

# Exploring the Relationship between Communication Skills and Group Work Effectiveness among Undergraduate Students

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## ABSTRACT

Effective communication is essential in facilitating the exchange of information, ideas, and opinions within collaborative settings. In higher education, group work is widely used to encourage student interaction, cooperation, and problem-solving skills, and its success largely depends on students' ability to communicate effectively with one another. However, ineffective communication may lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, reduced participation, and poor group performance. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan. This study employed a quantitative research design using an online survey questionnaire distributed to 382 undergraduate students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from Ding et al. (2023), measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Communication skills were assessed using a frequency-based scale ranging from "never" to "always", while group work effectiveness was measured using an intensity-based scale ranging from "not at all" to "to a great extent". Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the relationship between variables. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students, indicating that students with better communication skills tend to perform more effectively in group work activities. Effective communication was found to contribute to better cooperation, clearer information sharing, improved problem-solving, and stronger group coordination. In conclusion, communication skills play a crucial role in ensuring the success and effectiveness of group work in higher education settings. The study highlights the importance of developing students' communication competencies to enhance collaborative learning experiences and academic performance, while also providing useful insights for educators and higher education institutions in designing strategies and activities that promote effective communication and teamwork among students.

**Keywords:** communication skills, group work effectiveness, undergraduate students, Spearman correlation, collaborative learning

## INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in enabling group members to plan tasks, exchange ideas, and collaborate effectively. The concept of communication has various interpretations depending on the context in which it is applied, including communication as a social process that influences human interaction and behaviour (Fahmi & Ali, 2022). Communication involves the transfer and exchange of messages in the form of facts, feelings, ideas, data, and information (Fahmi & Ali, 2022). According to Adu-Oppong and Agyin-Birikorang (2014), communication refers to the process of conveying knowledge and shared understanding from one individual to another. Effective communication involves understanding the needs and expectations of others and

delivering messages appropriately (Amrin & TutySariwulan, 2020). Although communication can be difficult to master, it remains an essential skill in ensuring successful collaboration, particularly in academic group work. In higher education, group work is commonly used as a collaborative learning approach in which students work together in small groups to complete assigned tasks (Agustina & Setiawan, 2020). Group work activities encourage students to share information, solve problems collectively, and develop interpersonal skills through active interaction (Irkinovich, 2021). Therefore, communication skills are considered one of the most important competencies that students should develop to improve teamwork effectiveness (Kćulo & Skendrović, 2010). Effective communication not only strengthens relationships among group members but also facilitates smoother information exchange, better coordination, and the achievement of project goals throughout the project life cycle (Ekwuno, 2022).

However, ineffective communication during group work may negatively affect project success and overall group performance. Olanrewaju et al. (2017) stated that poor communication can lead to project delays, low-quality outcomes, disagreements among group members, frustration, and low morale. Similarly, Subramaniam et al. (2020) reported that ineffective communication contributes to the failure of approximately one-third of projects. In academic settings, students frequently experience issues such as unclear meeting objectives, unequal contribution among members, and pressure to complete assignments within limited timeframes (Akindele, 2012). Additional challenges include role conflicts, personality differences, cultural diversity, and ineffective group management, all of which may hinder group effectiveness (Akindele, 2012). These issues highlight the importance of developing effective communication skills and positive group work characteristics to improve collaboration and minimise conflicts. Strong communication skills can contribute to better group dynamics, enhanced cooperation, and improved outcomes in collaborative academic projects. Despite the importance of communication in group work, limited empirical studies have specifically examined its relationship with group work effectiveness among undergraduate students in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication skills and group work effectiveness are widely recognised as interrelated constructs that play a critical role in collaborative learning and project success in higher education. Communication facilitates the exchange of ideas, information, and feedback among individuals working towards shared objectives. It is commonly defined as the process of transferring and exchanging messages in various forms, including facts, ideas, feelings, and data (Radovic Markovic & Salamzadeh, 2018). From a broader perspective, communication is a dynamic social process that shapes human interaction and influences behaviour in collaborative settings (Riyanto et al., 2017). In project-based environments, communication is consistently identified as a key determinant of success, often described as the “lifeblood” of effective teamwork (Hussain et al., 2018; Akintelu et al., 2023). Effective communication ensures clarity, coordination, and shared understanding during task execution (Ekwuno, 2022; Ward, 2018).

Communication skills refer to the ability to express ideas clearly while ensuring mutual understanding among individuals. These skills involve not only message delivery but also understanding the needs of others, engaging in meaningful interaction, and positively influencing group behaviour (Amrin & TutySariwulan, 2020). Poor communication, however, may lead to misinterpretation, reduced coordination, and failure in achieving group objectives (Gamil & Rahman, 2017). In academic group work settings, communication breakdowns may result in overlapping tasks, missed deadlines, and poor-quality outcomes (Ekwuno, 2022). Nevertheless, communication skills can be developed through experience and practice, making them essential competencies in collaborative learning environments.

Group work effectiveness refers to the extent to which a group functions efficiently in achieving shared goals through cooperation, coordination, and mutual responsibility. It involves collective engagement, where members share accountability, support one another, and evaluate both individual and group performance (Irkinovich, 2021). In higher education, group work is widely implemented as a pedagogical strategy to develop teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills (Brannen et al., 2021). It is also recognised as a high-impact

educational practice that enhances student engagement and prepares learners for workplace collaboration (Volkov & Volkov, 2015; Center for Teaching and Learning, 2025).

Effective group work depends on multiple interrelated factors, including communication quality, trust, shared goals, and adaptability among members. According to Ding et al. (2023), group work effectiveness is characterised by free flow communication, team flexibility to change, team trust, focus on goals and objectives, good information sharing, commitment from educators, collective understanding, and encouragement of initiative.

Free flow communication reduces misunderstandings and promotes idea exchange, improving coordination and performance (Iorhen, 2019; Malik et al., 2021). Team flexibility enables groups to adapt to changing conditions and respond effectively to challenges, enhancing productivity and problem-solving (He et al., 2014; Li et al., 2007). Team trust strengthens collaboration by encouraging openness and willingness to share ideas without fear of criticism (Amrin & TutySariwulan, 2020; Ishaq et al., 2019). Clear goal setting ensures that group members work in a unified direction, reducing conflict and improving coordination (Ding et al., 2023; Volkov & Volkov, 2015).

Moreover, effective information sharing enhances decision-making and knowledge integration, particularly in collaborative academic tasks (Hoozeboom & Wilderom, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Educators also play an important role in facilitating group effectiveness by guiding students through structured learning phases that support engagement and knowledge application (Assi et al., 2022). In addition, collective understanding ensures that knowledge, roles, and responsibilities are shared among members, improving coordination and reducing misunderstandings (Runhaar et al., 2014; Dong et al., 2017). Finally, encouraging initiative promotes proactive behaviour, creativity, and responsibility, which contributes to improved group performance (Kobushko et al., 2020; Lisbona et al., 2021).

Overall, previous studies indicate a strong conceptual link between communication skills and group work effectiveness, as communication underpins most dimensions of successful group collaboration. However, despite extensive literature on both constructs, limited empirical studies have examined their relationship among undergraduate students in the Malaysian higher education context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students. This design was chosen because data were collected at a single point in time to identify associations between variables. The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban, with a total population of 5,499 students from three faculties. A convenience sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 382 respondents.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed via the Google Forms platform. The instrument was adapted from Ding et al. (2023) and designed using two types of 5-point Likert scales according to the constructs measured. Communication skills were measured using a frequency scale ranging from “never” to “always”, while group work effectiveness was measured using an intensity scale ranging from “not at all” to “to a great extent”. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A gathered demographic information (gender and year of study) and Section B assessed respondents’ experiences in applying communication skills and group work characteristics during group activities.

Although reliability analysis was not conducted due to the unavailability of post-data collection testing, the instrument was adapted from previously validated scales reported in Ding et al. (2023), which demonstrated acceptable reliability in prior studies. Data were analysed using Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient to examine the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness. Spearman’s correlation is a non-parametric test used to measure the strength and direction of association between two ordinal variables

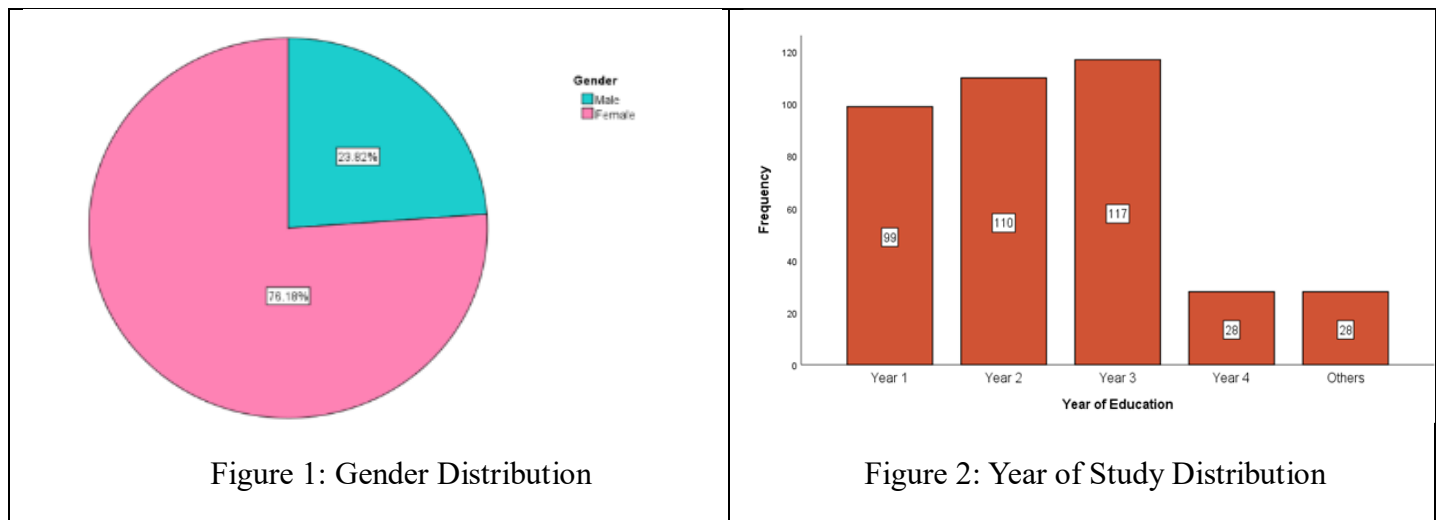
(Laerd Statistics, 2018). The interpretation of correlation strength was based on Cohen (2013), as adopted in Ding et al. (2023), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Strength Interpretation

Correlation Strength	Value Range
Weak	0.10 – 0.29
Medium	0.30 – 0.49
Strong	0.50 – 1.00

## RESULTS

The demographic profile of respondents is presented in Figures 1 and 2. A total of 382 undergraduate students participated in the study. Most respondents were female (76.2%, n = 291), while male respondents accounted for 23.8% (n = 91). In terms of year of study, the highest proportion of respondents were from Year 3 (n = 117), followed by Year 2 (n = 110) and Year 1 (n = 99). The smallest group consisted of Year 4 and “Others” categories (n = 28).



Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students. The results presented in Table 2, show that all dimensions of communication skills are significantly and positively correlated with all characteristics of group work effectiveness ( $p < 0.01$ ). The strength of the correlations ranges from moderate to strong positive relationships. The highest correlation values are observed between listening and good information sharing ( $\rho = 0.588$ ), conflict resolving and good information sharing ( $\rho = 0.593$ ) and listening and team flexibility to change ( $\rho = 0.565$ ). These indicate relatively stronger associations compared to other pairs.

Moderate correlations are observed in several relationships including persuasion and focusing on goals and objectives ( $\rho = 0.453$ ), self-disclosure and focusing on goals and objectives ( $\rho = 0.429$ ) and conflict resolving and focusing on goals and objectives ( $\rho = 0.478$ ). These findings indicate weaker but still significant positive associations between the variables. Overall, the results demonstrate significant positive relationships between communication skills and group work effectiveness across all dimensions.

Table 2: Correlation of Communication Skills and Characteristics of Effective Group Work

Spearman Correlation Rank Coefficient								
Group Work Effectiveness	Communication Skills							
	Persuasion	Able to Ask Effective Questions during Conversation	Explaining	Reinforcement	Listening	Conflict Resolving	Motivating	Self-Disclosure
Free Flow Communication	0.544**	0.572**	0.567**	0.527**	0.571**	0.552**	0.523**	0.531**

Team Flexibility to Change	0.512**	0.598**	0.535**	0.570**	0.515**	0.565**	0.526**	0.581**
Team Trust	0.498**	0.569**	0.532**	0.504**	0.565**	0.541**	0.537**	0.513**
Focusing On Goals And Objectives	0.453**	0.511**	0.518**	0.500**	0.522**	0.478**	0.526**	0.429**
Good Information Sharing	0.485**	0.550**	0.511**	0.498**	0.588**	0.593**	0.478**	0.507**
Commitment From Educators	0.431**	0.536**	0.505**	0.510**	0.565**	0.560**	0.511**	0.537**
Collective Understanding	0.504**	0.582**	0.553**	0.568**	0.532**	0.593**	0.511**	0.563**
Encouraging Initiative	0.518**	0.530**	0.529**	0.564**	0.559**	0.542**	0.521**	0.538**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that communication skills are significantly and positively associated with all dimensions of group work effectiveness among undergraduate students. Overall, the results suggest that stronger communication skills contribute to more effective group functioning, reinforcing the importance of communication in collaborative learning environments.

Persuasion demonstrates positive relationships with all dimensions of group work effectiveness, particularly free flow communication, team flexibility, and team trust. This suggests that persuasive communication contributes to creating an open and supportive group environment. Vijaylakshmi (2023) supports this view by emphasising that persuasion encourages active participation and idea sharing, while Derin et al. (2020) highlight its role in influencing beliefs and behaviours, thereby enhancing adaptability and trust within teams. However, the relatively weaker associations with goal orientation, information sharing, and educator commitment suggest that persuasion alone may not fully determine structured coordination within groups.

The ability to ask effective questions shows consistently strong relationships across all dimensions of group effectiveness, indicating its central role in group communication. According to Ding et al. (2023), questioning facilitates information sharing, problem identification, and knowledge exchange. Edmondson (2012) further emphasises that questioning promotes psychological safety and trust, which enhances openness and collaboration. These findings suggest that questioning behaviour is a key mechanism for strengthening group coordination and engagement.

Explaining is also strongly associated with all dimensions of group work effectiveness, particularly collective understanding, trust, and information sharing. Clear explanations improve transparency and help group members understand tasks and responsibilities, reducing misunderstandings and improving coordination (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Ding et al., 2023).

Reinforcement demonstrates consistently strong positive relationships across all group effectiveness dimensions. This indicates that recognition and appreciation of contributions play an important role in sustaining motivation and collaboration. Werdi (2021) explains that reinforcement strengthens desirable behaviours, while Costley (2021) highlights that motivation increases when group success is perceived as a collective responsibility.

Listening shows strong correlations with all dimensions of group effectiveness, particularly communication flow, trust, and collective understanding. Ding et al. (2023) emphasise that active listening ensures accurate message interpretation, while Kluger and Itzhakov (2022) note that feeling heard enhances engagement and strengthens group cohesion.

Conflict resolution is positively associated with all group effectiveness dimensions, although a comparatively moderate relationship is observed with goal orientation. This suggests that while conflict management is

essential for maintaining group harmony, clear goal setting may also depend on additional factors. Stahl and Maznevski (2021) highlight that effective conflict resolution strengthens trust and adaptability within teams.

Motivating communication is positively related to all dimensions of group effectiveness, particularly collective understanding and initiative. Fahmi and Ali (2022) explain that motivation is enhanced through clear communication of expectations and performance feedback, which encourages engagement and participation.

Self-disclosure shows positive relationships with trust and collective understanding. Ding et al. (2023) explain that self-disclosure reduces uncertainty and enhances interpersonal understanding, while Jalali Sohi et al. (2020) emphasise that openness improves flexibility and group performance.

Overall, the findings confirm that communication skills play a crucial role in enhancing group work effectiveness. Among the communication dimensions, questioning, listening, and explaining appear to be particularly influential in strengthening group collaboration, coordination, and shared understanding.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between communication skills and group work effectiveness among undergraduate students using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed that all dimensions of communication skills are significantly and positively correlated with group work effectiveness characteristics. Overall, most relationships demonstrated strong positive correlations, while a smaller number of relationships showed moderate positive correlations, particularly between persuasion and goal orientation, information sharing, and educator commitment, as well as between conflict resolution, motivation, and self-disclosure with selected dimensions of group work effectiveness. These findings suggest that although all communication skills contribute to group work effectiveness, certain skills may play a more prominent role in specific aspects of group functioning. In particular, communication behaviours that support interaction, clarity, and engagement appear to be more influential in enhancing collaborative outcomes. In conclusion, the study confirms that communication skills are essential in improving group work effectiveness among undergraduate students. Strengthening these skills can contribute to better collaboration, coordination, and overall group performance in academic settings.

## Limitations Of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between communication skills and group work effectiveness, as data were collected at a single point in time. Secondly, the use of convenience sampling may restrict the generalisability of the findings to the wider population of undergraduate students, as the sample may not fully represent all student groups. In addition, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response bias, including social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of the items. Furthermore, reliability analysis was not conducted in this study due to data and procedural constraints; however, the instrument was adapted from previously validated research by Ding et al. (2023), which reported acceptable reliability in prior studies. Future research is encouraged to revalidate the instrument within different populations to strengthen measurement consistency.

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