

# A Correlational Study on Personal Development Skills in Relation to Communication Confidence and Interpersonal Communication Among TVET Students

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## Abstract

Malaysia is rapidly evolving in educational and economic landscape with a social and technical workforce. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector is crucial to the development of graduates who are not only skilled in technical skills but also able to work in a team-oriented environment. This study aims to examine the relationship between personal development skills, communication confidence, and interpersonal communication among students enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs at Politeknik Mukah. This study employed a quantitative correlational approach, and a total of 326 TVET students participated in the study. The results revealed significant and strong positive correlations between communication confidence and interpersonal communication with personal development skills. These findings suggest that TVET institutions and industrial cooperation should incorporate strategies in developing programs that could strengthen personal development skills among TVET students. In conjunction with Industry 4.0, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector must attain holistic growth, and this will align to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which encourages the provision of quality education and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG8) which promotes decent work and economic growth.

**Keywords:** - Personal development skills, TVET students, holistic growth

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## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is rapidly evolving in educational and economic landscape with a social and technical workforce. Therefore, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector is crucial to the development of a social and technical workforce. According to Yong & Ling (2023), employer expectations continue to diverge, particularly in the field of communication and interpersonal skills. Therefore, the contradiction ultimately led to improvements in curricular, industrial cooperation reforms, and an increase in unemployment.

According to Ministry of Higher Education (2020), Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 outlines the importance of achieving soft skills in improving behavioural ability among the workforce from 75% to 80% by 2025. The institution of Politeknik Mukah needs to produce graduates who are not only skilled in technical skills but also able to work in a team-oriented environment. Despite these policy directions, many TVET institutions continue to prioritize technical skills over soft skills, resulting in graduates who are technically competent but lack the interpersonal and emotional capabilities required in the workplace. Addressing this imbalance requires a systemic shift in curriculum design and educator training,

ensuring that personal development is treated as a core outcome of vocational education.

Hence, programs in Politeknik institutions must intensify personal development skills in their curriculum to be excellent TVET institutions. In developing employability skills for graduates, hands-on industry-involved activities are critical. The technical skills must correlate to personal development skills in shaping well-rounded graduates who can contribute meaningfully to Malaysia's socio-economic advances (Majid et al., 2024).

Producing high-quality TVET graduates is very important for achieving sustainable development goals and fostering a productive economy. Consequently, it encourages the provision of quality education (Sustainable Development Goal 4) and promotes decent work and economic growth (Sustainable Development Goal 8) (McLeod & Marshall, 2023). The recognition of the importance of soft skills among the workforce in Malaysia is crucial, however, many TVET graduates are facing challenges in demonstrating effective personal development skills, even though it is already embedded in the Politeknik curriculum.

This study aims to fill the gap in the relationship between communication confidence and interpersonal communication skills, as well as personal development, among students at the Politeknik Mukah, as it has not yet been explored in the local context. The results aim to improve the development and implementation of the curriculum, enhance industrial cooperation, and increase employability among TVET students, particularly Politeknik students, in achieving sustainable development in education.

## 2. Literature Review

Personal development skills are recognized as essential to TVET student success and align with the national aspiration for employment and lifelong learning. Although the practices of the TVET curriculum have shown that technical skills are well established, the integration of personal development elements remains contradictory, and it is particularly prominent in industry sectors that require high levels of interpersonal interaction. Therefore, enhancing personal development skills in the curriculum is seen as a necessary step towards the production of quality graduates.

The technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector must go beyond technical training and incorporate soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and ethical values to meet the expectations of advanced industries. Malaysian TVET curriculum practices revealed that while technical competencies are well-established, the integration of personal development skills elements remains inconsistent across institutions (Azmi & Salleh, 2024).

A professional teacher plays a critical role in nurturing students' personal growth. When educators adopt student-centered approaches and receive institutional support, they are better equipped to foster emotional and interpersonal

skills among learners. This aligns with Malaysia's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and quality education that nurtures holistic development. Industry 4.0 requires TVET institutions to cultivate digital readiness alongside personal competencies, such as communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence. It is revealed that on-the-job training and immersive technologies like virtual reality can enhance personal development skills by simulating real-world challenges and encouraging reflective learning (Rajamanickam et al., 2025).

Communication confidence is a foundational element in the development of personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, and self-management among TVET students. It influences how individuals engage with peers, instructors, and industry professionals, especially in collaborative and problem-solving environments. Jamaludin et al. (2019) emphasize that interpersonal and technical communication confidence are essential for students to express technical ideas, collaborate effectively, and adapt to workplace dynamics. It is found that students who demonstrate higher communication confidence tend to perform better in hands-on tasks and show greater personal development outcomes such as initiative, leadership, and adaptability at the workplace (Magembe, 2021).

This aligns with Malaysia's TVET transformation agenda, which prioritizes holistic graduate development to ensure that students are not only technically skilled but also personally competent and industry ready. According to Bassah & Noor (2023), industry experts perceive a lack of communication confidence among TVET graduates, which will negatively impact their ability to collaborate effectively, demonstrate leadership, and adapt to dynamic workplace environments. According to Cahyadi et al. (2024), the organizational culture encourages open expression of ideas and opinions, which reflects a climate that supports communication confidence among employees.

Interpersonal communication, defined as the dynamic exchange of information through verbal and non-verbal means, is foundational to personal development. Ndiung & Menggo (2024) argue that interpersonal communication encompasses encoding and decoding messages, responsiveness, and ethical engagement, all of which contribute to a learner's ability to collaborate, solve problems, and adapt to diverse environments. These competencies are essential for personal growth, particularly in vocational settings where teamwork, client interaction, and workplace adaptability are vital.

Varma (2024) & Barseli et al. (2019) conclude, strong interpersonal communication skills will build positive relationships and navigate social interactions effectively. Therefore, interpersonal communication fosters self-esteem, reduces stress, and enhances life satisfaction in the work environment. In the TVET sector, where practical skills are often prioritized, interpersonal communication is sometimes overlooked despite its importance in workplace readiness. Jalaludin et al. (2014) emphasize that graduates with robust soft skills, particularly communication

abilities, are increasingly valued in the job market, as cited in Azhari et al. (2025). This aligns with the goals of TVET Malaysia 2025, which seeks to produce holistic graduates equipped with both technical and interpersonal competencies to meet the demands of Industry 4.0 and the evolving workforce.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational approach to examine the relationship between personal development skills, communication confidence, and interpersonal communication among students enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs at Politeknik Mukah. The correlational approach was selected to identify the strength and direction of associations between variables without manipulating them (Pallant, 2020). A total of 326 students participated in the study, representing various academic semesters and departments. SPSS version 27 software was used to analyze descriptive statistics to summarize demographic information and describe the distributions of variables. An analysis of Pearson correlation was conducted to determine the strength of the relationships between communication confidence and interpersonal communication on personal development skills. To assess the reliability of the instruments used, Cronbach's alpha was calculated.

### 4. Result and Discussion

A total of 326 TVET students of Politeknik Mukah participated in the study. The result showed that the gender distribution was balanced, with 51.5% (168) male and 48.5% female respondents. Regarding academic semesters, the highest proportion of respondents was from Semester 2 (22.7%) and Semester 5 (20.9%). Department-wise, the largest number of participants was from the Department of Commerce at 27.3%, followed by Civil and Mechanical Engineering at 19.3%. In terms of race, most respondents were Indigenous Sarawakians (56.7%), followed by Malays (36.2%).

The reliability analysis of the tools utilized in this study is shown in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values for all three measured constructs suggest good to excellent internal consistency. Specifically, the independence variable of Communication Confidence showed the greatest reliability ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ), followed by Interpersonal Communication Skills ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) and Personal Development Skills ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). These results suggest that the measurement scales used in the study are reliable and consistent in capturing the intended constructs.

Table 2 provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between communication confidence, interpersonal communication skills and students' development skills among TVET students, using Pearson correlation. According to Pallant (2020), correlation coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 are considered weak, those between

0.30 and 0.49 are considered moderate and those between 0.50 and 1.0 are considered strong.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )

Variables	Total Item	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Personal Development Skills	5	0.80
Communication Confidence	5	0.90
Interpersonal Communication Skills	5	0.84

Table 2: Pearson correlation between communication confidence, interpersonal communication skills and students' personal development skills

Variables	Personal Development Skills	
	Sig.	Pearson Correlation (r)
Communication confidence	0.00	0.81
Interpersonal communication skills	0.00	0.71

Based on Table 2, the results reveal statistically significant and strong positive correlations between both independent variables and the dependent variable. Specifically, communication confidence shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.81$  with a p-value of  $p = 0.00$ , indicating a very strong and highly significant relationship. This suggests that students who possess greater confidence in their communication abilities are more likely to exhibit higher levels of personal development skills. According to Jamaludin et al. (2019), communication confidence is essential for students to express technical ideas, collaborate effectively, and adapt to workplace dynamics and all of which contribute to personal growth and maturity.

Correspondingly, interpersonal communication skills are also significantly related to personal development skills, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.71$  and a p-value of  $p = 0.00$ . This strong positive correlation implies that strong interpersonal communication skills, which are a critical component of personal development, will build positive relationships and navigate social interactions effectively. Therefore, interpersonal communication fosters self-esteem, reduces stress, and enhances life satisfaction in the work environment (Varma, 2024; Washington et al., 2013).

Overall, the results highlight the importance of communication confidence, and interpersonal communication skills in supporting personal development skills, ultimately contributing to the producing of workplace-ready graduates (Sarkar, 2020 & Mourshed et al., 2014). These findings suggest that programs aiming to enhance personal development skills among TVET students should incorporate strategies to strengthen both competencies.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In 2023, Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim emphasized the financial budget for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (The Star, 2023). It showed that this sector is very important in contributing to the development workforce in Malaysia and fulfils the needs of Industry 4.0. Personal development skills are critical for academic and career progression (Hengki & Ratna, 2025; Cottrell, 2021 & Hrehova, 2010). Hence, the Politeknik institution must enhance personal development skills among students through teaching and learning and cocurricular activities in producing workplace-ready graduates. According to Chen (2021), the inquiry-based teaching and learning approach had a favourable effect on the development of workplace communication competence.

However, the support from the industry is much needed to match the skills of graduates and the needs of the market. Developing a very strong collaboration in terms of developing curriculum, sharing knowledge from the industry expertise, and providing opportunities for students' industrial training in getting real exposure are very crucial in creating graduates who are practical in work skills and strong in soft skills (Okolie et al., 2019).

Thus, graduates who are equipped with communication confidence and interpersonal communication skills are supporting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which encourages the provision of quality education in providing relevant competency skills to the industry. Besides that, these skills enable the students to be confident in resolving conflicts and succeed in the workplace. It shows that personal development skills in graduates will promote decent work and economic growth to Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG8) (McLeod & Marshall, 2023).

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