

## **Exploring the communication skills of TESDA trainees: basis for a differentiated enhancement program**

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**Abstract:** The research conducted at the Kalinga Campus of the Cordillera State Institute of Education aimed to assess the Communication skills of TESDA trainees in the construction field. A mixed methods approach was employed to collect and analyze data, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. For the quantitative aspect, trainees were surveyed about their demographic information, including age, gender, marital status, employment situation, and education level. In the qualitative aspects, trainees were given writing and speaking tests. Moreover, the study sought to examine the relationship between this competency and other factors. Additionally, it aimed to identify the obstacles and challenges trainees face in developing and sustaining effective communication skills and so they were also interviewed to discuss the difficulties and issues they faced. By evaluating these elements, the research revealed patterns and trends that offered insights into the communication skill levels, indicating that trainees were limited users in writing while showing modest proficiency in speaking. The challenges most trainees encountered in communicating with others included unfamiliarity with the English language, behavioral barriers, inadequate listening skills, and a lack of confidence in language use. These findings guided the researcher in creating a differentiated enhancement program to aid trainees in their progress.

Keywords: communication skills, skill level, TVET trainees

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### INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) globally, plays a crucial role in infusing a much-needed dose of relevance into the education system. By focusing on practical skills and knowledge directly applicable to the workforce, TVET programs help students develop the expertise needed to succeed in today's competitive job market. (Wang, 2024) Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is important in human resource development. It helps trainees acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop and enhance competence, employability, and productivity, thereby meeting the labor market's human power needs Gebremeskel, (2021).

The National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP) for 2023-2028 sets a bold vision for Philippine TVET to be globally recognized as a catalyst for education, lifelong learning, workforce development, and socio-economic transformation. The plan focuses on Area-based Demand-driven TVET as its primary strategy, aiming to address different regions and sectors' specific needs and demands. This vision aligns with the objectives outlined in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP), particularly in chapters 2.2 and 4, which emphasize transformative lifelong learning opportunities for all and increasing income-earning abilities. Furthermore, the NTESDP is designed to align with the goals of the Philippine Labor and

Employment Plan for the same period, as well as other sectoral plans, national directives, legislations, and international policies (NTESDP 2023-2028).

In line with the efforts of Technical Education and Training in the Philippines, the language skills program of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) focuses on communication in the workplace because communication skills are essential to human interaction and play a crucial role in personal and professional relationships. According to a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank, (2021), The TVET and tertiary education sectors in the Philippines have shown significant improvement in recent years, which has brought credibility to the country's "tri-focalized" education system introduced in the reforms of 1994. This progress is a testament to the effectiveness of the government's efforts to enhance the quality of education in the country. The competency standards set by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for Basic Competencies, in conjunction with the 21st Century Skills, highlight that Communication Competency encompasses workplace communication, which involves the provision, reception, and response to the communication needs of co-workers (including peers, superiors, and subordinates), clients, partners, and the general public. Advanced qualifications should incorporate specialized communication abilities alongside skills for leading, managing, and maintaining effective communication.

In relation to this, TESDA courses in the construction sector, including Carpentry NC II, Tile Setting NC II, Masonry NC I, Masonry NC II, and Construction Painting NC II, incorporate Basic Competency standards along with 21st Century skills. These courses consist of nine (9) competency units over a duration of 37 hours, with the first unit focusing on participating in workplace communication. This unit aims to enhance communication skills in English, emphasizing the ability to express oneself clearly, concisely, and confidently. It involves understanding and applying correct grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and tone to effectively convey messages. Effective communication is a two-way process that involves both speaking and actively listening. It also involves interpreting non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures, as Rodriguez (2019) mentioned. The importance of strong communication skills in English cannot be overstated in a professional context. In the business world, effective communication is crucial for building relationships with clients and colleagues, as well as for negotiating deals and resolving conflicts (Jones, 2020). TVET graduates need to be armed not only with technical skills but also with other essential skills such as English competency, particularly communication skills (Suhaili et al., 2021).

In the present context, according to a study by Dela Cruz (2023), an evaluation of trainees at a Technical Education and Skills Development (TESDA) institution in Taguig City indicated that they received low to very low scores in twenty-first-century skills. This suggests that while TVET trainees excel in core competencies, they struggle with soft skills associated with these modern skills. Thus, determining the level of communication skills of the trainees in using the English language will benefit the trainers to acknowledge the level of competency of the students to address the appropriate needs of the trainees. The Technical Vocational Education and Training institutions are to be directed in crafting functional and applicable training guidelines and curricula for practical communication skills related to work.

### *Research Objectives*

This study aimed to determine the level of communication skills in the English language skills of the trainees of the construction sector in CSITE-Kalinga campus, 2024-2025

- 1) Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions;
- 2) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, civil status, employment status, educational background, and pieces of training related to communication skills development?
- 3) What is the level of communication skills of the trainees?
- 4) Is there a significant difference in the trainees' communication skills when they are grouped according to their profile variables?
- 5) What are the challenges and issues in communication skills encountered by the trainees when communicating?
- 6) What differentiated enhancement program will be proposed based on the result of the study?

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

The study used a mixed methods approach, which includes both quantitative and qualitative research designs in collecting and analyzing data on the English proficiency of trainees who have different qualifications. First, the quantitative approach used in this research meticulously gathered demographic data in order to provide a robust understanding of the participants. It entailed the collection of some specific and quantifiable information about several major variables participant's gender was noted for future analysis of possible differences between males and females in outcomes, age was taken for having a continuous variable which can be studied for relationships with other results, the maximum educational level of every participant was documented to help explain formal schooling experience. Employment status, whether employed full-time or unemployed, was also included, acknowledging the potential influence of the work context. Lastly, the presence and nature of any previous training specifically related to communication skills were also recorded, to allow for an exploration of the impact of formal communication education on the research subject. This detailed demographic data, captured through a systematic quantitative approach, lays a solid foundation for comprehensively analyzing the study's results and identifying potential patterns and relationships.

Qualitatively speaking. Among the principal tools used were: a test on writing, testing their mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and written discourse; and an oral test on speaking, testing their fluency, pronunciation, and proficiency in communication with other people in dealing with oral exchanges. These performance-based tools were complemented by individual interviews that were conducted. Through these interviews, further avenues were opened into the experiences of participants, allowing researchers to gather valuable qualitative data about the particular challenges or issues that they faced while communicating, both in terms of writing and speaking. Therefore, combining observation and self-reported experience, this study aimed at providing a

comprehensive and detailed insight into participants' communication skills and factors affecting their capabilities.

### *Respondents and Locale of the Study*

The participants were trainees from three courses within the construction sector. The trainees comprised 25 from the Carpentry NC II course, 25 from the Tile Setting NC II course, and 50 divided between the two courses of Masonry NC II and Masonry NC I with a total of 100 trainees. These trainees fully participated in the various courses given under the Special Training for Employment Program for 2024. This colourful crowd of students was geared towards learning and specializing in their particular fields of study to obtain relevant work opportunities in the construction industry when their training is completed.

### *Research Instrument*

The data collection method used to gather information on the demographics of the participants was a survey checklist, where they marked the relevant information applicable to them. For the assessment of the communication skills of the trainees in TVET, a written test and a speaking test were used, both adapted from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The letter writing test was the first part of the writing test, and the essay writing test was the second part. The speaking test was conducted in the form of an interview, which is similar to IELTS speaking parts 1, 2, and 3 under the general training category. Lastly, there were two days allocated to perform the said tests. The written test was on the first day and the interview and speaking test was on the second day.

### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics, frequency counts, and percentages were utilized to compile a comprehensive profile of the participants based on factors such as sex, age, civil status, employment status, educational background, and training related to communications skills. This provided a clear snapshot of the demographics of the study sample. Additionally, the level of English competency was assessed using weighted mean calculations. T-tests were employed to compare means between employed and unemployed participants, while ANOVA determined any significant differences among three or more populations. The percentage scores were categorized and interpreted according to the scoring scales provided by the IELTS. This approach enabled a thorough analysis of the data and facilitated meaningful conclusions regarding English proficiency levels among the study participants.

Moreover, the qualitative data gathered from the interview and written test were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, patterns, and trends in the responses provided by participants. Through this method, the researcher categorized and coded the data to extract key insights and draw meaningful conclusions. Additionally, content analysis was used to examine the language and tone used by participants to provide a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences. By combining these two data analysis techniques, researchers gained a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data collected and derived valuable insights to inform future research and decision-making processes.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Profile of the respondents*

The data presented in the table indicates that males significantly outnumber women in training for construction-related skills at TESDA because it reveals that there are 58% male participants and 42% female participants in the study., while the majority of participants fall within the 18-24 age range, with 49% belonging to this demographic. Additionally, the civil status of participants is predominantly single, with 67% reporting being unmarried while half of the participants, 50%, are currently unemployed. 39% of participants have attained a college degree or higher educational qualification. Interestingly, the data shows that 85% of participants have not received any training related to communication skills development.

### *The level of communication skills along with written skills of the trainees*

#### *Written skills of trainees*

The distribution of participants according to their performance in the written test is as follows: The majority of participants are limited users, comprising 36%, whose basic competence is restricted to familiar situations, often demonstrating difficulties in understanding and expression, and are not able to utilize complex language. Meanwhile, 35% are modest users, possessing a partial command of the language and managing overall meaning in most situations, though they are prone to making numerous mistakes. 17% of them are extremely limited users, facing significant challenges in understanding written English, 7% are competent users, and they typically maintain an effective command of the language despite occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage, and misunderstandings. They can use and understand fairly complex language, especially in familiar scenarios, and finally, 5% of them are non-users, meaning they cannot employ the language except for isolated words.

### *Significant difference in the level of communication skills along written skill of the trainees when they are grouped according to their profile variables*

The findings of the written examination demonstrate a notable difference attributed to sex, with a p-value of 0.002, signifying that gender has an influence on test performance. Additionally, age exhibits a significant difference in test outcomes, reflected by a p-value of 0.009, indicating that individuals of varying ages may achieve different results on the test. Furthermore, educational background represents another element that affects test results, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.00, highlighting a robust correlation between the level of education and performance.

### *The level of communication skills along with speaking skills of the trainees*

The table presents the speaking test results of students, including their scores, skill levels, frequencies, and percentages. This data provides valuable insights into the students' performance and proficiency in speaking where in the skill level, 39% of the participants with a score of 4-5 are modest users which means they have a partial command of the language, can cope with overall meaning in most situations, although are likely to make many mistakes. Secondly, 36% gained a

score of 3 are classified under limited users. On the other hand, only 4% percent of the participants are competent users while only 2% are good users.

*Significant difference on the level of communication skills along speaking skill*

The result of the speaking test shows that there is a significant difference in performance based on sex with a p-value of 0.004 and educational background with a p-value of 0.00. Sex and educational background play a crucial role in speaking tests because they can influence a person's language proficiency, confidence, and communication skills.

*Post hoc analysis on the significant difference on the level of communication skills along speaking skill of trainees when grouped according to educational background*

The data shows that there is a significant difference in the result of the Speaking Test as the table presents that there is a 0.03 significant difference between high school undergraduates and high school graduates while a 0.008 significant difference between high school undergraduates and college undergraduates and a 0.002 significant difference between high school undergraduates and college graduates or higher.

*Challenges and issues in communication skills encountered by trainees*

*A limited understanding of the English language*

The responses show that speaking English is difficult when someone lacks knowledge of the language and more so when and how they use it.

S1: It is difficult because I lack the self-confidence to speak English. I find it difficult to explain the reasons.

S2: Sometimes, if I talk to people who are experts in the English language, I Stutter.

S18: It is difficult especially when writing formal letters and articles.

S14: It is difficult because I cannot express myself well using the language.

S15: It is difficult especially when I have to explain things.

*Misunderstanding and miscommunication*

S3. When we had a conversation he used words inappropriately. We didn't agree at one point because he used different terminology.

S4. when a friend asked me to do something in her favor, I didn't do it because I didn't understand her instructions, I explained to her I didn't understand her but she understood me.

S9. They don't understand me when I say new terminology that is new to them, they just laugh and assume they understand me.

S12. When communication letters are written in technical terms, we interpret them differently.

S15. When my friend talks in her native tongue which I do not understand. I talked to her and we agreed to use the common language.

*Insufficient self-confidence and poor listening abilities*

S1. I do have misunderstandings with my co-workers because they do not listen and so I just keep silent when something goes wrong.

S14. When I cannot express myself because I am afraid I will commit a mistake

S5. I just keep silent because I can't express myself well.

S6. I always asked her for confirmation and correction and she was not patient.

S7. he underestimated me because I am not a degree holder.

S10. I am frustrated but keep quiet.

The study conducted at TESDA-CSITE Kalinga Campus sought to evaluate the communication skills of trainees in the different courses in the construction sector, with a particular emphasis on discerning any significant differences that might arise from their diverse demographic profiles. This research was grounded in the belief that communication is essential for professional success and personal development. By analyzing factors such as age, educational background, and socio-economic status, the research aimed to uncover specific challenges that trainees encountered in their communication efforts. Knowing these challenges is crucial, as it provides valuable insights into the unique needs of each demographic group within the training program. By identifying potential barriers to effective communication, educators, and program developers can create more tailored interventions that address these issues directly. This not only serves to enhance the individual trainees' communication skills but also fosters a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

The respondents' profiles revealed that 58% of the trainees enrolled in training programs are male, indicating a predominant male presence in vocational education. This trend may reflect traditional gender roles within certain sectors, where skilled trades and technical jobs have historically been male-dominated. For instance, professions in the construction field such as Masonry NCII, Carpentry NC II, Tile Setting NC II, and Electrical Installation and Maintenance NC II, often see higher male participation. However, it's important to note that TESDA has been actively promoting inclusivity and encouraging more diverse participation through various training initiatives aimed at women and other marginalized groups. Additionally, the profile of TESDA trainees reveals a predominantly young demographic, with nearly half (49%) falling within the 18 to 24-year-old age bracket. A significant majority (67%) are single, suggesting a crucial life stage where acquiring new skills and career opportunities is likely a priority. The employment status of the trainees paints a picture of need, with half (50%) currently unemployed and a substantial 41% engaged in self-employment, potentially reflecting a desire for greater stability and improved income prospects. Interestingly, despite a considerable portion (39%) holding a college degree, a striking 85% admitted to having no prior training in language or communication skills. This

highlights a potential gap in their educational background, suggesting a necessity for targeted training in these crucial areas to enhance their employability and success in the workforce.

The results of the writing skill test revealed that 36% of the participants were classified as limited users of English, the finding underscores both the challenges and opportunities within language acquisition, that they have partial command of the language and can cope with the overall meaning of text during writing but are likely to commit many mistakes, and that their writing ability of basic competence is limited and shows difficulty in comprehension and expression. This classification suggests that these individuals possess a basic understanding of English but struggle with fluency and comprehension in more complex contexts, which may hinder their ability to navigate academic or professional environments and even communicate with others where English is the primary mode of communication. The reasons behind this limitation can vary widely, from insufficient exposure to the language in everyday life to the absence of formal education opportunities. A study similar to this finding was by Buarquob (2019) where he discussed that language barriers due to the lack of knowledge of the language affect performance. another similar study was by Singh et. al. (2022) entitled “A cross-sectional evaluation of communication skills and perceived barriers among the resident doctors at a tertiary care center in India” where the findings showed that two-thirds of the residents did not practice good communication skills due to barriers like the infrastructural deficit, lack of time, and long working hours. Despite the varying reasons behind communication barriers, it is crucial to address them to improve overall communication effectiveness. By acknowledging and working to overcome these barriers, individuals can foster better relationships and understanding with others in both personal and professional settings.

Meanwhile, in the speaking skill test, overall, 39% of the trainees were classified as modest users and 36% were limited users. They have a partial command of the language and cope with overall meaning in most situations during the conversation, although they are likely to make many mistakes when in fact they should be able to handle basic communication in their field. It implies that limited opportunities to use the language and the complexity of the English language including pronunciation, structure, and other semantic aspects make it difficult to learn and use in daily conversation. This finding supports what Leong (2019) mentioned in her study that speaking skills can be affected by the linguistic component of the language. When someone uses the language and is not confident in using it because he is not an expert in using it, it will surely affect how he delivers his message promptly.

Moreover, the study on the communication skills of trainees in TESDA revealed varying skill levels in both written tests and speaking tests. When grouped according to age, sex, and educational background, significant differences were noted in their abilities to effectively communicate. In the written test, age, sex, and educational background were found to show a significant difference. Young adults may struggle with their vocabulary range, and sentence complexity as they are still developing their writing skills, unlike adults who are exposed to more life experiences and writing context resulting in better writing skills. In like manner with educational background, Individuals with lower educational attainment may struggle with complex sentence structures, advanced vocabulary, and formal writing expectations. Meanwhile,

in the speaking test, significant differences were seen between high school undergraduates and high school graduates, between high school graduates and college graduates, and between Senior high school graduates and College undergraduates. The significant differences are not surprising because the higher the level of education, the better performance that is to be expected to be good at their level to deal with communication-related tasks and performance.

Furthermore, the result of the interview on communication challenges revealed that speaking English is difficult due to a lack of knowledge of the language. They find it difficult to use because they lack vocabulary, lack the confidence to use the language, and cannot reason out about things using the English language. This finding affirms the claim of Buarquob (2019) that language itself can act as a bridge or wall of communication. Wherein language is a tool to bridge gaps in communicating with others but can be a wall at the same time that prevents people from exchanging simple, clear, and accurate messages. Another one, the result shows that miscommunication arose due to inappropriate usage of the word, using technical terms, and incoherence. Participants admitted that misunderstandings happened when they used the wrong word or used technical terms during conversation. It was also a challenge for them to be coherent in using the English language because they did not understand the meaning of words in the first place. Similarly, Buarquob (2019) in his article said that senders misuse words that may distort or change the message and lead to misunderstanding. Even so, technical terms are crucial in communication because terms are sometimes arbitrary. Lastly, incoherence may cause someone to lose track of the discussion and distract the smooth flow and relevant points in the communication process.

Another challenge in communication revealed was the lack of listening skills and lack of confidence to use the language. These two common barriers are challenges in communication that significantly affect the communication skills of the trainees. Listening is crucial for understanding the message being conveyed because they said that when someone does not listen carefully, they miss key details, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. On the other hand, some are hesitant when speaking because they are unsure of the correctness of grammar or organization of thoughts which hinder personal and professional interactions and prevents them from fully expressing their thoughts, ideas, and needs. Though the finding shows that trainees were aware that listening skills affect communication skills, no one admitted that he or she lacked listening skills but rather pointed out that they experienced miscommunication when their colleagues, co-workers, or friends did not listen to them.

These findings highlight the importance of tailored communication training programs to address the specific needs of different groups within the trainee population.

Table 4 presents the designed specialized program for communication skills training. This is specifically crafted for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) participants, particularly those in the construction industry, such as Carpentry NC II, Masonry NC I, Masonry NC II, Tile Setting NC II, and other related courses that adhere to the same basic competency standards. The program aims to improve their overall performance in interactions with others. This program adapts its methods to cater to different communication styles and preferences by acknowledging trainees' varying backgrounds and learning requirements. The activities are

derived from the first unit of competency, “Participate In Workplace Communication,” identified by unit code 400311210, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to collect, analyze, and communicate information effectively in response to workplace demands, based on the Competency Standards for Basic Competencies integrated with the 21st Century Skills for National Certificate Level II

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings demonstrate a clear link between the demographic factors such as sex, age, educational background, and previous language training of the trainees and their communication skill levels. Specifically, the data indicated that these individuals face challenges in their written English proficiency and possess a moderate capability in spoken English. This suggests a functional understanding that is restricted to basic English, hindered by deficiencies in grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. Moreover, the challenges extend beyond linguistic skills, highlighting confidence barriers and certain behavioral factors that impede their effective communication.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative that the instruction of communication skills, as outlined in the 21st-century skills present in the training regulations for all courses offered at the CSITE-Kalinga campus, be emphasized significantly.

A comprehensive approach to skills development that encompasses both written and oral communication must be pursued, integrating structured activities, workshops, and practical applications into the curriculum, thereby empowering trainees to enhance their writing skills to align with their speaking capabilities.

This study provides a valuable framework for confronting communication challenges, ensuring that trainees possess essential skills that are critical in today’s competitive and dynamic workforce. In this regard, the designed differentiated enhancement program will assist the trainees in improving their communication skills.

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