



Salahaddin University-Erbil

College of Basic Education

English Department

## **The Role of Interpersonal Skills in Improving EFL Communication Skills**

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Prepared by:

**Tawar S. Rahman**

**Zhiyan S. Ramadhan**

Supervised by:

**Asst. Prof. Dr. Rozhgar J. Khidhir**

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## **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to our parents, family and teachers in appreciation of their everlasting love, support, and encouragement during our academic path. They have greatly influenced who we are now with their sacrifices and wisdom.

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# Section One

## Introduction

Interpersonal skills promote successful interaction, comprehension, and teamwork in academic settings, they are academically significant for enhancing EFL communication skills. These abilities support students in taking an active part in group projects, having meaningful conversations, and developing strong bonds with both teachers and fellow students. Interpersonal skill development allows EFL learners to improve their overall EFL communication competency by enhancing their ability to listen intently, present ideas clearly, and modify their communication style for academic settings.

This research project aims to review and reflect on the role of interpersonal skills in improving EFL communication skills at the university level.

Interpersonal skills, according to Libyan J med. (2007) are “those essential skills involved in dealing with and relating to other people, largely on a one- to-one basis” interpersonal skills are the set of abilities that enable individuals to effectively communicate, collaborate, and build positive relationships with others. They involve skills such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and effective verbal and nonverbal communication. These skills are essential for successful interactions in various personal and professional settings.

Communication comes from the Latin "communis", which means "common". When we communicate, we are trying to establish "commonness" with someone. That is, we are trying to share information, an idea or an attitude (Schramm, 1993). "Communications is the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop" (Schramm, 1993).

Communication skills refer to the ability to convey and understand information effectively. It entails using non-verbal clues, writing, speaking, and listening to communicate with others in a clear, concise, and polite manner. Effective communication is a prerequisite for successful interactions in a variety of settings, including both personal and professional ones. (Hanson, 2023)

This research project comprises four main sections. Section one covers the introduction to this study. Section two is about literature review. Section three is the place for the experience and reflection. Then the project ends with conclusions in section four and the list of references.

## Section Two

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Interpersonal skills

According to Brian H. and William R. (2011) Interpersonal skills are the sine qua non of social life. And yet, few things in life are so taken for granted as interpersonal and social skills. Like eating and walking, talking and interacting are part of the mundane landscape of everyday behaviour.

Interpersonal skills are the ability to accomplish individual and organizational goals through interpersonal interactions. Although interpersonal skills have been regarded as relatively straightforward behavioural routines, a more contemporary view of a skilled person is more complex: a person who can appraise his/her broader impact and can flexibly apply a repertoire of interaction tactics to accomplish a set of goals. (John.D 2015).

Everybody has a style, both interpersonal and personal. When it comes to applying interpersonal skills for certain, desired outcomes, some people are more successful than others. Personality and instinct may play a role in the development of interpersonal skills. Good ones, however, can also be enhanced and shared with others.

Although they can be developed, interpersonal skills cannot be acquired only through textbook instruction. Some people need to practise, use them every day, see how they work, and then make adjustments. In other words, while some people may be born with these skills, others may need to put in more effort to develop them. Regular engagement with other people is often the means via which this cultivation takes place.

Interpersonal skills are strongly linked to a knowledge of social expectations and customs, whether that knowledge is inherent or learned. People with the strongest interpersonal skills adjust their tactics and communications as needed, depending on the reactions of others to their messages and meanings.

Interpersonal skills can be developed once they are gained. Practice is the key to perfecting them.

Your interpersonal skills can be enhanced by showing empathy, moderating and promptly resolving conflicts, limiting outbursts of anger, and expressing gratitude to team members and support personnel. (Evan T. 2023)

## **2.2 Types of interpersonal skills**

Interpersonal skills encompass various abilities, and they can be categorized into different types such as (teamwork, body language, facial expressions and emotional intelligence)

### **2.2.1 Teamwork**

Team work is defined by Harries and Harries (1996) as “a work group or unit with a common purpose through which members develop mutual relationships for the achievement of goals/tasks”

The outcome of teamwork is shaped by the pool of skills and expertise of all members. The collective effort of a group enhances productivity and ensures the delivery of higher quality work. In addition, having diversity in backgrounds, opinions, and attitudes adds various perspectives, originality, and overall richness to the project at hand. In fact, enhanced creativity in problem solving and decision-making has been observed in teams with divergent opinions or intellectual conflicts.

Human social organisation has always revolved around groups of individuals working together towards a similar goal. Teams affect our daily lives and are vital to the functioning of many different societal activities.

### **2.2.2 Body language and facial expressions**

Body language plays a crucial role in interpersonal skills, as it communicates nonverbal cues such as gestures, posture, and facial expressions. It can convey confidence, attentiveness, or openness, enhancing effective communication and understanding between individuals.

According to Deborah Bull, "Body language is a very powerful tool. We had body language before we had speech, and apparently, 80% of what you understand in a conversation is read through the body, not the words. Sight makes up 83% of impact on brain from the information gained during a visual presentation. Taste makes up 1%, hearing makes up 11%, smell 3% and touch 2%." With such a high percentage of body language in the message being communicated, it is almost impossible to neglect or overlook it.

The face is arguably the most prominent nonverbal channel, and for good reason. Of all the channels of nonverbal behaviour, the face is the most intricate. It is the most complex signalling system in our body. It is the channel of nonverbal behaviour most studied by scientists. It is a channel that can reflect involuntary reactions and produce voluntary gestures. And arguably it is the seat of the greatest amount of information that is conveyed nonverbally. That's why we have “face-to-face” interactions. Sometimes we need to get “in people’s faces.” When we have meetings with others this is “face time,” and sometimes we need to “face off.” When talking with others we need

to “face the facts” or “face the consequences.” One of the most important signals the face displays is emotion. Being able to read the emotional states of the person you are talking to is an incredible skill that can help anyone whose profession requires face-to-face interaction. Being able to read others’ emotions can give you insights not only to their emotional states but their intentions, motivations, personalities, trustworthy-ness, and credibility. (David M, Hyi S. 2013)

### **2.2.3 Emotional intelligence**

The term ‘Emotional Intelligence’, first coined by psychologists Mayer and Salovey (1990), refers to one’s capacity to perceive, process and regulate emotional information accurately and effectively, both within oneself and in others and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions and to influence those of others.

Emotional intelligence has been shown to play a meaningful role in academic success, mental and physical health, as well as attainment in professional domains; the findings of Bar-On (1997) suggested that people with higher EI (emotional intelligence) performed better than those with lower EI (emotional intelligence) in life.

### **2.3 Importance of interpersonal skills (Developing interpersonal skills)**

Interpersonal skills also known as human skills — are the soft skills we use to connect with and understand others. Interpersonal skills are mainly used by people on the basis of a daily basis while communicating with people around them.

They are also crucial for English as Foreign Language (EFL) students for several reasons:

**1-Communication:** Effective communication is made possible by interpersonal skills, which aid pupils in understanding others and expressing themselves in a clear and concise manner. This is essential for language learning.

**2-Cultural understanding:** EFL students engage in cross-cultural interactions frequently. Their ability to navigate cultural differences is made possible by their interpersonal skills, which promote an inclusive and courteous communication environment.

**3-Collaboration:** Learning a language is frequently a team effort. Interpersonal abilities such as collaboration and teamwork improve the educational process by enabling students to participate in group projects, conversations, and activities.



**4-Confidence building:** Gaining interpersonal skills increases pupils' comfort level when speaking the language. A helpful learning environment is facilitated by positive interactions between students and teachers.

**5-Networking:** Interpersonal skills are valuable in building connections. EFL students who can effectively communicate and connect with others may find it easier to practice and improve their language skills through real-life interactions.(Larsen &Anderson 2013)

Interpersonal skills can be developed and enhanced in a variety of methods. Here are some of them:

**1. Identify areas for improvement:** Getting to know yourself, your shortcomings, and the areas you need to work on is the first step towards improvement.

**2-learn from feedback:** Thinking about the feedback you have been given, either directly or indirectly, will help you develop.

**3-Focus on your basic communication and listening skills:** Speaking with others involves much more than just using words. Pay attention to the words you use when you speak. Could you be misinterpreted or misunderstand the situation? To make sure your message has been understood, strive for clarity and learn to ask for clarification or criticism.

**4- Develop emotional intelligence:** Developing emotional intelligence is arguably the most crucial general life skill. This is the capacity to comprehend feelings, both your own and those of others, and how they impact actions and mind-sets. Thus, it is possibly best understood as having a dual interpersonal and personal nature. (Egan G. 2010)

## **2.4 Communication skills**

Your capacity for straightforward communication and the sharing of ideas, feelings, and thoughts will benefit you in all of your interactions with other people. You can learn any language as a student, but in order to communicate effectively, you must be able to read, write, speak, and listen. Being multilingual can facilitate effective communication with individuals worldwide.

Acquiring proficiency in English can facilitate your communication with individuals who comprehend the language, even if it is not your mother tongue or the language your family speaks.

Today, the need for communication skills has become more important than ever before. Communication plays a vital role—be it the preparation one has to do to face an interview or deal with diverse business deals, or interacting with colleagues, superiors, and others.(Leena 2007).

If we add here to the fundamentals of professional communication skills, we can communicate effectively.

The seven Cs— clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete, and courteous—can be used to summarise these.

Clear	Concise	Concrete	Correct	Coherent	Complete	Courteous
Be clear about what you want to say and write	Use simple words and say only what is needed	Use exact words, phrases, Use facts and figures	Use correct spellings, language and grammar	Your words should make sense and should be related to the main topic	Your message should have all the needed information	Be respectful, friendly and honest

## ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

For effective communication to take place, the following elements **MUST** be present:

- **Sender:** The sender initiates communication.
- **Message:** The message is what the sender communicates to the receiver.
- **Channel:** This is the means used to transmit the message from the sender to the receiver.
- **Receiver** - the recipient of the message.
- **Feedback:** this is the response the sender gets from the receiver.

Good communication skills are essential to allow others and yourself to understand information more accurately and quickly. In contrast, poor communication skills lead to frequent misunderstandings and frustration.(Julia 2009).

## **2.4.1 Types of communication skills**

The types of communication represent the different ways used to communicate messages while the modes of communication focus on the mediums. Here are the 6 unique types of communication:

### **1. Verbal Communication**

Through spoken words and the use of speech and language to convey messages. It occurs when we speak to others. Verbal communication can be formal and informal. However, when it takes place in person, verbal communication and non-verbal communication go together.

### **2. Non-Verbal Communication**

Body language, facial expressions, eye contact, appearance, sign language. Non-verbal communication complements verbal communication and also helps when words do not help. It is an important type of communication in interviews and discussions as they value a lot.

### **3. Written Communication**

The use of written words to convey messages. Written communication happens through email, memos, texts, posts, etc. While written communication helps you share your thoughts well, sometimes it does not fully convey the emotion that you are trying to share

### **4. Listening**

Listening is one of the most important parts of communication as it helps you understand the perspective of the communicator and effectively engage with them. The process of any communication takes a crucial value at listening correctly and responding appropriately.

### **5. Visual Communication**

Through visual messages like pictures, graphs, objects and other visual facets. Visual Communication is a crucial part of today's methods of conveying important information. It is used in presentations, televisions, etc.

### **6. Various Cultural and Intercultural Modes of Communication**

Several cultural modes of communication are specific to each area and culture. It can be symbolic usage of actions, body language, etc. The culture of a person is not just what they eat or wear but also how they communicate.(Knapp M.2010)

## **2.5 Relationship between interpersonal skills and effective communication:**

A broad range of competencies known as interpersonal skills allow people to engage with others in a variety of social and professional contexts. Communication, empathy, active listening, resolving conflicts, emotional intelligence, and flexibility are some of these abilities. Conversely, good interpersonal interactions depend on effective communication, which is the ability to convey ideas, information, emotions, and feelings in a clear, succinct, and meaningful way. Numerous studies have highlighted the intrinsic link between interpersonal skills and effective communication. For instance, research by Guerrero and Floyd (2006) emphasizes the role of nonverbal communication and emotional intelligence in fostering successful interpersonal relationships. Similarly, studies by Knapp and Hall (2010) delve into the significance of various communication channels and their impact on relational outcomes. Moreover, the essential skills of effective communication and interpersonal skills include the capacity to identify and analyse social cues, articulate one self, demonstrate empathy, and settle disagreements in a constructive manner. These proficiencies not only promote easier interactions but also aid in the development of relationships, mutual understanding, and trust. In summary, the relationship between interpersonal skills and effective communication is intricate and multifaceted, with each complementing and reinforcing the other in facilitating positive interpersonal dynamics and achieving desired outcomes in personal, professional, and social contexts.

### **2.5.1 Communication enhancement through interpersonal skills:**

Improving communication through interpersonal skills entails cultivating and perfecting the aptitudes required for meaningful engagement and bonding with people. These abilities help people communicate ideas accurately, comprehend the viewpoints of others, and establish wholesome connections. Research by Hargie (2011) in "Skilled Interpersonal Communication: Research, Theory, and Practice" explores strategies for enhancing communication through interpersonal skills, emphasizing the importance of active listening, empathy, and assertiveness. Additionally, studies by DeVito (2017) in "The Interpersonal Communication Book" provide practical insights and exercises for improving communication effectiveness through the development of interpersonal skills. These sources underscore the significance of interpersonal skills in enhancing communication outcomes, offering valuable guidance for individuals seeking to improve their communication competencies in various personal and professional contexts.

## Section Three

### 3.1 Experience

Let's talk about the journey of EFL students like us and how our daily experiences intertwine with the importance of interpersonal skills in improving our communication abilities. Every day starts with a mix of excitement and a bit of nervousness as we step into the classroom or join online sessions. We are eager to learn and improve our English language skills, but sometimes, the fear of making mistakes holds us back. However, as we engage with our teachers and classmates, we begin to realize that communication is not just about getting the grammar right or using fancy vocabulary. It is about connecting with others, understanding their perspectives, and expressing ourselves effectively. One of the good things about our journey is the support we receive from our peers and teachers. They create a welcoming environment where we feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions, and sharing our thoughts. This encouragement boosts our confidence and motivates us to keep pushing forward. But let's be honest, it is not always smooth sailing. We face challenges along the way, like struggling to find the right words, feeling self-conscious about our accents, or misinterpreting cultural cues. These obstacles can be frustrating and sometimes make us want to give up. Yet, it is during these tough moments that we realize the importance of interpersonal skills. Learning to listen actively, showing empathy towards others, and being patient with ourselves and each other are crucial in overcoming these challenges. As we continue on our journey, we are constantly reminded of the value of interpersonal skills in improving our EFL communication. Whether it is striking up a conversation with a stranger, participating in class discussions, or navigating social situations, these skills serve as our guiding light, helping us navigate the complexities of language learning with confidence and resilience. So, while the road ahead may have its twists and turns, we are ready to face whatever challenges come our way, armed with the knowledge that our interpersonal skills will always be our greatest asset in becoming proficient English communicators.

## 3.2 Reflection

Reflecting on the role of interpersonal skills in improving EFL communication, we are struck by the profound impact of these skills on our daily lives as students. From navigating language barriers to fostering meaningful connections with our peers, interpersonal skills serve as the cornerstone of our journey towards becoming proficient English communicators. One of the most uplifting aspects of our experience as EFL students is the sense of community and support that surrounds us. Despite the challenges we face, we are fortunate to have teachers, classmates, and resources that empower us to overcome obstacles and strive for success. However, it is important to acknowledge that our journey is not without its challenges. Whether it is struggling to express ourselves fluently, feeling self-conscious about our accents, or misinterpreting cultural cues, we encounter roadblocks along the way that can hinder our progress. Moreover, seeking out solutions to our problems has been instrumental in our growth as EFL learners. Whether it is seeking feedback from teachers, practicing with language exchange partners, or immersing ourselves in English-speaking environments, we have taken proactive steps to enhance our communication skills and build our confidence. In doing so, we have come to realize that improving our EFL communication is not just about mastering grammar rules or expanding our vocabulary. It is about fostering genuine connections, understanding different perspectives, and communicating effectively in diverse contexts. As we continue on our journey, we are reminded of the words of researcher Claudia Finkbeiner (2018), who emphasized the transformative power of interpersonal skills in language learning. By embracing the principles of active listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity, we are not only improving our EFL communication but also enriching our lives through meaningful interactions and connections. The role of interpersonal skills in improving EFL communication is undeniable. By embracing these skills and seeking out solutions to our challenges, we are paving the way for a brighter future filled with confidence, connection, and cultural understanding.

## **Section Four**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our research journey on the significance of interpersonal skills in improving EFL communication, it is clear that these skills are like the secret sauce in our language learning adventure. We have explored different types of interpersonal skills, like being good listeners, showing kindness, and working well in teams. We have also learned about how our body language and facial expressions can speak louder than words sometimes, and how being aware of our emotions helps us communicate better. Understanding the importance of interpersonal skills, we have seen how they help us develop better relationships with others and make our communication smoother and more effective. By sharpening our interpersonal skills, we have become better at expressing ourselves and understanding others, which has made our language learning journey more enjoyable and rewarding. Throughout our research, we have discovered that communication skills are at the heart of effective interpersonal interactions. From speaking clearly to using gestures and even writing emails, we have practiced different types of communication skills to become better communicators. By focusing on developing our interpersonal skills, we have seen firsthand how our communication has improved. Whether it is through listening more attentively, speaking with confidence, or working collaboratively in teams, we have found that our interpersonal skills have been the key to unlocking better communication in our EFL journey. In conclusion, our research has highlighted the importance of interpersonal skills in enhancing EFL communication. By understanding and practicing these skills, we have not only improved our language abilities but also become more confident and effective communicators in our everyday lives.

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