

# Interpersonal Communication Skills among the Master's Students in TVET

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## Abstract

This study aimed to identify the level of interpersonal communication skills element among final year undergraduate students in University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. In particular, these studies look mastery and interpersonal communication skills in the four elements of verbal communication skills, non-verbal communication skills, listening skills, and feedback skills. Researchers have prepared a questionnaire as an instrument to collect data from respondents. A total of 54 respondents were selected to answer the questionnaire. The study used data on descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The data collected were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, according to the order of T test and Pearson correlation. The findings will show that most verbal communication skills high level of proficiency in interpersonal communication. The results will indicated the difference between the sexes in interpersonal skills and no relationship between the levels of interpersonal skills with under graduate educational background of respondents. Several suggestions were made to improve interpersonal communication among students at the university.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal communication skills, Technical and Vocational Education

## 1 Introduction

Malaysia is still on the way leading to the formation of a developed country. Various challenges and obstacles should be encountered, namely to create a society that is prosperous, economically strong and progressive and can use increasingly sophisticated technology. An important element in addressing these challenges is the activation of the human resource needs by improving skills through education and comprehensive training (Safarin and Zolkifli, 2005). Furthermore, education in Malaysia since the beginning has undergone various changes or reforms that are influenced by the increasingly rapid technological developments leading up to the competition of high quality human resources (Abdullah, 2007).

According to Latif (2006), the main strategy to ensure that the country is able to face the challenges of globalization and sustained economic growth is to create a human resource base that supports dynamic knowledge-based economic development, increase productivity and competitiveness. According Sidin (1998), Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) plays a role in building the community, especially to make Malaysia one of the industry sustainable and competitive among the developed countries and also able to produce a source of skilled technical manpower to perform jobs based on skills technical. This is supported by Dare and Leach (1999) stating Technical and Vocational Education as well as the Human Resources Development is a major contributor to the technical labour market in Malaysia.

Resource development is very important and can be met through the education and skills training. According to Marzuki (1999), a system of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) always have a direct reform to meet current needs. In keeping with the current needs of each individual to master technical skills with good working environment for the world of work requires high competitiveness. According to him, an important skill in today's working environment is communication skills.

Communication is a skill that is very important in their daily life. With the advent of effective communication, individuals capable of triggering ideas and information as well as a force of good relationship without any problems, regardless of race, religion and social status. Experts in the field of communications believe that poor communication is the root cause of most problems and effective communication is the solution to most problems (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

### 1.1 Background of the Problem

FPN practiced in Malaysia and show that there exists a close relationship and linkages as well as an integrated aspect of effective communication between teachers and students, between principals and teachers, and between teachers and teacher. Moreover, it can be seen through a deep understanding of the National Education Philosophy, educators must adopt the characteristics and values of humanity known as soft skills to the students

during the learning process. Among the soft skills are communication skills, problem solving skills, can work in groups, general knowledges. As always, effective communication is the basis for quality education. Soft skills are fostered and nurtured while receiving education in higher education institutions is very important to prepare your working life. This is because the employer has criteria that must be met for an employee.

In Malaysia, the higher education institutions have realized that in order to produce first class human capital requires a new alternative to increase the level of thinking as well as mastery of soft skills in a dynamic self by the passage of time. Therefore, a program to improve interpersonal skills among students in institutions of higher learning have been formulated by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2006). Interpersonal skills are among the skills that are considered essential by employers to increase productivity (National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) (2003). Differences inherent skills among graduates of higher education institutions with the skills required by the employer to be the cause of the poor quality of graduates (Zaleha *et al.*, 2007).

There are various causes of today's graduates are difficult to get employment and unemployment problems. One of the main causes is that many graduates fail in the early stages of the interview. This is due to weakness in communication skills between the interviewers. According to Rahman (2000) states that 80 percent of people fail in his career is due to their inability to communicate and connect with others. The failure of individuals to communicate well not only for English but also the Malay language is spoken and the official medium for teaching and learning.

Most employers find graduates lack skills is the root cause employers to be careful to hire graduates working in private firms and government. As a result of these factors, a large number of graduates failed the interview. Found that their failure in communication skills can cause problems in terms of social existence, cooperation, communication techniques and conflict management (Zaleha *et al.*, 2007). The Jali (2007), graduates have excellent results but still not able to argue or produce brilliant thoughts on various issues.

#### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nowadays, the piece belongs to a degree that could not guarantee would get a job when she is a graduate. The demand for human resources with the skills required by employers is very high because nowadays most of the work is replaced with cutting edge technology. Therefore, students should equip themselves with other skills academic outstanding achievements such as communication skills. An effective communication skill is one of the skills that are of concern to employers when hiring.

In moving towards globalization, Malaysia need a workforce or human capital, skilled and possesses strong interpersonal communication skills, particularly in education. This clearly shows that interpersonal communication is very important to graduate students in producing graduates who have skills and interpersonal communication quality.

Therefore, the researcher felt that this study should be carried out to find out whether the graduate students of the Faculty of Technical Education, University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) and interpersonal communication skills are required at high and serve as instructors in polytechnics or community colleges Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE).

#### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives to be achieved through the study undertaken are:

1. Identify the elements of the level of interpersonal communication skills are the most used by graduate students in the teaching and learning process in TVET.
2. Identify whether there are differences in the level of interpersonal communication skills between boys and girls among graduate students in TVET.
3. Identify whether there is a relationship between the level of interpersonal communication skills and educational background of a bachelor.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, it is hoped that this study will answer the following questions: -

1. What elements of the level of interpersonal communication skills are the most used by graduate students in the teaching and learning process in TVET?
2. Are there differences in the level of interpersonal communication skills between boys and girls among graduate students in TVET?
3. Is there a relationship between the level of interpersonal communication skills and educational background of a bachelor?

#### 1.5 Research hypothesis

This study focuses on a number of hypotheses based on the research objectives as follows:

H<sup>o</sup> There was no statistically significant difference between the levels of interpersonal communication skills of students of the opposite sex.

H<sup>a</sup> There was statistically significant difference between the levels of interpersonal communication skills of students of the opposite sex.

H<sup>o</sup> There was no significant relationship between the levels of interpersonal communication skills to students with undergraduate educational background

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### 1.6 Significance of the Study

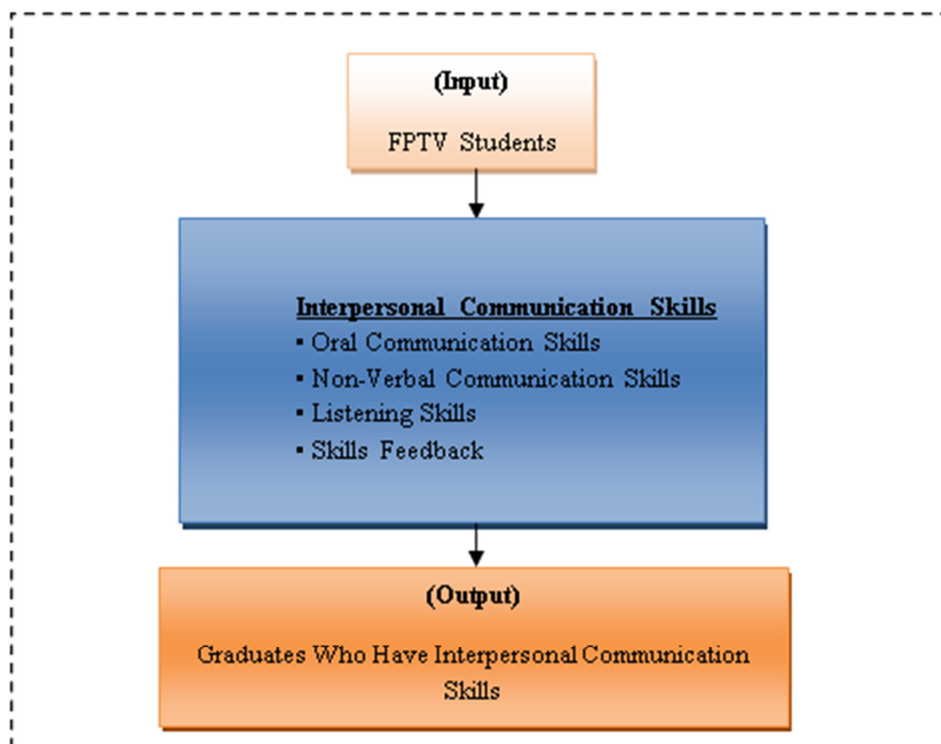
This study is specifically designed to allow students to identify what level of mastery element of interpersonal communication skills among final year undergraduate student in TVET. The results of the study can be used to identify the weaknesses and interpersonal communication skills of students while taking the initiative to improve and increase the level of interpersonal communication students in the working world in the future.

This study also provides a guide to the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) in their study in stepping up our efforts to help and improve teaching and learning in improving the mastery and application of interpersonal communication skills among students.

This study will guide the university in raising efforts or programs related interpersonal communication skills among undergraduates who take any of the courses at the institution.

### 1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study proposes a research framework of the Interpersonal Communication Skills among the Master's Students. It indicates that elements of interpersonal communication skills as independent variable and level of interpersonal skills as dependent variable.



## 2 Literature Review

Performance of a university is always measured based on the level of interpersonal communication skills of graduates (Ronald, Quaid and Lindsay, 2005). Now, interpersonal communication skills of graduate students should be expanded not only at national level but at the international level. In other words, the graduates produced by universities are able to penetrate the wider job market. By offering new programs of study and review the existing curriculum of the program, the graduate level interpersonal skills can be enhanced. Interpersonal communication skills are one of the essential skills to be applied in education nowadays.

### 2.1 Education and Development

The goal of education in Malaysia is to produce knowledgeable human capital, individuals with pure skill, responsible citizens, as well as moral values and strong ethics, national unity as well as help develop a workforce with the technical abilities that will increase the science economy (Government of Malaysia, 1991). In the study Mohamad (2007), education planning in Malaysia is generated by the Planning Commission of Education, Ministry of Education Malaysia. Other departments responsible as Part of Information and Research, National Development Planning Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Office, the Universities, the Department of Education states and other agencies related to education. Each committee is guided by the Cabinet

(Cabinet) through the Minister of Education.

Higher labour productivity and interpersonal skills is required on an annual basis to further improve the performance of the education sector. By 2020, Malaysia's workforce is expected to increase to 15.3 million compared to 7 million at present (Yaacob, 2000). The Government has outlined a number of strategies to further adapt to the development. The strategy is to increase productivity through enhanced knowledge, skills and expertise to work and improve the country's human resource base to ensure continuity of supply of manpower with the knowledge, technical skills and additional skills like interpersonal skills, communication skills and thinking skills.

## 2.2 Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is an important thing in our daily life. A person living in this world will always use interpersonal communication. Almost every day a person will communicate with each other either at work, at school, at college, at home or in public places. According to Beebe & Beebe and Redmond. (1999), most people spend as much as 80 to 90 percent of the time awake with interpersonal communication.

According to Hassan and Mohamed (2000), Interpersonal communication is the process of how one is to share experiences with other individuals. As we all know, every person has the experience and knowledge. People who communicate with each state experience and knowledge respectively. By the way, they discover the meaning of the exchange. According to the statement Centko (1998), interpersonal communication is selective, systematic, unique, and a process of interaction between people which develop knowledge of the individual and other people and share experiences and gain meaning as a result of changes made.

Interpersonal communication has four principles of interpersonal communication is inevitable, interpersonal communication is the thing that cannot be changed back, interpersonal communication is complicated and is contextual (Beebe et al., 1999). The first principles of interpersonal communication is inevitable means a person will always communicate with others regardless of place and atmosphere. Interpersonal communication occurs not only through words but it also occurs through non-verbal such as the eyes and body language.

The second principle is that interpersonal communication is a thing that cannot be changed back. It is the same as the Russian proverb that "Once a word goes out of your mouth, you're free to never swallow it again" (Beebe et al., 1999). The third principle is complicated interpersonal communication. This means that it is not easy to explain things to others when communicating. Fourth principle is that interpersonal communication is contextual which is the context that involves five psychology, relationships, situation, environment and culture.

## 2.3 Elements of Communication Skills

Communication skills involve effective communication in Malay and English in different contexts. Malay is the main language and English is an international language which is very important. Therefore, it becomes one of the important elements. There are eight elements of communication skills as follows:

- i. Ability to communicate ideas clearly, effectively and confidently, both orally and in writing.
- ii. Ability to practice active listening skills and permission is given by the feedback.
- iii. Ability to make clear presentation with confidence and in accordance with the listener.
- iv. Ability to use technology in the presentation.
- v. Ability to negotiate and reach an agreement.
- vi. Ability to communicate with people of diverse cultures.
- vii. Ability to develop personal communication skills.
- viii. Ability to use non-verbal skills

(Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2006)

According to Perl, Murray and Lutrick (2005), verbal communication is a skill that is unique and must be learned by using beautiful words and effective. It requires one to understand the things that are said and how it is transmitted. Based on OUM (2007), verbal communication refers to communication between toasted and it emphasizes human talk language and speech in an opinion or share meaning with others.

Oral communication is also considered the best communication in order to convey the message to someone. A person who speaks in a style and a smooth and orderly conversation is a feature of the language of success. A person who is not satisfied and comfortable with what the friendly will produce language that is not smooth and does not have a purpose and meaning. This in turn signifies one is not committed to the ideas that we want to. According Onn (2003) found that oral communication skills of graduates are still weak. Graduates are not able to speak properly when communicating with customers.

Non-verbal communication is not involved speech. According to Baba and Madon (2003), nonverbal communication is the message conveyed not by our words but through facial expressions, eye gaze and gestures as well as focus and passion for all that is said by the other. Sometimes it is shown by clear and often happens unconsciously. It also is supported by Hassan and Mohd (2000) which states that non-verbal communication is more popular with nonverbal communication or body language which is separate from the relationship, including

distance, time orientation, gesture, facial expression, eye movement, touch, voice and pace of the conversation. They also stated that the body also communicate even if it does not speak for others can read several types of information on the person who is speaking, from physique, height, weight, skin, eyes and hair. Here it is more focused on the appearance of a person who is speaking.

Beebe et al. (1999) also noted that nonverbal communication is a form of communication that does not involve writing or speech or conversation, and it gives the meaning of things. In addition, non-verbal communication is a lot of emotions involved. Bull (2001) express non-verbal communication is a form of communication that does not involve words or speech but it involves intonation of voice, pace of speech, body language, facial expressions, posture, size and appearance of a person. Eye, face and body gestures is one of the key features in the process of communication and interaction. Eyes sharp, dull, earthy, closed, blinking rapidly and so has the sense and meaning of its own. Eyes too, who can interpret another person whether good or interpretation is not good. Similarly, facial and body gestures a person can we read or interpret (Salleh, 2002).

Listening is one of the important activities yet so many people do not bother listening this (Riemer, 2000). Active listening and practice will enhance the effectiveness of communication. Listening skills are not confined to the listener but also a presenter. The presenter should heed the alert to what is being announced by the listener through the response by the listener (Hassan and Mohamed, 2000). Listener needs to have skills like focusing on what is communicated by others, a willingness to see things from other points of view and be able to detect the hidden meanings behind the words and sentences uttered (Riemer, 2000).

Listening can be defined as a complex process used to respond to what is heard (Beebe et al., 1999). An individual who communicates must use specific steps in the process of listening to produce effective communication. Good listening process requires the use of voice, feeling and vision (Scarnati, 1998). Skill in listening is more important than skill in speaking. This is based on the study of Beebe et al. (1999), in which an average American uses 80 percent of the time in the day to communicate with others. Of that percentage, 45 percent was spent in listening to what others are saying.

Garside and Kleiner (1991) also noted that listening is an important skill in communication skills as it requires a person to pay attention to a conversation of others to fully understand any message. Actually, the main function one needs to have skills in listening is to learn, to influence people, build relationships, to have fun and help others (Hassan and Mohamed, 2000). Based on this statement, many people are good at talking but not good to hear.

Feedback can be defined as a response given by an individual after hearing someone else is talking. Feedback can occur either in the form of words or deeds. Feedback is also composed of two types of feedback, namely positive feedback and negative feedback. Positive feedback is like praise, appreciation and recognition while a negative feedback as abusive (Hassan and Mohamed, 2000). According to Dowd et al. (2002), the response is actually a mechanism that occurs between employers and employees in a variety of things such as information sharing, teamwork and problems occur which can increase the productivity of a country. According to McLagan (1989) using a model approach HRD Practice. McLagan also stressed the interpersonal skills that include feedback is very important skill. This is supported by Hamzah (2001) stated that the mastery of these skills are very important and necessary to meet the needs of the organization to a higher level of organization.

According to the Bridgespan (2003), the state feedback is dependent on the style of communication that involves the recipient or the provider's own response, the extent of hospitality properties that are available within the receiver and the giver of feedback and analytical properties available within the receiver and the giver of feedback. Most of the feedback given or received is dependent on the style or styles of communication that happens.

An individual will receive and respond to every day of the forms and under different conditions. If anyone can understand and use it well, feedback can be used to create better communication and more open. As such, an individual should have their own skills in giving feedback to enable communication activities can walk better, smoother and more openness.

#### 2.4 Previous Research Related Interpersonal Communication Skills

Studies related to communication skills have been conducted by previous researchers. Among them are Paton (1996) conducted a study at the University of Western Australia (University of Western Australia) entitled "Generic Skill Survey". In this study, researchers examined the development of generic skills among final year students at the university based on the courses taken. The findings of the study have listed 15 generic skills needed by students. Key skills needed by students, according to Paton is communication skills. There are two important findings in this study are:

- i. Generic skills of the least developed in students during the study were in their communication skills.
- ii. Generic skills are the most important and valuable in the eyes of students is communication skills.

In addition, a study conducted by Hashim (2005), shows the method of teaching and learning lecturers and industry training programs contributed significantly towards improving communication skills among students. The study also found that the level of communication skills is at a medium level. The study also showed that



communication skills are an important element that is needed in industries other than academic excellence. In addition, there are researchers who conducted the study related to relationship communication skills and academic achievement. According to Dare and Leach (1999) who conducted this study in Urbana to see interpersonal communication students in Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) with reference to the study of Reddick (1997) which states that there is no relationship between educational background with the application of communication but have a high relationship between interpersonal communication students with curriculum HRD Practice McLagan. According to Mustafa, Buntat, Salleh, Madar and Maznor (2011), in the study of interpersonal competence among university students based on the model of Human Resource Development (HRD) McLagan Practice shows that there is no relationship between the level of implementation of interpersonal competencies with educational background undergraduate students. In addition, the study Riemer (2000), found that communication skills are not related to a student's academic achievement. This means that if a person has a good academic record, students do not necessarily have good communication skills and vice versa.

Men and women show different types of achievement. Women are more prominent with good grades achievement of boys in early schooling. But the opposite is true when you are in high school. Female achieve common standards in all subjects while men showed more selective, they do their best and worst subjects liked the subject did not like (Mohamad, Esa and Junoh, 2007). Gender differences in the interpersonal communication verbal and non-verbal communication much impact on social work education in at least three cases training social work students, interaction between faculty or staff member and the interaction between faculty and students (Lange and Janice, 1996). Sex differences in communication has been studied by a number of sources or external researchers. Hearing someone is different and it depends on the gender in which when an individual is male or female, to listen, that their actions are different and this is probably due to hearing how they are different. According to Lange and Janice (1996), the way men hear is from the ground or meaning here guys listen carefully at the beginning of the conversation to perform an action or decision, while the girls were just listening to things that are important to take an action.

In addition, the way of vision or eye findings when communicating orally vary by gender where men about using context or finding points while the female is much more a curiosity to ask questions and stare at someone's eyes when communicating and thus always want to maintain a conversation. While most of the conversation initiated by women, but men will control the topics discussed are no less favourable than to other topics. While the women who started a conversation, but it is not as expected after several studies made by researchers, it appears is more men talk and prefer to intervene and disrupt a conversation.

According to Amiruddin, Abdullah and Aziz (2006), there are significant differences between the level of generic skills possessed by male students and female students enrolled in the new academic session KUSTEM Jun 2005/2006. The mean scores of female student's skill level was higher than male students. But in contrast to the findings of a study that was done by Adnan (2005) indicated no significant differences in generic skills between the sexes and, indirectly, the results of this study support the research conducted by Hassan et al. (2005), which states that the application of skills by teachers not by gender.

Based on the data obtained on the differences in the findings of the eye, and the use of a self-disclosure when communicating this question reveal that girls and boys may have different skills and different academic programs while becoming a student. In addition there are also other studies that show females lack communication skills, especially in verbal skills and non-verbal than boys. This review is from study of Wright et al. (2006), who found that students who took a course of medical men have the skills to communicate with patients with higher than female students.

It can be said that, not all girls capable of communicating and not all boys are weak in communication skills. Not necessarily even boys and girls have different levels of communication skills, particularly in interpersonal communication skills. Communication issues involving gender is actually a lot depends on several things. This is based on statements by Mulvaney (2005) in which gender differences in communication is dependent on religion, culture, communications and social status of a person. In addition, she said that people related to each other.

In conclusion, not all girls have weaknesses in communication skills and not all boys have higher interpersonal communication skills. Sometimes, the level of interpersonal communication skills are the same for both sexes this. As such, the study needs to be done to determine whether there a difference between the two boys and the girls in interpersonal communication skills majored in technical and vocational education.

## 2.5 Communication Process Model

The model is used to facilitate the communication of a performer understand the communication process that takes place. There are six basic elements of the communication model of the source, receiver, message and channel. According to Ismail and Wok (2002), the source is the cradle of the communication process. It may be individuals, groups or anyone who initiate communication with producing the message. However, the message is the idea or feeling to be shared between source and receiver. The message contains the symbols of the verbal and non-verbal.

Communication channels are intermediate or roads used to send messages from a source to a receiver such as voice, body movements, phone, and other writings. Vary according to the type of communication channel that is formal or informal. Formal channels are channels which have a predetermined order such as channel power within the organization. While for non-formal channels, the nature of the personal and social order (Ismail and Wok, 2002).

The initial model is designed to explain the meaning of communication is the Lasswell model. This model is the simplest model proposed by Lasswell in 1948 to state that the communication element source, message, channel, receiver, effect and how the elements relate to each other. Lasswell model also known as the basic model of communication (Ismail and Wok, 2002).

Next, SMCR model presented by David K. Berlo in 1960 (Samson, 2001). Berlo model uses four basic components of the communication process that Source (Source), Message (Message), Channel (Channel) and Receiver (Receiver). Although this model is simple, but Berlo interpret each element in detail by listing every feature of each elements. Figure 2.1 below shows the SMCR Model.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

According to Wiersma (2005), states that the design of the study done to find the answers to all the questions raised in the study. Therefore, the study design is a guide on how methods and procedures to obtain data and also a plan in the process of achieving the objectives of the study. There are various designs and methods studies, each of which has specific features such as data analysis techniques and distinctive.

The study was conducted in the form of a quantitative survey method based on the category of quantity as numbers, scores and frequency as a result of the use of questionnaire. According Piaw (2006), survey research is one of the most popular methods for the use of comprehensive, preferred operating mode, how to collect data quickly, use a large sample size, the information can be collected directly from the respondents and the results of the study can be generalized to the population accurately and effectively. Thus the first step in this research is the analysis of documents. This step is to create a benchmark and can find the variables and indirectly can be formed to be the domain of study. Next generation instruments include questionnaires. This study will identify the criteria required for each selected domain.

#### **3.2 Population and Sample**

Purposive sampling selected for this study in which the sample was selected from a population according to the purpose of the study. The information can also be added to collect information from respondents, and to analyse the information to answer the research questions. Sampling is taking part of that population. It is a good way to cut costs and reflect the entire population. As is known, the sample is the source for data. For this study, the population consisted of undergraduate students of the Faculty of Technical Education and Vocational semester session 2013/2014. The total number of students is fifty-four (54) students

#### **3.3 Instrument Review**

Rensis Likert (1932) as modified by Abdul Ghafar (2003), suggesting that the index should be constructed by adding the items associated with a concept. Likert Scale score was chosen because of the scale is easily constructed and controlled by the researchers and most of the respondents are familiar look Likert scale use. Likert scale questions are used to control the issues raised in line with the research questions in order to achieve the research objectives.

Moreover, this form of the question easier to analyse for the analysis. There are two types of items used in the questionnaires, the item multiple-choice and Likert scale items. Questions using multiple choice items consist of gender and educational background Bachelor. While to analyse ordinal data type of survey respondents, the item Likert scale used. Likert scale using five scales, each scale rated the score that matches the 1 = 'Very Low', 2 = 'Low', 3 = 'Medium', 4 = 'High', and 5 = 'Very High'.

#### **3.4 Data Collection Procedure & Data Analysis Plan**

Data will collect using self-administered questionnaires to examine the preceding issues because responses could be easily quantified and summarized, data could be collected quickly, inexpensively and efficiently, and a large number of participants could be reached in a short span of time. After collecting the information from the questionnaires, all data will be transfer into the SPSS software, and questions were being coded to enable for analysis using Statistical Packages for the Social Science (SPSS) which is PC version 19. The analyses that are going to be examined in the study will include reliability test, correlation, and descriptive statistics.

### **4 Conclusion**

Expectations or initial assumptions for this study are available on the hypotheses that have been made by researchers in chapter 1, that there is a direct effect or a relationship in Interpersonal Communication Skills among the Master's Students in TVET. It means that what the elements of the level of interpersonal communication skills are the most used by graduate students in the teaching and learning process in TVET or

whether there are differences in the level of interpersonal communication skills between boys and girls among graduate students in TVET and also whether there is a relationship between the level of interpersonal communication skills and educational background of a bachelor. In addition, the findings also will conform to the expectations of the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between demographic factors such as gender, age and length of service in influencing the Interpersonal Communication Skills among the Master's Students in TVET. Anticipation is not just a hypothesis the researchers only, but also based on a literature review that has been made.

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