
EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENT CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION AT UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Classroom communication is a very important and complex aspect in teaching and learning. Its complexity is attributed to a host of factors that include participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. Not much is currently known concerning classroom communication in the context of architecture education in Malaysian universities. This paper evaluates classroom communication of students undertaking architecture degree programs at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Four factors of student classroom communication were investigated to understand student abilities and issues in classroom communication. Forty-four students undertook the self-administered survey. The majority of the students exhibited good non-verbal communication practices, and scored favourably in the aspect of adapting the way they communicate to others. However, students seemed to have some difficulty to express ideas in class presentations. Additionally, some students appeared to be handicapped in actively participating and leading class discussions. Last but not least, a number of students were not comfortable in using English in the classroom, but not to the extent of hindering them in participating in classroom discussions. Further studies are needed to uncover classroom communication issues in student learning among architecture students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Keywords: *Classroom communication, non-verbal communication, architecture education, language.*

INTRODUCTION

Communications between students and lecturers, and among students, are very important issues in teaching and learning. The process of communication is complex (Hubley, 1993), and currently not much is known concerning classroom communication in architecture education in Malaysian universities. Moreover, there have only been sparse writings on classroom participation (Tatar, 2005). This is despite findings that classroom discussion is a favourite go-to strategy in classroom teaching and learning (Dallimore, 2004). Thus, there is a veritable need to investigate architecture education classroom communication in Malaysian universities. This study was conducted to explore student communication in the classroom. It evaluated students currently enrolled in the bachelor's degree and master's degree in architecture programs at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Four classroom communication components were examined. A total of 44 students responded to the survey.

METHODOLOGY

To gather data, a questionnaire of 33 questions was developed. The questionnaire sought to evaluate four important aspects of respondents' classroom communication. The four aspects were: 1. Explaining and Expressing Opinions (nine questions); 2. Class Discussions (nine questions); 3. Adapting Personal Communication to Others (eleven questions); and 4. English Language Usage (four questions).

The respondent's answer to each question was graded via a 5-point ordinal Likert scale: 1. Very Untrue, 2. Untrue, 3. Somewhat True, 4. True, and 5. Very True. This scale indicated the respondent's degree of agreement with the statement of each question. Every respondent was required to answer all 33 questions. The questionnaire was untimed and self-administered via the Google Forms online survey platform.

Even though the survey was intended to record anonymous responses, each respondent was required to furnish a student matriculation number so as to ensure no replication of responses, and to obtain accurate statistical analysis. The survey itself comprised of two sections. The first section recorded the student's basic information, which was gender, entry qualification, language used at home, and language used in class. The second section was the set of 33 questions, each of which respondents answered by choosing only 1 point from the 5-point Likert scale.

I. Subject Population

The survey was disseminated to students of architecture programs at UKM. A total of 44 returns were recorded at the end of the survey period. Out of the 44 respondents, slightly half (52%) comprised of female students. 35 respondents were undergraduate students (of Year 1 to Year 3), and 9 were postgraduate Master's students.

ii. Demographic Description

The majority of respondents (36%) graduated from the Malaysian Matriculation Program, to enter UKM. Diploma holders, comprising of 34% the total respondents, closely follow this. See Figure 1. Interestingly, as shown in Figure 2, most students spoke Malay in class (70%). Unsurprisingly, 71% of respondents also conversed in Malay at home, shown in Figure 3.

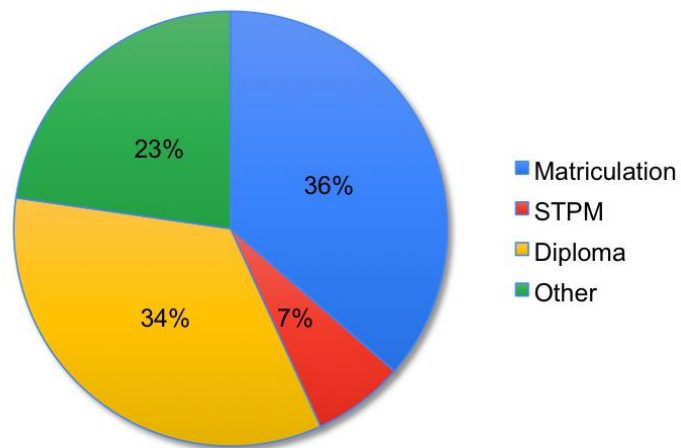


Figure 1: Distribution of survey respondent's entry qualification into UKM's architecture programs.

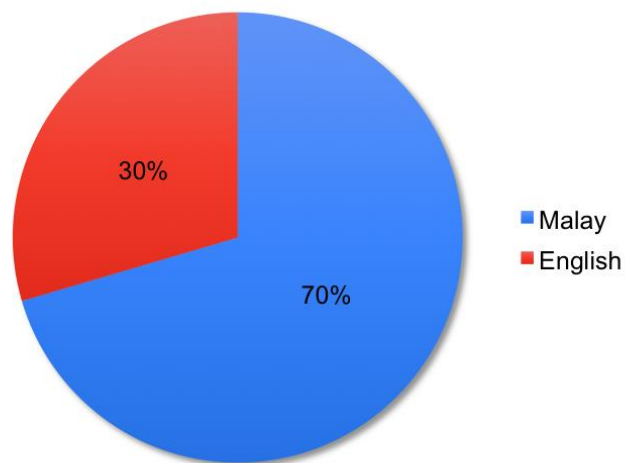


Figure 2: Distribution of survey respondents' language use in class.

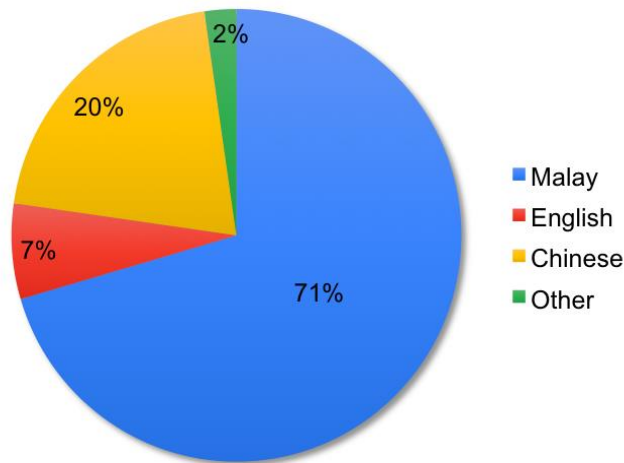


Figure 3: Distribution of survey respondents' language use at home.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are four components that make up classroom communication, that is, (1) Explaining and Expressing Opinions, (2) Class Discussions, (3) Adapting Personal Communication to Others, and (4) English Language Usage. Statements in each domain are scaled at 1 to 5, where 1 denotes 'Very Untrue' and 5, 'Very True'.

I. Explaining and Expressing Opinions

In this domain, nine elements are analysed. From the results obtained, it is found that the students, in explaining and expressing themselves, to a large degree feel competent in giving simple instructions on a class topic to classmates. This element received the highest score of 4.32. A close second at 4.23, students also feel relatively confident in explaining simple facts to classmates.

On the other hand, at the lowest end, with a score of 3.73, students feel less confident in giving classroom presentations. Also of significant note is that the architecture students feel less adroit in explaining difficult subject matter using detailed examples (3.89). Also notably, at a score of 3.95, students are, to some extent, uncertain in their ability to use diagrams and charts to help express their ideas.

What is also revealing here is the lowest score element is related to giving presentations, which people in general also find difficult or uncomfortable. Overall, the average score tabulated in this domain is 4.04. Table 1 demonstrates the results of the 'Explaining and Expressing Opinions' factor.

Table 1: Average scores for the domain of Explaining and Expressing Opinions

No.	Statement about explaining and expressing opinions	Average score
1.	Able to answer lecturer's questions in class.	4.09
2.	Able to give simple instructions to classmates on a class topic.	4.32

3.	Able to explain simple facts to classmates.	4.23
4.	Able to explain difficult subject matter using detailed examples.	3.89
5.	Able to express my opinions and ideas clearly and concisely in class.	4.05
6.	Able to restate information that is presented orally to my classmates.	4.07
7.	Able to give clear instructions to classmates.	4.02
8.	Able to confidently give presentations in class.	3.73
9.	Able to use diagrams and charts to help express my ideas in class.	3.95
	Overall	4.04

II. Class Discussions

As in the previous category, nine items are scrutinized in this category. Table 2 displays the scores for 'Class Discussions'. At the apex is the students' admirable habit of asking questions in their conversations, when they do not understand what the other person has said. This garners a score of 4.30. Following very closely at 4.25, the students are confident in their ability to discuss class matters with classmates. What is also encouraging is the architecture students are not abashed at asking for more details and clarification on something not understood. The score for this entry is 4.23, which is also the same score attained for their ability to listen to others without interrupting.

In the lower range at a score of 3.77, respondents report difficulties to participate actively in class discussions. Worryingly, at the lowest end (3.59), the respondents are not confident in their ability to lead classroom discussions.

Seven out of nine items in this category of classroom discussions exceeded the score of 4. These items suggest students are comfortable discussing among themselves. But weaknesses are also present. Asking questions in class to obtain lesson information, and asking complex questions to get appropriate information are the chief misgivings. The average score for this domain is 4.06.

Table 2: Average scores for the domain of Class Discussions

No.	Statement about class discussions	Average score
1.	Able to discuss class matters with classmates.	4.25
2.	Able to discuss class-related problems or issues in detail.	4.07
3.	Able to lead classroom discussions.	3.59

4.	Participate actively in class discussions.	3.77
5.	Able to ask questions in class to obtain lesson information.	4.05
6.	Able to ask complex questions to get the appropriate information.	4.02
7.	Ask for more details and clarification on something not understood.	4.23
8.	In conversations, I ask the other person questions when I don't understand what they've said.	4.30
9.	Able to listen to others without interrupting.	4.23
	Overall	4.06

III. Adapting Personal Communication to Others

In this set, 11 constituents are weighed. Table 3 represents the scores for 'Adapting Personal Communication to Others'. The leading score (4.20) records the students actively try to understand differing ideas of classmates. This is a good communicative sign. A peg down the ladder at a score of 4.16, it was found the respondents use appropriate body language (e.g. smiling, nodding, making eye contact) in discussions. Also positively, the students also allow classmates to finish talking before they speak (4.14).

At the bottom, three issues stand out. At a score of just 3.55, the respondents think people are just mildly interested and attentive when they are talking to them. Next, to a certain degree, some respondents tend to finish sentences or supply words to classmates during their speaking turn (3.36). On a personal level, some respondents also view themselves as tending to talk more than the other person (3.32).

Looking at the overall picture in this category, all seven items that exceeded the score of 4 suggest that the respondents are courteous and thoughtful to others when communicating.

Table 3: Average scores for the domain of Adapting Personal Communication to Others

No.	Statement about adapting personal communication to others	Average score
1.	Consider cultural issues when speaking to others.	4.07
2.	Try to understand ideas that are different from mine.	4.20
3.	Think about what the person needs to know, and how best to convey it.	4.07
4.	When someone is talking to me, I think about what I'm going to say next to make sure I get my point across correctly.	4.07
5.	People tend to put words in my mouth, or finish my sentences for me when I try to explain something.	2.89

6.	Tend to talk more than the other person.	3.32
7.	Pay attention to others while in conversation.	4.07
8.	Tend to finish sentences or supply words for the other person.	3.36
9.	Let the other person finish talking before speaking.	4.14
10.	People are interested and attentive when I talk to them.	3.55
11.	Able to use appropriate body language (e.g. smiling, nodding, making eye contact) while having a conversation/discussion.	4.16
	Overall	3.81

IV. English Language Usage

To round up the research, English language usage in the classroom among students is studied. In this segment, only four items are enquired, listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Average scores for the domain of English Language Usage

No.	Statement about English language usage	Average score
1.	Able to confidently use English in class.	3.86
2.	In English conversations, my words usually come out the way I would like.	3.80
3.	Find it difficult to express ideas in English.	2.95
4.	Do NOT participate in class discussions because of poor English language skills.	1.86
	Overall	3.12

Significantly, all scores received are relatively low, that is, they fall below 4. This correlates with the majority of students being speakers of the Malay language. A minority of the students reported difficulty in expressing ideas in English (2.95). There are also students who struggle to find the right words when conversing in English (3.80). Quite a significant number of respondents also feel a level of apprehension to use English in the classroom, driving down the score for this item to 3.86. This is an area that needs further investigation. On the other hand, many students are not hindered in class participation because of poor English language skills (1.86).

FUTURE WORK

Two areas of improvement have been identified at the conclusion of this study. Firstly, the number of questions for each domain could be increased so that the assessment of each domain is more thorough. This, however, has to be considered in tandem with the average respondent's attention span so that the respondent remains interested and committed to provide accurate and reliable answers throughout the survey. Secondly, a pre-test of the survey to a small group of selected respondents could be conducted₅₁

ahead of the actual full-scale dissemination of the survey. Such a pre-test could be done to evaluate the respondent's comprehension of each question, ensuring it is aligned with the survey's intention. The questions could then be rephrased or reworded if the need arises.

CONCLUSION

In summary, some notable insights in classroom communication of architecture students have been obtained through this study. One of the most compelling is that a number of students are not comfortable in using English in the classroom. In addition, students seem to have some trouble in giving classroom presentations. Furthermore, some students experience difficulty to lead class discussions. Conversely, the majority of students exhibit good non-verbal communication techniques. In closing, we believe more research needs to be done to uncover classroom communication issues in student learning among architecture students at UKM.

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