



Communication Experiences in Hospitality Management Education

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December 25, 2020

COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES IN HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Introduction and background

Excellent communication skills of teachers are well established in the class in every field of studies (Biggs, 2011). Teachers' communication knowhow can enhance the student experience, such as learning objectives, as it shows that students are listening to teachers with pleasure, valuing designed topics and exchanging clear messages as intended to receive and send (Wlodkowski, & Ginsberg, 2017). Education leaders, including those in hospitality, most often emphasize teachers' degrees and achievements. Still, less emphasis is placed on learning about communication competencies with students and particularly communication within the theory and practice-based working environments such as hospitality management (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Zizka, & Varga, 2020). Until recently, unlike research skill, communication skills training for prospective teachers or who are, among upcoming graduates, interested in teaching has not been included in most hospitality curricula. Thus it leaves graduates prepared below par for the effective communication management in the class (Gudmundsdottir & Hatlevik, 2018). As a result, they have had to depend mainly on early experience and personal judgement when making decisions about how to communicate in a hospitality management class (Plews, & Zizka, 2020).

Although there are available books (see Biggs, 2011; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017) that guide teachers for communication in the class, the content suggests that problems of communication in the study have long been recognized. However, there lacks much empirical research to support what is well known. In the books, general themes are identified in the anecdotal and advisory literature targeting teachers. Reference is made to the essentials verbal and nonverbal communication in the class with emphasis placed on active participation in advancing students' learning process. There is little understanding of the unique environment in which the teachers' communication takes place or factors students' smooth learning process that may influence how students become enthusiastic about interacting, participating, understanding and receiving the knowledge they intend to acquire for both career and personal development (Guskey & Link, 2019). The literature also deals with stereotypes such as the explicitly general communication style of teachers or with communication procedures rather than effective communication style to make the topic more acceptable and valuable (Boud & Lee, 2005). Thus, the overall aim of the current research is to provide a nuanced exploration of hospitality students communication experiences and preferences in their education. Specifically, this study has two baseline objectives: (1) to understand the critical aspects of communication that can play roles for a successful hospitality education (2) to identify teachers' communication competencies as students perceive for their effective learning and topic demonstration in the class.

Method

A qualitative focus group interview is built on the interpretive paradigm in the current research, which aims to provide a nuanced exploration of hospitality students communication experiences and preferences in their education (Emery & Anderman, 2020). The interpretive approach guides the in-depth interviewing process to seek and understand the interactive social world through people's perspectives (Tracy, 2019). This approach thus allows the researcher to observe and look for specific and detailed information and interpretation in which communication experience in education is one instance. Undergraduate 24 students of hospitality management in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who are 18 years and above were asked to participate in four focus groups (6 participants in each focus group). Participants were recruited via snowball sampling. The sampling frame used in this research was studying in hotel and tourism management who had spent at least one semester, and who were willing to share their communication experience in the class. The duration of the focus group discussion sessions varied between 45 and 60 minutes (Rachel, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). All participants were briefed about the study before the focus group sessions, and their identity was confidentially kept and had no harm in terms of discussing their teachers' skills (Loreto, 2020). Content analysis has been applied for making interpretations of particular messages or body of materials through systematic examination. It attempts to identify patterns, themes and meanings (Rourke, & Anderson, 2004). The focus group sessions were conducted in English at the author's office, and audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Results and discussion

Based on research objectives, critical aspects of communication that can play roles for a successful hospitality management education and perceived communication competencies of hotel management teachers were revealed in focus group discussions. In regard of critical aspects of communication, the majority of study participants indicated several aspects that can be effective mediums of communication for the successful learning process, such as (a) case study, (b) technology application, (c) students' competence. On the other hand, participants identified (a) topical experience, (b) easy writing style, (c) display of body language, (d) leadership quality, (e) engagement approach as teachers' communication competencies for effective learning and topic demonstration in the class.

Critical aspects of communication

(a) Case study

Participants expressed that teachers may relate a reliable and available story behind the topic during its discussion in the class. Thus students may appreciate the topic livelier and can visualize the subject matter in their personal intension. In contrast, sharing a case study from previous research may encourage students to become updated regarding the subject matter. The above arguments were informed by a participant (5) in the following manner:

(...) if it [subject] is visualized through storytelling. Any topic [subject] related example of other countries gives us a clear picture of facts [case] that are very helpful to understand.

(b) Technology application

The analysis results of the interviews revealed that diverse applications of the technology are needed in the class, such as digital whiteboard, multimedia, Blackboard, social media and apps. Participants stated that by using technology in the study, they can solve complex problems, initiate critical thinking. They further added that their engagement with technology might increase their learning interest since technology allows teachers to share video, images, sound clips, apps and more within a virtual class environment. Social media may allow them to communicate teachers any moment to share—not only lesson plans but their study issues even they are away from face-to-face communication in the school. The necessities of technology application to boost communication in the hotel management class is revealed in the following excerpt:

Technology eased our studies. Most of us carry smartphone and education becomes full of fun. Uploading different events in Facebook, [YouTube] video link, email of our teachers keep us live with them [teachers], and we also communicate them [teachers] quickly and comfortably (...) (P-13)

I would prefer apps based course or instructions, and this can save our time and energy (P-21)

I heard that in a developed country they have a smartboard in the class. It is very enjoyable for students [course] attractions (...). They [students] also give assignments and are communicated by their subject teachers through online [Blackboard] (P-24)

(c) Students' competence

Regarding the technological application in the hotel management class, several respondents argued that technology application could be successful if students can appreciate technology application. Students should understand their operation and application. The management may provide training or seminar to students. The above is reflected in the following views:

We should also be good at communication with teachers (...). If we do not know the technology application, our teachers do not like this. They [institution] should train us [students] how to use technology for our study purpose. (5-7)

Teachers' communication competencies

(a) Topical experience

Focus group discussions with student participants disclosed that nearly all student expected that their teachers should have industrial experience and anecdotes of the industry (e.g., a brief, revealing account of an incident) which may help them

comprehend the ongoing topic, may grow inspiration to visualize their future profile. This notion was expressed by focus group participants in the following points:

Our one teacher (...) has ten years' working experience in a restaurant. His teaching is different and clear. (P-16)

(...) Experience of critical situations gives us a live picture. (P-5)

(b) Easy writing style

The findings suggested that writing or wording in teachers' notes, whiteboard, PowerPoint presentation and email instructions should be understandable to students. It helps students understand the aim of teachers' instructions, time management and improve the quality of the given assignment.

We [students] do not understand hard English [language] in email and [PowerPoint] presentation. (P-22)

The teacher should translate it [complicated sentences] in our language [mother tongue (...)] Because sometimes tourism words are difficult to understand. (P-1)

(c) Display of body language

Hospitality teachers were expected by participants as animated persons and reserving a positive attitude in the manner and body language. Participants thought that teachers' smiling and service-oriented facial expressions might train the hospitality generations to serve guests with similar expressions. In contrast, physical movements towards and across the students and class during teaching can be supportive of communicating views of teaching subject lively and understandably.

(d) Leadership quality

Analyzed findings indicated that leadership quality, such as taking responsibility for students' success could let students feel to obey their teachers. Thus teacher's workout on topics became a part of interest and fun. The guardianship approach was observed by participants as an accessible medium to reach them out for any aim that teachers intended to pursue students' benefits. The discrete intention of expecting teachers' leadership is evident in the following sentiment:

(...) He (the teacher) is very responsive and gives many students jobs. Everybody likes his class [lecture], and he is a very caring leader like our guardian. (P-1)

(e) Engagement approach

Findings revealed that in times or out of times, teachers' eventful meeting with students and social media posting based on class activities were discussed as teacher-student engagement or academic attachment that recognize students' existence and encouraged their responsibility to foster studentship while publicly teachers-students showed their togetherness and belongingness to each other.

(...) *Our teachers mention us on Facebook and tag us when we have activities or events in the school. We give comments, likes and shares in our groups. Everybody makes fun and feels friendly.*

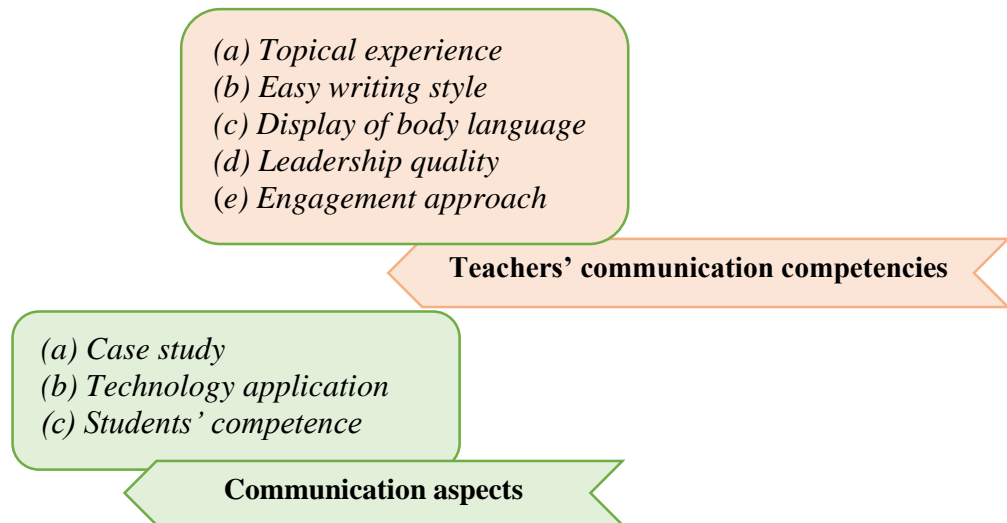


Figure 1.
Communication experiences in hospitality management education

Conclusion and implication

Although research for fundamental communication aspects and competences for teachers is not new for effective practice in the different fields of studies, there are not adequate empirical and dedicated implications, specifically in hospitality management education. Therefore, this study advocates that systematic communication may help students understand and foster knowledge and skills and nurse self-efficacy in their designed career goals. It further highlights the rule of communication can trigger the expertise of teachers in connections with establishing a generation aimed to sustain and lead the industry. In practice, up to now, the communication aspects and preferences of teachers' communication competences was viewed from the standpoint of the anecdotal and advisory context in the institutional level, understanding the role of communication in hospitality education should help additional touchpoints to improve the provision of hospitality management education and ultimately sustainable hospitality industry in times to come.

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