



EXPECTATIONS OF THE STUDENTS OF PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTIONS FROM COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSES W.R.T INSTITUTIONS IN DELHI-NCR

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ABSTRACT

Communication Skills Courses are an integral part of professional education these days. Communication is the life-blood of any organisation in today's competitive world. The more effective the communication is in an organisation, the more productive it becomes. But communication skills courses are unable to deliver what is expected. This inference is made out of reading many research papers and articles in the area. Almost every research points out gaps between the objectives of these courses and the actual delivery.

When the students of some of the professional colleges in NCR were asked about the reasons and their expectations from these courses, 36 per cent students wanted these courses to focus more on improving listening skills, almost 38 per cent wanted emphasis to be given on speaking skills, while 25 per cent of them believed that all four skills are equally important in order to help students acquire effective communication.

Key Words: Communication Courses, Expectations of students, Professional Institutions, Speaking Skills, Writing Skills, Listening Skills, Reading Skills

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SUMMARY

Communication is the back bone of any organisation today. The growth of an organisation depends on how effective the communication is. Communication is a means to convey one's messages to the other person in such a way that the message suffers the least distortion. Effective communication can be developed or improved through constant practice. Since, communication is one of the most important aspects of the corporate today, it is imperative that the students who are to join the corporate are given a very rigorous training in communication in the colleges. For this purpose, communication skills courses have been made an integral part of the curriculum of professional institutions. It is unanimously agreed that effective

communication skills courses play an important role in preparing the students for the workforce in the corporate. In fact the whole placement processes in these institutions rely upon effective communication skills. Students with reasonably good communication skills have relatively better chances of getting hired than those who are poor at communication. It has been observed that even students with valid professional degrees are not able to get jobs in the corporate and the major reason for this is poor communication skills. Therefore, it can be inferred that communication skills courses are not able to fulfil the objectives which have been laid.

The present study aims at finding reasons as to why these communication skills courses are not delivering what is expected from these. The

reasons can well be found out by knowing the expectations of the students of professional institutions because they are the ultimate beneficiaries. It is imperative that we find out what the students expect from these courses and which macro or micro skills the courses must put more emphasis on so that students get what they require to get an entry into the corporate world. In this study data from different professional institutions was collected, analysed and discussed in order to ascertain the main reasons behind the failure of these courses and to know what the beneficiaries want.

METHOD

The primary focus of the research is to find out what the students of professional institutions expect from communication skills courses. What are the areas where the students want more emphasis? Which are the skills that the students want more practice on?

80 students from different professional colleges in NCR were asked about their expectations from communication skills courses and about the macro and micro skills which they think should be emphasised more. The data was collected through a standard questionnaire prepared to collect the relevant information.

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a very vital role in the lives of human beings. In fact we are humans because we communicate relatively more effectively. We start communication from the very moment we are born. In fact it would not be wrong to say that we start communicating, with our mothers, even before we enter into the world. Communication is required to even survive in the world. Communication basically is just a means of receiving and sending information. We express our ideas, emotions, thoughts, messages by communication. Various macro level skills in communication are reading, writing, listening and speaking. We receive information through the receptive skills that are listening and reading. Listening and Reading help us acquire information or knowledge that can be further used in speaking and writing, which are considered productive skills. In each of the macro skills, lie various micro skills like

presentation skills, e-mail etiquettes, negotiation skills, persuasive skills, conflict resolution, analytical skills, telephone etiquettes, understanding of grammar, and likewise.

In today's world, a very important aspect of communication skills is Business Communication. Business communication is the sharing of information between people within and outside the organisation that is performed for the commercial benefit of the organisation. It can also be defined as relaying of information within a business by its people. Business communication encompasses topics such as marketing, brand management, customer relations, consumer behavior, advertising, public relations, corporate communication, community engagement, reputation management, interpersonal communication, employee engagement, and event management. It is closely related to the fields of professional communication and technical communication. The students of professional and technical institutions have to be very thorough with the fundamentals of Business Communication if they want to be effective at their workplaces later in lives.

In the professional institutions today, placements of the students is the major goal. And the placements, to a major extent, depend directly on the ability of the students to communicate effectively. There has been a lot of study done on the impact of communication skills on the recruitment of the students of the professional institutions and it has been unanimously agreed that most of the students, even with relevant degrees, fail to get placed because of poor communication skills.

It is unanimously agreed that a business communication curriculum plays an important role in preparing students for the workforce in the corporate (Pittenger, Khushwant K. S.; Miller, Mary C. & Allison, Jesse, 2006; Zhao, Jensen J. & Alexander, Melody W., 2004). There is consensus among the educators and technical/business executives that effective communication skills are pre-requisites of getting a good job in the corporate sector today. Students in the technical and professional colleges have to be made corporate ready.

As such communication does not depend on any particular language. It only means conveying messages to the receivers. But in today's world, since English has become the most prominent link language, when we talk about communication skills, it is by and far English Language communication Skills. The communication skills courses which are taught to the students of these colleges aim at helping the students get into the corporate sector with good profile. Since, communication skills courses focus primarily on English language communication, it becomes extremely important to analyse the pedagogy in teaching these courses. The major reason for analysing the teaching methodology is that almost all these students study English language as a second language.

It becomes imperative to help these students develop or improve English language communication skills. the courses should emphasise the use of English language in order to inculcate effective language skills in the students.

The present Research work is based on an exploratory study of communication skills courses that are taught in technical and professional colleges. The study aims at exploring the expectations of the students of these technical and professional colleges from communication skills courses. After going through a number of researches already done in this field, it is quite clear that the courses in question form an integral part of the curricula of even the professional and technical courses. The main aim of Communication Skills Courses is to develop and improve overall personality of students. These courses have properly laid out objectives but it is generally seen that these objectives are hardly met. The present study aims at exploring the reasons for the same. To identify such gaps and to find out why these gaps exist the researcher shall explore the syllabi of the courses and shall seek response from the students and teachers. The focus shall also be on the teaching methodology and other things that directly or indirectly obstruct the progress of the students as for the communication skills of the students are concerned. The current research will suggest to the stakeholders of communication skills courses the gaps and the means by which those gaps may be

bridged so that the students of the technical and professional courses are provided with the required skill sets that are needed to fetch them good jobs in the corporate sector. The research shall also help the subject teachers to adopt a pedagogy that the students feel comfortable with and that would help in meeting the objectives of the courses.

Major Attributes That Affect Communication Skills

Through extensive reviews of the various communication skills theories, relevant research papers, books and websites the researcher made an attempt to understand the basic nuances of the communication skills courses which are taught in the professional Institutions in India and the attributes which affect communications skills of the students. The major Factors are:

1. Written Communication
2. Oral Communication
3. Listening Skills
4. Reading Skills
5. Non-Verbal Communication
6. Methodology

All these factors are just the macro level factors which can be further sub divided into a variety of micro level attributes. The detailed discussion on each of these factors and attributes follows.

1. Written Communication

Written Communication is a part of verbal communication that depends on words. Communicating through writing is essential in the modern world and is becoming ever more so as we participate in what is now commonly called the information age. In fact, written communication is the most common form of business communication. It is essential for small business owners and managers to develop effective written communication skills and to encourage the same in all employees. The information age has altered the ways in which we communicate and placed an increasing emphasis on written versus oral communications.

Some of the major attributes for written communication are as follow:

2. Using Correct English grammar
 1. Completeness of Communication
 2. Being Precise

3. Clarity of Thought
4. Etiquettes for E-Mail Writing
5. Spellings

3. Oral Communication

Oral communication is the process of expressing information or ideas by spoken words. It also comes under Verbal Communication since words are used in it. With advances in technology, new forms of oral communication continue to develop. Video Phones and Video Conferences combine audio and video so that workers in distant locations can both see and speak with each other. Other modern forms of oral communication include Podcasts (audio clips that you can access on the Internet) and Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP), which allows callers to communicate over the Internet and avoid telephone charges. Skype is an example of VoIP.

There are many situations in which it makes sense to choose oral over written communication. Oral communication is more personal and less formal than written communication. If time is limited and a business matter requires quick resolution, it may be best to have a face-to-face or telephone conversation. There is also more flexibility in oral communication; you can discuss different aspects of an issue and make decisions more quickly than you can in writing. Oral communication can be especially effective in addressing conflicts or problems. Talking things over is often the best way to settle disagreements or misunderstandings. Finally, oral communication is a great way to promote employee morale and maintain energy and enthusiasm within a team.

Some of the essential attributes of Oral Communication are:

1. Giving Individual Oral Presentation
2. Using Correct Pronunciation
3. Using Effective Interpersonal Skills
4. Style of Communication
5. Using Correct Grammatical Structure
6. Telephone Etiquettes
7. Negotiation Skills
8. Resolving Conflicts

4. Listening Skills

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening skills are receptive in nature since while listening one has to just receive and understand. These skills are sometimes also called passive skills. But just because these are receptive only, we can't put them in the secondary skills category. Listening skills are as important as speaking or writing. In fact it would not be wrong to say that listening skills could be a little more important than the productive skills like speaking and writing. Listening skills form the very basis of communication because information or knowledge is first received and then imparted. The nature itself emphasises the importance of listening skills. Somebody who is deaf will be dumb also. It proves that one can produce language only after receiving it. Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Various attributes of Listening Skills are:

1. Ability to Understand the Discussion
2. Ability to Understand the Instructions
3. Attentive Listening to Understand the Topic
4. Patient Listening

5. Reading Skills

Reading skills, just like Listening Skills, fall in the category of receptive or passive skills. Reading skills give inputs which can be further used in writing or speaking. Reading skills too, like Listening skills, form the basis of communication. Different types of reading include skimming, scanning, intensive reading, extensive reading, etc. People sometimes read to pass time; sometimes to gather information; sometimes to understand the technical details; sometimes to go through a particular piece of information; and sometimes just a gaze at the text to get the gist. All these types of reading help in the formation of the case of any communication. Information or knowledge is gathered through these skills. In day to day Business, it is required to read mails, memos, letters etc. and respond to them. Poor reading skills increase the time it takes to

absorb and react in workplace. Active reading is asking questions while reading, using recall techniques, structure, annotation and summarising. For the management professionals it is very important to have the ability to read between the lines and ability to understand the correct perspective.

Different attributes that affect Reading Skills are:

1. Reading Between the Lines
2. Analytical Skills
3. Understanding of the Texts

6. Non-Verbal Communication

Communication that takes place without using words is called Non-Verbal Communication. Emotions, ideas, messages, thoughts are expressed through gestures, body movements, facial expressions, in non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is believed to be an integral part of communication since it enhances the effectiveness of communication. In the absence of Verbal communication, non-verbal communication may not be very effective but if verbal and non-verbal are used simultaneously, the messages conveyed are very clear and very effective since the messages will be reinforced by means of non-verbal cues.

According to Burgoon and Saine, nonverbal communication is defined as the "Attributes or actions of humans, other than the use of words themselves, which have socially shared meaning, are intentionally sent or interpreted as intentional, are consciously sent or consciously received, and have the potential for feedback from the receiver."(Burgoon,J.K. &Saine ,T.,1978)

More often body language, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact are more critical than the words spoken and are considered more while forming the opinion. In the professional world, often people interpreted the meaning more by analysing body language rather than the verbal message, thus it is important that non-verbal communication should complement the verbal communication. Managing our own body language is important, the better we manage our body language, the stronger our communication will become. (Cole,K., 2001)

Physical expressions reveal many things about the person using them. For example, gestures

can emphasise a point or relay a message, posture can reveal boredom or great interest, and touch can convey encouragement or caution (Engleberg, Isa N,2006).

Thus, in order to understand communication as a whole, it is imperative to study the the basic nuances of non-verbal communication.

The major attributes of Non-Verbal communication are:

1. Facial Expressions
2. Eye Contact
3. Body Language and Gestures

7. Methodology:

The pedagogy devised by the teachers to teach communication skills courses to the students of professional institutions needs to be analysed. As pointed out earlier, almost all the the students in the professional institutions in Delhi NCR study English as a second language. Their command over business English is not as required by the corporate sector and thus, in order to teach them the fundamentals of business communication a proper teaching method should be deployed. The most used approach to teaching communication skills courses these days is task based approach where the students are made to participate in different tasks and are made to communicate in a professional way in English language that helps them acquire the business language and at the same time helps them become more professional. Its imperative to know which teaching method the students find most effective.

The different methods that could be adopted by the teachers are:

1. Lecture Mode
2. Interactive Sessions
3. Case Study Method
4. Role-Play Method

Scale Used for Analysis

A standard scale has been used to assess the attributes under various Major Skills. The expectations of the students have been assessed on a 5 point scale as shown below:

| Expectations | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------|-----------|--------------|
| Critical | Important | Average | Desirable | Not Relevant |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

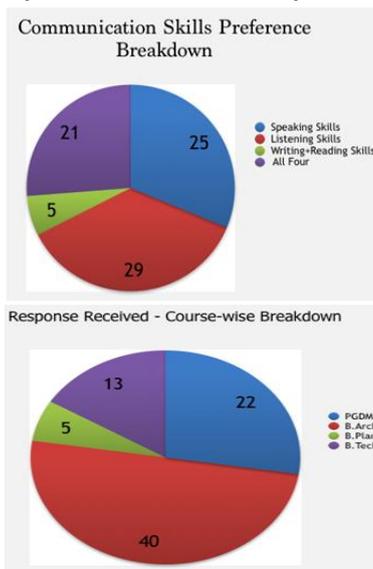
Analysis of the data collected has been done by using the following tools:

1. MS Excel
2. Self - Observation

Sample Profile

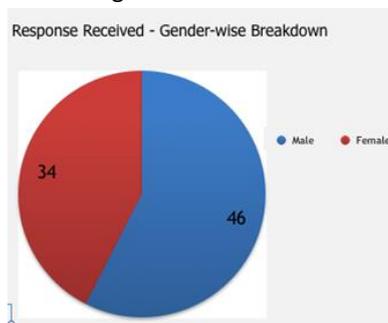
Response was received from 80 students from various professional colleges in Delhi NCR.

Graphic Representation of the Sample:



Analysis

Total number of respondents who have answered the questionnaires is 80. Apart from the seeking response on the importance of micro attributes of different communication skills, the respondents were also asked to choose one of the major communication skills which they considered of utmost importance. The graphic representation of the preferences is given below:



Out of 80 respondents, 29 feel that Listening Skills are the most important skills. That is about 36 per cent. 25 respondents find Speaking Skills to be of utmost importance and form around 31 per cent. The third major chunk believes that all four skills are required to be an effective communicator. That is

around 26 per cent. A very few think writing and reading are essential skills.

It is quite clear from the analysis that most of the students want the communication skills courses to focus more on speaking part and listening part. Listening is, as we know, the very basis of speaking or writing. If we are good listeners, only then we can become good and effective writers or speakers. Listening is the receptive skill while speaking is the productive skill. The students in the professional institutions have one goal in front of them and that is to get a good job in the corporate sector. The skill that is required mainly to crack an interview is Speaking. So, there is no doubt that the students want the courses of Communication Skills to emphasise more on developing and improving spoken language. Many of the respondents also believe that the amalgamation of all the four skills is required to bring about the desired results. They believe that the courses of Communication Skills should focus on improving every skill in balanced proportion. Reading and Listening, the receptive skills, form the very basis for Speaking and Writing, the productive skills.

Analysis of the various Micro Attributes of the Macro Communication Skills

Use of correct English grammar is the attribute that is considered most crucial when it comes to writing skills. 48 per cent respondents consider it crucial while 32 per cent believe that it is important. Completeness of Communication and Being Precise too are considered important by the majority of the respondents. The respondents want a reasonable focus on improving thought process and spellings while writing. E-mail writing etiquettes is also considered desirable. In Business Communication completeness of communication and being to the point hold the key to success. And framing grammatically correct sentences is as important as anything else otherwise the meaning will not be clear.

In oral communication i.e. while speaking the most important factor highlighted by the sample is Use of Standard and correct Pronunciation. 84 per cent respondents believe that improper or non-standard pronunciation creates confusion in communication and messages are often distorted or

completely destroyed. Grammar plays an important role here also. While speaking, one has to be cautious of the grammatical structures that he/she is using. Grammatical errors would make the communication tedious to understand and the audience will lose interest. 78 per cent respondents consider grammar very important. In the current scenario the Conflict Resolution skill is also very important. One who can manage people well and who can resolve conflicts in an organisation will always be preferred. Equally crucial is considered the negotiation Skills. In the business world today everything depends on how you negotiate and resolve issues. Using Effective Interpersonal Skills and Style of Communication are considered desirable.

When it comes to Listening Skills, almost 70 per cent respondents believe that Understanding a Discussion and Understanding Instructions are crucial to be effective at the workplace. Around 62 per cent of the respondents feel that listening skills can be acquired and improved only through patience. A patient listener is the one who is able to gather most information.

Reading forms the basis of knowledge. One acquires information and knowledge when one regularly reads various texts. In today's scenario Reading between the Lines is as crucial as anything else. Today, not everything is black and white. One must be able to understand what's hidden between the lines. 58 per cent students want to acquire the capability to read what not written in black and white. A critical approach to the text is very necessary according to 63 per cent of the respondents.

Non-Verbal communication is considered an integral part of Oral communication especially when communication takes place face to face. Non-verbal cues are capable enough to either enhance the meaning or completely distort it. The most crucial attribute of Non-Verbal Communication, according to 65 per cent respondents, is the Body language and Gestures. These can complement and supplement the oral face to face communication. If gestures are used in an improper way, they can completely destroy the messages. Almost the same percentage of respondents believe that Facial

Expressions and Eye Contact are also very important.

When the respondents were asked about the preferred teaching methodology in communication skills classes, most of the respondents said that the classes should be highly interactive. Simple lecture mode would not be able to make classes effective. Almost 75% of the respondents believed that Role-Play method should be used in the classes. 55-60% respondents also believed that case study method would also, to a large extent, help the students understand the basic nuances of business communication skills.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion and analysis, it is quite clear that communication skills courses are very important in framing the career prospects of the students in all the professional colleges. Without effective communication skills students can not express their knowledge and knowledge unexpressed would have no practical use. As far as placement interviews are concerned, good command over language and effective communication skills play a vital role. There is no doubt that almost all the major communication skills including speaking, listening, writing, and reading are necessary to survive in today's competitive world, but emphasis should also be laid on individual micro skills or attributes of both verbal or non-verbal communication. As we have seen in the analysis of the data that most of the respondents want a lot of focus on presentation skills as far as speaking is concerned. Use of correct grammar and pronunciation makes communication clear and effective. In today's corporate world if one wants to be an effective manager, he/she should have conflict resolving ability. Thus, conflict resolving skill is a much valued skill. In written communication writing effective and convincing business letters holds the key to success. As far as listening skills are concerned more emphasis should be laid on practicing listening to understand since listening forms the basis for productive communication skills like speaking and writing. Same is the case with reading skills. Reading between the lines and understanding the text are the major attributes which should be practiced a lot by the students.

Non-verbal communication may enhance or worsen the effect of verbal communication. If body language and gestures are used in a proper way, they may complement and supplement what is orally said. On the other hand if non-verbal cues are used improperly or in a vague manner, they may distort or completely destroy the meaning of what is said. Finally, the analysis of the data clearly indicates that the pedagogy used in communication skills classes must be based on students' participation either through role-plays or case-studies. Role-play method involves students in a participative way through which they learn how to communicate effectively in different situations whereas case-study method helps the students familiarise with the formal structure of the organisations and enable them to know how to handle crisis in an organisation.

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