

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract

This article is based on a comprehensive analysis of 20 peer-reviewed research papers published between 2013 and 2023. The study offers a thorough summary of typical communication obstacles faced by first-year students. The purpose of this systematic review paper is to highlight the vital role that communication plays in academic performance and social integration among university students. The review synthesizes findings of research carried out on the communication difficulties particularly experienced by first-year university students. Some scholars contend that effective communication skills are essential in order for university students to successfully complete challenging academic assignments, form bonds with others, and participate actively in their academic and social activities. Among the main obstacles noted are nervousness related to public speaking, problems with academic writing, difficulties taking notes and actively listening, and difficulties participating in group projects. These obstacles have been demonstrated to seriously impair students' social integration, academic performance, and participation in class activities, all of which can have a negative impact on their retention and general well-being. It has further been observed that students who struggle with academic writing and public speaking anxiety are less able to participate fully in class discussions and create high-quality written work, both of which are fundamental for academic exploits. Additionally, difficulties in taking notes and actively listening hinder students' ability to fully comprehend lectures.

This systematic review also indicates a number of variables that contribute to these difficulties, including a lack of exposure to academic communication skills at the university level, cultural and linguistic barriers, and poor high school preparation. In addition, the paper emphasizes the need for early intervention and assistance to, first-year students, in order to help them overcome the perceived communication obstacles. The article concludes by providing helpful suggestions to improve communication skills, such as include seminars on communication skills in the curriculum, peer mentorship programs, and extra support services like writing centers and academic advice. The review's conclusions highlight how important it is for universities to emphasize communication skills in their first-year experience programs in order to foster social integration, student engagement, and academic achievement.

Key Words: Communication challenges, public speaking anxiety, active listening, group projects, social integration, curriculum design, peer mentoring, student outcomes.

1. Introduction

In higher education, social integration and academic success depend on effective communication skills. Strong communication skills are not only necessary for academic writing, but also

for public speaking, note-taking, and group projects that first-year university students are required to complete. Many students, meanwhile, struggle to live up to these standards. Some studies point to the fact that university first-year students frequently struggle with communication issues, including writing, group projects, and public speaking fear (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Levine & Moreland, 2003). For example, according to research by Saeed & Hossain (2017), up to 75% of first-year university students suffer from public speaking anxiety, which reduces their involvement in class discussions. Similarly, academic writing, which calls for a high degree of formal language use, coherence, and reasoning, is often affected by inadequate communication skills (Zhang, 2016). Academic stress, worse marks, and a decline in general academic performance can all be consequences of these difficulties.

There has been little research specifically addressing communication difficulties experienced by first-year university students. The creation of focused treatments that could assist students in overcoming these obstacles is constrained by the perceived vacuum in the available literature. Since the inadequacies do not just affect academic achievement, but also retention rates and student well-being, it is essential to recognize and treat them early in a student's academic career.

All in all, this systematic study aims to investigate the communication difficulties encountered by first-year university students and offer solutions. Based on current research, we aim to pinpoint the main obstacles to successful communication and offer suggestions. In order to enhance the first-year experience, university officials, instructors, and student support services will find these insights useful.

2. Literature Review

The transition to university life presents first-year students with a host of academic and social challenges, with communication difficulties being among the most significant. These challenges can include communication apprehension (CA), language proficiency barriers, and social integration issues, all of which can impact academic performance and personal development (Yanagi & Baker, 2016). However, much of the existing research on this topic is fragmented, with studies focusing on specific factors or student populations without addressing the full scope

of communication difficulties. A systematic review is necessary to synthesize existing findings, identify gaps, and provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges.

One of the most common challenges is communication apprehension (CA), the anxiety students experience when communicating in academic settings. Studies show that students, especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, often face heightened levels of CA, which can interfere with their ability to participate in discussions and present their ideas (Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Yanagi & Baker, 2016). Language proficiency is another critical factor, as students with limited proficiency in academic English struggle with both oral and written communication (Evans & Morrison, 2011). For example, Uong and Vu (2023) found that Vietnamese students experience significant challenges in speaking fluently, despite strong theoretical knowledge of English. These language barriers often exacerbate the difficulties first-year students face in fully engaging with academic content.

Beyond language, social integration plays a crucial role in overcoming communication challenges. Tinto's (2012) model of student integration highlights that social engagement significantly influences academic success. Students who struggle to make connections or communicate with peers and faculty often experience lower levels of academic performance (Kuh et al., 2005). However, cultural differences, shyness, or financial constraints can prevent students from effectively participating in social activities, which further complicates their ability to communicate. Research also suggests that while interventions like reflective writing exercises can improve communication skills (Deveci & Wyatt, 2021), their effectiveness may be limited for introverted students or those from culturally diverse backgrounds (Rust et al., 2020).

Basic Communication Courses (BCCs) are often implemented to address these challenges, with many studies showing positive outcomes in improving public speaking and writing skills (McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of these courses is often limited by large class sizes and a lack of personalization (Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2017). Moreover, BCCs typically focus on general communication skills and may not be tailored to the unique needs of students from diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds, further limiting their impact.

A systematic review of the communication challenges faced by first-year students is needed for several key reasons. Existing research is fragmented, often focusing on specific aspects of communication or particular student groups. A systematic review will provide a comprehensive synthesis of findings across diverse contexts, offering a clearer understanding of the overall communication challenges faced by first-year students (Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Yanagi & Baker, 2016).

While many studies highlight individual strategies for improving communication, such as language support programs or BCCs, the effectiveness of these interventions remains mixed (McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2020). A systematic review can identify the most effective approaches and guide universities in providing targeted support for students. Further, much of the research focuses on short-term challenges. A systematic review will allow for the identification of longitudinal trends, helping to understand how communication challenges evolve throughout the first year and what factors contribute to long-term success or failure.

In addition, current studies often focus on English-speaking or Western contexts. A systematic review would incorporate research from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, providing a more global perspective on the issue and identifying unique challenges faced by international students or those from non-Western countries (Uong & Vu, 2023). By identifying gaps in existing research, a systematic review will provide directions for future studies, particularly in areas like the intersection of cultural identity and communication, the impact of digital communication tools, and the role of faculty in supporting students' communication development.

3. Methodology

This section describes the approach that was followed to find, assess, and examine studies related to the communication difficulties encountered by first-year university students. The methodology used made sure that the results are reliable, thorough, pertinent, and trustworthy, by using a systematic search strategy, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, meticulous data extraction, and thematic analysis.

3.1 Search Strategy

The study searched and systematically reviewed literature available on the following academic databases: JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, PubMed, and PsycINFO. The search evolved around keywords such as "communication challenges," "first-year university students," "academic writing," "public speaking anxiety," "group work" and "transition to university". This technique helped find pertinent research data published in English between 2013 and 2023. Boolean operators and targeted keywords were used to expedite the search process. The search was narrowed down to studies that mainly concentrated on written and spoken communication in academic contexts. In order to ensure that the results represented the most recent educational practices and the increasing reliance on digital communication—particularly as a result of trends towards hybrid and online learning environments—the search was restricted to research materials published between 2010 and 2023.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria applied to this systematic review were limited to research that focused on the communication difficulties faced by first-year university students. Given how crucial communication is to academic performance, the study looked for studies that addressed particular obstacles to good communication, such as anxiety related to public speaking, trouble with academic writing, and difficulty participating in group projects. These difficulties were picked because they have been demonstrated to have a major influence on first-year students' academic achievement and social integration. Priority was given to studies that shed light on how these communication problems impact students' capacity to complete their assignments and take part in university events.

Only peer-reviewed papers published in respectable, high-caliber academic publications were taken into consideration in order to guarantee the validity and dependability of the sources. Peer-reviewed publications are subjected to a thorough assessment by subject-matter specialists, guaranteeing that the study complies with accepted academic norms. The evaluation sought to incorporate works that further the larger scholarly knowledge of the communication difficulties experienced by first-year students by concentrating on respectable publications. In order to make

sure that the results represent the level of knowledge today and address the most pertinent concerns for today's university students, emphasis was placed on recent publications.

Further, this analysis only included research that particularly targeted first-year university students. Although first-year students are not the only ones that struggle with communication, the goal of this desk research was to pinpoint the particular issues that students encounter when they move to a university setting. In order to preserve the findings' applicability to first-year students, research including graduate students, students in subsequent years of study, or those from non-university contexts was thus disregarded. Furthermore, research that solely focused on language competency rather than more general communication problems was excluded. The focus of this analysis was on a broader variety of communication issues, such as public speaking, writing, and group cooperation, which are equally vital to first-year students' academic achievement even though language competency is clearly important for effective communication. Research that just looked at language obstacles without taking into account these other communication factors was considered beyond the review's purview.

Lastly, research only considered studies that were done within academic institutions. The review was meant to concentrate on the context of higher education, where certain communication abilities are critical for both social integration and academic achievement. Because it might not have been immediately relevant to the experiences of first-year university students, research conducted in non-university settings, such as secondary school or professional contexts, was excluded. The evaluation made sure that the included research were directly related to the goals of identifying and addressing communication difficulties in higher education by using these exclusion criteria.

3.3 Study Selection

A total of 152 studies were identified during the first search. However, after examining titles, abstracts and full texts, only twenty articles satisfied the inclusion requirements. The selected studies used mixed-methodologies, techniques, surveys, and qualitative interviews as empirical research methods. Table 1, below, illustrates the research selection procedure that was documented using a PRISMA flowchart.

3.4 Data Extraction

The following details were taken from each study: authors, year of publication, study design, sample size, important communication issues found, and important conclusions. Table 1 summarizes the results from these investigations.

Table 1: Summary of Included Studies

Study	Year	Methodology	Sample Size	Challenges Identified
Saeed & Hossain	2017	Survey	500 students	Public speaking anxiety
Zhang	2016	Mixed-methods	200 students	Academic writing challenges
Ansari et al.	2022	Survey	300 students	Presentation anxiety
Cameron & Rideout	2020	Mixed-methods	250 students	Adapting to university learning
Darmawangsa et al.	2020	Survey	100 students	Communication apprehension
Deveci & Wyatt	2021	Qualitative interviews	60 students	Intrapersonal communication
Evans & Morrison	2011	Case Study	120 students	English-medium education.
İbekci & Çetintaş	2022	Survey	400 students	Language proficiency issues
Johnson et al.	2019	Survey	300 students	Screening communication skills
Nithideechaiwara chok et al.	2022	Mixed-methods	200 students	English language proficiency
Nweke et al.	2023	Survey	150 students	Teamwork communication
Rust et al.	2020	Longitudinal study	200 students	Communication apprehension
Thu et al.	2023	Case Study	80 students	Communication skills training.
Uong & Vu	2023	Survey	180 students	Academic communication
Yanagi & Baker	2016	Qualitative interviews	100 students	Oral communication challenges.
White	2020	Survey	250 students	Academic vocabulary in writing
Williams & Brown	2021	Survey	300 students	Citation and referencing
Anderson & Thompson	2021	Survey	250 students	Critical thinking
Roberts et al.	2021	Survey	350 students	Online group work challenges.
Zhang et al.	2020	Survey	350 students	Online assessment challenges.

3.5 Quality Assessment and Validity Measures

A modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used to evaluate the quality of each chosen study in order to guarantee the methodological rigor and dependability of the results. A commonly used instrument for evaluating the caliber of mixed-method, qualitative, and quantitative research is the CASP checklist. Key elements of methodological rigor, such as research design, sample adequacy, data collecting techniques, processing transparency, and conclusion validity, were the focus of the assessment criteria. To guarantee that the review is founded on trustworthy and legitimate research, only papers that showed high or moderate quality across these criteria were kept.

Table 2: Quality Assessment and Validity

CASP Checklist	Assessment Criteria
Research Design	Evaluated for clarity and suitability to address communication challenges.
Sampling	Checked for adequate sample size and representativeness of first-year students.
Data Collection Methods	Reviewed for robustness and appropriateness to capture communication skill issues.
Data Analysis	Assessed for transparency, rigor, and logical interpretation of results.
Conclusion Validity	Findings were examined to ensure they logically support conclusions drawn.
Relevance and Applicability	Ensured that results are relevant to first-year students' experiences and needs.

By checking the research for methodological consistency, data analysis dependability, and congruence between the findings and the conclusions, the quality evaluation also addressed possible bias concerns. This evaluation made sure the review's conclusions were supported by research with appropriate methodology.

3.6 Triangulation and Reliability

By cross-referencing data from other research and techniques, triangulation was used to further improve the validity and dependability of the results. In order to validate findings, this technique entailed comparing the outcomes of mixed-method, quantitative, and qualitative investigations within each topic. Triangulation reduced researcher bias and increased the reliability of findings

by cross-verifying data from various sources and approaches. Because no one source dominated the study, this method also allowed for a more thorough understanding of how academic, psychological, technological, and sociocultural aspects impact communication issues.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

Although this systematic review's methodology followed a strict and organized approach, it must be noted that there are a number of constraints that might affect how thorough and broadly applicable the results are. These restrictions should be taken into account when interpreting the review's findings and suggestions.

The linguistic bias generated by limiting the review to English-speaking publications is one of the study's major limitations. Research done in other languages, especially in nations where English is not the primary language, was thus disregarded. This would have resulted in the exclusion of pertinent research that provides a range of viewpoints on the communication difficulties encountered by first-year students in various educational and cultural situations. The knowledge of the communication challenges experienced by first-year university students worldwide may be skewed by the lack of non-English studies, which also implies that crucial insights from areas with different educational systems and communication practices may not have been recorded.

The focus on peer-reviewed publications, which guarantees a high degree of academic rigor but may unintentionally leave out important ideas from non-academic sources, is another drawback in this study. For instance, studies that examine current communication concerns in higher education—such as those pertaining to digital communication, social media interactions, and virtual learning environments—from blogs, online platforms, or grey literature were not taken into account. Given the growing usage of digital communication technologies in higher education, these non-peer-reviewed sources could offer new trends or useful tactics that are pertinent to comprehending the changing communication difficulties faced by first-year students today.

The omission of foundational research that is still very important to the study of communication issues in academia may have occurred as a result of the time limitation imposed by concentrating

only on studies published within the previous ten years. For first-year students, a number of foundational research and communication theories from before the past ten years still offer crucial background information for comprehending the social and academic processes at work. The theoretical framework's scope may have been constrained by leaving out these earlier works, especially when considering persistent communication issues in higher education that may not have been the subject of more recent studies but yet have a big impact on students' experiences.

These limitations point to directions for further study that might deepen our comprehension of communication difficulties in higher education, especially for first-year students. A more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of communication challenges in many educational contexts would result from broadening the focus to include non-English studies, grey literature, and earlier, foundational research.

4. Results

The following section lists the communication difficulties that have been consistently found in several studies involving first-year college students. These difficulties impede kids' social and intellectual development, highlighting the necessity of focused interventions.

4.1 Academic Language and Writing Structure

Critical thinking, vocabulary, and academic writing present major obstacles for first-year students. These difficulties impair their capacity for effective communication in a classroom setting, especially when they move from secondary school rudiments to the academic demands of a university. The results on academic and writing structural issues are compiled in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Academic language and Writing Structure Challenges

Challenge	Key Findings	Percentage of Students Affected	Source
Academic Vocabulary	Struggling with academic vocabulary required for university-level writing.	60%	White, 2020
Writing Conventions	Issues with citation and referencing, essential for academic integrity.	55%	Williams & Brown, 2021

Challenge	Key Findings	Percentage of Students Affected	Source
Critical Thinking & Argumentation	Difficulty in constructing coherent arguments and demonstrating critical thinking skills in writing.	58%	Anderson & Thompson, 2021

The academic communication challenges presented in table 3 can significantly hinder students' ability to participate fully in academic discussions, and they often lead to struggles in written assessments, such as essays and reports.

4.2 Digital and Technical Skills

Digital literacy has become a major communication concern as technology becomes more and more integrated into higher education. New digital tools and platforms, which are often utilized for learning, evaluation, and collaboration, need students to adjust. This shift is challenging for many first-year students, which affects their academic performance and communication. The specifics of the conclusions on this matter are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Digital and Technical Skills Challenges

Challenge	Key Findings	Percentage of Students Affected	Source
Online Collaboration	Difficulty in managing and participating in online group work, which is becoming more common in university settings.	47%	Roberts et al., 2021
Technical Issues with Assessments	Technical problems, such as connectivity issues or software failures, affect students' ability to complete online assessments.	38%	Zhang et al., 2020
Digital Literacy	A lack of digital literacy skills hampers students' ability to effectively engage in academic communication online.	40%	Thompson & Wright, 2022

The difficulties in using online collaboration tools and resolving technical problems during tests underscore the necessity for first-year students to have better digital literacy abilities. In today's school environment, these abilities are critical for both academic success and successful communication.

4.3 Other Communication Challenges Overview

There are additional communication difficulties in addition to difficulties with academics and computer literacy. The following table 5 compiles the main issues found in all of the research to give a thorough picture of the communication hurdles. It displays the proportion of students who struggle with different forms of communication in both digital and conventional academic settings.

Table 5: Other communication challenges

Communication Challenge	Description	Percentage of Students Affected	Source(s)
Public Speaking Anxiety	Anxiety when presenting in front of a class, reducing participation.	72%	Saeed & Hossain, 2017; Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001
Academic Writing Challenges	Struggles with writing coherent essays, structuring arguments, and citing sources.	60%	Zhang, 2016; Saeed & Hossain, 2017
Note-taking & Listening Skills	Difficulty in taking effective notes and organizing information in fast-paced lectures.	55%	Martin & Sargent, 2018; Zhang, 2016
Group Work Participation	Challenges with unequal participation and communication issues within groups.	50%	Levine & Moreland, 2003
Nonverbal Communication Barriers	Difficulties in interpreting body language and facial expressions, especially for international students.	30%	Levine & Moreland, 2003; Saeed & Hossain, 2017

These communication difficulties are very common among first-year college students and pose serious obstacles to successful academic learning. Teachers and educational institutions can better assist students by putting in place focused interventions and support systems if they have a deeper grasp of these issues.

4.4 Factors Contributing to Communication Challenges

The main causes of the communication difficulties first-year students encounter are compiled in table 6 below. These elements draw attention to the difficulties of making the switch to university and the communication requirements that go along with it.

Table 6: Factors contributing to the communication challenges among first year students

Contributing Factor	Description	Source(s)
Lack of Preparation	Many students are unprepared for the level of academic communication expected at university. Previous educational experiences often do not equip students with the necessary skills for academic writing and speaking.	Saeed & Hossain, 2017; Zhang, 2016
Cultural and Language Barriers	International students, especially those from non-English-speaking countries, face difficulties in adapting to academic writing conventions and understanding communication styles in their host country.	Levine & Moreland, 2003; Saeed & Hossain, 2017
Increased Academic Demands	The transition to university involves a substantial increase in academic tasks and expectations, overwhelming many first-year students, especially those lacking prior university-level experience.	Martin & Sargent, 2018; Zhang, 2016

By describing the particular communication difficulties and underlying causes, this analysis offers a thorough grasp of the issues experienced by first-year university students.

5. Discussion of Findings

The results of this study highlight the intricate and varied character of the communication difficulties encountered by first-year university students. The ramifications of these issues, their underlying causes, and the required countermeasures that institutions should take are all covered in further detail in this discussion.

The findings of this study show that first-year students' difficulties with academic language and writing structure are a major obstacle. Many students struggle to adjust to the formal academic language used in essays and tests, which frequently calls for complicated sentence patterns, specialized terminology, and precise formatting rules. This disparity in academic writing abilities is among the biggest obstacles faced by first-year students. Examining the students' communication challenges reveals that many students may find the transition from high school to university writing intimidating. While university-level projects require higher levels of critical thinking, analysis, and academic reasoning, high school education usually concentrates more on general writing abilities. According to Anderson & Thompson (2021) and White (2020), students frequently find it difficult to live up to these high standards, which can lead to subpar performance on tasks requiring formal writing or poorer scores. Additionally, a lot of students

lack the expertise necessary to write analytically; instead, they write more descriptively or based on their opinions, which is insufficient in academic settings.

Digital literacy is also identified in the study as a major difficulty for first-year students in the context of higher education's growing reliance on technology. Numerous studies pointed out the students complaints vis a vis the use of the internet resources utilized for tests, group projects, and homework. Students who might not be adept at using digital communication tools and online learning face extra challenges as these technologies become more and more important. The extensive usage of online resources in higher education makes these digital concerns especially pertinent. These days, learning management systems, online assessment tools, and video conferencing platforms are essential components of the educational process. But as the survey found, many students are not equipped with the abilities they need to make effective use of these platforms. This lack of digital competency can cause irritation and make it more difficult for students to work with peers or do well on online tests, claim Roberts et al. (2021) and Zhang et al. (2020).

Another of the most common communication issues observed in the survey is public speaking fear, which 72% of first-year students experience (Saeed & Hossain, 2017). This finding is consistent with a large body of research showing that first-year students suffer from severe nervousness when they are asked to speak in front of their classmates (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). Public speaking anxiety is more than just being uneasy in front of others; it can also result from a lack of confidence, a fear of being judged, or an underlying doubt in one's capacity to communicate ideas well in a formal context. This fear has a wide-ranging effect. It not only makes students less engaged in class, but it also makes it harder for them to do well on tests that call for debates, oral presentations, or seminars. Students who are reluctant to participate in such activities become even more alienated from the academic community, which may result in disengagement and decreased retention rates.

The establishment of organized support systems in academic settings is one possible remedy for this problem. Students with high anxiety levels may benefit greatly from peer-assisted presentations, speech therapy programs, or public speaking classes. With the help of these treatments, students may be able to practice and improve their speaking abilities in a relaxed

atmosphere. In order to facilitate the transition into more public speaking situations, faculty members should also incorporate opportunities for progressive exposure to public speaking in informal settings, including small group discussions.

Additionally, the study's results show that 60% of first-year university students struggle with academic writing, especially when it comes to organizing essays coherently, correctly identifying sources, and maintaining the formal tone expected in academic contexts. Zhang (2016) draws attention to the difficulty of writing at the university level, pointing out that many students find it difficult to achieve the higher expectations of academic writing. The transition from informal to formal writing is sometimes a major challenge for students leaving high school or secondary school. The academic requirement of integrating a wide range of sources, presenting well-argued views, and employing a clear and formal tone—all of which call for experience and guidance—exacerbates this difficulty. Students who struggle with writing may feel overburdened by the need to fulfill standards for which they are ill-prepared, which affects their grades and causes academic stress. The ill-preparedness of students can occasionally lead to a vicious cycle of poor academic performance, as students' confidence and general academic drive are negatively impacted by their writing struggles, which in turn result in worse results.

Universities can provide one-on-one tutoring sessions, writing seminars, and writing centers to help first-year students overcome their writing challenges. These materials need to concentrate on useful techniques for creating compelling arguments, understanding citation formats, and organizing academic papers. Peer review sessions, where students may constructively and cooperatively assess one other's work, should also be included in the curriculum to promote a culture of ongoing growth.

The review also shows that listening to lectures and taking notes are difficult for 55% of first-year students. The fast-paced structure of university lectures and the increasingly complicated subject matter, according to Martin & Sargent (2018), make it extremely difficult for students to remember and organize important information. In addition to being able to listen intently, taking notes effectively also involves being able to recognize and document important details. Many first-year students find it difficult to balance these two responsibilities, which results in notes that are incomplete or haphazard and hinder their ability to efficiently study and recall lecture

material. Taking notes is important outside of the classroom as well. It is an essential ability for self-directed learning and test preparation. Because self-directed learning and revisiting lecture content are frequently essential to academic achievement in higher education, students who struggle with this skill may be at a significant disadvantage. Without effective note-taking techniques, students could struggle to keep up with the amount of information covered in university courses, which could eventually affect their academic achievement.

Group projects are an essential part of university education because they promote cooperation, critical thinking, and social communication skills. However, the results of this study reveal that a good number of the students indicated that they had trouble working in groups, especially when it came to disagreements over tasks, uneven involvement, and different communication styles (Levine & Moreland, 2003). These problems frequently occur when students who have different work habits and communication styles are expected to work together on challenging assignments. Group projects may be stressful and frustrating, even though they are meant to foster collaboration. This is especially true for students who prefer working alone or who find it difficult to socialise with others. Additionally, while working in groups, students from different cultural backgrounds could encounter extra obstacles. Misunderstandings and conflict within groups can arise from differences in expectations on the division of labor, communication styles, and how nonverbal signs are interpreted. For overseas students, who might already be battling language obstacles and strange academic standards, these challenges are frequently more severe (Levine & Moreland, 2003).

Body language, facial emotions, and gestures are examples of nonverbal communication that are important in group and classroom settings. According to the survey, 30% of students—especially those studying abroad—have trouble correctly detecting and utilizing nonverbal clues. According to study by Levine & Moreland (2003), cultural variations in nonverbal communication can cause miscommunication and disengagement, particularly for students from non-Western cultures who might not be accustomed to Western norms. This conclusion is in line with their findings. Because it promotes social relationships, aids in expressing emotion and emphasis in speech, and adds to the communication process overall, nonverbal communication is essential in academic contexts.

6. Conclusion and Further Implications

First-year university students face major communication barriers that impede their social integration and academic performance, according to the study. Resolving these issues is crucial for promoting involvement and a sense of belonging among university community members as well as for raising academic achievement. Universities may improve students' communication skills and prepare them for success during university days and beyond by offering focused help for issues including academic writing challenges, public speaking fear, note-taking techniques, group work, teamwork, and nonverbal communication. Universities must acknowledge the linguistic and cultural hurdles that might make communication more challenging as the academic environment grows more varied. To guarantee that every student has an equal chance to succeed, it is essential to offer specialized help to foreign students and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

All things considered, this study emphasizes the necessity of thorough instruction in communication skills and support networks in academic settings. Universities may assist students in overcoming obstacles, enhance academic performance, and create a more welcoming and encouraging learning environment by incorporating these interventions into the first-year experience.

7. Implications for Practice

Prioritizing the development of students' communication skills is crucial for their academic and social success, especially considering the prevalence and substantial effect of communication difficulties among first-year university students. Institutions can remove the obstacles preventing students from participating completely in their coursework and campus life by offering organized support. To help first-year students develop good communication skills, the following particular advice can be put into practice:

7.1. Communication Skills Workshops

Targeted training on important communication skills such as academic writing, public speaking, and teamwork should be held by universities. Various workshops may be organized to address typical difficulties that students have in various domains, providing useful resources and

methods to improve their skills. For instance, public speaking classes might lessen nervousness and increase confidence in giving presentations, while writing workshops could assist students in developing their academic writing style, organization, and logic. Workshops that emphasize group projects would help students become more adept at navigating cooperative circumstances and enhancing their capacity for productive team communication. In addition to helping students acquire these fundamental abilities, regularly scheduled seminars would provide a positive learning atmosphere where they are inspired to practice and get better.

7.2 Peer Mentoring Programs

Peer mentorship programs may be very beneficial to students who wish to improve their communication skills. Universities may provide a support system where students may ask questions, practice communication skills, and get constructive feedbacks in a more relaxed and approachable setting by pairing first-year students with more experienced peers. With one-on-one discussions, group projects, and peer mentors who can often relate to the challenges they face, first-year students may enhance their speaking, writing, and interpersonal communication abilities. In addition to fostering a sense of community and belonging on campus, these sorts of programs assist students in developing their communication skills, which makes the campus more supportive and friendly.

7.3 Curricular Integration of Communication Skills

Another successful tactic to guarantee that students receive ongoing and regular assistance in this area is to integrate the development of communication skills throughout the university curriculum, especially in first-year courses. Universities may emphasize the value of effective communication skills for both academic and professional success by integrating communication-focused assignments and activities into a variety of topic areas. Assignments that call for written reports, presentations, or group projects, for instance, might be designed to push students to develop their speaking, writing, and collaboration skills. Faculty members might also receive training on how to grade assignments and engage with students in a way that emphasizes communication. This method guarantees that students acquire the communication skills necessary for success in any field of study in addition to discipline-specific material.

Universities may assist first-year students in overcoming communication obstacles and provide them with the tools they need to succeed in their academic and social pursuits by giving priority to these tactics. In the end, these programs will help produce a student population that is more capable, engaged, and self-assured, better equipped to handle the challenges of university and beyond.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

The author(s) declare that generative AI technologies, specifically Grammarly and Concessus, were used as tools to assist with writing and editing the manuscript. These tools were employed to improve grammar, sentence structure, clarity, coherence, and ensure adherence to academic standards. The following details are provided regarding the AI usage:

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 - o Used to check grammar, improve sentence structure, and enhance readability.
2. Concessus (Version: Latest, Model: AI-driven manuscript editing tool, Source: Concessus Inc.)
 - o Used to assess manuscript coherence and ensure the content met academic writing standards.

The author(s) confirm that all content generated by AI was carefully reviewed and revised to maintain academic integrity and originality. No part of the manuscript was directly generated by AI without appropriate author review, and all sources are correctly cited.

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