

## **Development of Communication Skills for Job Performance – Perception of Tourism Graduates of Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka**

**H.M.W.M. Herath**

*Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka*  
*Corresponding Author: H.M.W.M. Herath*

Communication skills is considered to be one of the most important soft skill required in the today's job market. It is expected that when university graduates enter the job market they possess high communication skills. Thus, developing communication skills in undergraduates is of utmost importance. Identifying this need, the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka has introduced a course unit in communication skills which is compulsory for all the students of the university irrespective of the degree program they offer. The present study aims to examine the perception of tourism graduates regarding the impact of this course on their job performance. The study sample consisted of 160 respondents of Uva Wellassa University graduates, and an online survey was conducted to collect data and data was analyzed by using SPSS software. A considerable variance was found between the perception on developing communication skills and job performance. The graduates have a positive perception regarding the communication skills course unit, but have proposed further improvement of the curriculum with more practical exposure. It could be concluded that the communication course curriculum need to be rich with more practical exposure with increasing the credit weight. A learning environments must facilitate the supportive exposure in order to get the learning outcomes of the courses.

---

Date of Submission: 14-06-2019

Date of acceptance: 29-06-2019

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industry in the world. Sri Lankan tourism industry is the third largest export earner in the economy. As Mowtor and Mount (2005) point out, the direct contribution to travel and tourism to GDP is expected to grow by LKR 842.5 billion by 2025, it is 6.1 percent of GDP. (Mowtor & Mount 2015). To reach this target, tourism industry must perform well in the economy. For that, there is a need for a skilled and educated workforce. On the other hand, according to the Sri Lanka TPS 2017-2020, one of the high level objective is to employ 600000 Sri Lankans workforce in Tourism and its supporting industries. (Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017- 2020). As per the tourism development strategy 2011-2016, the annual requirement of graduates for the industry is about 1500. To address this demand, several state universities and private institutions offer tourism related degrees. Although, the tourism education in Sri Lanka continues to grow, it faces many challenges. As the tourism educational higher educational literature indicates, the graduates are not adequately prepared for employment in the industry (Airey, 199; Ladkin, 2005; Morgan, 2004), and there are concerns about the quality of these degree programs.

On the other hand, there is a discourse on producing skilled graduates from universities. This discourse has been existing in recent few decades worldwide. Historically, the most important aspect of a degree program was considered as the theoretical knowledge of the relevant field of study and the linkage between field of study and subsequent specific occupation. However, now it has been changed and attention is being moving towards the role of broad general education, attitudes and communication skills. This can be seen clearly when the existing discourses are observed.

According to the Graduate Attributes of the University of Sydney (1997), the graduates should be employable and should able to cope with the change. As they clarify, graduates of any faculty, board of studies or college of the university should have a range of skills, as shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1: Graduate Skills and Attributes Expected by the University of Sydney**

Skill	Graduates should
Knowledge skills	(a) Have a body of knowledge in the field(s) studied; (b) Be able to apply theory to practice in familiar and unfamiliar situations; (c) Be able to identify, access, organize and communicate knowledge in both written and oral English; (d) Have an appreciation of the requirements and characteristics of scholarship and research; and (e) Have the ability to use appropriate technologies in furthering all of the above.
Thinking skills	(a) Be able to exercise critical judgment; (b) Be capable of rigorous and independent thinking; (c) Be able to account for their decisions; (d) Be realistic self-evaluators; (e) Adopt a problem solving approach; and (f) Be creative and imaginative thinkers.
Personal skills	(a) The capacity for and a commitment to life-long learning; (b) The ability to plan and achieve goals in both personal and the professional spheres; (c) The ability to work with others.
Personal attributes	(a) Strive for tolerance and integrity; and (b) Acknowledge their personal responsibility for: their own value judgments; and (c) Their ethical behavior towards others.
Practical skills	a) Be able to use information technology for professional and personal development; and, where appropriate, be able to do following: (i) Collect, correlate, display, analyze and report observations; (ii) Apply experimentally-obtained results to new situations; (iii) Test hypotheses experimentally; and (iv) Apply technical skills appropriate to their discipline

Source: Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney (1997) –Research Paper

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Field of communication skills has attracted so much attention of scholars in last two decades. Studies have shown a positive relationship between effective communication skills and a range of benefits, such as greater happiness in life, resilience to psychosocial problems and stress and enhanced professional and academic achievements. (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). As Stewart Zediker and Witterborn (2005; p. 70) states, there is a direct link between the quality of person's communication and the quality of his or her life. According to Elis (1980) who spend a large part of their lives in face to face interaction with others, who are called interpersonal professionals are needed for a great number as society developed and evolved. As McCrosky (1984) emphasize, the ability to communicate effectively is vital for success in many walks of life. As noted by Greene and Burleson (2003; p. xiii) in light of the importance of communication skills, it is hardly astounding that they have been a continuing object of studying by scholars and researchers from numerous disciplines. As Hargie (2006 P 15) points out, Competence in most types of professions includes the effective implementation of following three main sets of skills.

- 1 *Cognitive skills.* This relates to the knowledge base of the profession, that which characterizes it and sets it apart from others. Barristers must have knowledge of existing legal structures, doctors need to understand human anatomy, and so on.
- 2 *Technical skills.* These are the specialized practical and manipulative techniques essential to the profession. Thus, a surgeon must be able to utilize a scalpel skillfully, a nurse has to be able to dress a wound, and a surveyor needs to know how to use a theodolite.
- 3 *Communication skills.* Here, the professional must have the ability to interact effectively with clients and other professionals.

As such, there has been a solid increase in awareness among university scholars of the necessity for fitting communication skills in all professional graduates, whether they be doctors, engineers, accountants, lawyers, or any other professionals. (Al-Bahi et al, 2013; Dixon, j. 1013; Franklin. C 2012; Kurtz. S. 2006; Norgaard . B. et al 2012) when considered the tourism industry, Communication is vital for the success of tourism businesses since it is only through the effective use of communication that tourism marketers can offer to customers tangible cues about those intangible experiences. Also, while communication is an essential component in the conduct of any service business, it has got an overarching role in tourism. (George B., 2011)

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study were to identify the graduates' perception on the impact of communication course unit on their job performance and to identify the factors affecting in securing a job position after the graduation.

#### Population

This research assess the perception of tourism graduates on communication skill course unit and its impact on job performance in Sri Lankan state universities with special reference to Uva Wellassa University graduates. Therefore the target population of the research involves all the tourism graduates graduated from the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka.

#### Sample

In this research, sample unit represent the tourism graduates graduated from Uva Wellassa University. Sample size is 160 graduates. The sample procedure is based on snow ball sampling. Snow ball sampling (as known as chain referral sampling) specially, exponential non discriminative snow ball sampling, was used because the graduates are already joined to the industry.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected on primary data collection method, based on snowball sampling technique using. For this, a questionnaire was developed based on scholarly research article of Mehralizadeh et al, 2017 and own resource. Primary data was collected from the questionnaire using an online survey based on Googleforms.

#### Data Analysis

In accordance with the research objectives, data were analyzed through descriptive statistics using SPSS.

#### Cronbach's Alpha Reliability

The reliability of the research constructs in the accepted level. Most of the literature widely cited that coefficient alpha exceeds the 0.7

**Table 2** Reliability Statistics

variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Curriculum	0.748	11
Faculty	0.873	4
Institutional resources	0.843	5
Learning Outcomes	0.705	5
Job Performance	0.853	12

#### Findings

The respondent rate of this study is 100%. According to the analyzed data, gender distribution was as 41 male and 59 female. According to the below table, majority of the tourism graduates (38.1%) are engaged in the hospitality sector, 30.4% of them work in the travel agencies or tour operators. And the 25.3% are working in other sectors. In considering the current job position, majority of the graduates (32.63%) are engaged in the jobs as junior executives and 19.25% are working as executives. There are 15% graduates working in managerial levels.

**Table 3** Distribution of business field of work'

<b>Business Field</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Travel Agent/ Tour Operator	48	30.4%
Hospitality Sector	61	38.1%
Tourism Organizations	10	6.3%
Any other	42	25.3%
Total	100	100%

**Table 4.** Analysis of most significant factors influencing to obtain the current Job position of tourism graduates.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Adaptability Skills	4.32
Computer Skills	4.19
Communication Skills	4.28
Practical Skills	4.11
Management Skills	4.03
Industry Knowledge	3.88
Creativity	3.58
Work experience	3.68
Academic grades	3.38
Research Skills	3.12
Event Management Skills	3.57

The above table 4 shows the most significant factors affect achieving the current job position of tourism graduates. As shown in the table, Adaptability skills, computer skills. Communication skills, practical skills. Management skills and the industry knowledge are the most influencing factors with having higher mean values. Among all, communication skills is shown with the highest mean value of 4.28. However, academic grades and research skills shows lesser influence to the current job position of the graduates.

**Table 5.** Graduates perception on skills development through the communication course unit

	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	2	1.25%
Moderate	10	6.25%
Agree	102	63.75%
Strongly Agree	46	28.75
Total	160	100%

The graduates' perception on developing communication skills through the communication course unit is shown in the above table 4. According to the output 63.75% of graduates have agreed that the course unit is helpful to develop their communication skills. 28.75% of them are strongly agreed to that.

**Table 6.** Graduates' perception on effectiveness of communication skills course unit for job performance

	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	4	2.5%
Moderate	13	8.12%
Agree	103	64.37%
Strongly Agree	40	25 %
Total	160	100%

As shown in above table 5 of Graduates' perception on effectiveness of communication skills course unit for job performance, 64.37% of graduates have agreed that learning communication course unit at the university caused for their job performance.25% of them have strongly agreed to that.

**Table 7.** Graduate perception on Communication course unit meets the industry requirements

	Frequencies	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	5	3.12%
Moderate	20	12.5%
Agree	101	63.12%
Strongly Agree	34	21.25 %
Total	160	100%

According to the above table 5, graduate perception on Communication course unit meets the industry requirements, 63.12% of the sample agreed that the communication course unit meets the industry requirements. 21.25% of the sample have strongly agreed to that. While 12.5% graduates perception was moderate.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As stated above, the tourism industry is a fast growing industry in the world, and in Sri Lanka, it is the third largest export earner in the economy. The workforce of tourism industry, especially the graduates who work in executive level are expected to be highly educated and skilled to meet the industry's requirements. However, there is a mismatch between tourism education and industry requirements. Therefore it is widely recognized that improving the curriculum of tourism degrees in many countries is essential. (Christou, 1999; Zagonari, 2009). As some scholars have mentioned, there is also a need for a new model which emphasize integration of both theory and practice (Getz, D. 1994). This is because education can do a huge impact on job performance. And also there is a wide discourse exists on skills mismatch of graduate employability (Blasko, Z. 2002).

Therefore, this research aims to examine the perception of learning communication skills course unit at university for job performance of tourism graduates in Sri Lanka. Since there is a lack of researches available to examine the students' perception on a particular course unit for job performance, this research has identified a knowledge gap and empirical gap. From the observation and the data analysis, hawse have identified the graduates' perception on effectiveness of communication skill course unit for job performance. When identifying the graduates' perception on the effectiveness of communication course unit versus industry requirements, one of the questions the researcher used was the graduates' perception on knowledge and the abilities obtained through the course unit. According to the results, 69% of the sample agreed that they got necessary knowledge and abilities though the course unit. 16 % strongly agreed to that. So, graduates' perception was that they got necessary knowledge and abilities though the course unit.

According to the results, for the question of Graduates' perception on effectiveness of communication skills course unit for job performance, 64.37% of graduates have agreed that learning communication course unit at the university was effective for their job performance. 25% of them have strongly agreed to that and this proves that the communication course unit is effectively impacted on job performance of the graduates. In respect of the graduates' perception on Communication course unit meets the industry requirements, 63.12% of the sample agreed that the communication course unit meets the industry requirements. 21.25% of the sample have strongly agreed to that. While 12.5% graduates perception was moderate. Thus, according to the graduates' perception, the course unit meets the industry requirements.

Overall, the tourism graduates have a positive perception regarding the communication skills course unit, which is compulsory for the undergraduates of Uva Wellassa University. However, the respondents have proposed further improvement of the curriculum with more practical exposure. Further, the researcher recommends that the credit value of the course unit need to be increased in order to provide more practical exposure.

#### REFERENCE

- [1]. Al-Bahi AM, Taha MA, Turkmen N. Teaching and assessing engineering professional skills. *Int IJ Eng Pedag.* 2013;3(S3):13–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v3iS3.2728>.
- [2]. Blasko, Z (2002) Key skills; the graduate perspective. In *Higher Education Digest*, issue 42, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, The Open University.
- [3]. Christou, E. S. (1999). Hospitality management education in Greece An exploratory study. *Tourism Management*, 20(6), 683-691.
- [4]. Dixon J. Effective strategies for communication? Student views of a communication skills course eleven years on. *Br J Soc Work.* 2013;43(6):1190–205. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs040>.
- [5]. Ellis, R. (1980). Simulated social skill training for the interpersonal professions. In W. Singleton, P. Spurgeon & R. Stammers (Eds), *The analysis of social skill*. New York: Plenum.

- [6]. Franklin CC, Mohan A, Merle D, et al. Perceptions of professional skills by graduate students: a comparative study between engineering, education and biology. *Int J Eng Educ.* 2012;28(3):588–98.
- [7]. Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney (1997) Available online:
- [8]. George, B. 2011, *Communication Skills for Success: Tourism Industry Specific Guidelines*, ISSN 2041-8469 (Online) [www.anglohigher.com](http://www.anglohigher.com) Volume 3, Issue 1, Spring 2011
- [9]. Getz, D. (1994). Students' work experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards careers in hospitality and tourism: A longitudinal case study in Spey Valley, Scotland. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 13(1), 25-37.
- [10]. Greene, J. & Burlison, B. (2003). Preface. In J. Greene & B. Burlison (Eds), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. Hargie, O. & Dickson, D. (2004). *Skilled interpersonal communication: research, theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- [11]. <http://www.policy.rms.usyd.edu.au> [Downloaded: August 13,2002]
- [12]. Kurtz S. Teaching and learning communication in veterinary medicine. *J Vet Med Educ.* 2006;33(1):11–9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/jvme.33.1.11>. Medline:16767633
- [13]. McCroskey, J. (1984). Communicative competence: the elusive construct. In R. Bostrom (Ed.), *Competence in communication: a multidisciplinary approach*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- [14]. Nørgaard B, Ammentorp J, Kyvik KO, et al. Communication skills training increases self-efficacy of health care professionals. *J Contin Educ Health Prof.* 2012;32(2):90–7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/chp.21131>. Medline:22733636

H.M.W.M. Herath. “Development of Communication Skills for Job Performance – Perception of Tourism Graduates of Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 06, 2019, pp. 57-62.