

Role of Communication Skills in Higher Education

K.Umakiran

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Kakatiya Government College, Hanamkonda, Warangal—506001

Email: sendtoumkiran@gmail.com

Abstract

Communication is sharing of information between sender and receiver. Communication skills are of two types: verbal and non-verbal. Students of higher education must learn art of communication to be successful in life. Students should learn Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills. Students should also know that non-verbal communication skills are as important verbal communication skills. Students have to learn communication skills to become employable. Through communication you can understand and be understood by others. At higher education level, students need to upgrade their knowledge and wisdom with the help of communication skills. Students can also join in finishing schools to get trained in employable skills. At higher studies students need to write, speak, listen and read extensively. So that they can contribute to the world. They need to do research, make presentations, write dissertations and thesis. For all that they need communication skills.

Keywords: Communication skills, Verbal, Non-verbal, Empathy, Written, Spoken, Listening, Higher Education .

Introduction

The development of any country depends on efforts made to plan and implement in education. Education serves as a means by which people acquire knowledge and skills that can be used in exploiting and

utilizing resources available for micro and macro-development (Galabawa, 2005). The knowledge and skills include those which are concerned with problem-solving, information and communication technology, administration and management, science and technology, research, and languages (Komba, 2012). Such knowledge and skills can be learned and imbibed in schools, institutes, colleges, and universities through a medium of instruction.

Communication is essentially a process that involves sharing of information (Komba, 2008). It can be perceived better as a two-way process in which there is an exchange and progression of thoughts, feelings or ideas towards a mutually accepted goal or direction. All forms of communication require a sender, a message, a channel, and a receiver (Sen, 2005). While Mbowe (1994) defines communication as a process involving writing correct language, precise reporting, correspondence and mastering the mechanics of writing and speaking, Anderson (1972) views communication as a dynamic process in which a person consciously or unconsciously affects the cognition of another person through materials or agencies used in symbolic ways. In the same vein, Ndoloi (1998) contends that communication is the transactional process concerned with the creation, transmission, interpretation and use of information. (Komba, 2015) Generally,

effective communication involves the selection of the best communication channel for a specific purpose, the technical knowledge to use the channel appropriately, the presentation of information in an appropriate manner for the target audience, and the ability to understand messages and responses received from others.

The role of higher education in producing graduates in various fields useful to the market depends not only on academic achievement, but also on acquiring generic skills or soft skills required for them to compete in employment market. Now-a-days employers are giving importance to soft skills and personality development of employees to recruit. Therefore, higher education institutions in India are emphasizing more on soft skills apart from core subjects.

Generally, communication can be defined as a process of exchanging information, from the person giving the information through verbal and non-verbal methods, to the person receiving the information.

Previous research on communication skills among university students have been reported by Ihmeideh, Ahmad and Dababneh (2010) and Cleland, Foster and Moffat (2005). They found that a positive communication environment provides opportunities to students to learn how to communicate, and thus, have better communication skills. Therefore, university students need to be given opportunities to communicate in order to be better prepared for the job market after their studies. Communication is more effective if the receiver (of the information) can understand and practice the skills. Additionally communication will be more effective if the physical, spiritual and social factors are taken into consideration during the communication process.

As a university student gets ready to start on their selected career, he or she should take an opportunity in all activities that develop

communication skills in a wider and deeper scale. Students need to put in effort to develop their communication skills to be able to succeed in their chosen profession (Ihmeideh, et al. 2010). Harlak et al. (2008) proposes that university students be exposed to activities that can develop their communication skills starting from their first year at university. Hence, universities must provide many more activities and platforms to develop the students' communication skills in order to meet the challenges of the globalized world.

It is essential to develop communication skills for professional and private life. Strong communication skills, help in understanding people and situations. It facilitates in building trust, earning respect, and overcoming diversities. It also creates conducive conditions for sharing creative ideas and solving problems.

Why communication skills are important? Effective communication leads to:

1. More productivity
2. Consistency in work flow
3. Strong business Relations
4. Better control
5. Advanced professional image
6. Better response from all stakeholders
7. Quick in problem solving
8. Strong decision making

Therefore it is understood that, communication skills are the most demanded soft skills that employers are looking for in their employees.

Top 10 most in-demand Soft Skills HR research organisation:

Based on % of members with skills who were hired into a new job:

1. Communication Skills-----57.9
2. Organisation-----56.5
3. Teamwork-----56.4
4. Punctuality -----55.9
5. Critical thinking-----55.8
6. Social Skills-----55.8
7. Creativity-----55.0
8. Inter—personal communication-----55.0
9. Adaptability-----54.9
10. Friendly personality -----54.6

The following are five important communication skills students in higher education should learn to get employed in organizations:

1. **Listening:** Listening is important part of communication skill to be acquired. Successful communication skill is not only understanding the words spoken but also the human feelings behind it. Careful listening build conducive environment where ideas and thoughts bread and can be expressed freely.
2. **Straight talk:** Simple conversations lay foundation for building trust who are conversing.
3. **Non—verbal communication:** According to a study, 93% of the communication is non-verbal. Non-verbal signals are wordless communication, body position, facial expression, hand movements, gestures, eye contact, attitude and tone of your voice, muscle tension and the way we breathe. The way you look, listen, create, react, gesture, speaks far more about feelings than words will ever be able to. Developing the ability to understand others with empathy and use nonverbal signs will help you connect with people you are conversing, express what you think with clarity, negotiate challenging situations, and nurture better relationships at home and at work.
4. **Stress management:** Generally, stress pushes people to work. It can be very useful and encouraging for work. However, when the stress becomes unbearable, it can affect communication, clarity of opinion, and appropriate behavior and action. People under stress usually misunderstand other people, send misleading nonverbal signals, and use comical behavior.
5. **Emotion control:** In communication, feelings of people play

an important role. Decisions are made more often on the way you feel than the way you think.

Under emotions, nonverbal behavior affects the understanding of other people. Emotions also influence how others understand and perceive you. If inner feelings are not perceived properly, you will not be able to express experiences. Thus, frustration, misunderstanding and conflicts can be averted. Therefore, controlling of emotions helps in understanding others.

Smart Ways to Improve Communication skills: Listening with empathy will be able to make you understand the perspective of others. We will be in a better position to perceive others feelings. Communication begins with us. So, we should take the responsibility and start communication in a simple way. If it is a professional meeting, practice what you want to speak. It will save from embarrassment. We can also try mock conversations. Always expect views different from what we think. So do not react negatively. Try to be cool and accept others point of view and convince them sensitively. Instead of taking adverse stand it is always better to take a balanced opinion.

Good communicators will have clarity of thought and expression. So, if students cultivate and nurture communication skills they can share their views or thoughts with simplicity. With simple communication skills complex issues can be explained clearly.

All the great leaders in the world are outstanding communicators. With exquisite communication skills, people can be connected to targeted community be it students or public in our society. With Communication skills students can be inspired, persuaded and motivate other students. Communication skills facilitate you to understand and be understood by

others. Students own the task if they get connected to the communicator.

After completion of intermediate, students enter Graduation and later Post-Graduation. They would be entering phase of becoming matured. Communication skills come under Soft skills. Communication skills enhance student's employability. Students may have command over a subject, but if they don't have grasp over communication skills, students will not be able to succeed in their career or life. Generally, corporates look at communication skills of a student apart from the subject they wanted to give employment in.

Two types of communication skills have to be acquired. Verbal and Non-verbal. Verbal includes written and oral communication skills. Students should develop command over English, Hindi and mother tongue both written and spoken to seize opportunities. Students should strive to learn grammar, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph formation to be expressive. Students should recognize that there is difference between spoken and written language, and should get trained accordingly. Students should study keenly works of great writers and speakers to develop their own style of expression. Usually, it is observed that, people with knowledge, wisdom, character and communication skills prosper in life.

How do non-verbal communication skills help students in higher education? Humility, attitude, modesty and physical behavior comes under non—verbal skills. Non-verbal skills must be nurtured so that they do not look intimidating to others. By behaving politely students will approach us without any hesitation. Patient listening also helps us in empathizing with others. Great communicators are aware that nonverbal communication speaks louder than verbal communication; they listen with their eyes and ears, and pay attention to people's posture, hand movements, and eye contact

because these also send very powerful messages. These skills help in working in teams and get people along.

To cultivate leadership qualities verbal and non-verbal skills are needed. Students need to develop both types of skills to initiate several tasks in career and life. Students with good communication skills exude confidence and self-esteem. Generally, students with good communication skills are recognized in the class and appreciated. They also remain in the hearts of students and teachers throughout their life.

While pursuing Higher education, students need to do research. Students pursuing Post-Graduation, M.Phil and Ph.D need to submit synopsis, dissertation and Thesis. Application of knowledge is done in Higher Education. So, to complete all of them both written and spoken communication skills are needed.

Students stay in hostels. If they have to get along with other students, they have to have good communication skills. Higher education students need to get specialized in few subjects to pursue their career. They need to write essays as part of their course. Students should also present seminars as part of their course. Both tasks need communication skills.

Project reports: Students at higher education level need to do research and submit project report. They need to write and present their work in the classroom.

Team work: Students need to work in teams to accomplish the tasks given. When they join in Jobs all of them need to work in teams. Students also learn from peer-groups. Verbal and Non—Verbal communication skills helps students to work in teams. Students participate in N.S.S, N.C.C and Outreach programmes at Higher Education level. Communication skills play vital role in all those programmes.

Knowledge: To acquire knowledge students should be well versed in listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). In Higher Education, students need to study vast syllabus. LSRW skills are evaluated in students wishing to pursue higher studies abroad. Reading is essential to acquire knowledge.

Social Communication Skills: They are negotiating, language, culture and politeness. Students should practice social communication skills while participating in Group discussions and studying in institutions. Art of negotiation can be learned, while participating in extra-curricular activities. Because, it needs lot of practice to cultivate. Language should be acceptable in a civilized world. Arrogant and adamant attitude and language is generally ignored. Students have to adopt good culture as it reflects our personality. Students should behave politely with other. Students should recognize that only good culture, language, and politeness will be appreciated in this world to become successful.

Fieldwork: In Higher Education, students will be sent to do field work to get exposure to firsthand practical knowledge. Classroom knowledge should be accompanied by field work to get better understanding of the subject and get exposed to experience. Students if they cultivate communication skills can comprehend more knowledge which will be useful to them in their life and career.

Extra-curricular activities: They also need exposure to good communication skills.

Finishing schools: In Higher Education, students must be made to undergo short term courses in Finishing School after completion of Core programmes. Communication skills as part of Soft skills should be taught in Finishing school so that students can get employed.

Interviews: Students need to attend interviews for obtaining fellowships for research or get employed. Not only students need authority over the subject but also communication skills to express what they think and would like to do. Writing and Speaking with clarity wins the hearts of the expert who conduct interviews. Especially, during placements students' communication skills are evaluated and employment is offered based on them.

Profession: Whatever students aspire to take up as their profession, without communication skills they cannot succeed. Wisdom and intelligence are identified with communication skills.

John Sculley former CEO of Apple, in his autobiography *Odyssey time and again* emphasis on importance of communication skills. Jack Welch former CEO of General Electric in his book *Jack, Straight from the gut* also emphasis on communication. He says communicate, communicate and always communicate to people around you if you want people to accomplish their task. Students should get inspired from good communicators like Mahatma Gandhi, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, Tagore, Dr Shashi Tharoor, and Eminent writers like R.K Narayan, Stephen leacock, Raja Rao, former Parliamentarians like Atal Behari Vajpai, Sushma Swaraj. It is only illustrative and not comprehensive. Good communicators are present in all fields to emulate by students. Students should observe speakers of various political parties how they present their view point with language that is simple to understand.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Communication Skills play crucial role in Higher Education as they make students become useful to the society. Ultimately, Higher Education should mould students in becoming responsible citizens of any country.

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