



Communication Gaps and Employability Outcomes: Examining Listening and Speaking Challenges Among Undergraduates at The University of Professional Studies, Accra

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ARTICLE INFO

Publication Info:

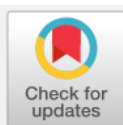
Research Article

How to cite:

Bibiebome, E, Z., Kwashie, N, S., Anderson, J. (2026). *Communication Gaps and Employability Outcomes: Examining Listening and Speaking Challenges Among Undergraduates at The University of Professional Studies, Accra*. *Journal of Language, Communication and Media Studies*. 1(1), 1–17

DOI:

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the listening and speaking challenges faced by undergraduates at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) and examines how these communication gaps affect their perceived employability readiness. While communication skills are essential for academic and professional success, a persistent gap remains between graduate competence and industry expectations. Guided by Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking (SPEAKING) model, the study treats communication as a context-dependent social practice. The study adopted a mixed-methods survey design involving 200 undergraduate students across seven academic programmes and 10 Communication Skills lecturers. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, with quantitative data analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative responses subjected to thematic analysis. Findings reveal widespread challenges: over 60% of students struggle to follow lectures because of rapid speech and technical terminology, while 76% feel nervous during public speaking. Furthermore, 72% reported low confidence during presentations. Although students recognize the importance of oral communication for workplace success, fewer than half feel confident about their abilities during job interviews. These deficiencies significantly affect graduates' professional readiness. The study recommends integrating sustained oral communication training across university curricula, specifically through presentation-based assessments, mock interviews, and workplace simulations, to bridge the competency gap and strengthen students' employability skills in professional contexts.

Received: December 27, 2025;

Revised: April 15, 2026;

Accepted: May 12, 2026;

Published: May 29, 2026.

Keywords: Listening Skills; Speaking Skills; Communication Competence; Employability Readiness; Undergraduate Students

1.0 Introduction

Communication and language skills are fundamental to students' academic achievement and social integration in higher education, as they facilitate knowledge acquisition, participation, and engagement (Eadie, 2022). In Ghanaian tertiary institutions, including the University of Professional Studies, Accra, Communication Skills courses are designed to equip students with the linguistic competencies needed for academic success and professional relevance. Beyond improving grammatical and textual competence, these courses also prepare students for workplace communication and professional interaction (Riemer, 2007; Yemeh, 2007).

Communication competence comprises four interrelated skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of these, listening and speaking are particularly significant, as they are central to academic participation, interpersonal interaction, and professional communication. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) describe listening as a cognitively demanding process involving comprehension, interpretation, and memory, while Richards (2008) identifies speaking as the primary means of articulating ideas and negotiating meaning. Consequently, oral-aural competencies are essential to both educational and professional development.

Despite their importance, previous studies indicate that tertiary language instruction has largely prioritised reading and writing over listening and speaking (Tambunan et al., 2018). Research further shows that many university students struggle with listening comprehension and oral participation in lectures and classroom interactions (Taghizadeh & Namayandeh, 2018). Similarly, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) argue that listening remains one of the least explicitly taught yet most demanding language skills. Although these studies establish that oral communication challenges persist in higher education, they focus mainly on language pedagogy, literacy practices, writing proficiency, and classroom performance (Afful, 2007; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). Limited attention has been given to the relationship between oral-aural communication challenges and graduate employability, particularly within professionally oriented Ghanaian universities.

This gap is significant because communicative competence is increasingly tied to employability in contemporary professional environments. Employers expect graduates to demonstrate strong listening and speaking skills across presentations, teamwork, negotiations, and workplace interactions (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Robles, 2012). Deficiencies in these competencies may therefore undermine not only academic performance but also professional confidence, adaptability, and competitiveness in the labour market.

The problem, therefore, is that although listening and speaking are essential to academic and professional success, many undergraduates continue to face substantial challenges in these competencies, and existing studies have not adequately examined how these difficulties affect employability outcomes. Previous scholarship has largely overlooked the experiences of students

at professionally oriented Ghanaian institutions, where communication competence is closely linked to workplace readiness and industry expectations.

This study addresses the gap by examining the listening and speaking challenges faced by undergraduates and analysing how these oral-aural communication barriers affect employability outcomes. By linking communication competence to labour market preparedness at a professionally oriented Ghanaian university, the study contributes to existing scholarship on language skills, higher education, and graduate employability.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Dell Hymes' (1972) *Ethnography of Speaking*, particularly his **SPEAKING** model. Hymes developed this framework to explain communication as a socially situated activity shaped by cultural, contextual, and interactional factors. Rather than viewing communication as merely the transmission of information, the *Ethnography of Speaking* positions it as a complex social event shaped by context, participants, purpose, and norms.

Hymes uses the acronym **SPEAKING** to describe the components that influence communicative events:

S – Setting and Scene

Setting refers to the physical context in which communication occurs, while scene denotes the psychological or cultural atmosphere surrounding the interaction. Communication does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by time, place, and expectations. Wardhaugh (1992) notes that communication is shaped by its setting, and participants may adjust the scene to suit the context. In the university environment, students must navigate both academic and emerging professional settings, each demanding different listening and speaking behaviours.

P – Participants

Participants include speakers, listeners, senders, receivers, addressors, and addressees. These roles are dynamic and may shift within a single interaction. They carry social implications and are shaped by power relations and expectations within the setting. Effective communication depends not only on what is said but also on how participants understand and perform their roles.

E – Ends

Ends encompass both the intended outcomes of communication and the individual goals of participants. Wardhaugh (1992) notes that communicative exchanges often have shared outcomes but may also involve individual objectives. Understanding these ends is crucial for evaluating how listening and speaking competencies influence professional readiness.

A – Act Sequence

Act sequence refers to the content and structure of communication, including the words used and the order in which they are delivered. Different communicative events, such as presentations, discussions, interviews, or negotiations, follow distinct patterns. Students who struggle to structure their speech or to understand extended spoken discourse may experience communication gaps that affect academic performance and professional interactions.

K – Key

Key concerns the tone, manner, and spirit of communication. The same message can convey seriousness, humor, authority, or uncertainty depending on tone and delivery. An inappropriate key may lead to misunderstandings or negative evaluations, which can directly affect employability outcomes.

I – Instrumentalities

Instrumentalities refer to the channels and forms of speech used, including oral, written, and digital modes, as well as dialects or language varieties. In multilingual contexts, speakers may engage in code-switching or adapt their language depending on the audience. Competence in selecting appropriate instrumentalities is essential for effective participation in academic and workplace communication.

N – Norms

Norms are the social rules that govern interaction and interpretation. They vary across cultures and professional settings. Students who are unaware of or unable to adapt to these norms may encounter communication barriers that extend beyond linguistic competence.

G – Genre

Genre refers to the type of communicative event, such as a lecture, presentation, interview, debate, or informal conversation. Mastery of genre-specific communication is critical for employability, as professional environments demand competence in diverse forms of oral interaction.

Wardhaugh (1992) argues that Hymes' SPEAKING model captures the complexity of communication and underscores that effective interaction requires awareness of multiple contextual factors. In higher education, this framework is particularly useful because it allows communication

challenges to be analysed beyond grammar or vocabulary limitations. It enables a broader examination of how contextual, social, and interactional elements contribute to communication gaps. In relation to this study, the Ethnography of Speaking provides a comprehensive framework for understanding listening and speaking not merely as language skills but as socially situated competencies that influence academic engagement and professional readiness. By applying the SPEAKING model, the study examines how contextual factors, interactional norms, communicative purposes, and genre expectations shape students' oral communication experiences and, ultimately, their employability outcomes.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Listening and Speaking Skills

Listening and speaking are widely recognised as foundational language skills, essential for both academic achievement and professional competence. While traditional approaches often treat listening as a passive reception of information, contemporary research conceptualises it as an interactive, cognitively demanding process (Rost, 2002; Wolvin, 2010). Listening involves integrating multiple sources of information, including phonological, lexical, syntactic, and contextual cues, to construct meaning. Beyond this, it mediates other language skills: listening comprehension underpins reading, writing, and speaking, forming the scaffolding for broader linguistic development (Renukadevi, 2014).

Debates in listening research reveal two dominant perspectives. The first, grounded in cognitive processing theory, emphasises the internal mechanisms by which listeners decode and synthesise oral input. Listeners draw on prior knowledge, inferential reasoning, and metacognitive strategies to interpret meaning (Vandergrift, 1999; Graham, Santos, & Vanderplank, 2008). This approach highlights the learner's active role in making sense of spoken messages, suggesting that proficiency results from deliberate cognitive engagement rather than from passive exposure. The second perspective, pedagogical neglect, critiques institutional approaches that marginalise listening in curricula. Despite its centrality, listening often receives less systematic instruction compared to reading and writing, leading to persistent comprehension deficits among undergraduates (Taghizadeh & Namayandeh, 2020; Tambunan et al., 2018). The failure to prioritise listening instruction is compounded by insufficient exposure to authentic speech, lack of targeted strategy training, and an overreliance on teacher-centred lectures (Mohanty & Mishra, 2020).

This dual lens, cognitive and pedagogical, illuminates the challenges students face. Linguistic complexity, including speech rate, unfamiliar accents, and technical vocabulary, can overwhelm learners, particularly when paired with limited background knowledge or motivation (Saraswaty, 2018; Buck, 2001; Long, 1990). Inadequate use of strategies further exacerbates difficulties: less

proficient listeners rely heavily on bottom-up processing, focusing on decoding individual sounds rather than constructing global meaning, whereas skilled listeners deploy top-down strategies that draw on contextual cues and prior knowledge (Shang, 2008; Vandergrift, 1999). Social and affective strategies, such as collaborative clarification and anxiety management, are often underutilised, highlighting the multifaceted nature of listening competence (Graham et al., 2008).

Speaking, the active counterpart to listening, is the primary medium for conveying ideas, opinions, and knowledge (Gudu, 2015). Contemporary discourse positions oral proficiency not merely as an interpersonal skill but as a professional imperative. Students' ability to articulate themselves influences participation in academic activities such as seminars, group projects, and presentations, as well as their preparedness for workplace interactions (Perse, 2024). In academic settings, speaking skills are assessed through performance tasks that simulate professional communication, thereby reinforcing their relevance to future employability (Bashir et al., 2011).

Scholarly debates about speaking competence often centre on pedagogical and psychological dimensions. Historically, oral instruction was reduced to rote repetition and mechanical drills, depriving learners of authentic communicative practice (Kayi, 2006). This has contributed to persistent structural and linguistic barriers, including limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and limited exposure to target-language environments (Ratnasari, 2020; Tsegaye & Moges, 2017). Psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, and fear of criticism further constrain speaking proficiency (Kakepoto et al., 2022; Ork et al., 2024). Performance pressure amplifies cognitive load, prompting overreliance on the mother tongue and avoidance of meaningful interaction. Addressing these affective dimensions is therefore essential, as oral competence cannot be developed solely through linguistic instruction; it requires a holistic pedagogical approach that integrates language, confidence-building, and authentic practice.

Importantly, listening and speaking are interdependent. Effective speakers rely on active listening to gauge audience understanding, adjust their messages, and engage in dialogue, while proficient listeners enhance speaking outcomes by assimilating input and producing coherent responses (Rost, 2009). This symbiotic relationship underscores the need for integrated curricular approaches that address both receptive and productive competencies, thereby fostering students' capacity to navigate complex communicative demands.

3.2 Communication Gaps and Challenges

Despite consensus on the importance of listening and speaking, persistent gaps exist between academic preparation and professional communication demands. One contributing factor is the undervaluation of soft skills among students in technically oriented programs, who often prioritise subject-specific expertise over communicative competence until confronted with workplace realities (Reddy, 2019; Otermans et al., 2025). This perception is reinforced by institutional structures that

emphasise theoretical knowledge, leaving practical communication underdeveloped (McManus & Rook, 2019; Tănaşcu et al., 2020). As a result, graduates may be intellectually capable but communicatively ill-equipped for professional contexts, highlighting the misalignment between curricula and labour market expectations.

Systemic neglect of listening and speaking is evident in higher education pedagogy. Curricular emphasis often favours reading, writing, and lexical acquisition, while listening instruction remains peripheral (Tambunan et al., 2018). Even when speaking and listening are formally acknowledged, implementation is often inconsistent, with limited opportunities for practice and feedback (Mohanty & Mishra, 2020). This structural deficit is compounded by learners' varied strategies: proficient students employ metacognitive oversight to regulate cognitive processing and deploy top-down strategies, whereas less skilled students rely on memory-based tactics and struggle to manage affective barriers (Vandergrift, 1999; Graham et al., 2008).

Beyond pedagogy, linguistic and environmental factors pose additional challenges. Speech rate, accent variation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and technical jargon complicate comprehension, particularly for learners with limited exposure to authentic discourse (Saraswaty, 2018; Buck, 2001). Personal motivation and engagement further shape performance, as learners with low interest or confidence may avoid active participation, thereby reinforcing skill deficits (Long, 1990). These challenges show that communicative gaps are not solely a function of language proficiency but also reflect cognitive, affective, and pedagogical complexities.

Speaking proficiency is similarly constrained. Historical reliance on rote oral instruction has limited authentic engagement and hindered skill development (Kayi, 2006). Contemporary barriers include structural deficits such as limited vocabulary, inadequate grammar, and a lack of supportive learning environments, as well as psychological obstacles, including anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Ratnasari, 2020; Kakepoto et al., 2022). Students often avoid speaking practice because of low confidence or previous negative experiences, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates oral deficiency (Ork et al., 2024). These combined structural and affective challenges underscore the need for pedagogical interventions that integrate cognitive, linguistic, and psychosocial support.

3.3 Communication Skills and Employability

The relationship between communication competence and employability is well documented. Riemer (2007) argues that effective communication is essential for maintaining professional relevance in a globalised labour market, where disciplinary knowledge alone is insufficient. Graduates must convey ideas clearly, engage with diverse audiences, and navigate both verbal and non-verbal interactions to succeed. Empirical studies confirm that students with strong communication skills are more likely to secure employment and advance in their careers

(Velayudham & Ganesan, 2021; Wu et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of systematic training and strategic learning to enhance both verbal and non-verbal competencies.

Despite this recognition, a persistent disconnect remains between academic instruction and workplace expectations. Higher education institutions often emphasise subject-specific knowledge, yet employers prioritise versatile communicative competence (Otermans, 2025). Graduates may acquire theoretical communication techniques but struggle to adapt them to the spontaneous, context-sensitive demands of professional settings (Khanyile, 2025). This transfer gap highlights the limitations of conventional pedagogical frameworks, which often treat communication as a peripheral skill rather than a core professional asset.

The consequences of inadequate preparation for communication are significant. Bharathi (2016) identifies poor language proficiency, underdeveloped presentation skills, and a lack of life skills as major contributors to educated unemployment. Graduates who cannot apply communication strategies effectively in professional settings risk underperformance despite strong academic records. Aligning academic training with workplace communication requirements is, therefore, essential to bridge this gap and enhance employability outcomes.

Moreover, communication skills intersect with leadership, teamwork, and collaborative problem-solving. Baxter (2010) notes that persuasive oral communication fosters leadership effectiveness by enabling individuals to articulate a vision and mobilise collective action. Similarly, active listening enhances team cohesion, mitigates conflict, and supports organisational productivity (Lee & Halim, 2019). These intersections illustrate that communication is not a discrete skill but a foundational competency underpinning broader professional capabilities.

3.4 Research Gap

The literature consistently emphasises the indispensability of listening and speaking for academic success and professional readiness. However, a paradox emerges: despite widespread recognition, these skills often receive insufficient curricular attention, leaving students to navigate linguistic, psychological, and strategic barriers on their own. This mismatch between higher education training and workplace communication demands further inquiry. Specifically, there remains a gap in understanding how deficits in listening and speaking translate into employability challenges within professionally oriented university contexts. By exploring these dynamics, research can inform curricular reform that aligns communication instruction with the practical and cognitive demands of the modern labour market.

4.0 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods survey design to examine listening and speaking challenges among undergraduates and their impact on employability. A survey was appropriate because it

enables systematic data collection from a defined population to describe patterns, identify relationships, and draw generalisable conclusions (Babbie, 1990). The study was conducted at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), a professionally oriented public university offering programmes in business, accounting, communication, and information technology. UPSA provides an ideal context for exploring the link between oral communication competence and employability, given the centrality of communication skills to professional success in these programmes.

The target population comprised undergraduate students and lecturers teaching Communication Skills courses. Two hundred (200) students from different study levels were randomly selected to ensure diverse representation. Ten (10) lecturers were also included to provide instructional perspectives on students' listening and speaking abilities. Including both students and lecturers enabled data triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. These addressed three areas: the nature and extent of listening and speaking challenges, the perceived impact of these challenges on academic performance and employability, and strategies for improving oral communication competence. Both closed-ended items, which allow statistical analysis, and open-ended items, which capture participants' experiences, were included.

Data collection was conducted in two stages: pre-fieldwork and fieldwork. The pre-fieldwork stage focused on refining questionnaires for clarity and contextual relevance, while the fieldwork stage involved distributing and retrieving completed questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was maintained to encourage honest responses. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to identify common challenges and patterns related to employability readiness. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns concerning communication gaps, confidence, participation, and professional preparedness. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the communication challenges and their implications for employability.

5.0 Findings

The findings are presented under four main areas: listening challenges, speaking challenges, communication gaps, and employability readiness, along with suggested strategies for improvement.

5.1 Listening Challenges

The findings reveal that listening difficulties are common among undergraduate students. A majority of respondents (62%) reported difficulty following English-language lectures, particularly

when lecturers speak rapidly. Similarly, 68% reported challenges in understanding discipline-specific terminology during lectures. Comprehension of instructions was also problematic, with 59% indicating that they sometimes fail to fully understand explanations for academic tasks when these are delivered quickly or involve complex information.

Another significant challenge concerns accent variation. Approximately 71% of respondents reported difficulty understanding different accents, particularly during professional seminars, guest lectures, and presentations by visiting experts. These results indicate that listening challenges are not limited to routine classroom communication but also extend to professional communication contexts. The impact of these challenges on academic performance is notable. A majority of students (64%) agreed that their listening difficulties negatively affect their academic performance, while only a small proportion (18%) disagreed. Despite these difficulties, there was strong recognition of the importance of listening skills. An overwhelming majority of students (92%) agreed that effective listening is essential for success in professional environments.

Patterns across programmes indicate that listening difficulties are more pronounced in technically oriented disciplines. Students in programmes such as Information Technology, Accounting, and Economics reported greater difficulty understanding fast-paced technical explanations in lectures. In contrast, students in communication-oriented programmes such as Public Relations and Marketing reported relatively fewer listening difficulties in classroom settings. However, across all programmes, a substantial proportion of students acknowledged difficulties when exposed to professional discourse outside the classroom. Qualitative responses reinforced these findings. Students frequently cited rapid speech, unfamiliar terminology, accent variation, and lengthy lecture sessions as major barriers to effective listening. Several respondents also noted that limited opportunities to request clarification during lectures further hindered their comprehension.

Lecturers' responses confirmed the presence of listening difficulties among students. A large majority of lecturers (80%) observed that students often struggle to sustain attention during lectures and sometimes fail to grasp key points, particularly in longer instructional sessions.

5.2 Speaking Challenges

Speaking challenges were also widely reported among students. A large proportion of respondents (76%) reported feeling nervous when speaking in front of others. Similarly, 72% reported low confidence during presentations, suggesting that public speaking remains a major source of anxiety for many students.

Difficulties in expressing ideas clearly were also evident. About 67% of students reported struggling to articulate their ideas in English, even when they understood the subject matter. These findings indicate that speaking challenges are not solely due to knowledge deficits but also stem from

confidence, language expression, and presentation skills.

Speaking anxiety appears to intensify in formal academic settings. Nearly four-fifths of respondents (79%) reported greater anxiety during assessed presentations than during informal classroom discussions. This suggests that evaluation contexts significantly shape students' willingness and ability to communicate orally. Across programmes, speaking anxiety was present but varied in intensity. Students in technically oriented programmes generally reported higher levels of presentation anxiety, whereas those in communication-related programmes demonstrated greater confidence in oral participation. Nevertheless, speaking challenges were evident across all disciplines. Overall, 61% of respondents acknowledged that speaking difficulties reduce their participation in classroom discussions.

Qualitative responses revealed several recurring themes related to speaking difficulties. Students frequently cited fear of grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, anxiety about public speaking, fear of negative peer evaluation, and insufficient time to prepare for presentations. These responses indicate that speaking challenges stem from a combination of linguistic limitations and psychological barriers. Lecturers' responses supported these observations. Most lecturers (90%) agreed that students struggle to present ideas clearly in oral presentations. In addition, 80% reported that anxiety significantly affects students' speaking performance. Lecturers also noted that some students who perform well on written assignments show hesitation or uncertainty when asked to communicate orally.

5.3 Communication Gaps and Employability Readiness

The findings reveal strong awareness among students of the importance of communication skills for employability. A large majority of respondents acknowledged that both listening and speaking skills are essential for professional success. Specifically, 95% agreed that effective listening is crucial in the workplace, while 97% recognised the importance of strong speaking skills for professional communication. Despite this strong recognition, perceptions of readiness for workplace communication were mixed. Fewer than half of students (46%) reported feeling confident about their communication abilities in job interviews, while a slightly larger proportion (54%) indicated uncertainty or a lack of confidence. These results suggest that although students understand the importance of communication skills, many do not feel adequately prepared to apply them in professional contexts.

A majority of students (69%) also believed that communication challenges could reduce their employability. This perception reflects concerns that limited speaking confidence or listening difficulties may negatively affect performance in interviews, internships, and professional interactions. Differences were also observed across academic levels. Final-year students showed higher confidence in their communication abilities, with more than half reporting readiness for

workplace communication demands. In contrast, students in earlier years expressed lower confidence, suggesting that communication competence may improve gradually over the course of university study.

Lecturers expressed greater concern about students' preparedness for professional communication. Only a small proportion of lecturers (20%) believed that students were adequately prepared for workplace communication contexts. In contrast, 70% disagreed with this view, while 10% remained neutral. Lecturers identified deficiencies in structured presentation delivery, professional tone, audience awareness, and confidence as key areas for improvement. Qualitative responses from students further illustrate these concerns. Many respondents reported that communication challenges may affect performance in job interviews, internships, networking opportunities, and workplace meetings. Students frequently expressed concern that low confidence in speaking tasks could limit their competitiveness in the labour market.

5.4 Suggested Strategies for Improvement

The findings also reveal strong agreement among both students and lecturers regarding strategies for improving communication competence. A large majority of respondents supported the introduction of more presentation-based assessments across courses. Approximately 81% agreed that frequent presentation activities could help students build confidence and improve their ability to organise and communicate ideas clearly. Workplace simulation activities were also widely supported. About 84% of respondents recommended including mock interviews, professional presentations, and meeting simulations as part of university training. These activities were viewed as valuable opportunities for students to practice communication skills in contexts that resemble professional environments.

Another commonly suggested strategy is to integrate communication practice into discipline-specific courses. Approximately 76% of respondents supported embedding communication training across different programmes rather than limiting it to standalone communication courses. This approach would allow students to develop communication skills relevant to the professional practices of their respective fields.

Students and lecturers also emphasised the importance of interactive teaching approaches. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) recommended reducing lecturer-dominated instruction in favour of more participatory learning environments that encourage discussion, questioning, and collaboration. Exposure to diverse communication styles was another key recommendation. A large majority of respondents (88%) suggested increasing students' exposure to different accents and professional communication contexts through multimedia resources, guest lectures, and industry engagement activities.

Finally, there was overwhelming agreement that communication training should be sustained throughout undergraduate education. About 91% of respondents believed that communication development should not be confined to introductory courses but should be reinforced continuously across all levels of study. This finding reflects the view that communication competence develops progressively and requires consistent practice to effectively support employability readiness.

6.0 Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that listening and speaking challenges among undergraduate students at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) are not isolated classroom difficulties but reflect broader issues related to communicative competence in academic and professional contexts. The results suggest that many students are aware of the importance of communication skills but struggle to translate this awareness into effective performance in real communicative situations. Interpreting these findings through Dell Hymes' concept of communicative competence reveals that the challenge lies not simply in linguistic knowledge but in the ability to use language appropriately within specific social and professional contexts.

A key implication of the results is that communication competence involves more than understanding vocabulary or grammatical rules. Rather, effective communication requires adapting language use to the demands of particular situations, audiences, and purposes. Students' reported difficulties indicate limitations in navigating diverse communicative environments, especially those involving professional discourse or unfamiliar interaction patterns. This supports the view that communicative competence is context-dependent and must be developed through repeated engagement in authentic communication settings rather than through theoretical instruction alone.

The findings also suggest that listening competence plays a central role in students' academic engagement and professional readiness. Listening is not merely a passive skill but a complex interpretive process that demands attention, contextual awareness, and the ability to process information presented in varied forms. When students encounter communication environments that differ from familiar classroom interactions, such as guest lectures, professional presentations, or seminars, their ability to interpret meaning may be tested. This indicates that listening competence is closely tied to exposure and adaptability. Without sufficient opportunities to experience diverse communication styles and discourse patterns, students may struggle to interpret information effectively in unfamiliar contexts.

Another important insight from the study is the role of psychological factors in shaping speaking performance. The findings indicate that students often experience anxiety when required to communicate orally, particularly in evaluative settings such as presentations or interviews. This suggests that speaking competence is influenced not only by linguistic ability but also by confidence, self-perception, and familiarity with communicative expectations. Students who lack

opportunities to practise structured oral communication may view speaking tasks as high-pressure performances rather than routine forms of professional interaction. Consequently, communication anxiety becomes a barrier to participation and skill development.

The disciplinary differences observed in the findings also offer an important perspective on the development of communication within higher education. Programmes that traditionally emphasise analytical or technical knowledge may offer fewer opportunities for structured oral communication, which may affect students' confidence when engaging in speaking tasks. In contrast, programmes that incorporate more interaction-based learning activities appear to foster greater confidence in communication. This pattern suggests that communication competence is partly shaped by the learning environment and the types of communicative practices embedded within disciplinary training. Perhaps the most significant implication of the study concerns employability readiness. Although students overwhelmingly recognise the importance of communication skills for workplace success, their reported confidence in professional communication contexts remains modest. This gap between recognition and readiness indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to develop employable communication competence. Instead, students need sustained opportunities to practise communication in contexts that simulate professional interaction. Such experiences help them become familiar with workplace communication norms, including structured presentations, interviews, meetings, and collaborative discussions.

Lecturers' concerns further reinforce this interpretation. From an instructional perspective, lecturers perceive a disconnect between students' academic knowledge and their ability to communicate it effectively in professional contexts. This observation suggests that communication competence should be regarded as an integral component of professional preparation rather than an auxiliary skill taught in isolation. When communication training is confined to introductory courses, students may not receive sufficient reinforcement to build confidence and adaptability across different communication situations. The results, therefore, highlight the importance of integrating communication development across the university curriculum. Communication competence develops gradually through repeated exposure to varied communicative tasks and contexts. Embedding oral communication activities within discipline-specific courses would enable students to practice presenting ideas, responding to questions, and engaging in discussions relevant to their fields of study. Such integration would also help students develop the ability to adjust their communication style to different audiences and professional expectations.

7.0 Conclusion

This study examined listening and speaking challenges among undergraduate students at the University of Professional Studies, Accra, and their implications for employability readiness. The findings indicate that although students recognise the importance of oral communication for

workplace success, many struggle with listening comprehension and speaking confidence, particularly in formal academic and professional contexts. These challenges highlight a gap between awareness of communication skills and the ability to apply them effectively. Guided by Hymes' concept of communicative competence, the study underscores the need for sustained, context-based communication training within university curricula. Integrating presentation-based assessments, workplace simulations, and discipline-specific communication activities can strengthen students' oral communication abilities and better prepare them for professional environments.

8. Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

9. Funding: This article received no funding from any individual(s) or institution(s).

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