



**AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF SCHOOL COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT AT A UNIVERSITY
IN MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM**

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Abstract:

Developing standard communication in an educational environment is imperative. Currently, by equipping behavioral skills, especially communication skills, to confidently communicate and integrate into a multicultural environment without losing national identity, students can become not only holistically developed global citizens in virtue, mind, and strength but also knowledgeable, skillful, and professionally responsible as set out in the educational goals by the University. This topic investigates the status quo of communication behaviors and some factors that affect students' behaviors. This study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods, including a questionnaire survey and interviews. The results show that the communication behaviors of students of the Foreign Languages Department at the University are affected by various factors such as learning environment, family circumstances, educational background, etc. Based on the results of surveys and interviews provided by students and lecturers of a university in the Mekong Delta, the topic researches and proposes a set of communication rules for students at the University.

Keywords: communication behavior, factors, communication rules, students, Foreign Languages Department

1. Introduction

Under the consequential impacts of science, technology, economy, and society in the 21st century, the decline in the sense of learning and training, in conjunction with the communication

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behaviors of young people, especially students, has changed in both positive and negative ways. It is considered to be an urgent issue not only for educators but also for social concerns. That students behave unsuitably at school, including being rude to teachers and disrespectful towards friends and school officials, etc., therefore, is a warning sign for educational developers. Communication culture at the university is a significant issue as it not only profoundly affects students' learning quality, awareness, and training attitude but also affects the perspective and attitude of society towards them. Therefore, it is urgent to establish behavioral rules for students of the Foreign Languages department. Not only does this practice require the support and contribution of the leadership of the school and faculty, but it also needs students' cooperation. Aside from enhancing their communication mindset and style, students of the Foreign Languages department will change the perspective of society towards them to a more positive sense.

2. Literature review

There are a variety of conceptions regarding communication because it is the activity of transmitting information between individuals depending on particular situations. After many studies, Tamotsu Shibutani, a Japanese-American sociologist, concluded that communication is an activity in which individuals who participate in the communication process adapt to the behaviors and coordinate the actions. According to Charles Egerton Osgood, an American sociologist, communication consists of separate activities that are virtually information transmission and reception. Charles Egerton Osgood believes that communication is a two-sided process: contact and mutual impacts, mutual interactions between those who are involved in communication.

In Vietnam, researchers have also introduced similar concepts of communicative behavior. Specifically, "*Human communication is an intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious process in which feelings and thoughts are expressed verbally and nonverbally*" ([Nguyen, Tran, 2000](#), p. 9). Communication is also defined as "*the process of psychological contact between people, in certain social relations to perceive and exchange ideas, emotions, life experiences, skills, and professional techniques, through which there are mutual impacts and interactions*" ([Dinh et al, 2003](#); [Ngoc, 2005](#); [Dang, 2010](#)).

There are two means of communication in the communication process: verbal (spoken and written language) and non-verbal (body language).

- Verbal communication is the use of spoken language to deliberately transfer a message to others. The ability to communicate verbally and nonverbally is considered to represent the core deficiency in the diagnosis of autism ([Volkmar, 2021](#)).
- Nonverbal communication: Nonverbal communication can be defined as a form of communication to either get attention or convey information to one or many individuals wordlessly. It is often used to express thoughts and transfer messages to whom one is communicating more attractively and interestingly ([Phutela, 2015](#)).

3. Methodology

The study has been carried out since June 2022 using mixed methods research: Synthesis and analysis of secondary documents, observation, in-depth interviews, exchange with lecturers and students, and semi-structured interviews via a questionnaire. Participants include 118 students from course 44 to course 47 of the School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University in the Mekong Delta. The form used for interviewing purposes consists of 65 questions related to the status quo of communication behaviors, influencing factors, and proposed sets of communication rules. In addition, the communication standards of global citizens in the 21st century based on the content of the book "Global Citizenship Education - UNESCO" are also included in the survey.

4. Results

Not only does the topic focus on studying the status quo of communication behaviors, and factors affecting communication behaviors, but it also aims at proposing a set of communication rules for students of the School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University.

4.1. The status quo of communication behaviors

4.1.1 Direct communication

Communication is not simply an individual behavior but a chain of thoughts or systematic behaviors that exists between parties or within them. Students in the Foreign Languages Department are considered to have something in common when communicating. Firstly, being friendly and open-minded, they project a source of positive energy, and they are always polite to lecturers, school officials, and staff. Results from the survey showed that the percentage of students politely and proactively greeting lecturers despite not being familiar with them was noticeable, up to 88%, while students who avoided greeting or looked away accounted for 12%. 22% of students found it hard to talk to others. Among 118 participants, 52 were from urban areas, and the other was from rural areas. Findings displayed that students from urban and rural regions who have difficulty talking to others made up a small ratio, about 23% and 22% respectively. It proves that students' friendliness is not affected by their origin. Students find it hard to greet teachers and start a conversation with other students due to some factors: others' looks (friendly or unfriendly), rumors (about that person), students' personalities, or whether students can overcome the fear of talking to others or not.

Besides, students' communication behaviors in the classroom can express their respect towards lecturers and are important skills for their future careers. Results showed that more than 82% of students chatted and used phones improperly during class time, which is a warning sign for the decline in students' sense of learning and their respect towards teachers. There are many reasons leading to this decline: boring subjects and lectures, students not being interested in their major, students' habit of chatting or using social media in class, checking messages, easy-going lecturers. Two reasons chosen by most students include easy-going lecturers (roughly 52%) and boring subjects (roughly 31%).

Staying calm when dealing with awkward communication situations is an essential skill for students of the School of Foreign Languages in order to satisfy the aims of Can Tho University. According to the qualifications of Can Tho University for foreign language majors, students of the Foreign Languages department have to master and apply soft skills such as problem-solving skills, communication skills, and negotiation skills. Therefore, staying calm and being patient enough not to act aggressively when there is a conflict is worth concerning. Findings from the survey demonstrated that a small percentage of students fiercely argued when having conflicts with lecturers and friends (3.4% and 6.8%, respectively). (Chart 1)

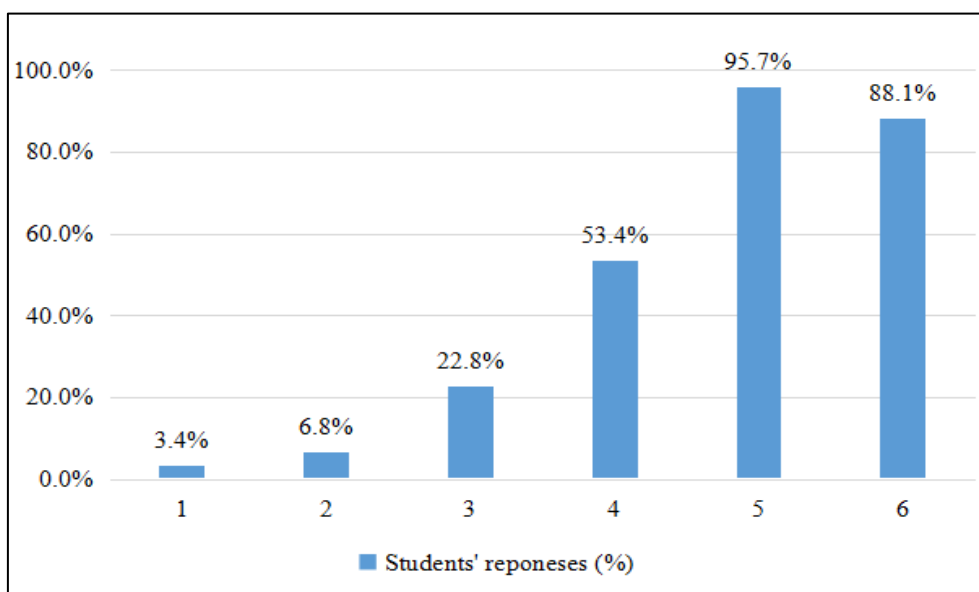


Chart 1: The percentage of students' response to direct communication survey

Statement	Frequency and percentage responses
1. I argue fiercely with teachers when there is a conflict	3 (3.4%)
2. I argue fiercely with friends when there is a conflict	8 (6.8%)
3. I afraid to talk to other students	27 (22.8%)
4. I talk privately in classroom	63 (53.4%)
5. I use mix language (English and Vietnamese)	113 (95,7%)
6. I greet every teachers on the campus	104 (88,1%)

Table 1: The percentage of students' response to direct communication survey

With the characteristics of foreign language majors, students who frequently code-switch between Vietnamese and English when communicating accounted for a high percentage, up to 93.2%. There are some typical reasons for this practice: not recalling the meaning of words in Vietnamese, and code-switching to learn vocabulary more effectively.

4.1.2. Communication via email

In addition to direct communication, communication via email also plays a significant role in exchanging and conveying information to one another, especially at school and the workplace. Results from the survey on how students of the School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University use email in communication indicated that most students have problems writing an email accurately. Some of the most common mistakes include spelling and grammatical errors (70.4%), confusing layout, no greeting and/or self-introduction at the beginning (64.4%), and no ending (97.4%). Also, similar to direct communication, most of the participants code-switch between Vietnamese and English when communicating via email (93.2%). (Chart 2)

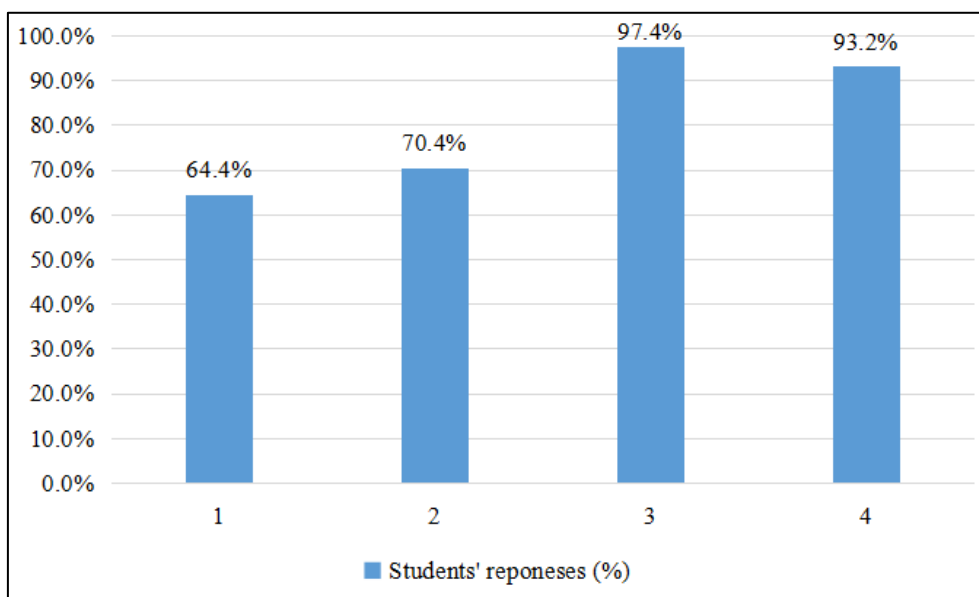


Chart 2: The percentage of students' responses to email communication survey

Statement	Frequency and percentage responses
1. I make mistake in the email layout (greetings, self-introduction)	76 (64.4%)
2. I make many spelling and syntax errors	83 (70.4%)
3. I do not write the conclusion at the end	115 (97.4%)
4. I use mix language (English and Vietnamese)	110 (93.2%)

Table 2: The percentage of students' responses to email communication survey

4.2. Factors affecting communication behaviors of students

4.2.1. Subjective factors

After conducting a survey and interviews, the research team has concluded that two subjective factors affect students' communication behaviors. First, due to the incorrect and incomplete social awareness leading to the superficiality and carelessness of many students in communication, many students do not often pay attention to their attitudes when communicating in different contexts. For example, communicating with lecturers, school

officials, and staff at school, inadvertently leads to disrespect and undeserved. Second, many students of the School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University now have an introverted lifestyle. As a result, it is not easy for them to comfortably communicate with other people, which leads them to behave inappropriately and/or be in awkward moments; in addition, according to the survey, it can be seen that the majority of students are afraid of crowds and strangers.

4.2.2. Objective factors

4.2.2.1. The inefficiencies in upper secondary education

Most high schools to which students of the School of Foreign Languages went mainly focused on training and developing Natural Science subjects in order to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Social Science subjects are not paid enough attention to at these high schools, but social science subjects are substantial contributors to human personality education. This problem leads to the lack of focus on soft skills training for students, including communication skills.

4.2.2.2. The ineffective education from family

It is undeniable that family plays a crucial role in nurturing and shaping an individual's personality. However, neither all parents behave appropriately and have time to educate their children about communication culture, which affects the way students communicate during their adult years.

4.2.2.3. The impacts of friends and society

In this aspect, the research team made three main ideas, including the impacts of friends, society, and Western culture. First, regarding friends' influences, it can be seen that almost every student has one or many peer groups to work with and share about study and life. The personality of peer groups is one of the most significant factors that can affect students' personalities, and their communication behaviors will develop in a positive or negative way. Second, the social impact on students is noticeable. When they get into university, they have to communicate with many different types of individuals. By consuming unhealthy cultural products and word-of-mouth rumors on social media and the Internet, students' personalities and communication behaviors are negatively affected. Last but not least, students of the School of Foreign Languages are exposed to a multicultural environment, especially cultures of English-speaking and French-speaking countries, during their learning and research process, which can have a significant impact on them. Nonetheless, many students absorb unselectively, leading them not to be able to control communication contexts because of some inappropriate cultural features they apply. In addition, students are often exposed to inaccurate knowledge of foreign social networking forums, songs, and movies with content that does not match the communication standards in Vietnam.

5. Conclusion

Communication skills are undeniably essential for students not only in daily life but also in work and study. Communication takes place on a daily basis through two means of communication: verbal communication and non-verbal communication (written/spoken language, body language). Under the impact of the multicultural environment, especially Western culture, the communication behaviors of students of the School of Foreign Languages are slightly different compared to other faculties. Results revealed that the communication behaviors of students of the School of Foreign Languages have become quite negative.

In terms of direct communication and communication via email, the research results indicated that most students make mistakes in everyday communication, mainly because they are affected by the learning environment in high school, their family situation, and unimpressive skills courses at the university. However, there are still some positive characteristics of students of the School of Foreign Languages that should be spread. As shown in the survey, a majority of students of the School of Foreign Languages are open-minded, confident, modest, highly critical thinking, adaptive to multicultural environments, and positive.

Through the above conclusion, the survey team made the following suggestions to raise awareness of the communication behaviors of students of the School of Foreign Languages as well as to improve the educational quality so that students can meet the requirements of society in the integration period after graduating:

- a) The school should organize and integrate activities and courses on communication skills into the training program in order to raise students' awareness as well as open more clubs to facilitate students.
- b) Lecturers should create many activities in the classroom to improve the interaction among students and between students and lecturers.
- c) Students need to actively participate in extracurricular activities to have more opportunities to practice and enhance communication skills.

6. Recommendations

After researching and surveying the opinions of students, lecturers, officials, and employees of the School of Foreign Languages, the research team has selected some outstanding points of communication behaviors of students of the School of Foreign Languages, thereby proposing a set of communication rules for students:

- a) Always be open, friendly, and sociable with everyone when communicating;
- b) Always be polite and respectful towards lecturers, officials, and employees of the university;
- c) Always have the spirit of caring and helping others;
- d) Always care about, empathize with, and respect others' differences (religion, region, ethnicity, gender);
- e) Always use appropriate language when communicating, depending on the contexts and objects of communication;

- f) Raise awareness, enhance and apply critical thinking to study, work and life;
- g) Know how to skilfully and clear-headedly handle different communication situations;
- h) Be able to express self-confidence by presenting personal views in front of a crowd;
- i) Try to practice code-switching, without abuse, when communicating verbally within the School of Foreign Languages to enhance the ability to apply foreign languages;
- j) Be comfortable and friendly when communicating, interacting, and asking for help from foreign teachers and/or international exchange students in order to increase engagement and express hospitality;
- k) Behave in a courteous and civilized manner;
- l) Keep a positive and respectful attitude towards others' viewpoints, regardless of the opposing ones;
- m) Be open-minded and have multi-dimensional views when debating to refrain from sharp conflicts.

Acknowledgement

This study was funded by Can Tho University, Vietnam. We would also like to thank the anonymous participants and interviewees for responding to the questionnaire and their interviews.

About the Author(s)

Kim Ngan Tran, Huy Nguyen, Tien Anh Nguyen, and Thanh Thuy Hang Nguyen are students majoring in English Studies. This article is our product in the process of accomplishing scientific research in the fields of Science Education, Law and Humanities at university.

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