for Business Skills

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Abstract This study aimed to determine the effectiveness level of the communication skills of the selected participants who were non-native speakers of the English language, and examine its implications for their business skills. A descriptive method of research was utilized and a borrowed questionnaire with slight modifications was administered to 145 students through purposive sampling. The results of the study showed that the majority of the participants have a moderate and high level of effectiveness in terms of their communication skills with 48% and 31% respectively. However, 21% of the participant showed a low level of communication skills effectiveness. The students who have a high level of effectiveness in their communication skills are interpreted as excellent communicators and those who have a moderate level of effectiveness in communication skills are categorized as able communicators. It implies that the participants can communicate with competence and use them in their various business skills. However, students who have low levels of communication skills need to pay attention to their communication skills so that they can be much more effective.

Keywords: *Communication skills, Business skills, Omani college, Omani students, Nonnative speakers*

1. Introduction

The English language has become the world's lingua franca in this globalized period (Crystal, 2003). It is considered as the world's dominant language of information in many fields like science, commerce, business, and technology. Countries all over the world recognized the value of the English language in their education systems and started to expose their learners to the target language, which became part of their curriculum (Philipson, 2014).

In Oman, the English language has played a vital role in the education system since the beginning of free universal education in 1970. When the General Education system was the only curriculum in government schools, English was introduced from grade 4 onwards. However, starting from the academic year 1998-1999, English was introduced as a course in public schools from the first grade. In colleges and universities across the country, English

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continues to be the medium of instruction in the medical and science field as well as in the field of humanities. The high level of support for the English language in the educational system is due to the importance of the language in both private and government sectors considering English as a lingua franca in Omani society (Al-Issa, 2007; Altbach, 2010).

Communication skills are the basic components of the English language. It helps us to understand people and situations. It also helps us to create conditions for sharing creative ideas and solving problems. Being able to communicate effectively is one of the most crucial life skills. It is the process of transferring ideas and information to produce greater understanding. It can be delivered in various channels: written, oral, and non-verbal.

According to Saunders and Mills (1999), listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four primary communication skills that people use, and the efficacy of the communication process is greatly influenced by the degree of mutual comprehension of the circumstances in which the communication takes place. Good communication skills are important to allow us to understand information accurately. On the contrary, poor communication skills will lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings. Improving our communication skills can benefit our careers, education, and even our personal life. Being an effective communicator in both our personal and professional life involves learning the skills and the approaches to deliver information with clarity and understanding. With that in mind, the major objective of this study is to determine the effectiveness level of communication skills of selected Omani college students who are non-native speakers of the English language and its implication to their business skills.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Communication Skills

There are two major areas of communication skills: linguistic skills and professional communication skills. Linguistic skills can be split into receptive and productive skills (Bhatt & Lilian, 2016). Receptive skills include listening and reading. When listening and reading (receptive skills), a person reads or listens to the target language and then decodes its meaning. When using productive skills, the person uses the target language in a meaningful way to produce writing and speaking. Productive skills need both accuracy and fluency, which means that the person should use correct grammar and speak or write fluently based on the context.

The sending and receiving of different information are the role of communication skills. It relates to uncertainty as the message travels from one end to the other, but this doubt is removed, and the message's meaning is made plain when it arrives (Bocar, 2017). The conveyance of a message from a source to the intended recipient was a component of the communication process.

There are five known stages in the communication process. This study covers these stages to determine the participants' communication skills effectiveness level. These stages are: planning the message to be conveyed (as the *source* of the message); creating a clear, well-constructed message (*encoding*); choosing the right means (*channel*); receiving and interpreting a message (*decoding*); and intended audience' *feedback* which includes the context or the situation in which the message is delivered (Mind Tools Ltd., 2014).

2.2. Communicative Competence

The ability of a person to attain communicative purposes in a socially right manner is known as communicative competence. The importance of English-language communication skills to the success of business students is the way how they communicate with different people in the workplace, which is vital across different business domains to be able to communicate effectively in English. Chomsky (1957, 1965) claimed that communicative competence is concerned with grammar and paid less attention to functional and sociocultural rules of communicative interaction. Several authors disagreed with this position by noting that grammatical competence is only one of the essential requirements for successful communication and is not all that a learner needs to become communicatively competent. Hymes (1972) articulated his strong disagreement with Chomsky's notion that communicative

competence is only based on the knowledge and mastery of grammar but also on how to deploy that competence to communicate in a variety of contexts and situations correctly. In Hymes' model (1972), in addition to linguistic competence, he introduces the three core competencies, including sociocultural (contextual appropriateness), psycholinguistic (i.e., implementational feasibility), and de facto (i.e., actual occurrence).

The study of Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) recommended communicative language ability (CLA) and defined it as "both knowledge, or competence, and the capability for applying, or performing that competence in the target language" (Bachman, 1990, p. 84). In 1990, following Hyme's model, Bachman and Palmer (1996) introduced another model of communicative competence, a theoretical framework of language ability, which was a more comprehensive model than the previous ones with three main components: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms.

2.3. The Communication Skills Approaches

The phases of the communication process are followed by both the sender and the receiver when speaking or writing messages. The communication is encoded into a message and transmitted across a channel by the sender. The recipient decodes the message and, in some manner, relays to the sender their comprehension or deficiency of the message. Understanding the phases in the process will help the person to have better comprehension, realize what he needs to say or do to communicate, foresee issues before they arise, and become more conscious of their involvement in the communication process (Mind Tools Ltd., 2014).

There are five essential communication skills approaches in sending and receiving messages. These include written, oral, non-verbal, contextual, and active listening. These skills are necessary to ensure that a person can deliver the message to the intended audience effectively and appropriately to the situation. In sending messages through written communication, a sender must give all of the background information and detail of the message to ensure that the message is understood. It involves careful planning. The message needs to be clear and concise. It includes all relevant information and considers the receiver's perspective, and all words need to be precise, which underwent proofreading (The University of New Mexico, n.d).

Sending messages through verbal channels needs to be effective. In speaking, the sender of the message must be confident, with poise, and needs to build rapport to ensure a better connection with the audience. A speaker must think first before he speaks by organizing his thoughts to avoid pauses. Ideas need to be clear and state the argument in direct language. It also helps to speak with confidence to build trust and command of respect from the audience. Bambaeroo and Shokrpour (2017) agreed that it would also be helpful if it is supplemented with non-verbal communication like body language and facial expressions to become more effective to the audience. Body language has a great impact on how the listeners interpret what the speaker says because body language reflects what the speaker is trying to get across.

Sending messages through oral communication entails active listening. Being a good listener is crucial to being a good speaker because it improves the speaker's verbal interaction. When considering the audience's perspective and level of understanding, listening to their feedback and questions matters most to be understood. By so doing, the speaker shows genuine care for the audience's ideas and needs (Mind Tools Ltd., 2014).

2.4. Implications of Communication Skills to Business Skills

According to Moody (2012), in Oman, English programs in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have failed to address the communication skills that are required in the job market. Similarly, the study of Al- Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2014) showed that both pragmatic and communication skills were not highlighted in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and asserted that higher education graduates emerge weak in English, and thus with communication skills inadequate for the job market.

There are several studies that examined the English communication skills of students and university graduates. Thomas et al. (2016) investigated communication skills in the workplace using the English language and found out that employers were not satisfied with their communication skills. The study revealed that students need to be fluent in English and familiarize various writing genres, such as writing emails, letters, memos, and writing minutes of the meeting.

In a recent graduate study conducted by the Omani Ministry of Higher Education in 2016, it was shown that Omani graduates lack English language skills, communication skills, a good attitude, and passion for work. As a result, Al Hinai (2018) found that only 12% of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) graduates have been used in the private sector primarily due to their low level of English language proficiency and communication skills.

Despite the importance of English in the educational system and the industries in the sultanate, Omani graduates have been described as having a lack of English communication skills that the industry is actually needed (Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010). While arguments about the reasons for this lack of proficiency have focused on such factors as the curriculum, inappropriate approaches to instruction, and attitudes of learners toward learning English (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Toubi, 1998), currently, little investigative attention has been engaged toward the potential link between graduates' communicative skills and those required by the world of work. Thus, this study is conducted to determine the level of effectiveness of communication skills of selected Omani college students for whom English is not their first language.

2.5. Level of Communication Skills.

The poor level of communication skills can be rooted in the students' background on how they learned the L2 and what makes them weak in English communication skills. In the study of Al-Mahrooqi (2012), one hundred college students from Sultan Qaboos University were investigated to express their views on how they were taught English in school and what affected their learning of it. The result showed that 85% of students thought that teachers were the major cause of their low level of communication skills in English. Teachers used traditional way of teaching methods and styles, which bored the students. There is a gap between teacher preparation programs and curriculum philosophies. Teachers are asked to teach in a certain way as they are guided by the teachers' books. Some teachers use Arabic when teaching English. In fact, some teach English in Arabic. It also revealed that many English teachers do not care about their profession and or improving their own level of English proficiency. Omani EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers generally experience language attrition in environments where English is not spoken as a first language (Al-Mahrooqi & Sultana, 2012).

Another factor in students' low level of communication skills effectiveness is the lack of communicative tasks provided in the classroom, wherein most of the time, students mostly sit passively in the classroom. There is little chance to practice speaking inside or outside class. English is taught too formally, and there is no variation in terms of class activities. The curriculum does not cover all four skills adequately. Most students are not interested in learning the English language because of their negative perceptions. They see the English language as difficult and not as important as other sources. They lack study habits on it, they only work for exams, and most of the time cheat for them to pass. They also lack appropriate study skills and depend on rote memorization, which is an Arab way of learning (Asante et al., 2012). Students with poor communication need to be fixed right away to avoid harmful consequences. The solution to ending bad communication is to establish effective communication learning techniques. The efficiency of communication affects success to some extent (Recruit Holdings Co. Ltd., 2022).

Students with a moderate level of communication skills effectiveness display their knowledge in a constrained number of spoken and written formats, and they comprehend particular facts, key concepts, and some detail offered in oral, visual, and written language. They convey their ideas, views, and experiences about a variety of known and unexpected events in a constrained range of interpersonal and cultural contexts. They engage in conversation and compose structured writing. They are aware that there are many ways to communicate and write for various audiences and goals.

Monte Sant'Angelo Mercy College (2022) considered capable communicators as individuals who can comprehend and react to a constrained range of spoken and written materials.

An effective communicator is a person who can convey his message comprehensively and is receptive and responsive to others' input. Those who have a high level of communication effectiveness can speak in a clear, direct manner, using clear language. They are typically confident with their opinions and views, but they are also open to suggestions from others. When listening, effective communicators use eye contact and use affirmative language. A person with a high level of communication skills recognizes the importance of being expressive of their opinions or ideas. However, they make sure to remain assertive and respectful if they disagree with others (Robinsons et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 145 male and female college students who were in their young adulthood aged 20 to 35. These participants were taking different specializations, such as Business and Management Studies, Accounting and Finance, and Business Economics and Marketing Management programs. They were currently enrolled in semester one of the Academic Year 2022-2023. They were on Levels 3 and 4 of their studies and were selected using purposive sampling.

3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire used in this study was obtained from the article entitled *How Good Are Your Communication Skills?* (Mind Tools Ltd., 2014). The questionnaire was modified to fit the needs of the study. It consisted of fifteen items indicators as descriptions of how a person communicates with another person. These indicators focused on the five essential communication skills, including written, oral, non-verbal, contextual, and active listening. To ensure the functionality and validity of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted randomly on the 25 respondents from across all levels in the college. The incidence of non-response was noted, and the trend of responses was also determined. Since the respondents were able to respond to the questions with a reasonable range of variance, the questionnaire was finalized and administered to the target participants.

3.3. Procedure

After the data was gathered, the scores of the participants were totaled and tallied, and the sum of all the values was the bases for interpretation. The interpretation of the score is patterned from the same article mentioned above to identify respondents' communication effectiveness level with slight modifications to make it more appropriate to the study. The responses of the participants in the fifteen items' descriptions of how they communicate with another person were the ones summed up. The scale for the interpretation of the results of this study can be found in Appendix 1.

4. Results

4.1. Communication Skills Approach of Non-Native English-Speaking Participants

Figure 1 shows the number and percent distribution of the overall scores of the participants in terms of their communication skills approach.

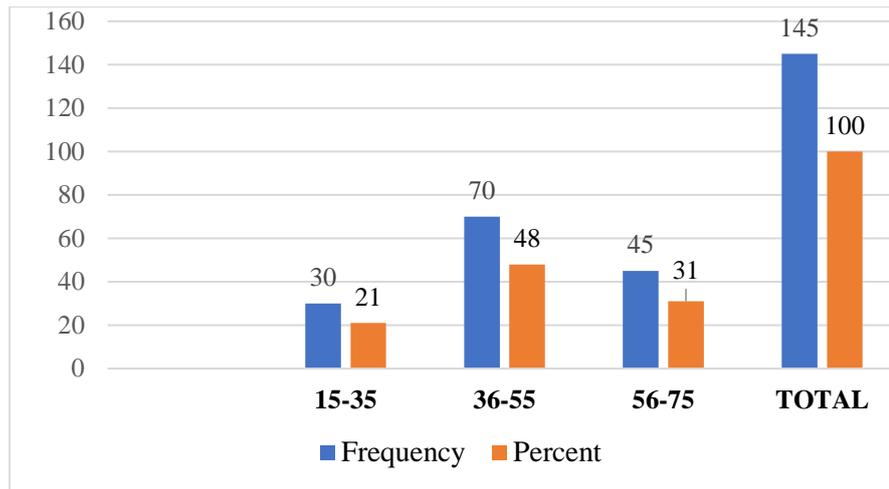


Figure 1

Frequency and Percent Distribution of Participants' Overall Scores of their Communication Skills Approach

Figure 1 indicates that out of 145 respondents, 48% scored 36-55, 45% scored 56-75, and 21% scored 15-35. The communication skills approach focuses on the five essential communication skills, including written, oral, non-verbal, contextual, and active listening. These skills are necessary to ensure that a person can deliver the message to the intended audience effectively and appropriately to the situation. The results signify that 79% of the total participants are able communicators. Communication is one of the crucial skills that a person needs to succeed both in school and in the workplace. Thus, a person must be effective at all points in communication skills approaches, whether it is through verbal, non-verbal, written, or visual communication when sending and receiving messages. Vain (2021) states that communication is important in building relationships with people and communicating ideas. People think that communication is focused mainly on verbal communication without knowing that it is just only one aspect of communication. The other aspects needed to be an effective communicator includes verbal and non-verbal, listening, written, and visual communication.

4.2. Participants' Level of Communication Skills

Table 1 highlights the effectiveness level of the communication skills of the participants. The results of the study showed that 48% of the respondents are *capable communicators*.

Table 1
Participants' Effectiveness Level of Communication Skills

Score	Percent	Level	Interpretation
15-35	21	LOW	The respondent needs to work out his communication skills.
36-55	48	MODERATE	The respondent is a capable communicator.
56-75	31	HIGH	The respondent is an excellent communicator.
TOTAL	100		

As shown in Table 1, 48% of the participants have a *moderate level of effectiveness* which means they are capable communicators, and 31% of them have *high levels of communication skills effectiveness*, which means they are considered excellent communicators. Only 21% of the participants belong to a *low level of effectiveness* in their communication skills. These participants need improvement in their communication skills.

The results indicate that the majority of the participants could plan and create the messages that they would like to send, they are able to choose the right approach when they are communicating with others, and they are competent in interpreting messages that they received and could transmit feedback. Monte Sant'Angelo Mercy College (2022) described these students as the ones who are aware that there are many ways to communicate and write specifically for various audiences and goals. They could comprehend, and react to particular facts, key concepts, and some detail offered in oral, visual, and written language but with constrained. They can engage in conversation and compose structured writing. They can convey their ideas, views, and experiences about a range of known and unexpected events in a constrained range of interpersonal and cultural contexts.

However, Mind Tools Ltd. (2014) explained that though people are capable communicators, sometimes they experience communication problems. They should take time to think about their approaches to communication and focus effectively on the received and sent messages. This is common to Omani students whose first language (L1) is Arabic, and English, for them, is a foreign language. These communication problems manifested in the 21% of the respondents who have a low level of effectiveness of communication skills. These students tend to process first the context of their messages before sending them either through verbal or written communication. They need to pay attention to their communication so that they can be much more effective.

Notably, despite the participants being non-native speakers of the English language, 31% of them showed a high level of effectiveness. This means that this group of students understand their role as sender and receiver of messages. They can anticipate probable problems and can find solutions on how to deal with the problems.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this research was to determine the effectiveness level of the communication skills of Omani college students who are non-native speakers of the English language across the five essential communication skills approaches, including written, oral, non-verbal, contextual, and active listening. It also aims to relate these skills to their business skills. As stated, the results showed that the participants are able communicators in the five areas of communication skills approaches.

The students' level of communication skills can be categorized into low, moderate, and high levels of effectiveness. As per the results of the study, the low level of effectiveness of the student's communication skills falls under the total score of 15-35. It means that the students who belong to this category need improvement in terms of their communication skills. There are many communication barriers for non-native speakers to become effective communicators using the L2. In other words, English follows different formulas for structuring and composing utterances, both verbal and non-verbal (Kakar & Sarwari, 2022). It implies that students with low levels of communication skills suffer from communication barriers. One of the barriers is the language barrier since the target language is English. It is sad to note that there are still students who are struggling with the use of L2. One common problem encountered by business lecturers among business students is the low level of English language proficiency. Most of them excel in computation skills, but when they are tasked to answer essay questions, they find it difficult to express their ideas because some of them have limited knowledge of vocabulary, some have a lack of interest in learning the English language, and many other reasons. Effective communication methods must be established in order to build a solid corporate partnership. Mishaps in the workplace may avoid numerous opportunities, and it may be due to improper communication. For instance, an order from a customer might not have been dispatched on time because the communication was not properly transmitted, or the boss might not have received a critical email from a subordinate. Poor communication will obstruct the organization's output. Ineffective written or spoken business communication might hinder the productivity of the company or a particular department. On the other hand, poor corporate communication abilities will affect staff's creativity since they will be made to sit through tedious presentations when they receive confusing project instructions from their managers. When crucial projects are handled insufficiently due to poor communication, the company's ability to innovate and improve society may be severely hindered (Evengroen, 2016). Thus, these barriers need to be rooted to enhance the students'

communication skills. In his study, Rabab'ah (2005) said that there are many problems encountered by Omani students in sending and receiving messages using the English language. He posited that Arab learners find it difficult to communicate freely in the target language, maybe because of the methods of language teaching or due to a learning environment wherein the formal language of communication is Arabic. Similarly, in the study of Albalawi et al. (2020), they clearly mentioned that some 39% of their respondents agreed that poor and ineffective communication is a common cause of poor performance for students.

The moderate level of communication effectiveness falls under the 36-55 overall score. This means that these students are capable communicators. The result showed that the majority of the participants are of moderate level of communication skills and are interpreted as able communicators. It implies that many Omani college students are now able to use L2 in their day-to-day communication, particularly in their studies. It also implies that the participants can communicate with competence and use various business skills. It can be inferred that this moderate level is due to the fact that English in basic education has already been introduced as part of the curriculum. Since the medium of instruction in the colleges and universities in Oman is English, students are forced to learn the target language with minimum proficiency. There is just a need for teachers to use appropriate teaching methodologies and senses and emotions in teaching, which are of utmost importance in classroom activities and learner-teacher interactions (Ebrahimi et al., 2022).

The result of the present study is somewhat the same as the study of Tuzlukova and Al-Mahrooqi (2017), which concluded that the tertiary-level English-language courses undertaken by Omani students are doing a somewhat satisfactory job in developing their communication skills across the five communication skills approaches. Although students are able to communicate using the target language, they sometimes experience communication problems. Despite this apparent success in enhancing learners' communicative skills, participants took time to think about their approaches to communication and focus effectively on the received and sent messages. This is an area of potential concern, considering the central role that English plays in workforces across the Gulf (Tuzlukova & Al-Mahrooqi, 2016).

The participants who manifested that their communication effectiveness level is high scored 56-75 and are considered excellent communicators. This shows that these students are those who can understand their role as a sender and a receiver of messages. They can easily anticipate problems and use the right approaches in conveying their messages. It indicates that these students can use communication strategies to send and receive messages properly in social and business interactions. It can also be inferred that students who have high levels of communication skills exhibit a clear knowledge of the essential communication skills approaches and can integrate all these strategies into various business skills needed in the workplace with competence. According to Ellis (2008), communication strategies can be regarded as a discourse approach wherein the learners involve themselves in social interactions, or they can be considered as mental processes concerned with the use of L2 in sending and receiving messages and information.

Consequently, it appears that the communication skills of Omani college students who participated in this study and were referred to as non-native speakers of English appear to be at a moderate to a high level of effectiveness. Finally, further research on the communicative competence of business undergraduate or graduate students is recommended to determine what aspects of communications skills affect so much on their low level of effectiveness and competency.

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Appendix 1

The Scoring and its Corresponding Level and Interpretation

Score	Level	Interpretation
15-35	Low Level	The respondent needs to work out his communication skills . To express himself clearly is necessary. He needs to pay attention to communication so that he can be much more effective.
36-55	Moderate Level	The respondent is a capable communicator but sometimes experiences communication problems. He must take time to think about his approaches to communication and focus effectively on the received and sent messages.
56-75	High Level	Excellent communicator . The respondent understands his role as a receiver and sender of messages. Problems are anticipated and the right ways of communication are used.