



**MAPPING THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND
PERFORMANCE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS OF PONDICHERRY**

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Abstract

This paper describes the level of prevalence of communication competence and performance, which is one of the important employability skills, among the graduates of Puducherry Union Territory (earlier known as Pondicherry). A survey conducted among the college students of Pondicherry has revealed that only less than 2 % of the sample possessed acceptable levels of communication competence and performance. The outcome of the research points out the prevalence of the 'communication skills gap' placing the youth of Puducherry at a disadvantaged position to obtain, sustain and climb up the professional ladder in the competitive global employment market. Possible cause of this scenario is analyzed and viable solutions to tackle the issues are proposed.

Key terms: *Employability skills, Skills gap, Communication competence, Communication performance.*



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Introduction

In last four decades, globally the scenario in the employment sector has undergone a radical change in several facets including organizational philosophy from **Fordism** of initial industrialization era which was characterized by scientific management techniques, hierarchical structure, inflexible processes, specialization and mass production to '**Post Fordism**'¹ which

places an emphasis on flexibility, decentralization, team work, horizontal structure, and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) utilization etc.; and the ‘**Globalization**’ in work culture. This has created ample employment opportunity which transcends the physical boundaries of Nations and Continents. Consequently, prospective employers are required to possess a ‘Global mindset’ characterized by set of skills described as ‘Employability skills’ which include several behavioral skills in addition to job specific knowledge and skills. Communication skills have been identified as one of the important employability skills in Employability skills framework developed by several nations irrespective of the job profile and level of the profession². ‘Skills gap’ is one of the major issues in global employment scenario causing far -reaching consequences in terms of economy and development both for the organizations and countries including developed nations³. Several nations have carried out systematic investigations to map different aspects of skills gap, and have devised and implemented appropriate measures to bridge the gap so that their youth are successful in global competitive employment market⁴.

India has the third largest higher education system in world producing human capital in diverse disciplines like engineering, medicine, management, science and humanities etc.; and the global employers look up on Indian youth for their skilled man power demand. India Skills report 2014⁵ presents the findings of the systematic investigations on the requirement and available human potential in India which can be used for planning human capital for the future.

Puducherry Union territory occupies a prominent position in several sectors of career opportunity map of India projected in India skills report⁵. This status of Puducherry can be attributed to the large number of educational institutions situated in Puducherry offering higher education opportunity to the youth of Puducherry as well as to students from all over India; thanks to Pondicherry Central University and other private universities in Puducherry.

It is in this context, the present research was carried out to map the skills gap, particularly the communication skills in English language among the college students of Puducherry. Communication skills are viewed as very important employability skills across different job profiles and levels for an employee needs work in a team and communicate effectively with different kinds of people like the team members, team leader, the superiors, subordinates, the customers and the public. Therefore, a prospective employee aspiring to obtain a job in global

employment market is required to possess proficiency in the language most commonly used internationally and competencies for effective communication⁶. English language has emerged as one of the most commonly used language in employment sector. Although, the term communication competence has been defined by several researchers⁷, in the present research it is being used to refer to the behavioral attributes that contribute for effective listening and speaking, two important aspects of oral communication.

Research methodology

Data for the research was collected by conducting a survey among the random stratified sample among the student population of Puducherry using a survey questionnaire. The survey tool used contained items to measure all four components of communication *viz*; writing, reading, listening and speaking. The reading and writing components of communication in English language was measured by measuring the performance of the sample by using appropriate items, and components of listening and speaking were measured by measuring behavioral competencies for listening and speaking by using self disclosure type statements which included statements reflecting the behavior that would influence either positively or negatively the effective listening and speaking of the respondents⁸, and the respondents were required to choose their likely behavior on a five point scale. Although the measurement of performance in writing component was qualitative in nature, numerical values were assigned for the responses based on the criteria developed for assessment of the performance and competence. The data was analyzed by performing independent t-test to find out if there is any relationship between performance and competence and variables like gender, demography and medium of instruction up to higher secondary level. Correlation analysis was performed to find out if there is any relationship between competence and performance. Statistical package ANOVA was used to perform statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

The sample for the study was selected by random stratified selection from the estimated population of the college students of colleges located in Puducherry and affiliated to Pondicherry Central University (Table 1).

Table 1 Estimation of Population of study

College type	No. of colleges	Intake per annum	Duration of the programme (in years)	Total strength
Engineering	09	5269	4	21076
Arts and Science	11	4353	3	13059
Education	20	2420	1	2420
Paramedical	09	916	4	3664
Medical	06	1022	5	5110
Pondicherry University	01	3000	2 / 5 *	6000
Total				51329

(* University offers two years M.A. & M.Sc. programmes and Integrated M.A. and M.Sc. programmes of five years duration which is analogous to B.A.;M.A / B.Sc.; M.Sc.; programmes in addition to research programmes)

Sample profile is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Sample Profile

Gender	No. of respondents	% of respondents
Male	161	27.15
Female	432	72.85
Total	593	100
Demography		
Rural	184	31.03
Urban	409	68.97
Total	593	100
Programme pursued		
Engineering (1)	186	31.37
Paramedical (2)	54	9.11
Undergraduate in Arts and Science (3)	232	39.12
Postgraduates (4)	121	20.40
Total	593	100
Medium of instruction		
Tamil	103	17.20
English	490	82.63
Total	593	100

Criteria adopted for assigning numerical value for the responses on performance and competence is presented in Box 1

Box 1 Scheme of assigning numerical value to responses

Scheme for assigning numerical value to responses in writing performance

1. A numerical value of 5 points was assigned to each meaningful sentence with correct usage of grammar and vocabulary.
2. A meaningful sentence but with a grammar mistakes was assigned a value of 3 points
3. An incomplete sentence which does not convey any meaning will be assigned a value of 1 point.
4. A response in one word was assigned a value of zero;

The range of scores in writing performance would be from 0 to 50.

Scheme for assigning numerical value to responses in reading performance

The performance in reading comprehension was also assigned numerical value of 5 point for each correct response and zero for wrong response and the range of scores for this section would be from 0 to 50 and the range of scores for overall performance would be from 0 to 100, and it was assumed that a score of 80 and above is good performance and others are moderate and poor performance.

The numerical value assigned to responses of the items used to measure competencies in listening and speaking is given in table 2. The range of scores for each competency would be -25 to 25; and overall competency scores would be -50 to 50. The range of scores and frequencies of scores are given in tables 3 to 5.

Scheme of evaluation of competencies

Response	Positive statement	Negative statement
Always	5	-5
Often	4	-4
Sometimes	3	-3
Rarely	2	-2
Never	0	0

The frequencies of scores for writing, reading and overall performance are given in tables 3 – 5 and percentage of frequencies of overall performance scores is given in Fig. 1.

Table 3 Scores distribution of writing performance

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0 to 5	225	37.9	37.9
6 to10	160	27.0	64.9
11 to 20	105	17.7	82.6
21 to 30	60	10.1	92.7
31 to 40	28	4.7	97.5
41 to 50	15	2.5	100
Total	593	100	

Table 4 Scores distribution of reading performance

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
0-5	51	8.6	8.6
6-10	18	3.0	11.6
11-20	114	19.2	30.9
21-30	175	29.5	60.4
31-40	157	26.5	86.8
41-50	78	13.2	100.0
Total	593	100.0	

Table 5 Scores distribution of overall performance

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
0-5	34	5.7	5.7
6-10	12	2.0	7.8
11-20	42	7.1	14.8
21-30	93	15.7	30.5
31-40	133	22.4	53.0
41-50	126	21.2	74.2
51-60	82	13.8	88.0
61-70	45	7.6	95.6
71-80	16	2.7	98.3
81-90	8	1.3	99.7
91-100	2	.3	100.0
Total	593	100.0	

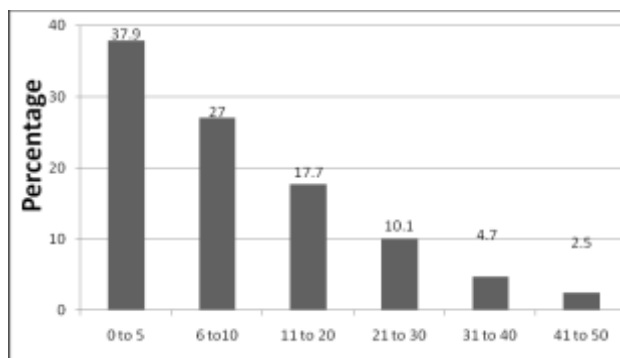
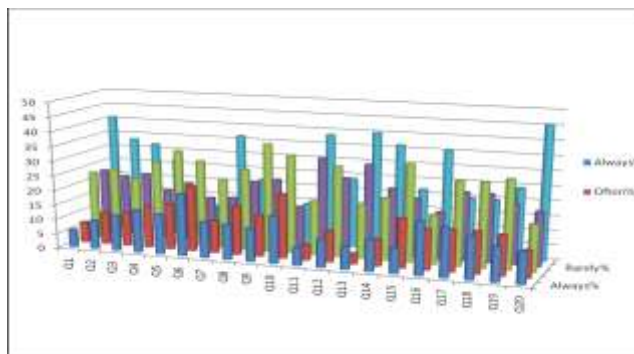


Fig.1 Percentage of frequency overall performance scores

The frequencies of likely behavior of respondents for items used to measure competencies are given in Table 6 and percentage of frequencies is given in Fig.2.

Table 6 Percentage of frequencies of likely behavior for listening and speaking competencies

Fig.2 Percentage of frequencies of likely behavior of listening and speaking competencies



Result of statistical analysis of the data is presented in table 7.

The results for performance indicated a very poor performance in writing skills of the sample with only less than 2 percent of the respondents demonstrating good performance (80 % and above). This observation may be attributed to either lack of language proficiency in terms of vocabulary and grammar to comprehend the text and questions as regard to reading skill and / or translating the idea in English language as regards to writing skills. It may also be suggested that the trend might reflect their attitude for giving appropriate response. Whatever is the cause of this poor performance, it may be suggested that prevalence of this level performance is detrimental to the sample to exploit the opportunity in global employment market. Results of independent sample t-test indicated significant difference in terms of gender and rural urban divide; females and urban respondents performing better than males and rural respondents and it was noticed that medium of instruction up to higher secondary level does not significantly affect the performance.

Table 7 Results of independent sample t-test

Communicative competence			
Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	161	6.26	9.168
Female	432	10.61	9.498
Variable	t	df	Sig.
L+S	-5.007	591	0.000
Locality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rural	184	7.87	9.877
Urban	409	10.13	9.399
Variable	t	df	Sig.
L+S	-2.669	591	0.008
Medium	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tamil	102	6.50	8.585
English	491	10.04	9.694
Variable	t	df	Sig.
L+S	-3.418	591	0.001
Communicative performance			
Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	161	32.06	17.778
Female	432	41.91	18.123
Variable	t	df	Sig.
R+W	-5.920	591	0.000
Locality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rural	184	35.60	18.818
Urban	409	40.87	18.203
Variable	t	df	Sig.
R+W	-3.230	591	0.001
Medium	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tamil	102	37.63	18.432
English	491	39.57	18.565
Variable	t	df	Sig.
R+W	-.963	591	0.336

Similarly, the overall communicative competence of the sample was found to be very poor. Assuming that overall score of 40 and above (80% and above) can be accepted as good to excellent communicative competence, then it was observed that only **one** respondent (0.17%) was under this category. If it is assumed that a score of 30 and above (60% and above) reflects an average communicative competence, then nearly 2% of the sample possessed average competence and the remaining nearly 98 % of the sample possessed below average communicative competence. The prevalence of poor communicative competence might have detrimental effect on effective communication and learning and enhancing other employability

skills. Independent sample t-test analysis results indicated a significant difference in communicative competence between males and females; and medium of instruction up to higher secondary level, but no significant difference between rural and urban samples.

It was assumed that there could be a correlation between communicative performance and communicative competence and performance. A correlation analysis between competence and performance indicated no relationship between the two. The trend in performance of respondents who scored above 30 in competence, and the trend in competence of respondents who scored above 75 in performance was plotted (Fig. (2) & (3)) which indicated no regular trend between the two.

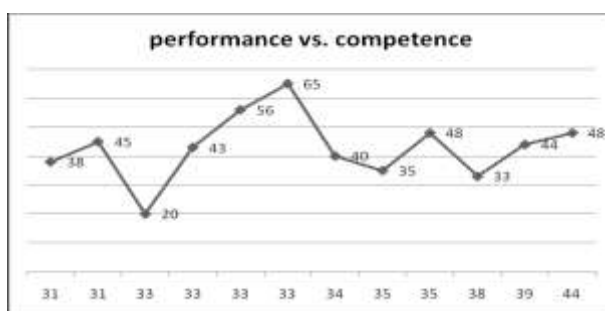


Fig. 3 Trend in performance vs. competence (score > 30)

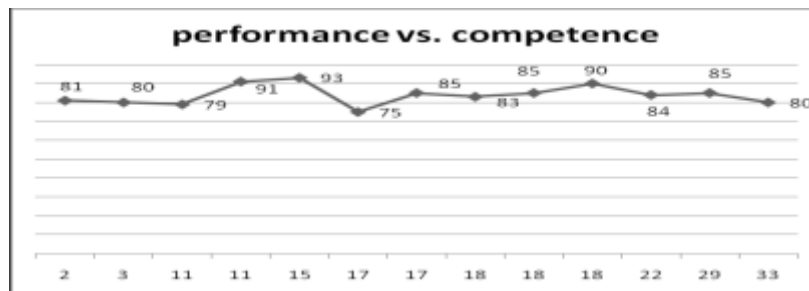


Fig. 4 Trend in performance(score >75) vs. competence

Conclusion: The study on mapping the communication competence and performance in English language among the the college students of Puducherry Union territory has revealed prevalence of poor communication competence and performance in English. In view of the global trend in the employment scenerio, these results point out the disadvantaged position of these students in obtaining, sustaining and climbing up the professional ladder in the competitive global employment market. Prevalence of poor communication competence and performance would also be detrimental to learning and enhancing other employability skills also. Urgent and remedial measures are required to develop these competence, which goes beyond imparting

subject specific knowledge and skills in academic institutions. But, academic institutions alone can not be held responsible for the observed situation but at the same time its role in imparting these skills can not be ignored. The existing evaluation system which heavily relies on memorization and its impact on teaching - learning process and attitude of learners need to be tuned to create awareness among the students about the need for developing employability skills, and to provide opportunity to learn these skills in and outside of academic set up, which requires a collective cooperative efforts of policy makers, employers, academicians and the stake holders. The findings of the research is only a tip of the iceberg and needs elaborate investigations in depth and breadth across the nation on different aspects of employability skills to provide input for formulating strategies for addressing the issues and exploit the opportunity available in global employment market.

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