



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Muhammad Syafiq Mohd Sakri, Ku Suhaila Ku Johari

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17835>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17835

**Received:** 11 May 2023, **Revised:** 13 June 2023, **Accepted:** 29 June 2023

**Published Online:** 16 July 2023

**In-Text Citation:** (Sakri & Johari, 2023)

**To Cite this Article:** Sakri, M. S. M., & Johari, K. S. K. (2023). Psycho-Education Group Counseling in Exploring Communication Skills of Final Year Students Career Preparation. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(7), 1372 – 1382.

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Vol. 13, No. 7, 2023, Pg. 1372 – 1382

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[www.hrmars.com](http://www.hrmars.com)

ISSN: 2222-6990

## Psycho-Education Group Counseling in Exploring Communication Skills of Final Year Students Career Preparation

Muhammad Syafiq Mohd Sakri, Ku Suhaila Ku Johari

Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia

Email: [kusuhaila@ukm.edu.my](mailto:kusuhaila@ukm.edu.my)

### Abstract

Communication skills are among the basic things that are important for the marketability of students to get a place in the world of work. The students need to be aware of the current situation which is now dire with the dumping of university graduates who have not yet found a job. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to identify the perception of final year students regarding the importance of communication skills in career preparation, identify communication obstacles and challenges in career preparation and explore student strategies to overcome communication problems in career preparation. Therefore, this study uses a case study design with the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted a group session with seven male and female students of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) for three sessions to obtain the results of the study. The study was analyzed through a thematic method. The results of the study, the perception of the importance of communication skills explain two main themes, namely its importance in terms of life and career. Meanwhile, there are three main themes that become obstacles and communication challenges in career preparation, namely self-confidence, knowledge and social. Next, some themes are highlighted in an effort to overcome communication problems. Among them, joining an active community, searching for information on websites, identifying suitable figures or icons and many others. In conclusion, preparations need to be made to be among the quality employees from time to time. This must be done from now on before graduating. It is important for all students to be aware of the importance of communication skills because academic achievement alone does not guarantee employment opportunities if communication skills are not the foundation.

**Keywords:** Group Counseling, Communication Skills, Career Preparation, Students

### Introduction

Every year the increase in the number of graduates from various public or private institutions has created high competition for employment. Every student wants a career that can guarantee life in the future. Career development is not an easy matter and a person will usually be influenced by the knowledge and factors in his environment. Career development programs implemented in institutions of higher learning give students the opportunity to thrive in their careers. A student or individual with high self-awareness will plan various

strategies to help career development. Investment in human capital is very impactful to make it a developed country in Malaysia (Mustapha, 2013).

Taking into account today's situation that shook the whole world with the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic in 2019. This Covid-19 pandemic has affected the economic sector in most country and Malaysia is no exception. According to the Statistics of Graduates 2020 by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the number of unemployed graduates in 2019 was 165,200 people and this number increased by 22.5% in 2020 which reached a total of 202,400 people (Sinar Harian, 2021). A graduate is understood to mean an individual who obtained the highest certificate from a university, college, polytechnic, recognized body or equivalent, with a study period of at least two years. This is a situation that needs to be taken seriously by prospective graduates in this Covid-19 pandemic season so that they are better prepared to find or build job opportunities with good skills.

In this era of globalization, individuals who want to have a job should be prepared for any challenges and obstacles. This proves that there is too much competition and organizations often look at the credibility displayed by each individual during the interview session. The interview plays a very important role in determining the hiring of an individual for work. However, excellence in academic performance alone does not guarantee a job interview. Without additional skills, especially communication skills, the chance for an individual to get a job opportunity is very slim because most employers prioritize communication skills as the main condition in getting a place in the world of work (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

A study according to Archer et. al (2008) states that 86% of companies feel good communication skills are very important, and most employers are not comfortable with the way graduates introduce themselves. Excellent graduates are those who can communicate, have self-confidence and also noble values (Abdul Rahim, 2000). Therefore, having good academics is no longer the main key to compete in getting a job. Graduates need to be aware that they have additional skills such as communication skills, broad knowledge and the courage to voice their opinions in any situation (Shaari, 2012).

Next, communication is the process of delivering or transferring messages from one individual to another. Communication is also a process to create other individuals' understanding of the message to be conveyed and both have an understanding that can be shared together (Osman, 2008). Effective communication will determine that information can be delivered clearly and easily understood by listeners (Husain et al., 2013). Further, notes from (Iksan et al., 2012) state that communication is conventionally verbal and non- verbal. It is a necessity of human relations and an important instrument for the well-being of life. Good friendships, good family relationships, success in work, quality of life and effective social bonding relationships. All these things depend on the individual's communication skills (Tatlilioğlu, 2018). Furthermore, communication skills include knowledge of non-verbal communication such as touch, physical proximity, knowledge of how to interact properly and voice intonation (Devito, 2013).

Communication skills are very important for future job success. There is a high demand for communication skills in a competitive corporate environment and it is considered the

most important skill for educated individuals (Khan, 2017). All types of professions whether professional or otherwise require good communication. In addition to helping to share ideas with others, effective communication skills also encourage excellent interactions, whether verbal or non-verbal, between fellow employees (Rathee & Rajain, 2018).

Therefore, this study focuses on the communication skills of final year students in a public university for career preparation. There are three main objectives listed which are

1. Identify the perception of final year students regarding the importance of communication skills in career preparation.
2. Identify communication obstacles and challenges in career preparation.
3. Exploring student strategies to overcome communication problems in career preparation.

### **Literature Review**

A study of the various types of work skills that are considered important by employers and the role of these skills in helping graduates to excel in their careers. The study found that the following are the most common skills required by employers, namely oral communication skills, written communication skills, non-verbal communication skills, teamwork skills, and positive attitude skills (Subbu & Rajasekaran, 2018). The results of the study from (Lim et al., 2016) show that employers value communication skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and time management skills as the most important because they will form a sense of responsibility, positive attitude, dedication, improvement Persistence and independence are the personal qualities most preferred by employers. Smith (2005) also in his research emphasized that communication skills are very important to succeed and progress in the complex and changing international global market.

Furthermore, the results of the study regarding job opportunities and employability skills for some job professions such as accountant/finance, office management/human resources and sales/marketing shows that soft skills related to communication skills are preferred among employers. From the point of view of economics, globalization and the ever-growing job market, graduates' marketability skills are the focus of employers (Heang et al., 2019). An individual is considered to have the ability to communicate effectively when the individual has deep knowledge (Noorasmahwati, 2008). In addition, Yahya & Shahabudin (2010) stated that communication skills are important skills in increasing a person's self-confidence. Therefore, the phenomenon of unemployment that occurs today is not due to the level of academic achievement as a whole, but the situation is due to the poor communication skills of graduates (Hanapi et al., 2018).

Because of that, the mastery of graduates in communication skills is indeed very necessary especially when entering the field of employment. Furthermore, employees who are weak in communication, may not be able to carry out their duties smoothly, despite having an excellent academic record. There are many employers who value communication skills before making the decision to hire the graduate (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Therefore, previous studies give emphasis to graduates in relation to career preparation. Therefore, this study was carried out to obtain research findings in exploring the communication skills of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan final year students in relation to career preparation.

## Methodology

This study uses a case study design with a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews. Focus group discussion method (Focus Group Discussion) is a popular qualitative method to identify effectiveness in research. A qualitative study was chosen because it is a study that collects research information data from identified sources. This qualitative study is formed from interviews, books, journals, articles, etc. The researcher has made use of interviews, journals and articles related to the research topic through the literature review that has been carried out. The main purpose of this study is to identify the perception of final year students regarding the importance of communication skills in career preparation, identify communication obstacles and challenges in career preparation and explore student strategies to overcome communication problems in career preparation. Therefore, The researcher conducted a group session with seven male and female students of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) for three sessions to obtain the results of the study. The study was analyzed through a thematic method.

## Sample Study

This educational psycho study was conducted on male and female students from a public university, namely Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). A total of seven (7) final semester students were involved in the group session. The selected students are male and female. There are three group sessions.

## Research Findings and Discussion

### 1.1 Perception of the Importance of Communication Skills

According to the findings of the study regarding the perception of the importance of communication skills this explains two main themes which are its importance in terms of life and career. Statements from all the majority participants stated that communication skills are very important in life and career as follows:

"This communication is very important, because when I intern, my supervisor have told me about communication is also one of the benchmarks for producing quality graduates. It's not just study time, it's time we work for the future and we have to learn to communicate well. I remember the message from my supervisor when the first day I internship, he said one of the important things he will value is communication..." (P6)

"Communication skills are very important in the session interview to get a job... The whole life is also important because we will socialize..." (P3)

"Communication is very important even though our field of work does not use a lot of communication but because we will be dealing with other people and in our organization there must be team. Between us and other employees we will also communicate, we learn to understand the people around us, understand the environment of our organization and communicate with each other..." (P4)

"Communication skills are broad and cover many things. It is very important because it involves how we communicate something well. If we don't have these communication skills, there might be a lot of misunderstandings and feeling uncomfortable with someone..." (P1)



"I agree with Hanisah. One of the important things in us wanting to apply these communication skills is closely related to our environment, whether at work, near home or anywhere..." (P7)

"Actually, in any career. Communication is the same as what Hanisah said earlier, communication is an important thing. No matter how small or small, communication still plays a role. If the communication is not clear, the work will not be done. In my opinion, all graduates or anyone who wants to find a job, he has first skill is communication. The most important skill if you want to get a job is communication..." (P5)

"Sacred words I can bring back from the friends who shared this, which is the importance of communication skills when we can convey something to that person and people can understand what we convey. Yes, all of this influences our lives..." (P2)

## 1.2 Communication Barriers and Challenges

Through the participants' statements, there are three main themes that are obstacles and communication challenges in career preparation, namely self-confidence, knowledge and social. For social- related problems are further broken down by language and environment. Here is what the participants stated

"I'm sure everyone has a problem with self-confidence, right... again, when you want to convey something, all kinds of things can happen when you feel too nervous... Then, the knowledge is important, there are many things that we don't know, for example the correct communication techniques and so on... Sometimes we have a social environment and that can be a challenge... for example, all the people of Kelantan are in this, sometimes there are outsiders who do not understand what we convey in our language..." (P5)

"As you all can see now, it's really low confidence because I'm waiting for Khuzaimah and Hanisah to share first... Just like sister Umaira said earlier, everyone is nervous... So, now it's like nervous too... The biggest challenge is knowledge I think, if in our scope we want to find a job, this knowledge is very important..." (P6)

"I recall what my challenges were in communication when I was at university, places intern... I'm a shame that has no place, sometimes when the feeling of shame is the worst that causes sometimes lack of self-confidence... The challenge of my time internship, we are used to being new boys... The environment and culture of the place intern sometimes it's challenging because we don't familiar with that situation... wanting to communicate, sometimes it's hard because relate with my problem earlier that shame was out of place..." (P2)

"Everyone mentions a lack of self-confidence, including me... I have been interviewed before, I think I lack self-confidence and am too nervous... I'm also lacking in terms soft skills and knowledge... It's normal in interview, we have to

know a little about the organization or company... Next, the language... This is actually a big problem... Like interview sometimes we have to speak in English, don't we... Then, the dialects of other states when I meet with friends from this university is also a challenge for me... I understand what is being said but wanting to respond is like pending..." (P3)

"Just like other people, low self-confidence... Then, this language-related challenge I have experienced in several situations... When internship, I have a problem in understanding the local dialect..." (P4)

"I also have challenges related to the surrounding environment regarding communication.. Yes, we all socialize with neighbors at home, friends at work. I see that if someone is good at communication, a quiet environment can become cheerful..." (P7)

"I am not exempt from a lack of self-confidence when trying to communicate with people. It's a bit difficult for me to start a conversation and even though at university I actively join programs, this communication science application is still mediocre...Of course, knowledge is important when we want to talk to people..." (P1)

### **Strategies for Overcoming Communication Problems**

Based on the statements from the participants, the majority of the participants began to identify appropriate strategies to deal with problems in communication. There are several themes that are highlighted and identified in an effort to overcome communication problems. Among them, join an active community, search for information on websites, identify suitable figures or icons, observe and evaluate the way someone communicates, read, make new friends, get involved as a volunteer, make your own short videos, be a good listener and participate in the interview simulation program. All these things were obtained from the participants as in the following statements

"I will continue to increase my knowledge by searching at youtube anyway, even before this I have been looking for additional info at youtube and the internet. After that I will read a lot more to increase my knowledge... I want to follow people who are good at communication..." (P3)

"Join a program or community at the university like an association or a uniformed body... I joined Shaklee because I found the things in Shaklee something which is good for overcoming communication problems... in that there are classes, there are leaders and there are group who always gives something positive..." (P2)

"I like to observe and evaluate the way people communicate... I will watch videos public figure... Take the opportunity to join any program such as lectures, seminars and community... Add new friends by getting involved as a program organizer..." (P6)

"I will join a seminar or program related to communication... A two-way program where I can apply the skills learned... Join the mediums that are available as one of the speakers, make short videos... Then be active as a volunteer..." (P5)

"I try to be a good listener..." (P4)

"I may be a little different from the others, which is to attend a program in the form of a simulation... Example like that interview right, when we have experience in that interview maybe a little bit will help us when we need it interview in the real situation... The other strategies are more or less the same as the others..." (P7)

"I will also read more, join the program as a volunteer and find friends who can help improve my communication skills" (P1)

Based on the analysis carried out, the findings of the study regarding the perception of the importance of communication skills for career preparation explain two main themes, namely its importance in terms of life and career itself. Statements from all the majority students stated that these communication skills are very important in life and career. In terms of career, this is in line with the findings of a study (Hanapi et al., 2018) which states that the phenomenon of unemployment that occurs nowadays is not due to the level of academic achievement but the phenomenon is due to the mastery of low employability skills among graduates. In the employability skills there are important skills that are discussed which are communication skills. While in terms of life, the findings of this study are related to the study (Tatlilioğlu, 2018) which states that effective communication skills are to solve problems that arise in the personal life of each individual and the learning process will be able to express himself so that he can understand what is inside him, to prevent or manage conflict. Easily able to understand himself and the social environment.

Further, a study conducted by (Sandy Mark Luna, 2016), states that approximately 40 percent of the unemployed in this country are new graduates. Among the factors are a weak personality, lack of problem-solving skills, poor language skills and poor communication skills. This matter coincides with three main themes that are obstacles and communication challenges in career preparation, namely self-confidence, knowledge and social. For social-related problems are further broken down by language and environment. This is also supported (Sharifah et.al., 2015) which states that employers need employees who have mastery of knowledge, good personality, and skilled in communicating. It should not be forgotten that the use of English in the employment sector is one of the most important elements, especially in global companies (Siti Aisyah, 2016).

Finally, the findings of the study are related to appropriate strategies to deal with problems in communication. There are several themes identified in an effort to overcome communication problems. Among them, join an active community, search for information on websites, identify suitable figures or icons, observe and evaluate the way someone communicates, read, make new friends, get involved as a volunteer, make your own short videos, be a good listener and participate in the interview simulation program. There is a theme that is in line with the findings of the study (Nurja & Tawau, 2020) regarding the



interview simulation, which is that all the students involved stated that this interview simulation activity benefited them in terms of career preparation.

Through the implementation of this interview simulation, the students have learned soft skills and technical skills for future career preparation. This finding is supported by (Lord et. al., 2019) who stated that the interview simulation program is a successful career development program and very important for career preparation. Next, the involvement of students with programs with the community or volunteers is in line with the findings of the study (Wan et. al., 2018) stating that volunteering can keep students away from being stuck with negative symptoms, live a more organized, more disciplined life, and have a status that is high in society. Their respondents also revealed that their experience of involvement in volunteering has matured their thinking, make them act rationally and cultivate patience. This is one of the important things that students need to have as an initial preparation for the world of work.

### **Conclusion**

According to the analysis of findings and discussion in this study, it clearly shows that communication skills are very important for career preparation. Apart from that, the strategies listed by the students can be practiced by anyone who wants to improve their communication skills. However, there are some weaknesses in this study. First, the sample findings of this study consist of a small number of students only. Second, this study only focuses on students from public universities. Therefore, the study needs to be continued by increasing the number of samples and from various universities, whether public or private.

Career is an important aspect of an individual's life. Preparations need to be made to be among the quality employees from time to time. This must be done from now on before graduating. It is important for all students to be aware of the importance of communication skills because academic achievement alone does not guarantee employment opportunities if communication skills are not the foundation. In addition, the students create group learning outside the classroom because little by little it can improve students' communication skills. In addition, student involvement in faculty and university activities such as seminars, competitions or anything else will increase their confidence to communicate better with individuals from various levels.

Overall, communication skills are among the most important aspects. Mastery of students in this skill is very necessary especially when students enter the field of employment in the future. In order to achieve the status of a developed country and make our graduates successful, graduates must have the criteria desired by employers, namely the ability to communicate, mastery of knowledge and language as well as high self-confidence.

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