

Communication Skills among Undergraduate Students at Al-Quds University

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the communication skills among undergraduate students at Al-Quds University. The researcher obtained responses from (193) undergraduate students enrolled in B.A. program. The researcher used the questionnaire of Hamidat (2007) which composed of (32) statements divided into four areas: listening skill, speaking skill, the skill of understanding others, and controlling emotions skill. The results revealed that university students have achieved a high level of communication skills in three dimensions (listening, speaking, and understanding others). It also showed a medium level in controlling emotions. Moreover, the results showed that there were no significant differences in the level of communication skills according to gender, faculty, or academic year.

Keywords: communication skills, undergraduate students, al-quds university

1. Introduction

Students interact massively every day; they exchange news, thoughts, feelings, information, and points of view. The students' ability to effectively carry out these operations is called communication skills. Today, this ability seems to be the most critical factor of student life to consider and maintain good relationships with one another. Every students, therefore, they need these skills everywhere to avoid misunderstandings and problems.

Communication has several definitions. According to Sikiti (1998:1), "Communication is a purposeful process of expressing, receiving, and understanding messages containing factual information, emotions, ideas, and needs by two or more individuals through common symbols." Mbowe (1994) defined communication as a process that includes writing, reporting, correspondence, and understanding the mechanics of writing and speaking. In addition, this capacity could refer to sharing and giving meaning that occurs at the same time through symbolic interactions (Seiler & Beall, 2005), while Sen (2005) suggested that communication involves a sender, a message, a medium, and a receiver. There are different skills related to communication such as, active listening, providing and receiving feedback, understanding body language (nonverbal cues), sympathy, persuasion, questioning, and speaking. Therefore, communication skills enable you to understand and be understood by others.

Students with good communication skills can explain their ideas and thoughts as well as building relationships without troubles or discrimination based on religion, race, and gender. Moreover, experts in communication skills consider poor communication as the basis of several problems, so communication is the solution to many obstacles (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). During studying years at university, students would have exposed to situations in classes or campus where they need to use their communications skills. Generally, communication is dynamic for expressing ourselves and understanding others. Academic achievements at university are always measured based on the level of interpersonal communication skills of graduates (Ronald, Quaid & Lindsay, 2005).

1.1 Literature Review

In general, a lot of research on communication skills has focused on investigating the level of communication skills among university students (Iksan et al. 2010; Arywh, 2017; Ihmaidat, 2007; Ihmeideh, Ahmad, & Dababneh, 2010; Cleland, Foster, & Moffat, 2005). In addition to these studies, there are also different areas of studies on communication skills such as effective communication (service-learning activities, innovative learning opportunities to promote communication skills, enhanced inter-professional communication) with health care students (Puri et al.,

2010; Stephenson et al., 2013; Kent et al., 2014). Undergraduate student perceptions of communication skills (Mercer-Mapstone & Matthews, 2015; Khan, Khan & Ahmad, 2015)). The improvement of the communication skills of undergraduate students (Asemanyi, 2015; Sonali, 2017). Communication skills and interpersonal problem-solving skills on social self-efficacy (Atilgan, 2013; Okoro, Washington, & Thomas, 2017). Interpersonal communication skills and organizational commitment (Matin, Jandaghi, & Hamidzadeh, 2010). Most research about the assessment of communication skills was conducted in Western culture.

Ihmaidat (2007) has mentioned the previous research that investigated the level of communication skills among university students. The findings of the study shown that a statistically significant effect applies to gender in the total degree on the measurement and in the degree of the fields: listening skill and controlling emotions skill. The findings also showed that there was no statistically significant effect due to the specialization or interaction between the gender and the faculty in the total degree or any of the fields. Arywh (2017) examined the average of using communication skills by students and whether there are differences in the use of these skills among students. The study found that the level of using communication skills by students was moderate. It also showed statistical differences in the use of communication skills due to gender. Researchers arranged communication skills as follows: controlling emotions, speaking, listening, and understanding others. Similarly, De Azua et al. (2020) and Iksan et al. (2010) examined the level of communication skills among university students. The findings of this study have revealed that university students have achieved good communication skills. Aljaman (2019) studied the communication skills of university students according to the variables of the academic year, gender, and specialization. The researcher used the measurement of Hamidat (2007) consisting of (32) statements divided into four areas: listening skill, speaking skill, ability to understand others, and controlling emotions skill. The researcher applied the measurement on a sample consisted of 200 students from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Pure Sciences and Humanities. The results revealed that university students have a moderate level of communication skills. They also showed that the level of communication skills among females was higher than that of males. Besides, the level of communication skills of fourth-year students was higher than that of the first-year students, and students of humanity specialization have a higher level of communication skills than that of students who specialized in Education.

Wang and Chang (2019) and Meng and Jianping (2018) mentioned that communication skills are related to the feeling of happiness and flexibility in dealing with stress and reinforcing the academic accomplishments of upgrading students. They are fundamental elements in personal and social wellbeing for them.

Even though there are many examples of studies in the literature examining communication skills among university students, the majority of these studies generally focused on American and European students, only very few researches focused on Arabs.

1.2 Justification

To achieve the purpose of communication, the parties of the communication process must have interpersonal communication skills. Although the communication process is essential in sharing information, ideas, attitudes, experiences, feelings, and opinions, we find that many university students lack interpersonal communication skills, which prevents them from achieving communication goals, which also causes many problems.

Relationships between students on campus have a powerful impact on their academic performance. Most of these relationships are academic in which students exchange different ideas and experiences. On the other hand, the student's success in his/her relationships and communication with others will have a positive impact on the student's personality, and so, on his/her academic performance. It is clear that communication and relationships between students contribute to the process of university education. For this contribution to be interactive, relationships must be useful and powerful, characterized by friendly and mutual respect between all parties. This high level of relationships will influence students at the university and in society. Then, he/she will go out, holding him/her the ideas, trends, and experiences he/she has acquired.

Sometimes, Palestinian universities suffer from clashes, verbal clashes, and differences that arise between students because of their different views and opinions, as well as how they express them. The lack of communication skills may increase these differences, which impedes students' interaction and social development properly. Our universities lack programs and courses in the field of communication skills and, perhaps, to come up with recommendations that would urge such programs and subjects to be taught to all students, not only in specific faculties (Medical Faculty). That is what this study is trying to do. University students must be encouraged to develop communication skills and create an environment in which they can express themselves well.

1.3 Aims and Questions of the Study

Thus, the current study investigates the level of communication skills, including listening, speaking, understanding others, and controlling emotions among undergraduate students. To reveal more detailed results, the researchers looked for answers to the following questions:

Hence, Universities must provide many more activities to develop the students' communication skills in order to meet the challenges of the globalized world.

1. What is the level of communication skills, including listening, speaking, understanding others, and controlling emotions among undergraduate students at Al-Quds University?
2. Does the communication skills level of participants differ significantly according to gender, faculty, and academic level?

Hence, universities must provide many more activities to develop the students' communication skills in order to meet the challenges of the globalized world.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

In the present study, the researchers used the descriptive approach. It is a design that aims to describe the phenomenon as it is and then analyze and interpret it. According to this design, data was collected using a questionnaire distributed to the sampling group to investigate the level of communication skills.

2.2 Participants

The population of the study:

The population of this study consisted of (12000) students enrolled at Al-Quds University in the year 2020.

The sample of the study:

The sample of the study included (193) undergraduate students enrolled in a Bachelor's program at Al-Quds University in Palestine who voluntarily participated in the study. The random sampling method was used to determine the study sample (Balvanes&Caputi, 2001).

Table 1. Distribution of the Demographic Information of the Participants

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	40	21.1
	Female	150	78.9
<i>Academic year</i>	First Year	26	13.7
	Second Year	61	32.1
	Third year	44	23.2
	fourth year and above	59	31.1
<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Sciences Humanities and Literary</i>	123	64.7
		67	35.3

2.3 Instrumentation

In this study, the questionnaire was developed based on the available literature on communication skills and discussions among researchers. The researchers used the measurement of communication skills, which was made by Ihmaidat (2007). It was a self-administered questionnaire with (32) statements that measured four dimensions in communication skills, including listening, speaking, understanding others, and controlling emotions. Participants' responses were tested using a five-point Likert measurement: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

2.4 Measurement Validity

The completed questionnaires were sent to four experts in the field of communication for validation. The validated questionnaire was then tested among undergraduate students, and values of (*R*) for the structure of each one and its corresponding sub-structure were very good.

2.5 Measurement Reliability

The researchers verified the reliability of the measurement in two ways; by applying it to a sample of (30) students, and calculating the internal consistency coefficient using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, with a reliability value (0.852). The researchers found that this percentage can be adopted for conducting this study.

2.6 Statistical Treatment

The means and standard deviations were calculated to find out the level of communication skills and to determine the differences due to gender, faculty, and the academic year on the measurement of communication skills; the following statistical tests were used (T-test, One Way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, Cronbach Alpha).

3. Results

The levels for the participants' responses scores were determined by the following degrees: (the mean that is lower than 2.33 reflects a low degree, 3.67-2.34 is a moderate degree, and more than 3.68 is a high degree).

The findings answered the questions of the study as follows:

First question: What is the level of communication skills, including listening, speaking, understanding others, and controlling emotions among undergraduate students at Al-Quds University?

The researcher calculated the means and standard deviations for the level of communication skills, including listening, speaking, understanding others, and controlling emotions among undergraduate students at Al-Quds University to answer this question. As shown in Table (2).

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for the Level of Communication Skills, Including Listening, Speaking, Understanding Others and Controlling Emotions Among Undergraduate Students at Al-Quds University

Domain	μ	S.D	Level
Listening skill	3.8150	0.54229	High
Understanding others	3.7184	0.58377	High
Speaking skill	3.7084	0.47934	High
Controlling emotions skill	3.5468	0.45302	Moderate
Total	3.6882	0.40264	High

Table (2) shows that the mean for communication skills of undergraduate students at Al-Quds University was high. The total score (3.68) and SD (0.402) indicating that their communication skills are high. These skills were ordered as follows: listening skill, understanding others, speaking skill, and controlling emotions.

Listening skill: The mean for students' response is (3.82), and SD is (0.542). That indicates that the level of listening skill came with a high degree. The statement 'I finish my speech in official interviews with carefully selected closing sentences' is on with the highest average (4.07), followed by 'Give my full attention to the person speaking' with a mean of (4.05). The statement 'I get my eyebrows frowned when I don't agree with the speaker' is the lowest (3.41), followed by 'When I'm in an official interview, I carefully select the first phrases so I can attract listeners' attention' with a mean of (3.65).

The skill of understanding others: The mean (3.71) and S.D (0.583) indicate that the level of ability to understand others was high. The statement 'I realize the gestures that people use while talking to me' got the highest mean (4.02), followed by 'I do my best to understand others' with a mean of (3.96). The statement 'I have my opinion and comments on what others say even if they don't ask me' got the lowest mean (2.95), followed by 'I review myself to make sure I understand what others are trying to convey to me' that got a mean of (3.73).

Speaking skill: The mean (3.70) and S.D (0.479) indicate that the level of speaking skill was high. The statement 'Smile when I talk to others' got the highest mean (4.27), followed by 'I encourage the speaker to complete his speech using expressions such as: 'complete, really!, yes, I understand you.' The statement 'I prefer not to convince the person who did something that is hard to believe, even if it is true' got the lowest mean (3.16), followed by the statement 'I address the people With whom I speak by their names and I say, 'I agree with you, Muhammad', instead of saying 'I agree with you' and then the statement 'I talk a little slowly and stop to give others a chance to talk.'

The skill of controlling emotions: Students' responses for controlling emotion skill got a mean of (3.54) and S.D (0.453), which indicates that the level of controlling emotions came at a moderate level. The statement that came up highly is 'If I make a mistake towards someone, I apologize to him with all the welcome chest' on the highest mean

(4.28), followed by the statement 'I take into account how my words and actions will affect others' with a mean of 3.94. The statement 'I can control my mood when it's bad' got the lowest mean (2.92), followed by the statement 'I avoid discussing sensitive topics' with a mean (3.11).

Second question: Does the communication skills level of participants differ significantly according to gender, faculty, and academic level?

The means and t-test have been calculated to find if the level of communication skills differs significantly according to gender and faculty. For the academic year, means, SDs, and one-way analysis of differences have been worked out to answer the second question. See Tables (3) and (4).

Table 3. Results of 'T' Test for the Responses of the Respondents on the Level of Communication Skills Among Students According to Gender and Faculty

Domains	Variable	No.	μ	SD	t'	Sig.
The total degree for gender variable	Male	40	3.6266	0.41650	1.062	0.292
	Female	150	3.7046	0.39868		
The total degree for faculty variable	Sciences	123	3.7027	0.35573	0.676	0.500
	Humanities	67	3.6614	0.47876		

Table 3 shows that there are no differences in the communication skills that students use due to gender and faculty variables.

Table 4. Means, S.Ds and One-Way Analysis of Differences Due to the Academic Year

Domain	Variable	No.	μ	SD	t'	Sig.
The total degree for the academic year	First year	28	3.7067	0.42187	1.653	0.179
	second year	61	3.7597	0.36797		
	third year	44	3.5845	0.43141		
	fourth year	59	3.6833	0.39975		
	andabove					

Table 4 shows that there are no differences in the communication skills that students use due to the variable of the academic year.

4. Discussion

The results indicated that there is a high level of communication skills among students. The researchers pointed out that these results suggest that the education level in educational institutions may help to raise the level of communication skills. Al-Quds University as an educational institution provides many opportunities for students. The reason for this may also be due to the nature of maturity of university students, as they have a degree of maturity that enables them to know and organize their communication skills. This means that they can face problems and deal with them positively as a result of having mental flexibility that makes their relationships and behaviors acceptable. All these experiences make students more successful in their communication. The university provides a social environment dominated by interaction, dialogue, and social communication. That gives students the ability to understand the feelings of people around them and interact with them positively, and then they can make friendships and communicate with others. These results are consistent with a study for De Azua (2020) Al-Juburi and Ali (2016) and non-consistent with the researches of Ihmaidat (2007), Arywh (2017), and ALjaman (2019).

The results showed that there were no significant differences in the level of communication skills according to gender, faculty, and academic year variables. The researcher attributed these results to the programs that are offered to all university students at the same time regardless of their gender, faculty, and academic year variables.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study attempted to examine the level of communication skills among undergraduate students at the university. Answers were obtained from (193) university students enrolled in Bachelor's Degree program. This study shows that university students have achieved a high level of communication skills in three dimensions (listening, speaking, and understanding others), the level of controlling emotions was moderate, but the findings also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the level of communication skills based on gender, faculty, or academic year.

Note that this study used Google Form in the process of collecting information, and this may be one of the factors that may affect the results of the research. As a result, the study outcomes may not be generalized.

Thus, future researchers are encouraged to study communication skills using the qualitative research approach. Besides, we need to develop programs on communication skills supervised by university professors in cooperation with students targeting the local community and to conduct intervention programs to raise controlling emotion among university students. Moreover, we need to approve teaching communication skills in all the faculties of the university, especially the skills related to the emotional side, and to conduct more studies on communication skills and their relationship to other variables such as emotional awareness and recognition.

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