Communication Efficacy and University Experiences of Vietnamese Students

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Abstract

Communication efficacy is important especially during the process of seeking job and is essential to the success of both the student and the teacher in learning environment. This study explored the students' communication efficacy in Vietnamese higher education, and how students' communication efficacy was affected by university experience variables. A quantitative research method was used in the study; out of the 618 third-year students of 24 faculties and departments in the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City responded to the study and were study participants. The finding of this study presents that students were moderated with their communication efficacy. The study also shows that of university experiences persistently exhibited significant positive effects on students' communication efficacy. Recommendation of study was discussed.

Keywords: communication efficacy, university experiences, higher education, Vietnamese students

1. Introduction

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2001) recognized that communication is one of the framework comprises five key skill areas. Communication is being defined as a process of sharing of knowledge, skills, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors or of making the meanings common (Bolat, 1990). Cooperstein and Weidinger (2004) recognized that communication is the process that includes transferring of information to long-term memory requires attention, organization, and repetition. In another definition of Seiler and Beall (2005), communication as sharing and giving meaning occurring at the same time through symbolic interactions. Communication has been said to start when the information is transferred from the sender to the receiver through a channel, and followed by the receiver giving feedback. There are many types of communication skills, but, according to Mohd

Helmi (as cited in Iksan et al., 2012) proposes that there are essentially three types of communication, which are interpersonal communication, management communication, and public communication.

Communication skills have emerged as key elements in 21st century curricula. Communication skills are so crucial to success that they need to be taught throughout the university general education and disciplinary curricula (Byrd, 2009). Trilling and Fadel (2009) suggested that to effectively teach 21st century communication skills, the following strategies: 1) students should be taught how to articulate thoughts and ideas using oral, written and non-verbal communication skills, 2) students should be taught how to engage in active listening, and 3) students should be taught how communication can be used for different purposes. According to Arkoudis (2014), best practice principles of communication skills should: 1) be promoted as a core competency, 2) not only provide support for international students to develop their foreign language proficiency, but support all students in developing the essential skills necessary for success, and 3) be discipline-specific and ensure both readiness for study and engagement with disciplinary learning. Human with enhanced communication skills can cope better with the problems they encounter in their lives, can develop satisfying relationship and can be more successful in their professional lives (Yılmaz & Çimen, 2008). Effective communication skills play a facilitating role in the human relations. The communication skills essential in the workplace include basic oral and writing skills, and the ability to communicate in workgroups and teams with persons of diverse background, and when engaged in problem solving and conflict management (Morreal, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000).

A positive communication environment provides opportunities to students to learn how to communicate (Cleland, Foster, & Moffat, 2005; Ihmeideh, Ahmad, & Al-Dababneh, 2010). Penbek, Yurdakul, and Cerit (2009) found that university students need to master communication skills in different cultural contexts and need to be given opportunities to communicate in order to be better prepared for the job market after graduation (Iksan, Zakaria, Meerah, Osman, Lian, Mahmud, & Krish, 2012). Higher education exist to create and disseminate knowledge, and to develop higher order cognitive and communicative skills for students (Chan, Brown, & Ludlow, 2014); despite current institutional moves toward skillsspecific and higher-level learning outcomes, such as communication (Keeling & Hersh, 2012). Therefore, the university's role in producing students in various fields to fulfill the market needs does not focus on academic achievement, but on generic skills required for them to emulate in the global market, in which communication efficacy is important especially during the process of seeking job (Iksan et al., 2012). Learning and developing effective communication skills will develop students' emotional intelligence and empathy through an understanding of their audience; these skills contribute significantly toward positioning graduates as global citizens (Anonim, 2013). In addition, Anonim (2013) found that the teaching of communication is important as it prepares students to better communicate through their assessment, enter into dialogue with peers and academics, formulate questions to further their learning.

This study explored the students' communication efficacy (including skills of speech, interpersonal, creation, and observation) in Vietnamese higher education, and how students'

communication efficacy was affected by university experience variables (namely teaching approach, curriculum engagement, and co-curriculum involvement, and exchange issues with others). The findings of this study will provide instructors, administrators, educators, and other concerned entities with data regarding courses of university students to built and develop a learning environment. The study is designed to answer two questions: 1) What is the general level of communication efficacy in Vietnamese university students? and 2) How is students' communication efficacy affected by university experience variables?

2. Research Method

2.1 Sample of Study

A quantitative research method was used in the study. The survey instrument was distributed to 700 third-year full-time students who were studying on campus of 24 departments and faculties at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (USSH-VNUHCM), of which 618 questionnaires were returned, for an 88.3% return rate, which exceeds the 30% response rate most researchers require for analysis (Dillman, 2000; Malaney, 2002). According to Huang and Chang (2004), third-year students are considered the best population for observing student involvement and development at the university. The sample of this study was drawn from 618 respondents who completed the survey instrument.

Out of the 618 third-year students in the USSH-VNUHCM, 51.6% were female and 48.4% of male students. The respondents consisted of 74.3% who were 21 years old. Regarding ethnic groups, 93.2% of students were majority of ethnic, remaining 6.8% were ethnic minority. In terms of their father's education, 34.5% of students had senior high school, and 24.8% had attained junior high school. Similarly, the mother's education, also focused on senior high school (30.4%), and junior high school (26.1%). For family income, 22.5% of students had under USD 1,000 and 32.8% were over USD 3,100. Regarding students' discipline, 90.6% were fields of social sciences, and remaining 9.4% faculty were fields of humanities.

2.2 Variables of Study

The dependent variable of the study, communication efficacy was constructed with four items measuring student efficacies of speech, interpersonal, creation, and observation. Factor analysis of the constructed dependent variable yielded adequate validity, showing factor loading values of the four items (0.708 – 0.862) greater than the threshold value of 0.5 (Hair, 2009). Internal consistency analysis revealed a Cronbach's coefficient (0.805) higher than the threshold value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating a satisfactory reliability. Total variance explained was 63.43 %, meeting the requirement of constructed variable for social science research (Hair, 2009).

University experience variables are the independent variables. The independent variables of the study encompassed 4 categories, namely teaching approach (such as one-way instruction, group discussion, multimedia, and distance teaching), curriculum engagement (namely memory emphasis, analysis emphasis, integration emphasis, and application emphasis), co-curriculum involvement (including student government, social service, sport groups, and art culture group), and exchange issues with others (such as entertainment; national, social,

political; arts; and science and technology). Table 1 shows the details of operational definitions, means, and standard deviations of the research variables.

Table 1. Operational Definitions, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables

Dependent Variable: Communication Efficacy

Constructed by 4 efficacy items of speech efficacy, interpersonal efficacy, creation efficacy, and observation efficacy. Measured on a 5-point scale, where 1 = very weak and 5 = very strong (M = 3.31, SD = 0.66)

Independent Variable: University Experience Variables

Teaching Approach

One-way instruction: measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = always (M = 3.49, SD = 0.72).

Group discussion: measured on a same scale of one-way instruction (M = 3.60, SD = 0.64).

Multimedia: measured on a same scale of one-way instruction (M = 3.46, SD = 0.73).

Distance teaching: measured on a same scale of one-way instruction (M = 1.70, SD = 0.87).

Curriculum Engagement

Memory emphasis: measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = always (M = 2.83, SD = 0.80).

Analysis emphasis: measured on a same scale of memory emphasis (M = 3.32, SD = 0.73).

Integration emphasis: measured on a same scale of memory emphasis (M = 3.20, SD = 0.75).

Application emphasis: measured on a same scale of memory emphasis (M = 3.28, SD = 0.79).

Co-curriculum Involvement

Student government: measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = always (M = 2.77, SD =0 .91).

Social service: measured on a same scale of student government (M = 2.86, SD = 0.75).

Sport groups: measured on a same scale of student government (M = 2.28, SD = 0.97).

Art culture group: measured on a same scale of student government (M = 1.89, SD = 0.90).

Exchange Issues with Others

Entertainment: measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = always (M = 3.08, SD = 0.81).

National, social, political: measured on a same scale of entertainment (M = 2.60, SD = 0.78).

Arts: measured on a same scale of entertainment (M = 2.59, SD = 0.91).

Science and technology: measured on a same scale of entertainment (M = 2.63, SD = 0.82).

2.3 Data Refinement and Analyses

Data collection for this study was gathered from survey questionnaires administered to 618 students in the USSH-VNUHCM. After collection, data were carefully examined and refined. The examination showed a minor situation of missing data. This study employs statistical methods of descriptive analyses, and regression to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis was employed to respond to research question 1 which conducted to understand the general level of student communication efficacy in Vietnamese higher education. To study the university experience variables which significantly affect communication efficacy of Vietnamese

students, multiple regressions analyses to respond to research question 2. After checking the precision of data entry and making codes for data analysis with the statistical analysis program, SPSS version 13.0, the following statistics were used.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The General Level of the Communication Efficacy of Vietnamese University Students

The survey used five-point Likert scales with responses ranging from 1 = very weak to 5 = very strong. In terms of Table 2 the findings indicated that students in the USSH-VNUHCM were moderated with their communication efficacy (M = 3.31, SD = 0.66).

Table 2. The Results of Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of the Communication Efficacy of Vietnamese University Students

Communication Efficacy Dimensions	Scores range	M	SD
Average of four dimensions		3.31	0.66
1. Speech		3.18	0.81
2. Interpersonal	1 – 5	3.34	0.82
3. Creative		3.21	0.84
4. Observation		3.51	0.85

In this study, the results of descriptive analysis showed that the average of the four dimensions of students' communication efficacy is 66.2% (3.31/5) indicating a moderate level of communication efficacy for students in USSH-VNUHCM by comparing the scale of 5. The research of Iksan et al. (2012) was measured three items of communication such as verbal communication skills, written skills and social skills. It can be concluded that of 533 final year students at University Kebangsaan Malaysia have good communication skills, with the mean ranging from 3.89 to 4.09. Harlak Gemalmaz, Gurel, Dereboy, and Ertekin, (2008) proposes that students be exposed to activities that can develop their communication skills starting from their first year in the higher education institutes. Other research of Hacicaferoğlu (2014) surveyed 633 college students of School of Physical Education and Sports, Turkey. Hacicaferoğlu uses different points in terms of the communication skills (including dimensions of respect, expression, value, barriers, motivation and democratic attitude), it was determined that the communication skills which the students perceived from the teaching staff was at a medium level (X = 3.02).

Each study used different methods, approaches and instruments to measure communication efficacy for students in higher education, in this study, communication efficacy was constructed with four items measuring student efficacies of speech, interpersonal, creation, and observation. Unfortunately, there is yet no empirical research done about the students' communication efficacy in Vietnam or even in other parts of the world by this approach. This study indicated that Vietnamese students were moderated with their communication efficacy. However, there is still much room for university administrators to provide and improve many

more activities to develop the students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM in order to meet the challenges of the globalized world.

3.2 Regression between Communication Efficacy and University Experiences of Students in the USSH-VNUHCM

Regression model proposed by this study explained 13.1% ($R^2 = 0.131$) of students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM. These models present coefficients of β values, with $\beta > 0$ indicating a positive effect and $\beta < 0$ indicating a negative effect on students' communication efficacy. However, the different regression models had different explanations for students' communication efficacy across university experience variables. Table 3 presents five models of multiple regression statistics which analyzed the effect across university experience variables on students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM. Models 1 through 4 presented the separate effect of these factors on students' communication efficacy, and Model 5 reported the combined effects.

As shown in Table 3, Model 1 suggested that two items of teaching approach, namely multimedia ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.001$) and distance teaching ($\beta = 0.089$, $p < 0.05$) had significant effect on students' communication efficacy. This finding was not the same with research of Zakaria and Dewa (2015), however, their research showed that both characteristics are still insufficient to influence academic performance of students plus no significant relationship between communication skills and academic performance. Osakwe (2009) indicated that effective communication is essential to the success of both the student and the teacher. The ability to motivate students and communication is part of the same conduit that emerges as a vital construct in achieving teaching effectiveness (Heffernan, Morrison, & Sweeney, 2003). Thus, using this as a fundamental condition discloses that the ability to communicate in a learning environment is fundamental.

Model 2 showed that curriculum engagement variables as a whole did not have significant effects on students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM. The research of Durukan and Maden (2010) indicated that the communication skills included in the curriculum, are that kind of skills that are needed to be imparted and effectively used in all disciplines. The development of academic communication skills has been explicitly incorporated into international strategic curriculum change (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012). Model 3 recognized that only social service item of co-curriculum involvement generally yielded significant effects on students' communication efficacy ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$). Especially, Model 4, almost of items of exchange issues with others, except arts item, entertainment ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.01$), national, social, political ($\beta = 0.093$, $p < 0.05$), and science and technology ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.01$) exhibited significant benefit on students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM.

Model 5 showed that collectively, multimedia of teaching approach ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.01$), social service of co-curriculum involvement ($\beta = 0.200$, $p < 0.001$), and entertainment ($\beta = 0.102$, $p < 0.05$) and science and technology of exchange issues with others ($\beta = 0.128$, $p < 0.01$) persistently exhibited significant positive effects on students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM. All items of curriculum engagement had not significant effects on students' communication efficacy in Model 5. Unfortunately, there is yet no empirical research done about the relationship between students' communication efficacy and

curriculum engagement, co-curriculum involvement and exchange issues with others in Vietnam or even in other parts of the world. The results of this study thus cannot be compared to results of others. Further research about the relationship between students' communication efficacy and curriculum engagement, co-curriculum involvement and exchange issues with others will contribute to fill in the literature gap.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results between Students' Communication Efficacy and University Experience Variables

University Experience Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Teaching Approach					
One-way instruction	.088				.005
Group discussion	.035				.039
Multimedia	.156***				.116**
Distance teaching	.089*				.060
Curriculum Engagement					
Memory emphasis		- .026			- .053
Analysis emphasis		- .062			- .078
Integration emphasis		.015			- .034
Application emphasis		.057			- .022
Co-curriculum Involvement					
Student government			-.041		-.046
Social service			.244***		.200***
Sport groups			.076		.057
Art culture group			.038		.002
Exchange Issues with Others					
Entertainment				.149**	.102*
National, social, political				.093*	.088
Arts				.018	.020
Science and technology				.135**	.128**
Adjusted R^2	.033	.000	.067	.072	.131

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

4. Conclusion

This study has measured students' communication efficacy (including skills of speech, interpersonal, creation, and observation) in the USSH-VNUHCM. This study explored the

students' communication efficacy in Vietnamese higher education, and how students' communication efficacy was affected by university experience variables (namely teaching approach, curriculum engagement, and co-curriculum involvement, and exchange issues with others). The empirical results of the study revealed that students in the USSH-VNUHCM were moderated with their communication efficacy. Further, multimedia of teaching approach; social service of co-curriculum involvement; entertainment, and science and technology of exchange issues with others persistently exhibited significant positive effects on students' communication efficacy. All items of curriculum engagement had not significant effects on students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM. In order to make a policy for the instructional program and to select a teaching method or to evaluate the studying result of the student, the experts or the program makers of USSH-VNUHCM should be notably concerned about these factors. If we must decide a universal intervention to enhance problem-solving efficacy of students across the universities in Vietnam, it might very well be university experience variables of multimedia, social service, entertainment, and science and technology.

The present study has some limitations. The primary limitation is that the study only sampled USSH-VNUHCM third-year students, hence, the results and implications should be applied with caution to students from different levels of Vietnamese higher education institutes. Further research should collect student samples from various higher education levels and disciplines to accumulate rich empirical information of Vietnamese university students. It is hoped that the barrier to the students' communication efficacy in the USSH-VNUHCM found in this study may help administrators and Vietnamese higher education institutes to built and develop a learning environment that would allow higher levels of students' communication efficacy - is essential to the success of both the student and the teacher (Osakwe, 2009) and contribute to filling the gap in the literature regarding Vietnam and other countries.

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