

Professional Skills As Enculturation Among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic and competitive landscape, the importance of professional skills for undergraduate (UG) students cannot be overstated. The job market demands a diverse set of abilities beyond academic knowledge, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Employers expect graduates to be well-rounded and capable of navigating interdisciplinary collaborations, leveraging digital tools, and demonstrating leadership qualities. Globalization and technological advancements require professionals to be globally aware, culturally sensitive, and proficient in digital literacy. Moreover, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among UG students encourages innovation, creativity, and the ability to identify and seize opportunities. As industries evolve rapidly, professionals must be adaptable, resilient, and committed to continuous learning and upskilling. Strong interpersonal skills are also crucial for building relationships with clients, customers, and stakeholders. This study focuses on enhancing the employability of undergraduate (UG) students by developing essential professional skills such as communication, teamwork, and time management. By honing these skills, UG students can effectively contribute their abilities in their chosen fields and thrive in the constantly evolving professional environment. Specifically, this study delves into the importance of communication skills among UG graduates and their impact on career success and advancement.

Keywords: Professional Skill, Communication, Employability

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a dynamic and impactful role in shaping individuals and influencing their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, ethical, social, and economic growth. The level of education among men and women is closely tied to the progress and quality of civilizations and living standards. It acts as a channel for passing down values, attitudes, behaviors, and ideals from older generations to younger ones. Every child has the fundamental right to education, regardless of race, gender, location, or religious background, as it significantly contributes to their overall personality development. Moreover, it is recognized as an indispensable catalyst for national development, demonstrating a strong correlation with a country's economic progress. A society's knowledge, skills, and creative capacity are heightened through education, contributing significantly to its advancement.

Education can be described as a process that brings out the best in individuals. Four essential elements are integral to this process: the educator (teacher), the educand (student), the subject matter, and the context (setting). To achieve the delivery of quality education, it is imperative to have dedicated and competent teachers as well as learners who possess an innate passion for teaching as well as learning and are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. Therefore, the focus should be on nurturing the UG students who are physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually adept to build capable future leaders as themselves.

UG students are expected to employ the best practices and strategies to meet the demanding challenges of their profession. When the 21st-century graduates receive comprehensive training and are highly motivated, the learning experience will be greatly enhanced. Therefore, it is essential to equip oneself with non-technical abilities commonly referred to as 'Professional Skills'.

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

Education in India has deep roots dating back to ancient times, interwoven with the history of human civilization. Today, the education system is expansive and diverse, reflecting the country's rich cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic tapestry. It encompasses various stages and forms of education, ranging from formal to informal.

Higher education and skill development are fundamental pillars of India's endeavours to ready its workforce for the challenges of the 21st-century economy. Through fostering collaboration among academia, industry, and government, India aims to equip its citizens with the knowledge, competencies, and capabilities necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

In the contemporary job market, graduates and skill development share an intricate relationship. While acquiring a degree holds significance, possessing relevant skills aligned with employers' demands is equally pivotal for graduates to secure employment and excel in their chosen careers. Employers increasingly value soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership alongside technical competencies. Thus, the UG students should prioritize developing these interpersonal and transferable skills, which are vital for success across diverse professional environments.

CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The term "Professional Skills" describes a range of non-technical personal qualities, social skills, and communication abilities. Professional skills are more transferable and applicable in a variety of settings and domains than hard skills, which are task- or profession-specific. These abilities are also frequently called people skills or interpersonal abilities. Effective interactions and connections with people need professional skills. They are essential to both personal and professional success and enhance one's overall emotional intelligence.

In simple terms, the term 'Professional Skill' typically refers to the fundamental abilities and competencies necessary for personal growth and success in one's career for the average individual. These skills are often referred to by different names like "people's skills," "employability skills," or "EQ skills." Essentially, they are non-technical skills that are vital for achieving success in one's job or career.

Sherfield et al. (2009) outline the following skills, which are among the top ten preferred skills sought by employers:

RANK TYPE OF PREFERRED SKILL

- 1 Communication skills
- 2 Honesty/Integrity
- 3 Interpersonal Skills
- 4 Motivation/Initiative
- 5 Strong work ethic
- 6 Teamwork skills
- 7 Computer Skills
- 8 Analytical Skills
- 9 Flexibility/adaptability
- 10 Attention to detail

COMMUNICATION SKILL RANKS AS THE FOREMOST ESSENTIAL PROFESSIONAL ATTRIBUTE

Effective communication skills are fundamental for graduates, influencing their capacity to convey information proficiently and engage in fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. Verbal communication entails clearly articulating concepts, delivering captivating lectures, and facilitating class discussions that stimulate critical thinking and active involvement. Non-verbal communication, encompassing body language and facial expressions, is equally vital in conveying warmth, empathy, and approachability, crucial for establishing connections with students. Proficient communication extends beyond the classroom, involving interactions with colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders. Graduates are expected to communicate professionally during team meetings, collaborate with peers on curriculum development, and participate in constructive dialogues to address educational challenges. Furthermore, effective communication skills enable the provision of feedback, aiding learners in recognizing their strengths and areas for improvement. Graduates must deliver feedback constructively, promoting growth and cultivating a positive learning environment.

In an increasingly diverse educational landscape, communication skills are vital for bridging cultural and linguistic barriers, and ensuring inclusivity and equity in the classroom. By honing their communication abilities, graduates can cultivate a supportive and engaging learning environment that empowers them to succeed academically and socially.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the communication skills of graduates, examining the influence of gender and academic stream.

HYPOTHESES

There is no significant difference in communication skill among the graduates owing to differences in

- Gender
- Type of management

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The term "Review of Literature" comprises two components: "Review" and "Literature." "Literature" denotes the comprehensive understanding of a specific domain within any discipline, encompassing both theoretical and practical aspects along with research studies. On the other hand, "Review" entails the systematic organization of knowledge within particular research areas, aimed at building a framework of knowledge to demonstrate that the researcher's study contributes to the field. Here are some reviews based on skills.

Mark Waldman and Andrew Newberg, M.D. (2010) outline eight essential elements that every speaker should commit to memory before delivering a speech. According to them, these key elements contribute to highly effective communication:

1. Keep a soft gaze.
2. Show friendly facial expressions.
3. Speak in a warm and inviting tone.
4. Use expressive hand and body movements.
5. Stay calm and composed.
6. Speak slowly and clearly.
7. Keep your messages concise.
8. Pay attention to the content of your words. In a related vein, Jack C. Richards developed his materials based on the three-part version of Brown and Yule's framework (following Jones, 1996, and Burns, 1998), which delineates talk as interaction, talk as transaction, and talk as performance.

The Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia (2006) highlighted the significance of soft skills, pointing out that although there aren't any particular talents listed, many are connected to moral principles, capacity for leadership, collaboration, communication, and lifelong learning. In today's global work market, soft skills are deemed essential, especially in this quickly evolving technology era.

Bakar and Hanaji (2007) aimed to evaluate the employability skills of technical vocational standards within the Malaysian government. The primary motivation for the study was to enhance workforce empowerment. The sample size consisted of 162 students. The study emphasized the importance of training students in specific skills, highlighting a significant finding that revealed a difference between the gender in terms of basic and personal skills.

Blgrave In 2010, In order to discuss the value of liberal arts education in life, the Huron University College Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences spoke with twenty business executives. Following these talks, a poll was created with recruiters in mind to determine what essential abilities are required for success. According to the 2012 poll results (N=45), 93% of participants rated both written and spoken communication as "very important." Similarly, 87% of respondents evaluated cooperation, problem-solving, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and analytical thinking as "very important". Only 33% of respondents said computer proficiency was extremely essential, though.

Indani, M. V. & Jadhav, N. K. (2012) conducted research titled 'A Study of the Effectiveness of Face-to-Face English Communication Skills among M.Ed. Students'. Pre- and post-test evaluations were used in the study to gauge the English communication skills of non-English medium M.Ed. students in a variety of real-world contexts, including the market, the railway station, and interview settings. Purposive sampling was used in the study to choose ten M.Ed. students who did not speak English as their first language from the Department of Education at North Maharashtra University in Jalgaon. An English oral rating sheet with 5-point criteria and a self-designed single-group pre-post test design were used. Using a tape recorder, the individuals' conversations in each of the three scenarios were captured for data collection. For both descriptive and inferential analysis, statistical methods such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, correlation coefficient, and t-value were employed. The findings indicated that the mean scores from the post-test were

Isdawati Ismail, Abdul Razaq Ahmad, Mohd Mahzan Awang (2017) conducted 'A Study of Soft Skills among Polytechnic Students'. employed a survey methodology utilizing questionnaires as the primary research instrument. The survey was carried out in Malaysia, involving 480 Polytechnic students from various zones. The findings revealed that the implementation levels of soft skills modules within Polytechnics, as perceived by students, were moderate across categories such as personal development, communication, management, leadership, writing skills, and professional ethics. Analysis using MANOVA indicated a significant difference in soft skills based on the department of studies and zones. However, there was no significant difference observed based on gender.

TOOLS USED FOR THE STUDY

In the present study, the researcher designed a rubric for assessing communication skill among graduates.(adopted the rubric from- Shafqat Hussain & Muhammad Saeed, (2014))

SAMPLE AND INSTRUMENT

The samples for the study were selected from the arts and science colleges in the Chennai district. The total sample was 100UG students.

A rubric refers to a set of guidelines or a scoring tool utilized to assess and evaluate the quality of a student's work based on predefined criteria. It typically consists of a set of descriptors or levels of achievement for each criterion being evaluated. Rubrics are significant in research as they provide a structured and consistent way to assess performance, ensuring that assessments are fair, transparent, and objective. They help researchers measure the effectiveness of interventions, programs, or educational practices by providing a standardized method for evaluating outcomes. Rubrics also aid in providing constructive feedback to individuals, guiding them toward improvement and growth. Overall, rubrics enhance the reliability and validity of assessments in research studies.

Understanding the importance of rubrics, the researcher designed a rubric specifically focused on assessing communication skills with a total of 25 sub-dimensions which were organized into five dimensions: Context, Verbal, Structure, Non-Verbal, and General having rating scale as -Very Well (5), Well (4), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (2), Not at all (1). The face validity is subjective and based on common sense judgment rather than statistical analysis or empirical evidence. Here this tool is evaluated by experts familiar with the content and purpose of the assessment which results in the effectiveness and accuracy in measuring the skill of communication.

Marks were distributed as follows: Advanced (100-80), Proficient (79-59), Emerging (58-38), and Does Not Meet (below 37).

During their seminar presentations, the graduates' communication skills were assessed by two language experts. Their ability to convey ideas, engage listeners, and demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication was evaluated. The expert provided comprehensive feedback and assigned overall marks based on the graduate's proficiency in communication.

The table below provides a concise overview of the selected criteria along with their descriptions.

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Context	Level of appropriateness for students
	Delivery of reliable information
	Development of Stimulation ideas
	Ensuring content with objectives
	Proficiency in the subject matter
	Logical structure of materials / Content
Language / Verbal	Pronunciation
	Grammar and vocabulary
	Tone of voice
	Fluency and speed of delivery
	Volume
Structure	Getting attention
	Indicating structure in the opening session
	Closing session
	Relevant Usage of Supporting Aids
Technique / Non Verbal	Eye contact
	Hand Movements
	Facial Expressions
	Body language

		Postures
General		Poise level
		Hackneyed Phrases & Cliches
		Clarity
		Overall impression
		Overall Environment of the class

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

H1: There is no significant difference in the skill of communication among the UG students owing to the difference in Gender.

TABLE 1 -Table showing a difference in the skill of communication among the UG students owing to the difference in Gender

Variable	Category	N	Mean	SD	t ratio	df	Sig
Gender	Male	42	32.52	5.829	2.116	98	P = 0.038* p < 0.05 (sig)
	Female	58	32.76	5.854			

*p<0.05

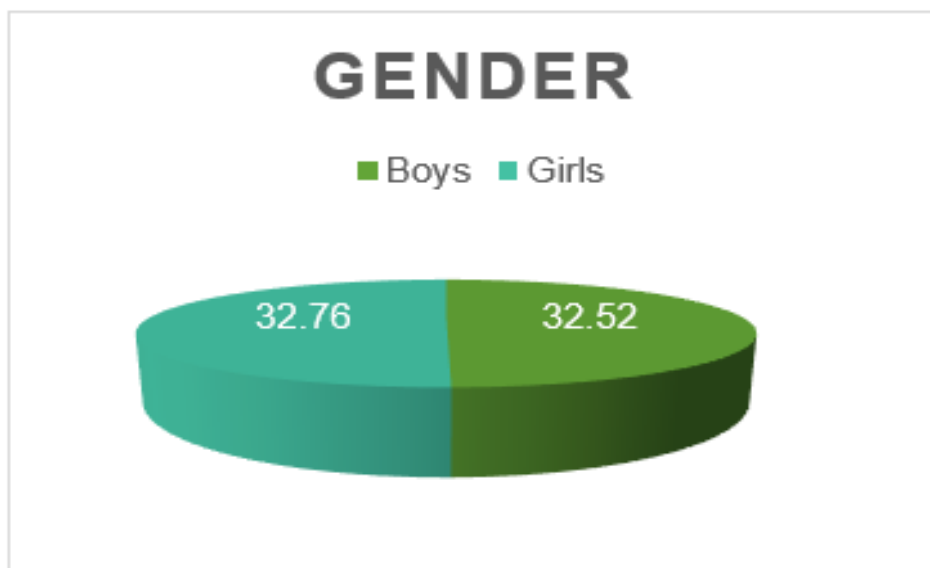


Fig-1 Pie diagram on gender

The above table as well as the figure shows the mean scores standard deviation and 'p-value of selected demographic variables.

The p-value of Gender is 0.038, which is less than the p-value at 95% confidence level (0.05) with a degree of freedom of 98.

Hence the hypothesis assumed that there is no significant difference in the skill of communication among the graduates owing to the difference in Gender is rejected.

Thus, we conclude that there is a significant difference between the skill of communication owing to gender. Also from the mean value, it is stated that female students possess better communication skill than male students.

H2: There is no significant difference in the skill of communication among the UG students owing to the difference in their type of management.

TABLE 2 -One-way ANNOVA showing the difference in the skill of communication among the UG students owing to the difference in their types of management

Types of management			df	F value	Sig
	Mean	SD			
Government	14.31 ^a	2.296	97	11.204	<0.001** (sig)
Aided	15.00 ^a	2.033			
Private	16.85 ^b	2.923			

** denotes significant level at 1% level

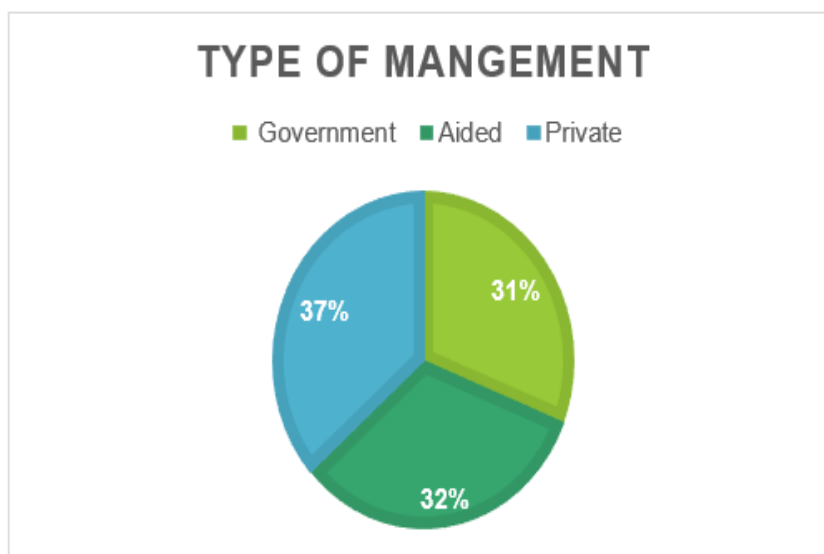


Fig-2 Pie diagram on types of management

From the above table (one way ANNOVA) and the pie diagram it is clear that the private college students show significant differences towards skill of communication since p -value is less than 0.01. Hence null hypothesis is rejected at 1% confidence level with degrees of freedom 97 which imply that there is a significant difference among types of management regarding students' skill of communication. As per the result of the Duncan Multiple Range test (DMRT), private college students show higher skills in their skill of communication than government and government-aided college students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main findings of the present study are summarized below.

As per the **Qualitative analysis** the feedbacks by the experts pointed out that the sample of undergraduates whose skill of communication is little satisfied when comparing to the past years but also male students possessed little low when compared to female students. And also the experts found that the undergraduates who studied their schooling in private school had little good communication than others who studied their schooling in government and government-aided schools.

Thus the experts pointed out that effective oral communication skill are indispensable for graduates navigating today's dynamic professional landscape. This skill encompasses not only the ability to express ideas clearly and persuasively but also the capacity for active listening and adapting communication approaches to diverse audiences and contexts.

In professional settings, strong oral communication empowers graduates to engage confidently in meetings, contribute meaningfully to discussions, and deliver impactful presentations that captivate and inform. It is the cornerstone of effective teamwork, enabling collaboration, brainstorming, and problem-solving among colleagues. Moreover, graduates with adept oral communication skills can build rapport, negotiate effectively, and handle conflicts diplomatically, fostering positive relationships with clients, stakeholders, and team members.

Ultimately, honing oral communication skills equips graduates with a competitive edge, empowering them to succeed in various professional roles, foster innovation, build strong networks, and effectively navigate the complexities of today's interconnected world.

Quantitative analysis added up to the above interpretation.

As per the hypothesis, the result showed that there is a significant difference in Gender towards skill of communication where the female students are good in their communication skill. This research aligns with the conclusions of the **Barkar and Hanafi (2007)** study, which identified a distinction between male and female students regarding basic and personal skills.

This study finds that there is a significant difference among types of management about students' skill of communication. The private college UG students are better than government and government-aided college students.

Private college students frequently demonstrate strong communication skills as a result of their high-quality education, which includes specialized programs and access to resources and facilities. Private institutions prioritize the development of soft skills, provide networking opportunities, offer professional support, and uphold higher academic standards. Therefore, implementing strategies such as interdisciplinary courses, communication workshops, and skill enhancement programs can establish an interactive and supportive learning environment, fostering robust communication skills among government and government-aided

college students.

Adding to this the Undergraduates must continuously acquire and hone employability skills essential for their future careers. This includes adaptability, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. Additionally, fostering positive attitudes towards employment, resilience, and embracing challenges are vital during periods of uncertainty and difficulty. Developing a growth mind-set, seeking learning opportunities, and being proactive in career planning can greatly enhance their prospects and readiness for the evolving job market.

In an era of remote work and global connectivity, digital communication platforms amplify the importance of clear and concise verbal exchanges. Graduates proficient in oral communication not only convey information effectively but also demonstrate empathy, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness, enhancing their ability to connect with diverse audiences and navigate multicultural environments.

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