

Teaching and Learning Interpersonal Communication:

Perspectives of Hospitality Students

การเรียนรู้และการสอนการสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคล : มุมมองของนักศึกษาด้านการบริการ

◆ Myla Medrano Loreto

Lecturer, Department of Languages, Faculty of Hospitality Industry,

Dusit Thani College, E-mail: myla.medrano@dtc.ac.th

ไมร่า เมตราโน โลเรโต

อาจารย์ประจำภาควิชาภาษา คณะอุตสาหกรรมบริการ วิทยาลัยดุสิตธานี

Received: May 7, 2020 ; Revised: June 22, 2020 ; Accepted: July 21, 2020

Abstract

Interpersonal communication skill is one of the key competencies in hospitality. However, research indicates that hospitality graduates have inadequate interpersonal skills when they join the industry. This study explored the current teaching methods used along with the factors that affect teaching and learning of interpersonal communication skills among 146 hospitality students. Most of the students obtained an average level of interpersonal communication skill in the areas of verbal communication, listening, emotional intelligence, and working in groups. The study employed a mixed research method through online test and focus group discussions. Teacher's personality and competence, authenticity, resources, class environment, size and duration are perceived to facilitate teaching of and learning interpersonal communication skills through integration of traditional, online, and learner-centered methods. The results have implications to curriculum design, identification of learning outcomes, teacher training, academic support, and linkages.

Keywords: Teaching and Learning, Interpersonal Communication, Teaching Methods, Hospitality, Factors Affecting Learning

บทคัดย่อ

ทักษะการสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคลเป็นหนึ่งในสมรรถนะหลักในงานบริการ อย่างไรก็ตามมีการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้สำเร็จการศึกษาด้านการบริการมีทักษะดังกล่าวไม่เพียงพอเมื่อเข้าสู่การทำงานจริง การศึกษาสำรวจวิธีการที่ใช้ในปัจจุบันและปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการสอนและการเรียนรู้ทักษะการสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคลในกลุ่มนักศึกษาด้านการบริการที่มีคะแนนทักษะการสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคลอยู่ในระดับค่าเฉลี่ย โดยใช้วิธีการวิจัย

แบบผสมผสานผ่านการทดสอบออนไลน์และการสนทนากลุ่ม ผลการศึกษาพบว่า บุคลิกภาพและความสามารถของผู้สอน ความน่าเชื่อถือ ทรัพยากร สภาพแวดล้อม ขนาดของชั้นเรียน และระยะเวลาในการเรียนเป็นปัจจัยที่ส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ทักษะการสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคลผ่านการเรียนรู้เชิงบูรณาการทั้งแบบดั้งเดิมแบบออนไลน์ และแบบผู้เรียนเป็นศูนย์กลาง โดยผลลัพธ์จากการศึกษาครั้งนี้เป็นประโยชน์ต่อการสนับสนุนด้านวิชาการ การเชื่อมโยงกับอุตสาหกรรม การออกแบบหลักสูตร การระบุผลลัพธ์การเรียนรู้ และการฝึกอบรมครู

คำสำคัญ : การเรียนและการสอน การสื่อสารระหว่างบุคคล วิธีการสอน ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการเรียนรู้

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is generally defined as the process through which people express, interpret, and coordinate messages to create shared meaning, meet social goals, manage personal identity, and carry out relationships. It is also considered as a soft or people skill. Crawford and Weber (2016) published a study entitled, *Developing Soft Skills for Future Hospitality Leaders: A Case Study*. The article presented the importance and application of soft skills, including interpersonal communication, in the hospitality industry. The study also presented the evolution of competencies for hospitality management trainees from 1980s. Over the years, the competencies that remain relevant are soft skills of communication, customer focus, interpersonal skills, and leadership. Interpersonal communication has long been recognized as a crucial success factor in hospitality industry (Plangpamool, n.d.). Literature has consistently stressed the importance of effective interpersonal communication skills in the workforce. Educational institutions have the huge responsibility of producing employable graduates who meet the requirements of the industry. However, some studies indicate that there remains a mismatch between what the students learned and what the industry needs. In a study conducted by Lolli (2012), his findings revealed that the entry-level hospitality leaders believed that interpersonal communication skills are very important. However, the respondents perceived that their college curriculum did not prepare them enough to be competent interpersonal communicators. Lolli (2013) furthered this argument in another study claiming that entry-level hospitality leaders rated the importance of interpersonal communication skills as higher compared to their level of preparedness.

This study is conducted on the assumption that the classroom experience of hospitality students must be geared towards attainment of this essential soft skill. As future shapers of the industry, it is highly relevant to assess the students' current interpersonal communication

skills, explore the teaching methods used, and determine how the hospitality curriculum can facilitate teaching such skills in the classroom or instruction level. Giving a voice to students, as the primary stakeholders, in describing what transpires in their learning experience inside the classroom is expected to provide an authentic picture of what happens inside hospitality classrooms, what methods are teachers of hospitality used and what and how students learn from these methods. Moreover, results will help the schools prepare the students to acquire the skills and narrow the gap between the academe and the hospitality industry. Research results will aid in curriculum and instructional design. The results may be used as a springboard for designing specific courses and planning teaching activities that will reinforce learning of interpersonal communication skills.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the students' current interpersonal communication skills in terms of verbal communication, listening, emotional intelligence, and working in groups
2. To identify the methods used in teaching interpersonal communication skills
3. To identify the factors that affect learning interpersonal communication skills
4. To propose activities to enhance teaching and learning of interpersonal communication skills

Scope of Research

The study explored the perspectives of 146 hospitality students in teaching and learning interpersonal communication skills. The scope of interpersonal communication skills included listening, verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and working in groups. The data on interpersonal skills assessment, teaching methods, and factors facilitating teaching and learning interpersonal communication were gathered from students enrolled in the course, Principles of Communication. Data collection was conducted during academic years 2018 to 2019.

Literature Review

Interpersonal communication in hospitality

Among the eight competencies perceived by hospitality undergraduates, communication skill ranked first while teamwork skill was fifth. Communication skill specifically pertained to confidence, speaking, writing, and communicating in English. As for teamwork, the skill includes building relationships, interaction, and working effectively to collectively reach a goal

(Mohammad, Osman, & Isajak, 2018). This is supported by the research findings of Grobelna (2015) that 86 percent of the competencies in hospitality account for soft or people skills and that 80 percent of hospitality manager's time is spent in communication.

Sisson and Adams (2013) argued that hospitality programs should put more emphasis on teaching soft competencies and revise curriculum to satisfy the needs of hospitality graduates. Furthermore, Lolli (2013) underscored that educators must set more selective criteria in planning and designing curriculum and setting learning outcomes that concern interpersonal communication skills particularly listening, body language, verbal language, and conduct. Mohamad et al. (2018) recommended looking into mechanisms that will provide more opportunities for practice and enhancing the perceived skills. Based on the framework of Grobelna (2015), the challenge regarding communication skills may be addressed through various teaching methods like working in pair, projects, problem solving tasks, case studies, study tours, and field visits. The following strategies were recommended to fill the gap: alignment of theory and practice by adapting teaching methods to more real-life practice (Rodriguez-Anon as cited by Grobelna, 2015), applying case study, group and team work, and project work (Luka as cited by Grobelna, 2015), and use of role playing, simulations, and videotaping supported with feedback (Lolli as cited by Grobelna, 2015).

Listening, Verbal Communication, Emotional Intelligence, and Working in Groups

The scope of interpersonal communication skills in this study covers four essential interpersonal competencies required in hospitality: listening, verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and communicating in groups. In 1994, Brownell's study on listening environments suggested that strong listening environment should be created by effective hospitality leaders. This encourages high employee participation, excellent guest service and organizational commitment. In another report, Brownell (2009) underscored the increasing importance of listening for hospitality employees despite the increasing utilization of computer and other technology. Her paper highlighted the role that listening play in customer service specifically in providing accurate information and developing strong relationships. The ability to speak and write effectively using English is very important in the hospitality industry. Rahim (2011) analyzed the training and internship needs assessment of verbal communication among hotel practitioners. The results indicated low verbal communication ability of the interns compared with the requirements of the industry. The study recommended a balance between general

English proficiency and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to match the needs of the students. The need for more practice was also emphasized. Some of the specific needs discussed are listening to customers' enquiries, explaining hotel procedures, and giving oral reports. Emotional intelligence, known as EQ or EI, is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions intrapersonally and interpersonally. Koroglu and Koroglu (2012) reiterated that emotional intelligence is one of the most essential skills in hospitality, specifically in tourism industry. These skills include identifying, using, understanding, and regulating emotions (Mayer and Salovey as cited by Koroglu and Koroglu, 2012). The research focused on the relevance of emotional intelligence in the tourism industry in the context of the job performance of tour guides. Nguyen, Ladkin, and Osman's (n.d.) qualitative research on emotional intelligence, on the other hand, dealt with hotel employees. They examined the employees' understanding and application of emotional intelligence. The results indicated the employees' high awareness about emotional intelligence and its applications in dealing with customers and colleagues. The research participants in this study highlighted that they learn better from experiences or real-life situations compared to trainings. The last interpersonal skill included in the scope of this study in communicating or working in groups. Group communication entails talking to and working in groups to reach shared or mutual understanding. As described by Sarkar, Ford, and Manzo (2017), digital natives are collaborative learners who prefer to work in teams and connect to peers. Kapoor and de Villa-Lopez' (n.d.) academic paper suggests that this skill can be developed among hospitality students through training, reviewing best practices, and providing opportunities to conduct team projects and exchange feedback. The study also emphasized the role of the teacher in teaching students on how to be a team player.

Teaching methods in hospitality education

Hospitality education is a more industry-linked discipline, utilizing more hands-on and experiential methods. While much research has been conducted on rating effectiveness of teaching, there remains to be limited literature presenting how hospitality teachers deliver instruction in their respective classrooms (Deale, O'Halloran, Jacques, & Garger, 2013). Liasidou (2016) explained that a hospitality courses like hotel management are divided to theory and practice classes and are presented using a variety of teaching methods.

The teaching methods consistently and frequently discussed in related studies included lecture, discussion, group activities, field trip, demonstration, presentation, case study, role play, and group project (Deale et al., 2013; Liasidou, 2016; Bhinder, 2019; Aynalem, Abebe, Guadie, & Bires, 2015; Loreto, 2018). Other methods used moderately to less often in hospitality classrooms were assignments, brainstorming, games, symposium, inviting guest speaker, and industry immersion. Among these methods, lecture is the most commonly used. Studies of Loreto (2018) and Liasidou (2016) highlighted lecture as the most effective method in teaching theories, however, participants in the study of Aynalem et al. (2015) perceived lecture as the least interesting method. On the other hand, Deale et al. (2013) considered lecture as a practical method to address increasing class size and scarcity in resources. They claimed that lecture can be effective for both theory and practice if combined with activities like experiential learning and demonstration. In the hotel management program, both teachers and students in the study of Loreto (2018) identified group work, case study, lecture as the most frequently used and most effective outcomes-based teaching and learning methods. Result revealed that active learning experience through group or cooperative facilitates discussion and interaction among students and emphasize value of teamwork. Demonstration, hotel immersion and field trips were viewed as relevant practices for skills acquisition. Tourism students in the study of Aynalem, et al. (2015), preferred field trip, discussion, problem-solving and brainstorming. Meanwhile, faculty members of hospitality mostly used presentation, assignment, and demonstration (Bhinder, 2019). Other outcomes-based methods used in teaching interpersonal communication include production of process-oriented portfolio through interactive writing, workshops, peer review, and class discussions (Cunningham, Bartesaghi, Bowman, & Bender, 2017) and use of digital video (Marshall & Cullen, 2003). Students who satisfied the portfolio requirement were able to have distinct engagement and participation in class. Through the interactive writing process, they developed an understanding that writing is a form of interpersonal communication (Cunningham, et al., 2017). The use of digital video for library science students focused on mastering verbal and nonverbal techniques for interviews. The content of video consisted of skills, case studies, and interactive sections. Both students and teachers had a positive learning experience using digital videos and considered this method as a flexible, goal-oriented, and reflective method (Marshall & Cullen, 2003).

Overall, a common theme in related studies suggests the use of a variety of innovative and active learning and learner-centered methods using both traditional and technology-oriented resources.

Factors affecting teaching and learning

In a related study conducted by Loreto (2019), students identified class size, classroom management, questioning techniques, more opportunities for practice, more electives or extra courses, group work, student-centered approach, and use of real life experiences as the factors that affect teaching interpersonal communication skills. These factors are in conjunction with previous studies that looked into effective teaching and learning, identifying the teachers' personality and competence as a significant factor, along with the others. The "overwhelming majority" of literature on the advantages of small class size, as noted by Mathis (2016), presents that class reduction is a positive and effective strategy. In relation, student participants of Tran's (2013) study attributed their low quality of learning to large class size, limited class time, lack of teacher's innovation and preparation, and poor resources, among others. Another similar study of Salvador and Await (2013) listed teacher's behavior and teaching methods, classroom setting, and information provided to students as factors that has much effect in students' learning behavior. This is also consistent with Liasidou's (2016) findings indicating that the personality and style of the educator play an important role in providing students with positive learning experiences. In the same study, results specified that the verbal communication of the lecturer, content, and interaction give the students more motivation to learn. Furthermore, Deale, et al. (2013) and Aynalem et al. (2015) identified students' preferences, backgrounds, and abilities as additional factors. Another significant factor is the characteristics of the students. Today's generation of college students, sometimes termed as digital natives are described by Sarkar et al. (2017) as active and collaborative learners. Digital native students have short attention span, expect immediate feedback and they prefer a conducive atmosphere that integrates use of technology, providing room for connectivity and productivity.

Research Methodology

As a descriptive study, the study employed a mixed methods research using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitatively, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted while an online test was administered to gather quantitative data.

One hundred forty-six students enrolled in Principles of Communication class for academic years 2018 and 2019 formed part of the respondents of the online test. All students who were enrolled in the class answered the online test. They were purposively selected to be the respondents of the study given their background knowledge in interpersonal communication. A total of 29 students participated in the focus group discussion which was divided into three sessions. Data collection was conducted during the first and second semester of academic years 2018 and 2019.

The online test is a self-assessment questionnaire adopted from skillsyouneed.com included questions regarding application of interpersonal communication skills in different situations. The test has 4 parts covering listening, verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and working in groups. Each part included statements where respondents indicated the frequency of practicing or applying specific behavior under each of the four interpersonal communication skills, based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never.

For the three sessions of FGD, an FGD guide was used in the facilitating the discussions. The first two sessions had 10 participants each while the third session had nine participants. An introduction about the research was provided along with the mechanics of FGD. The questions revolved on the learning experiences of the participants linked to their interpersonal communication skills with respect to the teaching methods used.

Scores in the test were analyzed descriptively using frequency count and percentage while the data gathered from the focus group discussions were analyzed thematically based on the research objectives.

Results

Interpersonal Communication Skills of the Participants

Looking at the scores per skill, emotional intelligence earned the highest average score while verbal communication had the lowest score though all four skills are on the average level (Table 1). Most (70.55%) of the participants have an average level of interpersonal communication skills. Only eight percent fell in above average level (Table 2). Tables 3 to 6 presents the participants' scores in each of the four interpersonal communication skills tested namely listening (Table 3), verbal communication (Table 4), emotional intelligence (Table 5), and working in group (Table 6). Majority of the participants were on the average level, except

in verbal communication where only 72 or 49.31% of the participant were rated average. A significant portion (54 or 36.99%) fell in the below average level. Few participants attained an above average level for all skills. The assessment level was based on the results of the online test from skillsyouneed.com. The scoring criteria of the assessment is divided in three levels: below 50 is below average, 50 to 69 is average, and 70 and above is above average. Tables 2 to 6 shows the summary of individual scores of the participants in each interpersonal communication skill.

Table 1 Group *interpersonal communication skills assessment by skill*

Skills	Average Score
Emotional Intelligence	58.03
Working in Group	57.43
Listening	56.77
Verbal Communication	53.63
Overall Average	56.84

Table 2 *Individual interpersonal communication skills assessment*

Level	Frequency (N=146)	Percentage
Below Average	31	21.23
Average	103	70.55
Above Average	12	8.22
Total	146	100.00

Table 3 *Listening skills assessment*

Level	Frequency (N=146)	Percentage
Below Average	25	17.12
Average	109	74.66
Above Average	12	8.22
Total	146	100.00

Table 4 *Verbal communication skills assessment*

Level	Frequency (N=146)	Percentage
Below Average	54	36.99
Average	72	49.31
Above Average	20	13.70
Total	146	100.00

Table 5 *Emotional intelligence skills assessment*

Level	Frequency (N=146)	Percentage
Below Average	26	17.81
Average	95	65.07
Above Average	25	17.12
Total	146	100.00

Table 6 *Working in group skills assessment*

Level	Frequency (N=146)	Percentage
Below Average	48	32.88
Average	72	49.31
Above Average	26	17.81
Total	146	100.00

Interpersonal Communication Skills of the Participants

Table 7 presents the variety of methods used in teaching interpersonal communication, and the participants' learning experiences in terms of skills obtained from the different methods relating to the four interpersonal skills covered in the study.

Table 7 *Teaching methods and interpersonal communication skills learned in class*

Teaching Method	Skills learned			
	Listening	Emotional Intelligence	Verbal Communication	Working in Groups
Lecture	✓			
Discussion/Question and Answer	✓	✓	✓	
Pair work / Group activity	✓	✓		✓
Field trip	✓	✓		✓
Games	✓	✓		✓
Case study		✓	✓	
Role play	✓	✓	✓	✓
Presentation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demonstration	✓			
Technology-oriented (movies, videos, songs, online exercises)	✓	✓	✓	
Invitation of guest speaker in class	✓	✓	✓	
Individual project		✓		
Group project		✓		✓
Writing assignments (essays and reflections)		✓	✓	
Practical/Experiment	✓	✓		✓

Interpersonal Communication Skills of the Participants

The proposed methods in teaching interpersonal communication skills are detailed in Table 8. For each of the interpersonal communication skill, the participants identified teaching methods that they perceive will reinforce or develop their specific skills on listening, verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and working in groups.

Table 8 *Proposed methods to teach interpersonal communication skills*

Interpersonal communication skill	Proposed teaching methods
Listening	Interactive lecture with discussion, questioning, and activities, more frequent use of media (videos, movies, songs), more group work, more opportunities to talk to foreigners, field trips
Verbal Communication	Assigned readings, vocabulary lessons, small group discussions, outside activities (tour guide), show examples or models of good essay
Emotional intelligence	More field trips, volunteer or outreach program, more guest/industry speakers, activities on self-awareness, role plays
Working in groups	Projects, group activities
Integration of skills	Use of more technology and media, games, reflective writing, combination of methods, volunteer program or service learning, field trips

Discussion and Conclusion

Objective # 1 Interpersonal Communication Skills of Hospitality Students

As described by skillsyouneed.com, the results indicate that the participants have an average or a basic grasp of key interpersonal communication skills and there is a need for more practice to develop the skills. Verbal communication skill appears to be the weakest among hospitality students. The participants unanimously expressed that verbal communication is a challenge to them, particularly citing the use of English as their main concern. Their confidence in writing and speaking in English is limited by their vocabulary and ability to construct essay and express themselves. The results are parallel with the results of Rahim's (2011) study which analyzed the training and internship needs assessment of verbal communication among hotel practitioners. The results also yielded low verbal communication ability among the respondents.

While the other three skills registered a slightly higher average score, they remain to be at the basic level. In essence, there is a need to improve all the four skills as students take move up in their curriculum. A multi-disciplinary approach in instruction is a potential action to address this and improve the interpersonal communication skills of the participants. Teaching and learning activities in different course should be aligned to the development of these skills. Teaching methods will be instrumental in improving the students' interpersonal skills. It is also interesting to investigate the different skill levels of the participants. While most are in the average level, there are few who are in the below average and above average levels. These must also be considered in planning and designing teaching and learning activities. One area that can be explored is the idea of peer coaching. The above average students could provide support to their peers in the lower levels. In terms of group work, the results may also be useful in grouping the students in activities and projects.

Objective # 2 Teaching Methods

The methods used in the participants' classes are consistent with the results of related studies. Participants discussed that the different teaching methods used in their classes are not specific to only one skill, but most of the time address more than two skills. When asked which particular methods cater to one of the four communication skills, they identified the method and which skill it addresses more (Table 7). Under listening, the first method recalled by the majority is lecture. This method appears to still be the most commonly used though some participants described it as a boring method. When asked if they perceive lecture to be relevant, all the participants agreed that it is a relevant method because it can give information and concepts they need to learn. As discussed in the study of Deale et al. (2013), students still preferred lectures because lecture organizes the content and prepares the students well for tests. However, participants expressed that lecture can be less boring and more interesting if used with other methods. Students and teachers who were part of several related studies expressed the same concern. Participants also emphasized the importance of the teacher's nonverbal communication skills in delivering a lecture. They are particular with the teacher's tone. They narrated two cases on how tone affects their learning: monotonous delivery bores them and makes them lose interest while sarcastic tone offends them and affects their self-esteem. In relation to Liasidou's (2016) findings, the emphasis was noted on the verbal communication of the lecturer. Use of technology-oriented methods are also considered good

practice for the participants. One participant noted that he could watch and listen to videos as many times as he needs until he understands the message. The nature of digital videos to provide better familiarization on a lesson was also appreciated by the respondents in the study of Marshall and Cullen (2003). However, use of online methods appeared to be limited since not much was mentioned except for Google classroom, online test, and YouTube videos. Other methods that helps develop listening skill are demonstration, field trips, discussion, role play, presentation, guest speaker, games, and group activity. For emotional intelligence, several methods were also identified, however, the outstanding methods catering to this skill are guest speakers, writing reflections, field trips, and practical classes. There was a discussion on how listening to guest speakers' real-life experiences makes them learn from the speakers' mistakes. On the other hand, field trips to hotels and other hospitality industries are fun and interesting learning experience. The authenticity of the practical kitchen class gives the participants more motivation thus develop their emotional intelligence. This is where they develop their skill as a team player, self-regulation, and in conflict management, along with other group activities in class and some group projects. "We can observe what our partner feels...we can solve the problem together" (P1). "In kitchen class, we have to take away conflicts about our past, family or friend...if you're happy, you put your feeling in your food, it's going to be great" (P6). Dealing with non-Thai teachers also develops their adaptability, open-mindedness, and understanding. One participant mentioned that he also learned from situations in case study while the majority has not been exposed to this method yet, since they are only on their first year. Working in group is also very evident in their kitchen class. While most of the participants prefer being assigned group projects, one participant expressed that individual projects must also be assigned so they learn to be more responsible and independent and they do not have to deal with group members that do not cooperate. Deale et al., (2013) advised that projects need to be extend outside the classroom and should engage the students in more authentic experiences. With regard to verbal communication, the three dominant methods discussed are writing, presentation, and discussion or question and answer. One group of the participants presented opposite view on the use of essay to practice or improve their written communication. More than half of the participants perceived that essays do not really improve their writing skill since in answering some essay questions which are limited to facts discussed, they just have to rewrite concepts learned in class and there is actually no room for them to

express their opinion or write about something interesting to them. On the other hand, the remaining participants in the group consider essay writing as a good practice. One participant argued that they have limited opportunities to practice writing skill and writing essays in class allows them to develop their writing skill. A common theme that emerged in the discussion is the participants' appreciation for writing reflection papers and film reviews. Cunningham et al., (2017) recommended a process-oriented framework in writing that might address this concern. With the use this reflective writing approach, there is a room for both theories and application in the students' writing assignments which are conducted through workshops, peer review, and discussions.

Objective # 3 Factors affecting learning

The participants identified and agreed on the following factors that affect their learning of interpersonal communication skills.

Class size. Participants believe that smaller class size will allow them more opportunity to practice their skills and the teacher can monitor their performance better. Smaller classes also give them more confidence to participate in class discussion. In large class, few students have the opportunity to participate, and usually they are the more confident ones or there's not enough time for more students to speak up. As Mathis (2016) explained, smaller class size improves the self-esteem of students since teachers have more time to individualized instruction, interact with students, and provide a better class environment. Participants also expressed that in smaller class size, they can develop better interaction and relationship with their classmates.

Class schedule. Participants view that their current schedule where theory classes that are set at three hours per session does not maximize their learning experience. "The longer we study, the more tired we get so the learning or information we obtain is not as much as it should be" (P9). As digital natives, this group of learners have shorter attention span (Sarkar et al., 2017). Another concern raised is the way the schedule of their different subjects is planned. Some classes finish late and then, the class for the following day is scheduled early morning.

Teacher's personality. Participants are keen about having teachers who are kind, approachable, flexible, and with sense of humor. In addition, they described an effective teacher as kind, energetic, caring, open-minded, a good listener, and demonstrates respect and empathy. "Some students learn differently, have different knowledge, experience, or skills set,

if the teacher can change their approach to students who don't understand, that could help" (P18). This is parallel to the research findings of Liasidou (2016) which also indicated that personality of the educator play an important role in defining the students' learning experiences. Similarly, Loreto's (2019) study emphasized the importance of the teacher's interaction and rapport with hospitality students.

Teacher's competency. This includes the teachers' questioning techniques, classroom management, and communication skills. Participants explained that teachers should ask more open "why" questions as this gives them opportunity to think and speak more. They also reiterated how a teachers' nonverbal cues, particularly paralanguage, body movements, and facial expressions affect their learning. One of the participants added that a good teacher as someone who can control the class well.

Use of authentic, real-life experiences. Another factor is the quality if examples provided during the discussion. They value authentic, real-life experiences. Going on field trips let them see the real situations in hotels, malls, or restaurants. This is one of the reasons why they appreciate listening to guest speakers who are industry practitioners. Studies of Bhinder (2019) and Aynalem et al. (2015) ascertained that hospitality industries can take part in providing students authentic and immersive experiences through sharing materials, field trips, internships, or subsidizing programs.

Teaching resources or support media. Participants talked about the use of other resources apart from PowerPoint presentations. Use of other media like movies, songs, videos, and games were brought about.

Environment. Participants described a conducive learning environment as one with good and positive teacher-student connection or relationship. In the second group of FGD, one participant cited how environment affects his use of English wherein it is limited only to classroom discussion. Once they step out of the classroom, they are back to speaking in Thai. The participant said that this kind of environment hinders the opportunity to improve verbal communication.

Objective # 4 Proposed Teaching and Learning Activities

As presented in Table 8, the participants' recommendations include more frequent use of the different teaching methods especially interactive lectures, field trips, games, and inviting more guest speakers. One out of the three groups of participants recommended integrating

service learning or volunteer programs in their subjects as this will give them more hands-on experience in dealing with people. In another group, they expressed their concern about their verbal communication ability. One of the participants proposed that they should be assigned more reading materials where they can improve their vocabulary. The group agreed that this will help them improve their writing and speaking skills. The use of more technology-oriented and online methods were also put forward but the some of the participants in the third FGD expressed their reservation in using online tools, they admitted that they easily get distracted by other applications and they tend to lose focus on the learning material. There was a discussion about use of subtitles in learning videos, the group agreed that subtitles will not help improve their listening skill but there must be a way to show the technical, unfamiliar words in some parts of the videos.

Conclusion

There is no best teaching technique (Lei as cited in Deale et al., 2013). Different teaching methods that are in place cater to teaching and learning interpersonal communication skills to hospitality students. However, there is a need to personalize and integrate a variety of methods to allow students to maximize their learning experience as 21st century learners. Methods that facilitate more skills should be used more frequently. Specifically, students' verbal communication, both oral and written must be given more emphasis and more opportunities for practice and application. Traditional teaching method like lecture is still relevant and is better used with other more active and student-centered methods. With digital native students in hospitality school, the teacher remains to be relevant in the learning process. The role of a teacher as a facilitator and knowledge mediator is more crucial in this generation of learners. With the students' need for varied and active teaching methods and resources, the competency of teachers in addressing these needs should be strengthened. Alongside improvement of the curriculum, course syllabus, teaching and learning resources, and student experiences, equal priority should also be given to the professional development of teachers and partnership with industries to respond to the several factors affecting the learning of interpersonal communication. The results have implications to academic support, industry linkages, curriculum design, identification of learning outcomes, and teacher training.

Limitations of this study

The sample size only involved students of one hospitality school. Testing a larger sample may yield more representative results. In addition, more focus group discussions, class observations, and review of assessment tools will provide a better picture of the teaching and learning process in hospitality classrooms.

Recommendation

For future studies, the participants may take an exit test on interpersonal communication by the time of their graduation to compare their scores, check for improvement and determine their readiness to join the workforce. Comparison of the perceptions of teachers, students, and industry representatives is also worth looking into in follow up studies. Assessing the effectiveness of the teaching methods identified in this study is another recommendation for future research.

References

- Aynalem, S., Abebe, F., Guadie, Z., & Bires, Z. (2015). Students' preference for various teaching methods in tourism courses: A case study of Tourism Management Department, Madawalabu University. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality*, 4(4). doi: 10.4172/21670269.1000175
- Bhinder, H. (2019). Teaching techniques adopted by hospitality faculty members in the classroom. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 6(1), 70-76. doi:10.18843/ijms/v6il(3)/07
- Brownell, J. (1994). *Creating strong listening environments: A key hospitality management task*. Retrieved from <http://scholarship.sha.cornell.edu/articles/1014>
- Brownell, J. (2009). Fostering service excellence through listening: What hospitality managers need to know. *Cornell Hospitality Report*, 9(6), 6-18. Retrieved from <http://www.chr.cornell.edu>
- Crawford, A. & Weber, M. (2016). Developing soft skills for future hospitality leaders: A case study. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Cases*, 49-51. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315445961>
- Cunningham, S., Bartesaghi, M., Bowman, J., & Bender, J. (2017). Re-writing interpersonal communication: A portfolio-based curriculum for process pedagogy and moving theory into practice. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 29(2), 381-388. Retrieved from <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/>

- Deale, C. & Jacques, P. (2013). An examination of current hospitality and tourism teaching methods. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, 22(2), 20-29. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261580788_An_Examination_of_Current_Hospitality_and_Tourism_Teaching_Methods
- Grobelna, A. (2015). Intercultural challenges facing the hospitality industry. Implications for education and hospitality management. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 7(3), 101-117. doi: 10.1515/joim-2015-0023
- Kapoor, S. & de Villa-Lopez, B. (2015). Developing teamwork skills in hospitality management college students. *Journal of Tourism Research*, 10, 10-24. Retrieved from http://jotr.eu/pdf_files/V10.pdf
- Koroglu, O. & Koroglu, A. (2012). The importance of using the emotional intelligence skills for tour guides and their performance. *Management and Education*, 8(3). Retrieved from http://conference-burgas.com/maevolumes/vol8/BOOK%203/b3_04.pdf
- Liasidou, S. (2016). Learning and teaching in Hotel Management Studies: Defining students' experience. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(11), 118-128. Retrieved from https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_6_No_11_November_2016/14.pdf
- Lolli, J. (2012). Interpersonal communication skills and the young hospitality leader: Are they prepared? [Abstract]. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 295-298. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272590009>
- Lolli, J. (2013). Perceptions of the importance and preparedness of interpersonal communication skills the entry-level hospitality leader. [Abstract]. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 13(4). doi:10.1080/1521220.2013.839302
- Loreto, M. (2018). Outcomes-based teaching and learning practices in the hotel and resort management program of Dusit Thani College. *Dusit Thani College Journal*, 12(Special), 82-98. Retrieved from <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/journaldtdc/article/view/129493>
- Loreto, M. (2019). The influence of social media exposure on the interpersonal communication skills of hospitality students. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities (Graduate School) Ramkhamhaeng University*, 4(1), 1-20.

- Marshall, S. & Cullen, R. (2003). Teaching interpersonal communication skills with digital video. In G. Crisp, D. Thiele, I. Scholten, S. Barker and J. Baron (Eds), *Interact, Integrate, Impact: Proceedings of the 20th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education*. Adelaide, 7-10 December 2003.
- Mathis, W. (2016). The effectiveness in class size reduction. Retrieved from <https://nepc.colorado.edu>
- Mohammad, S.F., Osman, M. N., & Ishak, F. A. (2018). Exploring the competencies perceived by the hospitality undergraduates in public and private universities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(15), 331-349. doi: 10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i15/5110
- Nguyen, Q., Ladkin, A., & Osman, H. (n.d.). Emotional Intelligence and Hotel Employees in Vietnam. Retrieved from http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/23968/3/CHME%20paper_Nguyen%20et%20al%20203020032016-1.pdf
- Plangpamool, S. (n.d.). Human capital and interpersonal communication: A successful factor in the hospitality industry. Retrieved from http://www.conference.phuket.psu.ac.th/conference2012/proceedings/pdf/o_FHT%2033.pdf
- Rahim, S. & Tazijan, F. (2011). Analyzing the training and internship needs assessment of verbal communication Skills amongst hotel practitioners. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n3p44>
- Salvador, M. & Awat, E. (2013). *Factors affecting the learning behaviors of students*. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/1808454>
- Sarkar, N., Ford, W. & Manzo, C. (2017). Engaging digital natives through social learning. *Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics*, 15(2). Retrieved from <http://www.iiisci.org>
- Sisson, L. & Adams, A. (2013). Essential hospitality management competencies: the importance of soft skills. [Abstract]. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 25(3). doi: 10.1080/10963758.2013.826975
- Tran, T. (2013). Factors affecting teaching and learning English in Vietnamese universities. *The Internet Journal Language, Culture, and Society*, 38, 138-145. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277719144>

Interpersonal Skills Assessment. Retrieved from <https://www.skillsyouneed.com>



Myla Medrano Loreto, Master of Science in Development Communication, University of the Philippines, Instructor, Department of Business Administration and General Education, Faculty of International Hospitality Industry, Dusit Thani College.