

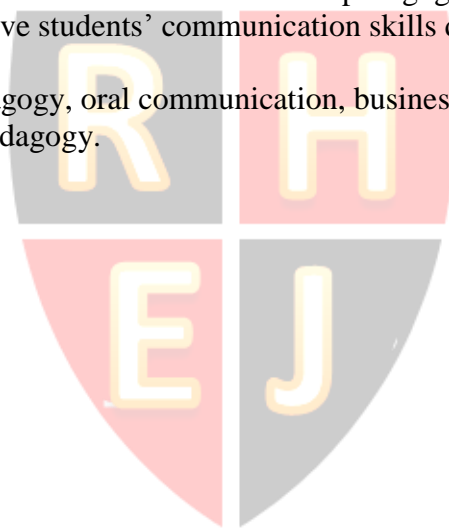
## **Comparing discussion and lecture pedagogy when teaching oral communication in business course**

Yao Dai  
Heidelberg University

### **ABSTRACT**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, oral communication skills are increasingly important for business graduates who will start their careers. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to discover the best method to help business students enhance their oral communication skills during their college years. This research also helps professors to make their business course more effective. A thorough review of the literature reveals this method can promote the effectiveness of communication class and oral communication ability for students. This review of the literature examines the impact of discussion based pedagogy in business communication courses, comparing this new method with the traditional lecture method. Findings reveal that discussion based pedagogy is an available and valuable method can improve students' communication skills during the course.

Keywords: discussion pedagogy, oral communication, business course, communication skills, traditional lecture pedagogy.



Copyright statement: Authors retain the copyright to the manuscripts published in AABRI journals. Please see the AABRI Copyright Policy at <http://www.aabri.com/copyright.html>.

## INTRODUCTION

Through the development of modern industry after the world war two, the constitution of industry has dramatically changed. Business organizations, such as the General Motors, have become bigger than before— not only with the number of members but also the level of hierarchy in the institution (Drucker, 1946). This means that communication, as a vital social skill, becomes increasingly important within corporations and organizations throughout the world. So, every employee encounters more challenges regarding communication than before; this is a result of globalization and commercialization.

As a result, new graduates who take part in businesses will encounter more communication issues with their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates (Andrews, 2008, p 413). For instance, graduates from the business field encounter challenges concerning communication and cooperation with their colleagues as members of team or group if they want to achieve the team purpose (Violeta, 2009), and they need to convince their subordinates, as a supervisor, if they want subordinates to implement plans. Further, they need to talk with clients if they want to obtain an order or a contract. Moreover, negotiation and collaboration between different companies and organizations are more frequent than before. As the trading between countries becomes increasingly common in this time, communication with people from other culture and who speak other language is going to be a general necessity for graduates in their future. Therefore, communication as a social skill is becoming more and more significant for business students to study and learn.

In order to improve the effectiveness of business communication courses, the content of the course and details of business communication skills are the first concepts that should be identified and confirmed. When the content and details are identified, professors and administrators who are in charge of curriculum design can modify the method of instruction and the course for students. For instance, “oral communication skill” was identified as one of the most essential communication skills for business communication course in research by Wardrope (1999). In order to enhance students’ oral communication skill, teachers can provide more opportunities for students to practice this skill during class, for example, teachers can set up some simulated trading negotiation for students; this opportunity can help students practice their oral communication skills such as expression ability.

While the content of the course and details of business communication skills were identified, the next step is to design a teaching method for business communication course. Actually, there are numerous studies focus on this topic and provided various instruments and pedagogical methods that could be employed in a business communication course. For example, in the research of Dallimore (2008), in-class discussion is one of these methods. Dallimore notes, “This instrument, in fact, has been advocated for a variety of reasons, including its inherently democratic nature, its emphasis on active learning and its impact on the development of problem solving and critical thinking skills” (p. 164).

Therefore, utilizing in-class discussion as a method to improve students’ oral communication skills in a business communication course is a valuable tool. As Dallimore points out, students can improve in their oral and written ability during the in-

class discussion if they prepare and participate in the discussion actively (p. 168). Thus, this in-class discussion method can also be utilized in this study to compare whether discussion or lecture pedagogy in oral communication in business course is better for improving students' communication skills.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Oral communication skill is one of the most essential abilities for graduates, especially the business graduates (Dallimore, 2008; Noblitt 2010; Surratt 2006); because business students' priority is communicating with their clients, supervisors or team partners. Therefore, teaching communication skills, especially oral communication skills are extremely important for business schools. Moreover, an appropriate teaching method can help schools achieve their teaching goal.

### **Oral communication, the skill required by the business industry**

“Communication is a basic life skill, as important as the skills by which you make your way through school or earn a living” (McKay, 2009, p. 1). This skill or ability is essential for every individual, because it not only happens within family life, but also emerges within their work place. As an essential skill for business students, “Communication has various definitions from various communication scholars. They include Charles Cooley who defined communication as a socialized mechanism. Robert Park also defined it as a network; “this network creates and makes possible consensus and understanding among individuals” (Aina, Ogunbiyi, 2012, p. 215). In short, it is inevitable and cannot be avoided during our daily lives.

More specifically, communication skills were required by the increasing number of business companies at this time (Wardrope, 2002; Freihat, 2012). Nevertheless, research also asserts that “graduates often begin their career with inadequate oral communication skills” (Gray, 2010, p. 40; Alshare, 2011). Therefore, this is a skill they need to excellent in their future career.

Moreover, many studies prove that communication skills are extremely vital for graduates from diverse areas (Alshare, Lane, & Miller, 2011, p. 186). For instance, according to research by Mohammad (2011), students with English majors also need to develop their communication skills for challenges in the future. Similarly, science graduates also must be able to possess communication skills to deal with professional issues in their future (Noblitt, Vance, & Smith, 2010).

According to Freihat's research (2012), a lot of communication skills were identified and related in the workplace by business companies. In this research, 24 business companies were finished the surveys towards communication skills in the workplace (p.164), the purpose is to identify the most significant communication skills for business graduate employees. As a result, persuading, presentation, negotiation, explaining etc. as those important skills were required in the workplace (p.172-173).

In Maes's study which is also concerning business students in the workforce, “oral communication is the most important competency for college graduates entering the workforce” (Maes, 1997, p. 67). Maes interviewed employers to identify which communication skills were required in employees' daily activities in the company. There

were two experiments in this research; the first experiment proved that oral communication is the most important competency. The second experiment identified four communication skills; which include 1. following instructions, 2. listening skills, 3. conversational skills, and 4. giving feedback. It means these skills are most significant in the office. Therefore, it is essential for schools to improve the oral communication skills of graduates.

As those skills were identified, how to communicate in those situations becomes an urgent problem for not only business students, but also their professors and supervisors as well. Moreover, how to help students obtain the knowledge or skills to deal with business problems in their future career is one of the main responsibilities the business schools should undertake (Wood et al., 2006). Fortunately, providing those communication skills through business communication courses is not difficult to achieve for business schools (Gray, 2010).

### **Oral communication, the skill schools should focus on**

In order to improve students' communication skills before graduate, appropriate curricular and courses should design school. In Wardrope's research (2002), the perceptions of department chairs were rated by a survey. In this research, "280 chairs provided the completed questionnaires towards the business communication courses at their institutions" (p. 63). As a result, 34 kinds of communication skills, which those chairs considered were significant for graduates in their future career, were rated. Skills like the use of correct grammar in written skills and making oral presentations were on the top of the rate.

Also in this research, six categories of communication skills were identified that should be taught within business courses for students. These skills include communication theory, written communication, oral communication, employment communication, technology, and current business communication issues. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to instruct these communication skills for business students who will begin their careers in the business world.

Since the significant communication skills were identified by business companies and department chairs, the next step is create an appropriate curricular for students. Also in Wardrope's research (1999), a common curricular was provided by a survey from 148 communication departments. In this research, 148 communication departments were invited in a survey about their current, expected, and desired course offerings (p. 256). As a result, 30 courses, such as group discussion, were selected by those departments as the significant courses that should be instructed for students

While the curricular of communication skills were identified, the method for instruct those knowledge for students is the next errand. Fortunately, there are various methods or tools can improve business students' communication skills; as Simmenroth-Nayda (2012) points out in her study, providing communication training can improve students' communication skills. However, other methods can also promote communication skills. In a Malaysian study about Blended Learning (BL, integrating learning programs in different formats to achieve learning), Dzakiria revealed that BL can provide students various linked options. If these options combine with classroom training, students can get a large number of potential learning resources which can

promote the learning experience of students (Dzakiria, 2009). As a result, “blended learning is a pedagogical alternative that could play a significant role not only for teaching Business Communication, but has the potential to promote lifelong learning initiatives in Malaysia in a more meaningful and inviting way” (p. 297).

Other tools can also be employed in business communication courses to enhance students’ understanding of communication. For example, Facebook, as a social instrument, can play a vital role for the business communication students (Decarie, 2010). Film is also a tool that can help students understand communication skills; for instance, students can learn the gesture language of other cultures, familiar with pronounce of people from other lingual areas such as India. Students can even study the cultures of other counties through foreign films to help them do business with foreign people (Cardon, 2010).

Besides that, Simmenroth-Nayda’s study also prove that providing communication training for students can improve their communication skills (2012, p. 6). Studying which methods can improve oral communication effectively is essential; for example, while compared the usage of case studies with traditional teaching methods, Noblitt (2010) found that case studies were a useful method for improving oral communication. In other research, in-class discussion was found as a beneficial method that can be employed in business courses. According to Dallimore (2008), students can get high scores on their evaluation reports towards oral and written communication skills if they can prepare and participate in the class discussion in an active way. Moreover, Dallimore also noted that in-class discussion is a suitable technique that could be employed with other teaching methods to improve students’ oral communication skills.

### **Discussion pedagogy and traditional instruction**

Discussion, as a widespread technique, has been utilized by many teachers throughout the world. A great number of articles (Hamann, 2012; Noblitt, 2010; Dallimore, 2008; Kosko, 2012) point out that “discussions are a useful method to facilitate student learning. At the same time, classroom discussions can be structured and organized in many different ways to accommodate varying classroom environments” (Hamann, 2012, p.65). According to various studies (Dallimore, 2008; Wardrope, 1999), in-class discussion method is valuable that can help teachers achieve the communication objective; also it can help students practice their oral communication skills. Moreover, a couple of studies declared that discussion can also improve the critical thinking of students (Noblitt, 2010; Dallimore, 2008), which is essential for business students when confronting complex problems. In addition, according to Kosko (2012), discussion is a useful strategy that can also improve students’ understanding of mathematics.

Further, In Dallimore’s research (2004), the author focuses on which kinds of instructors’ behaviors can enhance the quality of participation and effectiveness of discussion. In order to achieve this goal, an experiment was conducted in two graduate management accounting courses. The result shows that six categories such as required and graded participation can enhance quality of participation and effectiveness of discussion. Therefore, using discussion for business students to improve their oral communication is effective.

While talking about traditional lecture teaching method, it is indeed a widely used method throughout the world; however, it is also a method that accepted a lot of criticism (Chilwant, 2012). At this time, there are also a lot of research employing traditional lecture method as a comparison objective with other method (Chilwant, 2012; Noblitt, 2010; Browne, Mehra, Rattan, and Thomas, 2004; Pugsley, Clayton, 2003). For instance, in Noblitt's research, the author used the case study to compare with traditional teaching methods. As a result, the statistics show exhibited difference between those two different methods.

### **Comparison experiment as an experimental method in other study**

In this study, discussion pedagogy was compared with the lecture instruction method. As a comparison experiment was employed, it is necessary to prove the comparison experiment is reliable for this research and suitable to test the communication subjects.

There are various studies that employed the comparison experiment method in their study; for instance, Gillam compared experiment method was utilized to explore that "whether a new contextualized language intervention (CLI) or an existing decontextualized language intervention (DLI) resulted in greater changes in children's language and narration." (Gillam, Gillam, Reece, 2011, p. 276)

In another study, which was conducted by Starling (2012), the comparison experiment method was also employed in the communication course. In this study, two groups of students were divided to learn the same content but instructed by different teachers. As a result, the teacher who had the speech-language pathologist (SLP) training got a better result in children's grades. Therefore, the comparison experiment method has proven to be an available and reliable method for research communication in the classroom.

## **AN EXPERIMENT DESIGN FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **Research question and hypotheses for future research**

This research explores the effectiveness of discussions in the business communication course through the literature review and designs a compare the results of testing from different groups. Moreover, it explores whether the discussion method is more effective for promoting students' communication skill than traditional instruction, which does not contain discussion in the class. More specifically, the following research question was formulated:

Research Question: are students who take discussion communication course can learn more communication skills than students who take traditional lecture communication course?

In order to measure the result of this study, interviews and questionnaires can be used. Those methods can be employed as pretests and post-tests to measure whether the hypotheses are confirmed. What is more, an assessment criterion for communication skills which was published by University JYVÄSKYLÄ language center was attached as the Appendix A. This assessment criterion had exhibited the standard of measurement for different communication skills.

According to this research question, a hypothesis like the following can be developed:

Hypothesis: students who take discussion communication course can learn more communication skills than students who take traditional lecture communication course

### **Experiment design for future research**

In order to test the hypothesis, future study can employ two groups of business students who will take business communication course. These two groups of students can be selected randomly from the same grade; each group includes 10-15 students. In the experimental group, students will use discussion pedagogy; the control group will use a traditional lecture method. Students in the experimental group will be distributed to several small groups which include 3 to 5 students; then, they will get a topic for discussion in 15 to 20 minutes in each class. After discussion, students will get a chance to present the findings of the discussions. This experiment can continue throughout a semester. Finally, two groups of students from the discussion pedagogy and lecture method can be compared in different categories such as communication skills.

This study is essential for business courses to improve their effectiveness and gain better results in communication skills. Business graduates require an increasing range of experience and knowledge concerning oral communication skills. If they lack effective communication skills; they will not have the advantages of others in the workplace (Freihat, 2012). Therefore, improving communication skills for students is essential for business schools. Teaching communication skills in a business course also need to be implemented effectively. Therefore, this study can provide suggestions within this field to improve the effectiveness of business communication courses.

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this review was to identify the current studies examining the effectiveness of discussion pedagogy on the business communication course. It provides ideas for scholars on this area. Nevertheless, this review was also limited by the small size of evidence with business communication courses regarding the use of discussion pedagogy and the oral communication section. Fortunately, discussion pedagogy and oral communication skills also existed in other teaching areas such as foreign language or medicine; therefore, this required us to explore the similar experience and accomplishment regarding discussion pedagogy and the oral communication from other teaching areas. However, the differences between teaching business and other teaching areas in discussion pedagogy and the oral communication are obvious; hence, scholars should utilize those similar experience and accomplishment in a pragmatic way that they should examine those similar experience and accomplishment, complement their shortages in business teaching and cancel their useless sections in business teaching. Indeed, in this area, there is a long way to explore.

Besides that, because the papers selected for the current reviews were limited in numbers and period; therefore, the content and theory in this paper was limited and other relevant research concerning discussion pedagogy and the oral communication may include more valuable result for scholars in this area. However, the method in this paper and the experiment which was designed in this review still can be employed or referenced in future research.

## REFERENCES

- Aina, B. A., Ogunbiyi, O. O. (2012). Assessment of communication skills among pharmacy students of the University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy*, 3(1), 215-218.
- Alshare, K. A., Lane, P. L., Miller, D. (2011). Business communication skills in information systems (IS) Curricula: perspectives of IS educators and students. *Journal of Education for Business*, 85, 186-194.
- Andrews, J., Higson, H. (2008). Graduate employability, 'soft skills' versus 'hard' business knowledge: a European study. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33(4), 411-422.
- Browne, L., Mehra, S., Rarran, R., Thomas, G. (2004). Comparing lecture and e-learning as pedagogies for new and experienced professionals in dentistry. *British Dental Journal*, 197(2), 95-97.
- Cardon, P. W. (2010). Using films to learn about the nature of cross-cultural stereotypes in intercultural business communication courses. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 73(2), 150-165.
- Chilwant, K. S. (2012). Comparison of two teaching methods, structured interactive lectures and conventional lectures. *Biomedical Research*, 23(3), 363-366.
- Dallimore, E. J. (2004). Classroom Participation and Discussion Effectiveness: Student-Generated Strategies. *Communication Education*, 53(1), 103-115.
- Dallimore, E. J., Hertenstein, J. H., Platt, M. B. (2008). Using discussion pedagogy to enhance oral and written communication skills. *College Teaching*, 56(3), 163-172.
- Decarie, C. (2010). Facebook: challenges and opportunities for business communication students. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 73(4), 449-452.
- Drucker, P. (1946). *Concept of the corporation*. Piscataway, Transaction Publishers.
- Dzakhiria, H. (2009). Blended learning (BL) as pedagogical alternative to teach business communication course: case study of UUM executive diploma program. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 13(3), 297-315.
- Freihat, S. (2012). The picture of workplace oral communication skills for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 2(1), 159-173.
- Gray, F. E. (2010). Specific oral communication skills desired in new accountancy gradates. *Association for Business Communication*, 73(1), 40-67.
- Gillam, S. L., Gillam, R. B., Reece, K. (2011). Language outcomes of contextualized and decontextualized language intervention: results of an early efficacy study. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*, 43, 276-291.
- Hamann, K., Pollock, P. H., Wilson, B. M. (2012). Assessing student perceptions of the benefits of discussions in small-group, large-class, and online learning contexts. *College Teaching*, 60(2), 65-75.
- Kosko, K. W. (2012). Student enrollment in classes with frequent mathematical discussion and its longitudinal effect on mathematics achievement. *The Mathematics Enthusiast*, 9(1&2), 111-148.
- Maes, J. D. (1997). A managerial perspective: oral communication competency is most important for business students in the workplace. *The Association for Business Communication*, 34(1), 67-80.



- McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. (2009) Messages the communication skills book. *New Harbinger Publications*, p. 1.
- Noblitt, L., Vance, D. E., Smith, M. L. D. (2010). A comparison of case study and traditional teaching methods for improvement of oral communication and critical-thinking skills. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 39(5), 26-32.
- Pugsley, K. E., Clayton, L. H. (2003). Traditional lecture or experiential learning: changing student attitudes. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 42(11), 520-523.
- Simmenroth-Nayda\*, A., Weiss, C., Fischer, T., Himmel, W. (2012). Do communication training programs improve students' communication skills? – A follow-up study. *BioMed Central Ltd.*, 5 (486), 1-9.
- Starling, J., Munro, N., Togher, L., Arciuli, Joanne. (2012). Training secondary school teachers in instructional language modification techniques to support adolescents with language impairment: a randomized controlled trial. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*, 43, 474-495.
- Surratt, C. K., (2006). Instructional design and assessment: creation of a graduate oral/written communication skills course. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(1), 1-8.
- Wardrope, W. J. (1994). Oral communication skills instruction in business schools. *Journal of Education for Business*, 69(3), 132.
- Wardrope, W. J. (1999). A curricular profile of U.S. communication departments. *Communication Education*, 48(3), 256-258.
- Wardrope, W. J. (2002). Department chairs' perceptions of the importance of business communication skills. *Association for Business Communication*, 65(4), 60-72.
- Woods, P. R., Jordan, P. J., Loudoun, R., Troth, A. C., Kerr, D. (2006). Effective teaching in the multicultural business classroom. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 17(4), 27-47.

**Appendix - ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

GRADE	Interaction	Professional Vocabulary	Language Quality	Fluency	Pronunciation	Presentation
Excellent (5)	Can present ideas articulately and persuasively in a complex discussion. Sophisticated arguing and turn-taking strategies. Has no difficulty in understanding idiomatic language use or different registers.	Has a very good command of professional vocabulary, allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions.	Can consistently maintain a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot. Correct use of idiomatic expressions and collocations.	Can express himself/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language. Wide vocabulary evident.	Mastery of the sound system of English is obvious. Accurate pronunciation and intonation in most instances.	Student is thoroughly familiar with the topic and can respond confidently and spontaneously to complex questions. Presentation is well structured, uses transitional elements, and follows the conventions of the field. Good eye contact, no reading from his/her paper. Level appropriate for intended audience.
Very good (4)	Can successfully present and justify ideas in a formal discussion. Turn-taking handled appropriately. Can recognise register shifts and a wide range of idiomatic expressions.	Has a good command of professional vocabulary, allowing gaps to be generally overcome with circumlocutions.	Can maintain a good degree of grammatical accuracy; occasional errors do not impede communication. Largely correct use of idiomatic expressions and collocations.	Fluent and spontaneous, but occasionally needs to search for expressions or compromise on saying exactly what he/she wants to.	Pronunciation and intonation generally accurate, errors do not cause misunderstanding.	Knows the topic well. Can handle complex questions with relative ease. Presentation is clearly structured and appropriate to the audience. Consistent use of transitional elements. Good eye contact, minimal need to refer to papers. Level appropriate for intended audience.
Good (3)	Keeps up with the discussion and can justify an opinion. Responds and interacts adequately with other speakers. Uses communication strategies well when unsure about e.g. idiomatic use.	Has an adequate vocabulary to express himself/herself on matters connected to his/her field.	Can communicate with reasonable accuracy and can correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstanding.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo. Although can be hesitant as he/she searches for expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Some inaccuracy in pronunciation and intonation. Problems with voiced/voiceless consonants, for example.	Evidence of a standard three part structure and some use of transitional elements. Maintains contact with the audience. Level is appropriate, but the listener is not totally convinced that the presenter knows his/her topic well.
Satisfactory (2)	Has some difficulty keeping up with the discussion and arguing an opinion. Limited turn-taking and use of communication strategies.	Limited professional vocabulary.	Communication generally successful though limited in terms of accuracy. Some unresolved misunderstanding.	Generally acceptable tempo, but often hesitant as he/she searches for expressions. Some noticeable pauses.	Frequent inaccuracy in pronunciation and intonation. Mother tongue interference apparent.	Some structural weaknesses and only limited transitional elements. Basic level of acquaintance with the topic.
Poor (1)	Has marked difficulty in keeping up with the discussion and contributes only occasionally.	Basic professional vocabulary only.	Communication characterized by frequent inaccuracies and misunderstanding.	Frequent hesitations and pauses, can produce only short stretches of language at best.	Key words regularly mispronounced, strong mother-tongue influence.	Structure lacks coherence. Speaker unfamiliar with topic. Transitional elements largely missing.
In-adequate (0)	Severe difficulty in following the discussion and no active involvement.	Professional vocabulary minimal.	Communication limited at best.	Cannot produce complex sentences or link phrases coherently.	Control of the sound system so weak that comprehension is difficult.	Lacks the features of an acceptable presentation.