



## Communication Skills: A-Must-Have Skills for Today's Leaders

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### Abstract

Theories and principles taught are insufficient in imparting one of the most critical leadership skills – communication skills – in student leaders. Communication is identified as the most critical leadership skill (Blanchard, 2006). Through this experiential learning approach, undergraduates are given autonomy to discover their leadership skills. The paper investigates the relevance of an experientially-based approach to leadership education at the undergraduate level. There are about thirty (63) students who participated in the study. An explicit qualitative research methodology that integrates experiential learning approach in undergraduate soft-skills programmes is presented.

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### Introduction

Oral communication is an essential skill for every individual to function in a society. Being able to convey and receive messages are basic communication skills that all university students should acquire. These skills are prerequisite to students' academic, personal and professional success in life (Morealle, Osborn & Pearson, 2000). In academic setting, lecturers deliver instructions and modules mostly through oral communication to students. Students with ineffective listening skills cannot comprehend much input that has been transmitted. Their problems are worsened when they fail to respond precisely due to their poor speaking skills.

The students at tertiary level should be trained to be professional graduates to fit in current industry landscape. The graduates or future nation leaders should be equipped with good oral communication skills to add on their soft skills. Effective oral communication skills result in highly employability rate for graduates by established and gigantic companies.

In a survey piloted by Maes et.al (1997), oral communication skills have been recognized as the most important skills in the workplace. The study conducted in the Greater Gulf Coast area, including the coastal areas of Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida panhandle,

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discovered that oral communication in English is the most important skill demanded by employers when it comes to recruiting new staff. In addition to being one of the most essential skills for employment, oral communication skills are vital to job success and promotion (Lee, 2003; Crosling & Ward, 2001). Huckins & Olsen (1984) are of the view that employees who do not demonstrate good oral communication skills are rarely given managerial responsibility. Effective oral communication skills are vital to people who hold managerial positions because managers need to explain, listen to, persuade, guide, coach, encourage, facilitate and direct group members to meet the goals of individuals and their organisations. Effective oral communication enables individuals to be understood and helps create understanding between people and fosters good relationship among workers in any business context (DiSanza & Legge, 2000).

### *Objectives of the study*

The objectives of the study are to:

1. examine whether outdoor based-education improves their communication skills.
2. investigate whether outdoor based-education drives students to establish basic leadership skills through the effective use of communication skills.

### *Purpose of Study*

The study aimed to find out whether the outdoor based-education such as leadership camp would benefit undergraduates' communication skills. The outdoor based program is an alternative to *whiteboard and chalk* teaching styles popularly practiced among university lecturers and school teachers. The program was designed specifically to fulfill undergraduates' needs to explore the real problems faced by every individuals in the 'real' setting. The outcome of the program would increase undergraduates' soft skills, attitude, personality as well as emotions.

## Literature

### Empowering Communication Skills through Outdoor- Based Education Camp

All undergraduates should be given chance and accountability to groom their communication skills. They should be exposed to authentic and integrative learning in order to encourage the development of language and expressions in the real situation. Meaningful learning requires learners to relate new knowledge (concepts and propositions) to what they already know (Ausubel, 1960). With an extraordinary setting like *Outdoor Camp*, natural language and communication skills will be developed and thus contributes to boosting their self-confidence in interacting with other participants.

This study is mainly focusing how an Outdoor-Based Education Camp (OBEC) helps students in developing their communication skills and also cultivating other essential soft skills. The outdoor activity is a natural setting classroom that enables students to work collaboratively, think critically and perform confidently.

To be specific, the Outdoor-Based Education Camp (OBEC) intends to train undergraduates with soft-skills – leadership, communication and team working skills. This study however focuses on how the outdoor activities can develop participants' communication skills. The 3-day-2-night camp provides the participants with modules and programs by the camp instructors. Some tasks are given to the participants in order to develop and evaluate their communication skills.

### *Experiencing the Real Communication*

Oral communication is an essential skill for every individual to function in a society. Being able to convey and receive messages are basic communication skills that all university students should acquire. These skills are prerequisite to students' academic, personal and professional success in life (Morealle, Osborn & Pearson, 2000). In academic setting, lecturers deliver instructions and modules mostly through oral communication to students. Students with ineffective listening skills cannot grasp much input that has been transmitted. Their problems are worsened when they fail to reply precisely due to their poor speaking skills.

The students at tertiary level should be taught through experience. The instruction method at tertiary education should adopt experiential learning techniques. In order to generate professional graduates to fit in current industry landscape, good oral communication skills is a-must-have skill to add on their holistic soft skills. Effective oral communication skills result in highly employability rate for graduates by established and gigantic companies. Besides, professional and technical disciplines including education and the health careers and social work are using experiential learning instructional techniques to provide students with the competencies necessary to pursue successful careers upon graduation (Baxter Magolda 1993; Hightower 1993). These experiences, in turn, allow learners to develop skills and amass job experience which gives them an edge on the competition for initial employment upon graduation.

### *Communication Skills Reflects Students' Employability Skills*

The way students communicate is frequently seen as an image of the underpinnings of their personality and self-awareness. It is important for undergraduates to work on their communication and interpersonal skills throughout their course work. Communications skills should be seen as a part of the educational experience to avoid 'culture shock' when they are set for their work. Universities need to promote employability skills and attributes in their mission statements, learning and teaching strategies, course framework, strategic documents and practical guidance (Lowden et.al. 2011). Thus, developing graduate employability skills and attributes should be encompassed in all higher education institutions' strategic planning.

After struggling for 4 to 5 years in a university, undergraduates have to face the 'reality' of becoming a manpower in industry landscape. Companies are in the business of constructing their potential talent and leadership pipelines; they need managers who possess not just technical skills but the requisite communication and interpersonal skills to be strong, effective leaders (Bruggeman & Sparkman-Renz, 2014). Employers expect graduates to have the technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates to

demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and often managerial abilities or potential (Lowden et.al.,2011).

Recognizing which skills companies prioritize can help students stand out from the rivalry in the job search. Based on a study conducted by Graduates Management Admission Council (2014), of five major skill sets employers consider most important when hiring recent business grads for a mid-level position, communications skills top the list, followed in order by teamwork, technical, leadership, and managerial skills. With the exception of one industry—manufacturing, where leadership skills were in greatest demand—this finding was true across all world regions and employers, regardless of industry or company size (Bruggeman & Sparkman-Renz, 2014).

### Methods

This study is descriptive in nature and can be categorized as an exploratory study which the researcher wanted to explore whether Outdoor-Based Education Camp can increase the interaction among participants which will enhance their communication skills. This study adopted a quantitative method by gauging students’ feedback through administering a self-report questionnaire. There were sixty three (63) participants selected to respond to the questionnaire. The adapted questionnaire has a very good reliability of .773.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	N	of Items
.773	60	

**Table 1:** Reliability of Communication Skills

### Participants

The study involved sixty three (63) leaders from 4 student clubs in College of Foundation and General Studies, Universiti Tenaga Nasional as research participants. The students clubs involved in this study were Foundation Club, Junior Counsellors Fellowship, Integrity Club, and SEALS Association. The participants were divided into groups randomly and each group consists of both genders, multiple races and religions. They had to undergo Outdoor-Based Education Camp module which required them to lead groups effectively, work out a complicated assignment, present a proposal, and jungle survival. All modules were conducted by the camp instructors.

## Results and Discussion

The data gathered from the survey was analysed using SPSS. The analysis looked into the percentage of students’ perception towards the improvement of their communication skills after participating the outdoor program. It is important to note that students’ self-evaluation is needed to activate and regulate their metacognitive learning skills. The development of communication skills in students during the camp was very crucial in sustaining autonomous acquisition of the other soft-skills.

### *Self-Perceived Communication Skills Progress*

This study looks into the feedback from students pertaining to the efficiency of Outdoor-Based Education Camp in improving students’ communication skills. Referring to the table below, many participants had a positive attitude towards their improvement in communication skills after undergoing Outdoor-Based Education Camp (M=3.5, SD=.6). Most of them believed that through outdoor program could boost their self-confidence in approaching strangers and working together to achieve their goals.

Table 2:  
Self-Perceived Communication Skills after OBEC

Self-Perceived Communication Skills After OBEC					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Communication Skills</b>	63	2.05	4.90	3.5079	.55723
<b>Valid N (listwise)</b>	63				

After analyzing participants’ perceptions towards the improvement of their communication skills, it is interesting to note that these participant’s or as known as club leaders have shown their potential leadership skills throughout the camp. Based on the results of participants’ self-perceived Leadership Skills questionnaire, it was revealed that there was a positive correlation between Communication skills and Leadership skills (.769). Thus, it is assumed that the participants who believed their communication skills have improved, felt that they could lead themselves and their groups well throughout the camp.

Correlation	Communication
<b>Leadership</b>	.769
<b>Pearson Cor (2 Tailed)</b>	.000

## Conclusion

importance of communication skills among undergraduates is undeniably by both academics and employers. Discovering ways to assist undergraduates in developing and improving communication skills—be they interviewing, listening, writing, or presentation skills—is a good investment for colleges and universities, whether through course work or designing programs or co-curricular projects. All in all, the outcome of higher education learning is to generate and promote holistic knowledge and soft-skills development for better employability to power up the nation.

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