

Faculty Perceptions of Business Communication Skills and Needs of Management Students

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Abstract: It is unanimously agreed that a business communication curriculum plays an important role in preparing students for the workforce in the corporate (Pittenger, Khushwant K. S.; Miller, Mary C. & Allison, Jesse, 2006; Zhao, Jensen J. & Alexander, Melody W., 2004). However, Student population in India undertaking a program in business management primarily comprises those for whom English is a second language. In this scenario, it becomes extremely important to analyze how the faculty teaching business management students perceive the course of business communication and students' possession of business communication skills (Plutsky, Susan & Wilson, Barbara A., 1996). In this connection, very little work has been done on the perceptions of faculty teaching business management students in India. What are the areas of business communication curriculum which faculty perceives as important? What are those areas of business communication in which faculty feel students are more competent? Should something be added to the curriculum to make it more effective? This study enters this discussion by presenting a small empirical study of a faculty's perception of the business communication needs of students. A sample of 93 faculty members, teaching with AICTE accredited management institutions in India have expressed their opinion on the said issue by way of questionnaires. The ultimate goal is to reorient the curriculum of business communication according to the findings of the present study.

Keywords: business communication, oral skills, written skills, topics covered, knowledge dissemination, faculty perceptions

1. Introduction

In the past few decades, it has become widely accepted that the 'lingua franca of international business is English' (Charles 2007) with communication potential driving dramatic changes in organizations and their environments. In this scenario, business communication i.e. communication used in conducting business (Reinsch, 1996) has assumed a never before significance. B-schools have emerged as hubs catering to communication needs of the emerging business elite in the basic principles of sustainable development. Thus B-schools, which for long operated in separate domains, have inched closer to each other, creating synergies to cater to the demands of the day.

There is consensus among educators and business executives that excellent communication skills are pre-requisites of today's jobs. Yet, most business communication instructors realize that it is difficult to get students take business education classes seriously- thus culminating into the need of an effective business communication course, which challenges the students. In this scenario, it becomes extremely important to analyze how the faculty teaching business management students perceive the course of business communication *per say* and students' possession of business communication skills. In this connection, very little work has been done on the perception of faculty teaching business management students in India. What are the areas of business communication curriculum which faculty perceives as important? What are those areas of business communication in which faculty feel students are more competent? Should something be added to the curriculum to make it more effective? This article enters this discussion by presenting a small empirical study of faculty's perception of the business communication needs of students.

2. Literature survey

Business schools, always a subject of controversy, are 'almost regarded as a necessary evil' (Vinten, 2000). Such integral part of the business world is this 'necessary evil' that its purposes appear rarely to be a subject of reflection (Grey, 2002), especially to those who teach them. Yet a need to prioritize the mission objectives of business schools to the benefit of those stakeholders for whom they dedicate most of their energies is undeniable. Two decades back, Porter and McKibbin report (1988) established that business deplored graduates' lack of soft skills, including managerial skills. More or less same conclusions have been reached to in various studies conducted further (Wardrope, 2002;

McPherson, 1998). Numerous articles (for example, Buckley, 1989; Thompson & Smith, 1992) suggest that business schools are failing to help students develop needed competencies and skills. These facts confirm the criticism that B-schools are facing regarding failure to groom students with the required skills and competencies essential to the new workplace and yet the efforts to overcome this failure have proved fruitful only to a limited extent.

The content of a business management programme, the nature of its curriculum and how it meets the needs of business life distinguishes a B-school from its competitors (Baruch and Leeming, 1996). This curriculum is crucial to all the stakeholders- the employers, the business school, the faculty and the students. Given the importance of curriculum content to all the stakeholders and given the dramatic changes in the workplace environment, it is essential for business educators to incorporate changes in their curriculum in order to meet the changing workplace demands.

Research on the opinions of business executives (Chandler, 1995; Locker, 1995) and students (McPherson, 1998) reveal that the ability to communicate effectively in business is as ranked one of the top most skills necessary for job success. Chandler, 1995; Plutsky, 1996; Epstein, 1999; Stowers & White, 1999 Cappel, 2002, & many others in their studies based on their surveys on recruiters have repeatedly established that employers require and expect that business management students i.e. their employees will possess good communication skills when they graduate. In 2002, Wardrope conducted a study on the perceptions of department chairs, relating to business communication. According to the department chairs who responded, written communication was ranked the most important among the communication skills, while using correct grammar was ranked the most important in the written communication category. Swanson and Swanson (1990) found that alumni perceive business communication as the most valuable course than any other course required in the core. Likewise, Gustafson, Johnson, and Hovey's survey (1993) established that alumni believe communication to be the most significant tool for advancement to higher levels of responsibility. Such studies substantiate and confirm to the criticality most business communication educators attach to their subject for success in the workplace. The business communication curriculum must reflect the current trends that are accepted in the business world. This study makes a small attempt towards indicating the areas of this much required change in India.

3. Business communication in India

Criticism about lack of communication skills and concern about the need to improve them are not unique to India as well, a non-native English speaking country. The same is true of countries where English is the native or dominant language, (for example, in Australia and New Zealand (Clout, 1994; White, 1993; Dwyer, 1992) and the (Plutzky, 1996; Willmington, 1989).The problem of poor English communication skills becomes graver in a non-native English speaking country like India. Indian English is a language spoken by the educated class in India. There are 18 official languages in India, and English is often the language of national communication (Gannon, 1994).

Still, since English is a foreign and acquired language for Indians, communication skills in English do not come naturally to Indian students. It then seems only logical that the prime stakeholders of business management education in India, in the light of the international business scenario today, would be a very valid source of information about which communication skills they perceive as important for success and what would their preference be for the business communication course curriculum. Among various stakeholders, business instructors, with their obvious ties to local business, are arguably in the best position of all to determine the types of communication skills necessary to succeed in the workplace and to judge whether students need to improve those skills. These facts prompted this descriptive study in which business faculty members' perceptions about the business communication curriculum are examined. Stanga and Ladd (1990) noted that despite the importance of communication skills, relatively little is known about the obstacles that students face when attempting to develop their communication abilities. It is time to also acknowledge the troubles business instructors face while dealing with students for whom English is second language and yet, who have to be taught in English since it is the language of business. Hence, business instructors may arguably be in a strong position to opine what should be taught in a business communication curriculum and to what extent should it be taught. This study enters this discussion.

As stated earlier, studies examining employer and student perceptions of student communication skills have been conducted before but the share of faculty opinion in the above stated studies is relatively very small. Plutsky and Wilson (1996) did undertake some work what the faculty teaching

business management students feel about business communication course curriculum but little has been done in India, where the linguistic context, communication challenges and student expertise in English differ. Also, in the fast globalizing Indian corporate sector with increasing presence of MNCs, effective communication skills have assumed an indispensable quality in any successful manager's skill set.

4. The study

4.1 Objective

The specific purposes of the study are fourfold:

- To determine Indian business management faculty members' perceptions on the importance of business communication course.
- To determine Indian business management faculty members' perceptions on the students' possession of the important topics of business communication course.
- To identify the faculty reasons behind students not exhibiting the required level of interest in business communication classes.
- To analyze what the faculty community of business management institutions feels about the number of semesters this course should be taught as in India, business communication is a course taught in one semester and in few cases, in two semesters.

4.2 Instrumentation & demographic context of the study

The study was conducted on a population of 93 full-time faculty members teaching in various AICTE approved business management institutes of India. These faculty members represent all the departments of business management studies. The study deliberately did not focus specifically on business communication instructors alone as one of the primary objectives of the study was to determine business management faculty members' perceptions (irrespective of the course they taught) about the importance of business communication course. All the respondents were Indians & ranged between 27 to 63 years. All the respondents had an average experience of 7 years. 64 respondents were males and 34 were female.

The survey instrument was developed in three phases. In the first phase, a few faculty members were informally interviewed to assess their perceptions concerning the course, business communication, which is a compulsory course of 1-2 credits in management schools of India. This course covers almost all the topics of the prevalent business communication textbooks by authors as Bovée and Thill, Ober etc. Why I say 'almost all the topics' is because the study involves the perceptions of faculty members from various institutions, hence, some diversion is only natural. From the interview notes, a preliminary survey questionnaire was designed and plans for data analysis were made. In the second phase, a pilot study, using a group of 20 faculty members, was conducted. The results of the pilot study helped to refine the questionnaire and data-analysis techniques. In the third phase, the final version of the survey was administered.

Subsequently, copies of the questionnaire were mailed to faculty members of various management schools. Out of 315 questionnaires circulated, 119 were received, 93 of these were found to be complete for analysis. After receiving the completed questionnaires, responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Wherever ratings were asked, a five point Likert scale was used, where 5 represented the most positive response and 1 represented the most negative response.

The Questionnaire had 4 major sections:

- Faculty perceptions about the importance of various components of business communication skills
- Faculty perceptions about the possession of such skills amongst students.
- Faculty perception about reasons behind not taking business communication course seriously
- Faculty perception about the number of semesters in which the course should be offered.

5. Results and discussion

A look at the table 1 shows that the communication skills found to be highly important for management students, as the faculty perceived, were completeness (M= 4.63), clear expression of thoughts and ideas (M=4.57), and correct pronunciation (M= 4.55), listening skills (M= 4.35), speaking with confidence (M= 4.28) and coherence (M= 4.24). It is important to note here that only those components of business communication course i.e. oral/written skills were included on which all faculty members, irrespective of their areas could respond. Hence, components such as Augmentation, Business Etiquette, Negotiation Skills etc were deliberately omitted. The table also indicates that all the components, in terms of their importance, had a mean value of >3, indicative of the fact that all the specified components are important for a business management student. The table suggests that completeness in communication is considered to be the most important skill for students (M= 4.63), while the students seem to possess it the highest in written skills (M= 3.27), its possession in oral/ other skills is at the fourth place (M= 3.30), implying that there are 3 other components in oral/other skills which are better possessed by the students. Interestingly, despite this component being best possessed in written skills, its possession in oral/other skills is still higher. While grammatical correctness was found to be the least important in communication, (M= 3.26), its possession in written skills was towards the higher side, with the 4th best possessed skills amongst students, (M=3.15), though in oral/other skills possession, this was at the lower side comparatively with M= 3.06. Significantly, the faculty uniformly felt that there was no communication skill, the importance of which was lower than its possession with students. This is consistent with previous research (Agarwal, Chitranshi and Cardon, 2009) where possession of all skills was found significantly lower than its usage and importance.

Table 1: Mean of 'Importance' and 'Possession' of English communication skills among B-school students

English Communication Skills	Importance	Possession	
		Oral/other/ others	Written
Clear expression of thoughts and ideas	4.57	3.45	3.15
Support of statement with examples, facts, and statistics	4.17	3.19	3.13
Choice of words	3.93	3.22	3.06
Precision	3.82	2.97	3.07
Clarity	4.15	3.09	2.92
Completeness	4.63	3.30	3.27
Coherence	4.24	3.17	3.12
Subject-verb agreement	3.72	3.04	3.06
Use of jargons and verbosity	3.35	3.02	2.90
Grammatical correctness	3.26	3.06	3.15
Tenses	3.97	2.92	2.97
Speaking with confidence	4.28	3.17	
Correct pronunciation	4.55	3.17	
Variation in pitch and tone	4.09	3.18	
Effective use of audio-visuals in presentations	4.05	3.46	
Vocabulary	3.82	2.91	2.62
Effective organization of material	4.05	3.07	3.18
Use of appropriate business terminology	4.00	3.04	3.18
Correct punctuation marks	3.89	3.30	3.20
Correctness of sentence structure	4.07	3.28	3.20
Summary of key points at the end	4.00	3.12	3.07
Non-verbal Skills	4.04	3.24	3.06
Listening Skills	4.35	3.36	3.14
Avoidance of Hinglish (oral/other)	3.91	3.00	3.14

The oral/other skills best possessed were- effective use of audio-visuals in presentations (M= 3.46), clear expression of thoughts and ideas (M= 3.45), listening skills (M= 3.36), completeness (M= 3.3), and correct pronunciation marks (M= 3.3). While the component- effective use of audio-visuals in presentations was rated the highest in possession of oral/ other skills, its importance was perceived as comparatively lower by the faculty (M= 4.05). However, though there were 10 other skills that faculty considered more important, there appears to be a higher importance of this component than its possession (M= 4.05 compared to M= 3.46 respectively). While the component vocabulary was the lowest possessed in oral as well as written skills (M= 2.91 and 2.62 respectively), its importance was

also found to be lower than that of most other skills, (M= 3.82). Nevertheless, its perceived importance was determined to be still higher than its possession.

In written possession of skills, completeness (M= 3.27), correct punctuation marks (M= 3.2), correctness of sentence structure (M= 3.2), effective organization of material (M= 3.18) and use of appropriate business terminology (M= 3.18), emerged as significant. This is consistent with previous research. In 1995, in a study conducted at California State University, Northridge, by Susan Plutsky, showed that the faculty in the College of Business Administration and Economics rated English usage, which included grammar and sentence construction as the top-ranked items to include in a business communication course.

When comparing the possession of written skills against their importance, four components, namely, speaking with confidence; correct pronunciation; variation in pitch and tone; and, effective use of audio-visuals in presentations; were not included due to their inapplicability in writing. Completeness in writing, which was observed as the best possessed written skills of students, (M= 3.27), was also identified as the most important communication skill by the instructors, (M= 4.63). However, its importance was still higher than its possession amongst students. This is a reflection of what research has consistently pointed out. In various studies conducted on business educators' opinion (Zhao and Alexander, 2004; Hiemstra, 2001), students were perceived to have problems with basic writing skills as well as writing concepts and techniques. As a result, they seem to desire a business communication course in which writing is emphasized.

Out of 24 components, on the scale of importance, 15 were rated with a high mean of >4 and none with a mean of < 3; while in the oral/other possession of the same skills, no faculty seems to have highly perceived their possession amongst students as not a single component could reach to the mean value of 4, which is indicative of comparatively poor oral/other possession of the said skills amongst students. The same appears to be true of the possession of written skills, where again no component could reach to the mean value of 4. The lowest mean value amongst the possession of oral/other and written skills was of the component- Vocabulary (M= 2.91, M= 2.62 respectively). The difference in mean values for Vocabulary in oral/other and written skills possessions suggests that comparatively, students use better vocabulary while speaking than they do in writing whereas research has indicated that competency in written communication is the most important (Wardrope and Bayless, 1999; Quible, 1991). Research needs to take into account the reasons behind this.

It can be observed from the table that the highest mean values in terms of possession of oral/other/other and written skills are M= 3.46 (Effective use of audio-visuals in presentations) and M= 3.27 (Completeness), while in terms of importance, there are 19 components which have a higher mean values than the ones mentioned above. This substantiates the previous research which establishes that the students' possession of business communication skills is weaker than that of their importance (Clout, 1994; Nelson, Moncada, & Smith, 1996). It also needs to be noted that in comparison between possession of oral/other and written skills, the possession of written skills appears to be weaker amongst students, as observed by the faculty. While in oral/other skills, 21 components have a mean value of > 3 in possession of written skills, only 14 components have a mean value of > 3. There is significant difference between the highest and lowest mean values as well. (Highest Mean in oral/other/other skills= 3.46 whereas highest Mean in written skills= 3.27; Lowest Mean in oral/other/other skills= 2.91 whereas lowest Mean in written skills=2.61) This is consistent with earlier research (Agarwal, 2008; Pittenger, Miller and Allison; 2006) where possession of written skills with students has repeatedly emerged to be weaker than that of oral/other skills. This could be perhaps because, as has been often discussed, business education is not able to effectively develop its students' writing skills (Pittenger *et al*, 2006). Another reason, as pointed by Agarwal (2008), in her study on the perception of students regarding the course of business communication, could be that students, though well aware of their weakness in writing skills, are not very enthusiastic of improving in it since they feel it is too time consuming.

The data were further analyzed with the help of linear regression, the results of which are discussed:

Table 2 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 13% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is Oral possession of clear expression of thoughts and ideas. The F value (3.40) is significant. Therefore it can be said that

the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas for English communication is found closely associated (.43 significant at .01 level) with oral possession of clear expression of thoughts and ideas.

Table 2: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.424(a)	0.18	0.127	1.058	3.394	.005(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Oral Possession of Clear expression of thoughts and ideas

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	.916	1.010		.907	.367
	Importance of Clear expression	.609	.153	.426	3.973	.000
	Importance of Completeness	-.096	.186	-.061	-.516	.607
	Importance of Coherence	.109	.151	.084	.720	.473
	Importance of Speaking with confidence	.035	.143	.025	.247	.806
	Importance of correct pronunciation	-.024	.172	-.015	-.140	.889
	Importance of Listening Skills	-.070	.156	-.053	-.450	.654

Table 3: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.302(a)	0.091	0.032	1.06	1.55	.004(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Oral Possession of Completeness

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	1.541	1.012		1.523	.131
	4.1a	.099	.154	.073	.647	.519
	4.6a	.288	.186	.192	1.544	.126
	4.7a	-.080	.151	-.065	-.532	.596
	4.12a	.301	.144	.225	2.094	.039
	4.13a	-.040	.173	-.026	-.233	.817
	4.23a	-.182	.157	-.145	-1.165	.247

Table 3 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills)shares 3.2% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is Oral Possession of completeness . The F value (1.55) is significant. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the

importance of speaking with confidence for English communication is found closely associated (.23 significant at .04 level) with oral possession of completeness.

Table 4: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.192(a)	0.037	0.025	0.926	0.595	.734(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Oral possession of effective use of audio-visuals in presentations

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	3.125	.884		3.536	.001
	4.1a	-.189	.134	-.164	-1.413	.161
	4.6a	.070	.163	.055	.430	.669
	4.7a	.083	.132	.080	.630	.530
	4.12a	.137	.125	.121	1.095	.276
	4.13a	.107	.151	.082	.711	.479
	4.23a	-.128	.137	-.120	-.937	.351

Table 4 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares very little i.e. 2.5% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is effective usage of audio-visuals in oral presentations. The F value (.60) is non-significant. Therefore it can not be said with full confidence whether the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable or not. A look at the table further shows that none of the predictors are found significantly associated with Possession of effective usage of audio-visuals in oral presentations.

Table 5: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.248(a)	0.061	0	0.913	1.004	.427(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Oral Possession of correct punctuation marks

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	2.130	.872		2.444	.016
	4.1a	.135	.133	.117	1.011	.315
	4.6a	.131	.161	.104	.817	.416
	4.7a	.151	.131	.145	1.150	.253
	4.12a	.063	.124	.056	.509	.612
	4.13a	-.015	.156	-.011	-.096	.924
	4.23a	-.201	.135	-.189	-1.488	.140

Table 5 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) does not share the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is Oral possession of correct punctuation marks in terms of right pauses in speech. The F value (1.00) is non-significant. Therefore it can not be said with confidence whether the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable or not. A look at the table further shows none of the predictors is found significantly associated with Oral Possession of correct punctuation marks in terms of right pauses in speech.

Table 6: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.419(a)	0.175	0.042	1.19	1.312	.033(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Oral possession of Listening Skills

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	2.325	1.576		1.476	.148
	4.1a	.171	.252	.136	.680	.501
	4.6a	-.178	.323	-.102	-.552	.584
	4.7a	-.019	.243	-.013	-.077	.939
	4.12a	-.035	.308	-.022	-.114	.910
	4.13a	.448	.244	.329	1.835	.054
	4.23a	-.170	.240	-.136	-.711	.482

Table 6 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 4.2% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is possession of listening skills. The F value (1.31) is significant. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of correct pronunciation for English communication is found associated (.33 significant at .05 level) with possession of listening skills.

Table 7: Model summary and ANOVA

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.308(a)	0.095	0.037	0.697	1.626	.049(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Written Possession of Completeness

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	1.351	.924		1.463	.147

	4.1a	-.124	.140	-.100	-.885	.379
	4.6a	.340	.170	.248	1.998	.043
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	4.7a	-.152	.138	-.136	-1.105	.272
	4.12a	.257	.131	.210	1.961	.043
	4.13a	.100	.158	.071	.636	.526
	4.23a	.003	.143	.003	.024	.981

Table 7 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 3.7% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is Written Possession of completeness. The F value (1.63) is significant at .05 level. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of completeness for English communication and speaking with confidence are found significantly associated (.25 and .21 respectively both significant at .04 level) with written possession of completeness.

Table 8: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.427(a)	0.182	0.046	1.133	1.339	.042(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Written Possession of effective Organization of Material

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.440	1.500		-.293	.771
	4.1a	.081	.244	.068	.334	.740
	4.6a	.012	.308	.008	.040	.968
	4.7a	.312	.234	.235	1.331	.191
	4.12a	.506	.293	.344	1.726	.023
	4.13a	.045	.248	.034	.181	.858
	4.23a	-.141	.230	-.118	-.611	.545

Table 8 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 4.6% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is effective organization of material while writing. The F value (1.34) is significant at the .04 level. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of speaking with confidence for English communication is found associated (.34 significant at .02 level) with possession of effective organization of material in writing.

Table 9: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.498(a)	0.248	0.122	1.155	1.974	.035(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Written Possession of Use of Appropriate Business Terminology

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	-1.051	1.530		-.687	.496
	4.1a	.120	.248	.095	.483	.632
	4.6a	.575	.314	.328	1.832	.020
	4.7a	.191	.239	.135	.798	.430
	4.12a	.036	.299	.023	.120	.905
	4.13a	.322	.253	.229	1.271	.212
	4.23a	-.301	.235	-.237	-1.282	.208

Table 9 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 1.22% of the variance of the criterion variable which, in this case, is possession of use of appropriate business terminology in writing. The F value (1.97) is significant. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of completeness for English communication is found associated (.33 significant at .02 level) with possession of use of appropriate business terminology in writing.

Table 10: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.442(a)	0.195	0.065	1.218	1.495	.046(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Written Possession of correct punctuation marks

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	.528	1.613		.327	.745
	4.1a	.386	.258	.296	1.499	.000
	4.6a	-.218	.330	-.121	-.660	.513
	4.7a	.381	.248	.265	1.535	.133
	4.12a	.070	.315	.043	.221	.826
	4.13a	.114	.250	.081	.455	.652
	4.23a	-.104	.246	-.080	-.424	.674

Table 10 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares 6.5% of the variance of the criterion variable, which in this, case is written possession of correct punctuation marks. The F value (1.50) is significant. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas for English communication is found associated (.30 significant at .05 level) with written possession of correct punctuation marks.

Table 11: Model summary and ANOVA table

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.259(a)	0.067	0.006	0.958	1.105	.032(a)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Written Possession of correctness of sentence structure

Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.951	.918		2.125	.036
	4.1a	.166	.139	.138	1.198	.234
	4.6a	-.086	.169	-.065	-.513	.609
	4.7a	.029	.137	.026	.209	.835
	4.12a	.245	.130	.206	1.887	.032
	4.13a	-.066	.156	-.048	-.420	.675
	4.23a	.006	.142	.006	.045	.964

Table 11 shows that the model of the predictor variables (Importance of clear expression of thoughts and ideas, Completeness, Coherence, Speaking with confidence, Correct pronunciation, Listening Skills) shares very little (.6%) of the variance of the criterion variable which in this case is written possession of correctness of sentence structure. The F value (1.11) is significant. Therefore it can be said that the predictors have a definite role in predicting the criterion variable. A look at the table further shows that recognizing the importance of speaking with confidence for English communication is found closely associated (.21 significant at .03 level) with written possession of correctness of sentence structure.

Table 12: Ways of improving English communication skills by B-school students

Ways of improving English Communication Skills	Percent
Reading	37.8
Writing	12.2
Speaking	45.9
Listening	4.1

Table 13: Cross tabulation- gender and ways of improving English communication skills by B-school students

Gender	Ways to improve English communication skills			
	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Male	21	7	28	3
Female	16	4	13	1

Table 14: Cross tabulation- age group*Ways of improving English communication skills by B-school students

Age	Ways to improve English communication skills			
	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
20-30 years	10	1	10	0
30-40 years	15	7	18	2
40-50 years	9	3	8	1

50 years and above	1	0	3	1
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Table 15: Cross tabulation- no. of years of experience*Ways of improving English communication skills by B-school students

Teaching Experience	Ways to improve English communication skills			
	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
0-5 years	20	4	15	2
6-10 years	11	5	18	1
11-15 years	1	0	1	0
16 years and above	2	0	1	1

As indicated in Table 12, B-school students, as perceived by the faculty, could best improve their communication skills through speaking (45.9 %) and reading (37.8 %) as per Table 12. Table 13 depicts that out of the 45.9% respondents who felt speaking was the best means to improve, 28 were males and 13 were females. Amongst the other 37.8% who identified reading as the best way to improve the communication skills of students, 21 were males and 16 were females. The fact that practice writing was not determined effective enough for the required improvement is perhaps suggestive of the general belief that writing skills cannot be adequately developed in a business communication class (Pittenger, Miller and Allison; 2006). Table 14 shows that not a single respondent in the age group of 20-30 years felt that listening skills could be a way of improvement in communication skills. While the fact is surprising, is it also suggestive of youth giving little importance to listening skills? A definite pattern can be observed in Table 14. Irrespective to the age, the highest responses have been in the option of reading and speaking which is as expected. Table 15 clearly shows that faculty members with comparatively lesser experience find reading to be more effective than writing and gradually the focus seems to have shifted towards speaking. Interestingly, the cycle takes full circle and as can be seen in Table 15, the senior most faculty members, though very few in number, seem to be again establishing reading as the most effective way of improvement. However, this analysis may be subjective to the number of respondents.

Table 16: Reasons for not taking business communication classes seriously by B-School students

Reasons	Percent
Fluency in English is a problem	15.2
It is not the sole reason of their getting a job	16.2
It takes a lot of time to improve upon it	26.3
It is more important to concentrate on their specialization	21.2
The topics included are not of their interest	13.1
Any other reason	8.1

Table 17: Cross tabulation- age group*Reasons for not taking Business Communication classes seriously by B-School students

Age Group	Reasons for not taking Business Communication classes seriously					
	No Fluency in English	Can get a job otherwise also	Takes a lot of time to improve	More important to concentrate on specialization	Topics included are not of interest	Any other reason
30-40 years	5	6	13	11	5	4
40-50 years	4	4	5	2	4	1
50 years and above	0	0	2	3	0	0

Table 18: Cross tabulation- no. of years of experience*Reasons for not taking Business Communication classes seriously by B-School students

Teaching Experience	Reasons for not taking Business Communication Classes seriously					
	No Fluency in English	Can get a job otherwise also	Takes a lot of time to improve	More important to concentrate on specialization	Topics included are not of interest	Any other reason
0-5 years	7	7	11	11	4	1
6-10 years	4	6	6	7	6	6
11-15 years	0	0	1	0	0	1
16 years and above	1	0	2	1	0	0

Table 16 shows that the most important reason of not taking business communication classes as seriously as other classes by B-school students, according to faculty, was found to be that it takes a lot of time to improve upon it (26.3 %) and it is more important for students to concentrate on their specialization (21.2 %). It appears that the instructors generally feel that students today are more inclined towards immediate results; hence, despite their acknowledged weakness in communication skills and their awareness of its importance, students do not tend to accord appropriate seriousness to the course. A few other reasons cited by the faculty were –the tendency of business communication classes becoming English speaking classes in most B-schools, the failure of the course in appropriately challenging the heterogeneous batch of students; the deviation from focus on the part of business communication instructors and students’ assumption that business communication is more of self practice. The reasons do not seem to get affected by the age groups or number of years of experience as is indicated in Tables 17 and 18. It is perhaps suggestive of the fact the faculty has a uniform opinion on the students’ not taking business communication classes seriously. Interestingly when students were asked why they did not take their business communication classes seriously, in another study undertaken by Agarwal (2008), the major reasons emerged as ‘too much course crammed in one credit course’ and ‘only one credit course , that too in the first trimester’. However, the reasons that have emerged as highly significant in the current study were found to be significant in Agarwal’s study also. In a similar study conducted on new management recruits (Agarwal, Chitranshi and Cardon, 2009), concern over specialization was identified as the major reason behind communication classes not being taken seriously, followed by the belief that communication skills would not be the sole reason behind getting a job.

Table 19: Number of semesters over which business communication curriculum should be spread out

Number of semesters	Percent
1 semester	15.2
2 semesters	48.5
3 semesters	10.1
4 semesters	26.3

Table 20: Cross-tabulation- gender* no. of semesters

Gender	No. of Semesters			
	One semester	Two semesters	Three semesters	Four semesters
Male	13	32	5	10
Female	2	14	4	14

Table 21: Cross-tabulation- age* no. of semesters

Age	No. of Semesters			
	One semester	Two semesters	Three semesters	Four semesters
20-30 years	2	11	2	6
30-40 years	8	17	4	14
40-50 years	3	13	2	3
50 years and above	1	3	1	0

Table 22: Cross-tabulation- no. of years of experience * no. of semesters

Teaching Experience	No. of Semesters			
	One semester	Two semesters	Three semesters	Four semesters
0-5 years	5	20	4	12
6-10 years	8	16	4	8
11-15 years	0	2	0	0
16 years and above	0	2	1	1

Business Communication curriculum should be spread out into two semesters (48.5 %) or four semesters (26.3 %) for its better appreciation amongst students (Table 19). Most male faculty members opined that the business communication curriculum, for better understanding and appreciation, should be spread over two semesters while female faculty members felt that it should be spread over two or four semesters (Table 20). Faculty members of all ages have said that the business communication curriculum should be spread over two semesters (Table 21). Faculty members with work experience of 0-10 years especially and all the faculty members unanimously opined that the course of business communication would do more justice if spread over two semesters (Table 22). In the study conducted by Agarwal (2008), students opined that the course should be spread over two to three semesters while newly recruited management graduates (Agarwal, Chitranshi and Cardon, 2009) felt that the course should be taught in three and four trimesters. A significant observation here is that no stake holder wanted the course to run for one semester alone, as it is currently run in most B-schools of India.

Table 23: English communication-skills recruiters look for in MBA students

Communication Skills	Average of ranks
Theoretical knowledge	6.45
Practical application	4.98
Confidence	3.22
Clear expression of thoughts and ideas	4.41
Conviction	6.18
Choice of words	7.31
Speaking fluently	5.95
Proper body language	5.69
Presentability	5.78
Right attitude	4.74

Table 23 shows that recruiters, as felt by business management education instructors, look for the following skills in MBA students- confidence (average rank =3.22), where 1= 1st rank, right attitude (average rank= 4.41), right attitude (average rank = 4.74) and practical application (average rank =4.98). Significantly, choice of words (average rank = 7.31) and theoretical knowledge (average rank = 6.45) have been ranked lowest by the faculty, though these are the areas management schools have a major focus upon. This dichotomy between what the faculty needs is not so important and yet is delivered, needs to be immediately addressed.

6. Conclusion

Overall, there was some dichotomy between the perceived important components of communication skills for students and their possession amongst them. The skills which were considered to be more important were less on the possession scale while the skills which were considered to be comparatively less important by the faculty were high on the possession scale.

Possession of written communication skills was found to be lower than the possession of same components in the oral skills, which is consistent with the previous research (Pittenger, Miller, and Allison, 2006). It can be thus concluded that the students across the globe, in India and abroad, are weak in possession of written skills. This is despite the fact that most of the delivery of the business communication course is pre-dominated by written skills alone. This gap needs to be further addressed through research. Deliberations whether or not written skills can be taught have already begun (Pittenger *et al*, 2006). Such studies need to be further conducted to analyze and understand this fact and act accordingly. The study also identifies that the business management teaching community feels that the course of business communication should be taught in either two or four semesters as opposed to the course being presently taught in one semester in most B- schools. The

faculty also opined that the business communication classes are not taken very seriously by students, the most important reasons, as felt by faculty were that it takes a lot of time to improve upon it and that it is more important for students to concentrate upon their specialization. A few other very important reasons that emerged were that the business communication classes very often transform into English speaking classes in most B-schools and the course fails in appropriately challenging the heterogeneous batch of students. This appears to be a very significant feedback for the business communication course instructors across B-schools. Research has already started debating whether English usage should or should not be included in a business communication course (Plutsky & Wilson, 1996).

7. Implications of the study

The study would have some far-fetched implications for business communication instructors. The findings could help business communication instructors to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities towards a continuous improvement of business communication education. Second, since the respondents are from across Indian business management institutions, the findings would enable the business communication instructors in India to customize their curricula towards improvement, according to the demand.

8. Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions following guidelines are recommended to those who have a business communication course similarly designed and who would wish to revise based on the present study:

- A clear distinction between a business communication course and an English speaking course needs to be maintained. A basic understanding and level of students' expertise over English needs to be ensured before offering a course on business communication.
- A balance between the delivery of oral and written components of communication skills needs to be sustained, thus providing students with equal opportunity to speak and write. The study has revealed that though the course is focused on written skills, students' possession of written skills is comparatively lower.
- Analyze the need and receptivity of the business communication course and then, as the study suggests, spread the course out to various semesters. The number of semesters this course should be offered depends upon the need of the students. What needs to be more importantly ensured is that it challenges and creates learning opportunities to a heterogeneous batch.
- The course, which is highly contemporary by nature, needs a continual assessment and revision. These revisions should only be made after proper discussion with faculty across the disciplines to ensure that the course meets the needs of the students and simultaneously prepares them for right kind of oral and written communication skills for their future.

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