Bachelor of Arts in Communication Students Asked: "What is my Contextual Communication Competence Level?"

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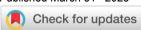[2]Shanghai International Studies University

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ABSTRACT

In general, students need to be able to interact and communicate with one another from all walks of life, whether they are in personal or professional settings. Therefore, it is essential to examine students' communication skills to ascertain whether they have adequate competence or not. In this regard, this research endeavored to determine the contextual communication competence of 266 Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) students in one prime state university in Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Through a quantitative-descriptive research design, one result revealed that BA Comm students are able to use their understanding of successful and appropriate communication patterns in public, meeting, group, and dyad situations with an average level of contextual communication competence. On the same level, BA Comm majors are committed to the field because they have the necessary communication abilities to adapt and improve various communication tactics when conversing with friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Lastly, compared to female BA Comm students, male students are more self-assured and open to communicating in various communication contexts, such as in public, meeting, group, or dyad contexts, as well as with strangers, friends, and acquaintances. Further, BA Comm students see a growth in their level of contextual communication competence as they move through their year levels because of their communication classes and social involvement. Recommendations are also included for future research directions.

1. Introduction

There is a great deal of pressure on communication students to graduate with a high level of communication competence because communication professionals must communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds including government, private businesses, and the public. Therefore, educators are pushed to generate professionals with a wide range of transferable talents in addition to producing skilled communicators with practical abilities (Chen, 2021). One way of doing so is by providing corrective feedback to students (Quinto, 2020). It does not, however, end there because competence in both technical and non-technical areas is expected of today's communication majors (Bajracharya, 2018; Bennett, 2002; Tenopir & King, 2004; Yusoff, 2010). The most important thing is that the students learn how to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, with both technical and non-technical audiences in mind.

In the Philippines, Lina (2019) highlighted that communication skill or competence is one of the top three factors companies examine when assessing job applicants. The survey said businesses have prioritized interpersonal or communication competence away from experience-based skills, which suggested a shift in the talents that employers consider the most when recruiting fresh graduates. Filipino employers expressed dissatisfaction with their employees' interpersonal and communication skills and their work ethics (Acosta et al., 2017; Schleicher, 2012; Rahman, 2018). With this, adequate attention must be taken into great consideration to develop communication competence and employable abilities (Abas et al., 2016; Rahman & Amir, 2019).

Pearson (2019) claimed that Filipino college students lack the requisite communication skills to convey information efficiently which indicates that it is vital to conduct a research on graduating students' communication competence to determine the adequacy or inadequacy of their acquired skills. Consequently, this study aimed to determine the contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) students in one leading state university in Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. To be specific, it addressed the following research questions: (1) What is the contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication students in public, meeting, group, and dyad contexts?; (2) What is the contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication students when they communicate with strangers, acquaintances, and friends?; and (3) What is the difference in the contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication students according to sex and year level?.

a. Self-Perceived Communication Competence

McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) describe Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) as "individuals' perceptions of their competence in different communication circumstances," suggesting that it is considerably important. In addition, SPCC is defined by Shahbaz et. al (2016) as "a person's perception of her or his own competence for spoken communication in a specific context."

b. Attribution Theory

Communication competence inputs determine how effective performance is measured according to attribution theory (McIntosh, 2009; Rasekh et al., 2012). In establishing attributions, the primary goal is to gain control over one's thoughts and actions by gaining insight into the reasons for one's actions and results (Manusoy & Harvey, 2001; Rasekh et al., 2012). Effective communication in a communication process will likely result from solid communication competence due to attribution (Weiner, 1986). Despite the increasing use of competency-based assessments, attribution theory method will provide more robust evaluation and predictive criteria for the important communication abilities needed to indicate improvement in the communication performance of students (McCloy et al., 1994; Prihandoko et al., 2019).

For this reason, Hymes (1972) notes that a person must have knowledge and aptitude. According to Ellis (1995), effective communication requires high level of communication skills. Consequently, Hsu (2010) highlighted that even scientists, technocrats, and engineers should be able to communicate their work in a way that is understandable to others who are not in their field of expertise. The application of relevant and practical behavioral skills is required to adjust to a particular communication scenario because communication takes place in contexts (Hinton & Kramer, 1998; Morreale et al., 2006). A communication expert's ability to communicate effectively in a team atmosphere is critical to the success of their job, which falls under the social and behavioral domain (Salleh, 2008; Hasnia et al., 2022). These are considered the most critical aspects of a person's ability to communicate effectively in any communication-related setting (Dainty et al., 2007; Salleh, 2008). Because competence is situational, a competent feature may not be appropriate in another setting (Salleh, 2008; Spitzberg, 2000; Amir P, 2023). Having this, communication competence must evolve from the context in which it serves.

2. Methodology

The researchers utilized a quantitative-descriptive design. The goal of descriptive research is to shed light on pressing topics or problems by gathering data that more precisely describes a situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In turn, this enabled the researchers to provide information about the self-perceived contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) students in one state university enrolled in the first semester of the School Year: 2022-2023. The researchers stratified the population before drawing a proportional sample from each year level. This is important to ensure that every characteristic is properly represented in the sample. Among the 155 freshman BA Comm students, 111 students were randomly chosen. Sixty-one (61) out of 72 students were randomly chosen as respondents for both sophomore and junior BA Comm students, while 33 out of 35 senior BA Comm students were randomly chosen as respondents. Overall, there were 266 participants in the study.

With 12 statements, the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale measures an individual's self-perceived communication competence when interacting with others (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). As researchers are bound by rules of ethics, the researchers asked permission to use the scale from the authors: James C. McCroskey and Linda Lee McCroskey via an email. The items on the scale range from 0 (inept) to 100 (entirely competent). The researchers tested the questionnaire's reliability by conducting a pilot test on 20 Development Communication students

in the same university. The instrument obtained a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.787, which means that it has an acceptable reliability.

Research participants were asked to sign a consent form that was emailed together with the study's electronic questionnaire to confirm that the study was done following ethical standards. Participants were also informed of the study's background and goals. Following the recruitment procedure, respondents' identities and backgrounds were held with the strictest confidentiality. To distribute the survey questionnaire, the researchers contacted the BA Comm-Program Adviser to obtain the names and email addresses of the various class representatives in each year level. Facebook Messenger was used to contact the individuals; the researchers had one-on-one conversations with each of the class representatives from freshman to senior levels. After getting approval from them, the survey questionnaire was sent to the respondents using a Google Form.

Following data collection, licensed SPSS 21.0 was used to analyze the results. To summarize the findings, mean was utilized. Subscores were added for stranger, acquaintance, and friend. The mentioned procedure is also applied to public, meeting, group, and dyad contexts. To check if the variables were normally distributed, a Shapiro-Wilk test was used. To determine the difference in the level of contextual communication competence of Bachelor of Arts in Communication students according to sex and year level, Kruskal-Wallis H test (also known as a "one-way ANOVA on ranks") was implemented.

3. Result and Discussion

a. Contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in public, meeting, group, and dyad contexts

Table 1 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students under the public context.

Table 1. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the public context

Public	Mean	Description
Present a talk to a group of strangers.	78.58	Average
Present a talk to a group of friends.	81.28	Average
Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.	80.39	Average
Overall Total	80.09	Average

"Presenting a talk to a group of friends," with a mean of 81.29, is where the students have the highest level of contextual communication competence. This is followed by "Presenting a talk to a group of acquaintances," with an 80.39 mean. The context that obtained the lowest mean is "Presenting a talk to a group of strangers (78.58). Based on the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988), the overall total of 80.09 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the public context is interpreted as average. Having an average level of contextual communication competence means that the respondents have adequate knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge when it comes to presenting a talk to a group of strangers, friends, and acquaintances.

Table 2 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the meeting context.

Table 2. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the meeting context

Meeting	Mean	Description
Talk in a large meeting of friends.	80.42	Average
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	79.45	Average
Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	77.87	Average
Overall Total	79.54	Average

The statement with the highest mean is "Talking in a large meeting of friends (80.42), which is followed by "Talking in a large meeting of acquaintances" (79.45). "Talking in a large meeting of strangers" (77.87) obtained the lowest mean. The overall total of 79.54 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the meeting context is interpreted as average. With an average level of contextual communication

competence in the setting of a meeting, the respondents have adequate understanding of efficient and suitable communication patterns, as well as the capacity to apply and modify this information when speaking in a large meeting of friends, acquaintances, and strangers.

Table 3 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the group context.

Table 3. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the group context

Group	Mean	Description
Talk in a small group of strangers.	79.09	Average
Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	80.66	Average
Talk in a small group of friends.	85.14	Average
Overall Total	81.63	Average

Based on the data, the students have the highest level of contextual communication competence when talking in a small group of friends, with a mean of 85.14 which is followed by talking in a small group of acquaintances (80.66). Talking in a small group of strangers obtained the lowest mean with 79.09. The overall total of 81.63 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the group context is interpreted as average. Having an average contextual communication competence reveals that the respondents possess good knowledge of successful and suitable communication patterns and the ability to utilize and alter this understanding when talking with a small group of friends, acquaintances, or strangers.

Table 4 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the dyad context.

Table 4. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the dyad context

Dyad	Mean	Description
Talk with an acquaintance.	80.16	Average
Talk with a friend.	83.66	Average
Talk with a stranger.	78.47	Average
Overall Total	80.76	Average

Based on Table 4, the students have the highest level of contextual communication competence in "Talking with a friend," with a mean of 83.66, while "Talking with an acquaintance" comes next, with 80.16. The students' contextual communication level is at the lowest in "Talking with a stranger" (78.47). The overall total of 80.76 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in the context of dyad is interpreted as average. With an average contextual communication competence in a dyad context, respondents know effective and suitable communication patterns and can use and adjust to them when talking to a friend, acquaintance, or stranger.

c. Contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers, acquaintances, and friends

Table 5 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers.

Table 5. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers

Stranger	Mean	Description
Present a talk to a group of strangers.	78.88	Average
Talk in a small group of strangers.	79.39	High
Talk with a stranger.	78.79	Average
Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	78.15	Average
Overall Total	78.79	Average

It is apparent from the table that "Talking in a small group of strangers" has the highest mean, with 79.39. It is followed by "Presenting a talk to a group of strangers" and "Talking with a stranger," with 78.99 and 78.79, respectively. "Talking in a large meeting of strangers" (78.15) obtained the lowest mean. The overall total of 78.79 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers is interpreted as average. This finding indicates that respondents can effectively convey ideas and knowledge when giving a talk to an unfamiliar audience, conversing with a small group of strangers, addressing a big gathering of strangers, and conversing with a stranger one-on-one.

Table 6 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with acquaintances.

Table 6. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with acquaintances

Acquaintance	Mean	Description
Talk with an acquaintance.	80.16	Average
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	79.45	Average
Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	80.66	Average
Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.	80.39	Average
Overall Total	80.17	Average

It is clear from Table 6 that students have the highest level of contextual communication competence in "Talking in a small group of acquaintances," with a mean of 80.66. "Presenting a talk to a group of acquaintances (80.39) and "Talking with an acquaintance (80.16) follow. Students have the lowest contextual communication competence when they talk in a large meeting of acquaintances, with a 79.45 mean. The overall total of 80.17 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with acquaintances is interpreted as average. The interpretation of average contextual communication competence shows that respondents' communication skills are effective and situationally appropriate when giving a talk to a group of acquaintances, conversing in a small group of acquaintances, meeting with a large group of acquaintances, and conversing with a single acquaintance.

Table 7 shows the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with friends.

Table 7. Level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with friends

Friend	Mean	Description
Talk in a large meeting of friends.	80.42	Average
Talk with a friend.	83.63	Average
Present a talk to a group of friends.	81.28	Average
Talk in a small group of friends.	85.14	Average
Overall Total	82.63	Average

The context in which the students have the highest contextual communication competence level is "Talking in a small group of friends," with an 85.14 mean. "Talking with a friend" (83.63) and "Presenting a talk to a group of friends (81.28) come next. "Talking in a large meeting of friends (80.42)" is the context where the students have the highest competence level. Having an overall total of 82.63 indicates that the level of contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with acquaintances is interpreted as average. The interpretation of respondents' average contextual communication competence suggests that their communication skills are appropriate and contextually acceptable when presenting a talk to a group of friends, speaking with a small group of friends, speaking in a large meeting of friends, and speaking with a friend alone.

d. Difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to sex and year level

Table 8 shows the difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to sex.

Table 8. Difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to sex

Group Sample	Significance	Interpretation
Male-Female	0.003*	Significant

*Significance Level= 0.05

Table 8 reveals that there is a significant difference between male and female contextual communication competence, with a significance level of 0.003. This means that there is a significant difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to sex.

Table 9 shows the difference in the contextual communication competence BA Comm students according to year level.

Table 9. Difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to year level

Group Sample	Significance	Interpretation
Second Year - Third Year	0.000*	
Second Year - Fourth Year	0.000*	Significant
First Year - Third Year	0.001*	
First Year - Fourth Year	0.000*	

*Significance Level= 0.05

Table 9 reveals that there is a significant difference between the second year and third year respondents' contextual communication competence, with a significance of 0.000; the second year and fourth year respondents' competence, with a significance of 0.000; the first year and third year's competence, with a significance of 0.001; and the first year and fourth year students' competence, with a significance of 0.000. This means that there is a significant difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to year level.

e. Contextual communication competence of BA Comm students in public, meeting, group, and dyad contexts

According to the results of this study, the self-perceived contextual communication competence is average among BA Comm students under the contexts of public, meeting, group, and dyad. Having an average level indicates that BA Comm students have a positive attitude toward communication because they have a firm grasp of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the capacity to apply and adapt this knowledge (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). This result is consistent with the work of Laurilla (2008) and Bakx et al. (2019) whereby this may be attributable to students' exposure to presentation skills on campus and their increasingly optimistic views toward communication.

Participants in this study reported having an average contextual communication competence when communicating in a group, with a mean of 81.63. This shows that BA Comm students would rather have conversations with others in a group in which they are more likely to have conversations that would have a beneficial effect on them. Similarly, Li and Campbell (2006) and Dilbeck et al. (2019) found that students prefer communicating within a group as this is a positive opportunity to gain experience and practice skills like problem-solving, interpersonal communication, conflict management, teamwork, and sustainability. However, the study by Myers and Goodboy (2015) says otherwise, as most students would prefer to communicate with one person or none, depending on the person they are communicating with. Dwyer and Fus (2018) pointed out that the extent to which a person's shyness impacts their ability to communicate in a group relies on their familiarity with the other persons in the conversation.

Furthermore, despite the respondents' average level under the contexts of public, meeting, group, and dyad, the context of meeting yielded the lowest score, with a mean of 79.54. This finding reveals that BA Comm students may have difficulties communicating with other people during meetings. It was observed by the National University of Singapore (2008) that only 25% of respondents mostly do not want meetings, especially with professors or other

professionals, likely because doing so could be a waste of time, and the students are afraid of being in a setting that requires a more serious atmosphere. This suggests that students did not feel greater confidence in meetings that need to be in a professional manner. In application of the Attribution Theory, the reason behind the students' level of contextual communication competence under the context of a meeting gives robust evaluation and predictive criteria for the important communication abilities needed to indicate improvement in the communication performance of students (McCloy et al., 1994).

f. Contextual communication competence of BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers, acquaintances, and friends

According to the results of this study, the self-perceived contextual communication competence was about average among BA Comm students when they communicate with strangers, friends, and acquaintances. Having an average level indicates that BA Comm students have a positive attitude toward communication because they have a firm grasp of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the capacity to apply and adapt this knowledge (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). Moreover, this level can be due to their communication courses that have honed their contextual communication competence. Subekti's (2020) study shows that students have a moderate amount of Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC), which means that they can have their communication skills and outlook on public speaking throughout their time in a university.

Participants in this study reported having an average contextual communication competence when communicating with friends, with an 82.63 mean. This implies that students are more open to communicating with their friends. This finding is in line with the studies by Morreale et al. (2006) and Fushino (2019), which state that most people feel competent while chatting with friends because they are confident in their ability to adapt to each other's' aims and have productive talks. Moreover, having this level of communication competence is due to their friends' support while communicating (Joe et al., 2017; Sabri & Qin, 2014).

Despite the respondents' average level when communicating with strangers, friends, and acquaintances, the context of stranger yielded the lowest score of 78.79. Consequently, students at this level are not yet familiar with the norms and processes for interacting with unfamiliar people. This is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2021) wherein students may feel shy about communicating with people if they are unfamiliar with the people they are talking to. Also, Mustapha et al. (2010) and Ferla et al. (2019) emphasized that if there are people the students do not know at a meeting, they may be more nervous about participating.

g. Difference in the contextual communication competence of BA Comm students according to sex and year level

The results show that there is a significant difference in the contextual communication competence levels between male and female BA Comm students. The findings indicate that female students have lower contextual communication competence than their male counterparts. This finding reveals substantial sex disparities among BA Comm students, with males being more open to interacting in a variety of settings and more confident in their communication skills. Men have a slight but statistically reliable tendency to be more talkative than women in general, especially in certain situations with strangers (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2019; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). It was also discovered by Pearson (2009) and Point Park University (2021) that when women make assertions, they tend to downplay their significance. Females may be less likely to speak up because they lack confidence in what they are saying and are afraid to admit when they are incorrect, a phenomenon that may be related to the stereotype that they are held in lesser esteem than their male counterparts. Nonetheless, this contradicts various studies wherein women were more likely to initiate a conversation with other people in different contexts and to use words to affirm their connection to the listener, while men were more likely to try to persuade through their words (Dey, 2021; Mast & Sczesny, 2010).

Based on the results, there is a significant difference in the contextual communication competence levels of BA Comm students according to year level. This indicates that the year level is determined by the level of communication skills possessed by BA Comm students, with higher year levels signifying a greater level of contextual communication competence. This is because, during their academic years, they have focused primarily on communication-related coursework and have engaged in significant amounts of social engagements. As BA Comm students take major communication courses throughout their academic years gives them another edge that improves their contextual communication competence. This is in line with the study of Kinash et al. (2015) whereby they stated that students could improve their communication skills or competence with any communication courses offered as they progress through the

years. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (2017) notes that the Bachelor of Arts in Communication program contains activities, training, and opportunities such as discussions, structured learning exercises, oral reports and reflections, and fieldwork course-relevant outputs. This aims to introduce students to a wide range of interpersonal communication topics and theories with the goal of improving students' overall communication skills (National Communication Association, 2017). With all the communication courses and the activities given to them, students are more prepared and engaged in any communication setting (LaFreniere, 2020).

BA Comm students' social interactions gives them the opportunity to hone their communication skills as they apply these to different communication contexts. Kaufmann and Vallade (2020) found that students who have more experience in the academe outperformed those who have the least experience connecting and communicating with other people primarily because they had more opportunities to maintain direct interactions with their peers and teachers through the years. Moreover, Routman (2018) argues that students learn more about how to improve their communication skills when they can converse with other people and are actively engaged. Thus, forging social interactions is an integral part of improving one's communication competence.

Sanson-Fisher and Cockburn (2017) opined that communication skills must be taught in major courses because increased experiences and lessons in communication lead to a shift in attitudes toward communication skills acquisition. Additionally, a study shows that the communication competence of students was found to increase after they received enough knowledge and topics on the fundamentals of effective communication (Willis et al., 2017). On the other hand, Rosenthal and Odgen (2018) mentioned that people's attitudes toward improving their communicative abilities can deteriorate over time depending on the context.

4. Conclusion

The researchers reached the following conclusions based on the study's findings. First, BA Comm students are optimistic about contextual communication because they understand effective and appropriate communication patterns and can apply these in public, meeting, group, and dyad contexts. Second, BA Comm majors are dedicated to the field because they possess adequate communication skills to adapt and enhance multiple strategies of communication when speaking with strangers, friends, and acquaintances. Finally, male BA Comm students are more confident and open to interacting in different communication settings such as in public, meeting, or group, or dyad contexts as well as with strangers, friends, and acquaintances than females. Moreover, the contextual communication competence level of BA Comm students develops as they advance through their year levels due to their communication courses and social interactions.

Based on the conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are made. In a case study, future researchers may determine how a person's culture may affect their communication ability in different communication contexts such as in public, meeting, group, and dyad. Researchers may also conduct an observation method if there is a difference on how students interact with strangers, acquaintances, and friends. Finally, researchers may seek a communication expert that could use an assessment tool to further compare the communication competence levels according to sex and year levels.

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