

# **Communication Skills among Accounting Students in Higher Education: Issues, Related Problems and Possible Solutions.**

## *Abstract*

*Communication skills are central to the interaction between the giver and the recipients of information. Accounting starts with the gathering and processing of information. This paper examines the issues and related problems associated with communication skills which employers, academic and accounting students consider important. It also identifies the similarities and differences in perception between these groups.*

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose and significance of the study**

Drucker (1974) stated that communication is central to business. Communication is the medium by which information and instructions are interchanged in order to achieve the aims of the organisation (Rosenblatte, 1982). In order to be useful, information should be communicated effectively. Effective communication is particularly essential to the accounting profession for which communication is one of the key objectives (Littleton and Zimmerman, 1962).

The ability to communicate is one of the most important attributes an accountant can possess. Communicating involves people in getting their views, opinions, or ideas understood and accepted, or, if not accepted, then given due consideration.

The accounting curriculum of most universities seems to place emphasis on the technical aspects of accounting. The undergraduates are able to communicate with

one another but they may not be able to communicate effectively with non-accounting graduates because they have not acquired the much needed communication skills.

The 1984 Study Committee appointed by the American Accounting Association recommended that accounting educators should treat accounting as information development and distribution function, and accordingly university education for future accountants should focus on the central theme of information identification, measurement, analysis and communication' (Bedford and Shenkir, 1987, p.88). However, no studies in Malaysia have considered the viewpoint of accounting undergraduates with regards to their communication skills. For the purpose of this study, undergraduates are those who have not completed a tertiary degree majoring in accounting.

The major areas of academic training in communication skills have been, traditionally, in the areas of verbal (oral and written) communication (Juchau and Galvin, 1984; McLaren, 1990).

The importance of communication skills has been recognised by members of the accounting profession. Miller (1984) identified the ability to communicate as essential in the early years of the accounting profession. Lothian (1985) in his study of the accounting curriculum, found that interpersonal skills, teamwork, report writing, speaking and presentation skills were important , but they were not taught in the accounting undergraduate program.

The issues of English communication skills for accounting students is a vital one for any higher institutions. Accounting students must be able to communicate, both orally and in writing, in each required course throughout the degree program. Their communication abilities will be demonstrated by completing various assignments including : research papers, written article summaries, case write-ups, presentations, and audits (written reports and oral presentations).

A dominant theme of accounting curriculum reform has been the need to improve graduates' writing skills. In 1986, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) adopted the recommendations of a national committee (Anderson, 1985) which, among other recommendations, mandated additional communication skills.

### **Organisation of the study**

This paper is organised as follows: The second chapter reviews the past studies in the areas of communication skills in accounting education. The third chapter outlines the research method and the treatment and collection of data. The fourth chapter reports and discusses the results. The fifth section draws conclusion and recommendations and offers suggestions for future research.

### **Contribution of the Research**

With the new era of globalization and office automation, the accounting profession is entrusted with additional responsibilities in managerial needs. Thus, accountants need to possess the relevant communication skills.

From this research it is hoped that the Business and Accounting School of UM will improve and upgrade the teaching of communication skills in the accounting programs. Since not much research had been conducted in Malaysia with regards to the importance of integrating communication skills in the accounting programs, it is hoped that this research will help to realize the importance of the Business and Accounting Faculty to incorporate communication skills in this discipline.