STATUS OF COMMUNICATION IN WORKSHOPS AT ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY: STUDENTS' VIEW

By

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Abstract

This paper analyses different types of communication and role of the teacher in different dimensions of communication. The pedagogical communication is explored: what is expected and what has been learned? Communication in workshop is complex one since individuality is varied to a large extent. Research conclude that resource persons have command over topic(s), feedback is appreciated, students share their ideas in workshop, words used by the resource persons are open to interpret, teachers are not much flexible during communication. Recommendations include that resource persons may: study non-verbal communication techniques, reflect flexibility, motivate students to give and discuss their views.

Communication is the process of exchanging information and learning between or among individuals through a common system of symbols, signs and behaviour. In other words, communication is expression of feelings, conversing, speaking, corresponding, writing, listening and exchanging etc. In educational institutions communication is designed to achieve the goals of education. Basic purpose of communication is "to inform, to persuade, and to entertain". It is the process in which exchange of thoughts, messages, or information is made. Teachers and tutors also use non-verbal messages to communicate a message/ lesson to the student. Non-verbal refers "without use of words". This communication includes Meta communication and kinesics messages.

Lehman, Hintreet and Baty (1996, pp.5-6) list following characteristics of Meta communication:

1.   Non-verbal messages cannot be avoided.
2.   Non-verbal messages may have different meanings for different people.
3.   Non-verbal messages may be in textual or unintentional.

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4. Non-verbal messages can contradict the accompanying verbal messages and affect whether your message is understood or believed.
5. Non-verbal method may get more attention than verbal messages.
6. Non-verbal message provide clues about senders background and motives.
7. Non-verbal messages are influenced by the circumstances surrounding the communication.
8. Non-verbal messages may be beneficial or harmful.

Kinesics communication: ideas expressed through non-verbal behaviour. This may be:

- Visual-gestures, smiles, anger, all kinds of body movements (e.g. communication among deaf).
- Vocal intonation, projection and resonance of the voice.

Communication is a complex process (Hubley, 1993). If things go wrong, communication becomes less effective. Effective communication is not automatic process; eliciting feedback from students is necessary which ensures that the words which teacher intended to communicate have been communicated. Classroom is a complex community, so it is necessary to ensure that message received by the students is as close as possible to the message given by the teachers.

Simplified form of communication process model has the following stages: The sender (originator/ source/ encoder) codes a message, the sender selects an appropriate channel and transmits the messages, the receiver decodes the message, the receiver (respondent/ destination/ decoder) encodes a message (feedback) to clarify any part of message not understood, the sender and receiver removes or minimizes interference that hinders the communication process. The sender encodes the message. Now many other models are available but nearly all agree on four components (Shannon and Weaver, 1948, Schramm, 1954, Berio, 1960).

Teacher may design a message (lesson) by selecting words which are very clear, non-verbal signs those reinforce the verbal message of sender (teacher) uses words/ definitions/ terms not present in receive (student) vocabulary. Specific ideas which convey a variety of meanings. These non-specific ideas are open to interpret by the students. Non-verbal signals which contradict the verbal

signs or written signs (text). There can be other factors which may be added to this list.

Selection of an appropriate channel: There may be three typical communication channels:
- Two-way: face to face (classroom situation).
- Two-way: non face to face (distance mode).
- One-way, non face-to-face (distance mode, reports, letters).

If a teacher selects inappropriate channel, message may be misunderstood and may adversely affect the human relations (affective domain). A face-to-face counseling session is more appropriate for hyperactive student instead of group discussion on the problem.

Decoding of message by receiver: Receiver (student) is destination of message. It is decoding process when if the student interpret the message (lesson). Break down in the communication may occur:
- Sender (teacher) inadequately encodes the message e.g. words/ terms/ definitions are not in the vocabulary of the receiver (student).
- Receiver is unwilling to receive or understand the message e.g. class has not developed rapport with a specific teacher. Topic of lesson is beyond their cognitive/ physical development.
- Receiver has stereotyped vision and prejudicious.

Encoding message to clarify any misunderstanding: Feedback is an important element in the teaching learning process. Feedback is promoted to modify and adjust the original message to make it clear to receiver.

Before entering the class, teacher/resource person must prepare himself by thinking the reason for going to the class. Develop objectives of the lesson, draw central idea, then use central idea to organize the content and learning activities. For a classroom, effective communication considers the following factors:
- Age of the students.
- Educational background.
- Economic background.
- Culture.
- Rapport.
- Needs of receiver.

- Expectations.

After having the student profile, message can be adopted according to students needs. Lehman, Hinsteet and Baty (1996, pp.175-176) recommend to have empathetic attitude, focus on receiver point of view, use bias free language, avoid gender, religion bias and ambiguous sentences.

The pre-requisites for effective communication in the classroom are varied. Human psychological and social factors are important thus no single formula can bring effectiveness. According to Verderber and Verderber (1995) "the human factors involved the approaches towards the effective communication are ever changing in forms but not basically in nature so human factor may be given due consideration".

Distance education is now defined as, "Institution based, formal education where the learning group is separated geographically, where interaction telecommunications systems are used to contact learners, resources and instructors". (Simson, et al. 2000, p.7). Daro Coldway has developed a four-way framework for education on the bases of time and place. These are:
- Same time, same place education (ST-SP).
- Same-time, different places of education (ST-DP).
- Different time, same place of education (DT-SP).
- Different-time, different places of education (DT-DP).

Traditional classroom is an example of (ST-SP). The same is the case with workshops held in distance education.

Now a days the credibility has received significant attention in the fields of communication and psychology. Variables that have emerged as salient factors of credibility are trust, competence, and dynamism (McCrosky and Young, 1981). A more recent factor which has gained attention is immediacy, which "refers to the use of communication behaviors [e.g., movement, enthusiasm, use of gestures, humor, vocal variety] that reduce both the psychological and physical distance between two individuals. Teacher immediacy has been found to be an important variable for influencing the effectiveness of communication and for helping students to diminish their apprehension in the classroom (McCrosky and Richmond, 1992).

The first dimension explored is trust. Verderber and Verderber (1995) define trust as "placing confidence in the other" (p.143). Clearly, in a workshop,

both student and teacher need to operate in a climate of trust where each can place confidence in the other. The student may trust the resource person to provide sound guidance on personal or academic matters. Trust must be earned through the pedagogical communication process that teachers display with their students. Building confidence of student in communication is as key element in teaching and learning for beginning and qualifying level practice. (Digins, 2004)

When presenting messages, the teachers have to relate it to the level of understanding of their students. This needs to be done in ways that convey sincerity and honesty. Moreover teachers need to encourage active learning by inviting students to engage in dialogues with them on issues related to class topics. Students can learn from these types of exchanges to evaluate messages and sources for honesty and accuracy.

The next dimension of classroom communication is competence which involves more than simply being knowledgeable. Knowledge needs to be interrelated and organized within mental structures that permit its efficient recall and effective use. (Glazer, 1992, 1994) It involves a perception that others have of people concerning their degree of knowledge on topics, abilities to command such knowledge, and abilities to communicate this knowledge clearly. Teachers are being evaluated and tested by others especially by students. Moreover, a teacher's command of the subject, as well as how he or she communicates this information influences on a student's perception of the teacher's competence.

For better communication, competency of the teacher play a significant role. It is not "knowledge only". As the teacher is being viewed by a number of eyes in workshop so command of knowledge, and ability to communicate this knowledge also counts. This may include whether:
1. Presentation of knowledge is highly organized (Lucas, 1998).
2. Massage is error free.
3. Key issues have been addressed.
4. Using local, national, international and personal experiences for involving students in the workshop.
5. Involving students in practical work i.e. presentation, discussions.

Teachers want their students to view them as being competent instructors. Preparation is the key for establishing an organized, well-developed message. For instance, the lesson plan needs to contain sound evidence, arguments, and current material that can gain and hold the attention of students. Teachers have presented their messages with greater command of the subject and familiarity with delivery. When appropriate, teachers should let their feelings

help demonstrate both their interests as well as command of the topic. And if teachers feel not competent to address the subject, they can alert their students to these qualifications. For example, teachers may suggest that in high school or college they won awards in their fields of study. Teachers must be careful in presenting additional information.

Communication also focuses on dynamism. Simply, this "is the degree to which the audience admires and identifies with the source's attractiveness, power or forcefulness, and energy" (Larson, 1992, p. 226). Certain teachers, for example, may show a high level of energy in their presentations. Dynamic speakers command of the situation. People expect them to know what they are discussing and leading them in the discussion. In the workshop, teachers need to appear not only in control of their environment, but also energize it.

Flexibility in both visual and vocal aspects of pedagogical communication enhances dynamism. A non-dynamic andragogical communication style makes both instructor and course content boring to students.

The last dimension of the communication is resource person's immediacy behavior. Utilizing some of the traits of dynamism, such as physical movement, eye contact, etc. Immediate behavior suggests that a teacher uses a more direct style of teaching. That is the teacher displays behaviors that reduce physical and psychological distance between himself or herself and the student. Kelly and Gorham (1988) operationalize high immediacy as "the teacher . . . sitting on the edge of the chair, leaning forward, placing nothing between himself and the subject, and utilizing head nods" (p. 203). Richmond, Gorham and McCrosky (1987) further suggest that such behavior may also include "local expressiveness, smiling at the class, and having a relaxed body position", and these last three behaviors appear to be the "most important" for predicting student learning in the classroom (pp. 586-587).

Suggestions for doing this through pedagogical communication include:
1. Appearing highly organized in the presentation of subject matter (Lucas, 1998),
2. Message delivery may as free as possible of errors (e.g., grammar, pronunciation, enunciation) and maintain strong eye contact with students.
3. Lesson preparation should be made thoroughly especially key issues, sources, evidence or differing viewpoints on the subject supporting.

4. Having lesson plans that are organized and detailed which can help teachers gain greater confidence and control of their subjects, and

5. Using relevant personal experiences that can provide greater insights for students on the subject.

Effective communication in the class depends upon the principles of the seven C's. These, as mentioned by Murphy, Hildebrantt and Thomas (2000, p.32), are completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy, correctness. Teachers' hold give complete message in all respects. In this five Ws: who, what, when, where and why. Conciseness means eliminate the words expressions, exclude irrelevant information. Consideration means putting the teacher in the place of students. Focus on "you" instead of "I" in case of adult where mutual planning is made, use "we" concrete. Be specific in choice of words and figures. Clarity is an important principle; use precise, concrete and familiar words, effective sentences. Courtesy means teacher should be factful, thoughtful and appreciative. Last principle is correctness; teacher should review all his communication to correctness.

In communication the range of issues are: that include languages and language style, patterns of discourse genres, audiences and purposes.

Perception is the process by which organization selects, organizes and interprets sensations. (Crider et al. 1983, p.610) Perception is how you look at others and the world around you. When one comes across new information, one goes through a three step perceptual process. Resource person may use different communication skills. Resource person own attitude and knowledge level, socio-cultural background also influences the communication in the classroom situation.

Today's teachers face a variety of reactions from their students and other communities from simple classroom praise to national awards. No matter what the reaction is care of the response is the person's perception of teacher's credibility. (http://cie.asu.edu/volumes/number4, 21-5-2006) This credibility largely depends upon how teacher effectively communicates with his/ her classroom (Frymier and Thomson, 1992). This pedagogical communication is the process to advance student learning. Such behaviour as vocal variation (e.g. change in facial expressions, eye contact, gestures) helps to communicate subject matter and is used by the teacher and this behaviour may increase students' continued affective learning alongwith psychomotor domain. First and important factor is "trust". Verderber and Verderber (1995, p.143) defined trust as "placing

confidence in others". Since workshop is a classroom where the both the parties teachers/ resource persons and students have to operate in the climate of trust.

In the 1990's, educational reforms two fundamental questions were focused. How well are students learning? How effectively are teachers teaching? http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/internet/committee. A teacher questions to stimulate the class and ensures mental involvement. This gap is noticed between what is expected and what has learned. Workshop systems of AIOU have been using conventional teaching aids and methods for the past several years, but now TV, VCR and computer has entered in the workshop. AV aids combine the sence of hearing and that of vision also. Researches have shown that "50 percent of what we see and hear is remembered by us and it is believed that 83 percent of learning comes through sight". (Ghandhi, 2004, p.111)

The resource person, teachers in higher education tend to be resistant in their attitudes towards instructional communication and rigid for change (Pang, 1982). Assessing communication may involve such questions:

- Is it better to assess competence skills separately or as pact of other learning outcomes?
- Is it better to assess competence through written or observational methods? (Diggins, 2004).

Being the only open university of Pakistan, the AIOU since its inception has been serving by producing a highly educated human capital. Taking a meager start from an Elementary Arabic course, the AIOU has now reached to the pinnacle-imparting education to the level of Ph.D, M.Phil, Executive MBA/MPA, M.Sc. etc. The university offers Ph.D and M.Phil programmes in selected academic areas, keeping in view the shortage of highly qualified personnel in the country pertaining to concerned disciplines.

The origin of the Faculty of Education predates the university itself. The National Institute of Education was established in 1973 under the Federal Ministry of Education. It became part of the University in June 1975 as Institute of Education in the then Faculty of Social Sciences. The progressively extending functions of the institute brought the needs for structural change and in 1984 it got the status of Faculty of Education. Faculty has seven departments including Distance, Non-Formal and Continuing Education.

M.Phil Education is joint venture of different Departments of Faculty. M.Phil has 3 parts. Total credits of the programme are eight:

i.   Common core which is to be studied by every students of M.Phil student: 6 credit hours
ii. Specialization course: student selects courses from his areas of specialization: 6 credit hours
iii. Thesis 24 credit hours

In M.Phil Education class, the medium of instruction is English, the second language, which may create language problem. But workshops like classroom communication is a two way street. Distance Education 741, Non-Formal Education 734, Adult Education/ Literacy 737 and Educational Technology 740 are courses of specialization Distance and Non-Formal Education students have to choose 2 courses out of these four.

Workshop

Workshop like classroom is living organization with diversified individual differences. So, there is flexibility in factors which might increase the complexity of the communication. Thus the teacher communicates in such a manner which overcomes the psychological distance and make up the deficiency of physical distance which is character of distance mode.

Workshop is compulsory component of M.Phil programme. Workshops are held at main campus Islamabad at the end of semester before examination. Workshop of each course is 7 days duration. Attendance in the workshop is compulsory. Only those students who qualify in assignment can attend the workshop and only those students who score minimum 50% in the workshop can take final examination.

In workshop, daily 5 sessions are designed for lectures/ demonstration while last session is designed for student's presentation and discussion. So the status of communication was the topic for this study.

Methodology

This study is designed to have "Status of Communication in M.Phil Workshops at Allama Iqbal Open University: Students View". Objectives of this study were to define communication and explain it as a process, describe the types of communication, identify the elements of effective communication, assess the status of resource person's communication and enlist the ways to improve the workshop communication.

Assumptions of the study were resource persons communicate in the workshop, communication transaction involves physical, psychological and

mental process, participation is continuous, communication has a past, a present and future and communicators play roles

This study was delimited to M.Phil Education specialization of Distance and Non-Formal Education Programme students and 2000-2008 and study was descriptive in its nature.

All these students who attended these workshops were taken as population i.e. 172. Total population was taken as sample i.e. 100% sample.

Development of Tool

During survey of related literature, elements of communication were identified; keeping in view these elements, five point likert scale as tool for collection of data was drafted, was discussed with 5 experts on distance education and with 5 experts on communication. Afterwards, the draft was presented to equivalent population of five students for validation. Their observations were accommodated and face sheet was placed on the scale.

Administration of Tool

Tool was administered through pre-paid postage. After 15 days a reminder alongwith another scale was given and after 20 days another request was made to those who had not responded back.

Analysis of Data

Out of 132 were received. The data is analyzed on percentage, mean score and median. Mean score 3 and above is taken as favourable to the statement while median above 2.5 or above was taken as favourable.

Analysis of data on mean score shows that highest agreed statement is 12 i.e. feedback helps to clear the message conveyed by the teacher with 4.4 mean score. Next agreed statement is 4 i.e. use of white board is legible with mean score 4.6. Least agreed statements are 17, 30, 35 i.e. workshops are planned mutually by the students and teachers, teachers demonstrate flexibility during communication, and student feels comfortable that resource persons care while communicating with them mean scores are 3.04, 3.03 and 3.09 respectively. Range of mean is 4.48 – 3.03.

Highest median is of statement 4 with median of 4.77 i.e. use of white board is legible. Next median is of the statement No.26 i.e. 4.70 resource persons have command on topics. Lowest median is of statement No.11 "words

used by the teachers are open to interpret i.e. 2.84 so the most agreed statements are 4, and the least agreed is 11.

Table – 1
Analysis of Data

S.No	Statement	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	Mean Score	Median
1.	Environment of workshop facilitates the communication.	20	40	15	15	17	3.29	3.66
2.	Resource persons come prepared with the lesson.	40	32	12	10	13	3.71	4.08
3.	Resource persons use understandable language.	31	27	18	14	17	3.38	3.67
4.	Notes on white board are legible.	69	33	5	0	0	4.60	4.77
5.	Presentation is given in an expressive way.	51	26	20	6	4	4.07	4.40
6.	Books/ written material is also used for communication in workshop.	30	45	12	15	5	3.75	3.98
7.	Students are allowed to express their views in the workshop.	43	38	21	3	2	4.09	4.22
8.	Students share their part of view in the workshop.	61	34	10	1	1	4.43	4.62
9.	Resource persons use non-verbal language also for communication in the workshop.	57	21	9	10	10	3.98	4.56

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10.	Non-verbal messages receive more attention than verbal messages.	52	23	12	14	6	3.94	4.43
11.	Words used by the teachers are easy to interpret.	20	25	27	17	18	3.11	2.84
12.	Feedback helps to clear the message conveyed by the teachers.	63	35	7	1	1	4.48	4.65
13.	Resource persons first visualize the students than communicate.	57	22	8	16	4	4.05	4.56
14.	Resource persons are emphatic in their approach.	33	34	23	13	4	3.74	3.90
15.	Resource persons send message in a stable way.	43	33	13	15	3	3.92	4.18
16.	Resource persons convey their message politely.	62	21	11	5	8	4.16	4.64
17.	Workshops are planned mutually by the students and teachers.	20	24	18	30	15	3.04	3.85
18.	Teachers focus on correctness in communication.	45	23	27	5	7	3.88	4.13
19.	Message has effect on affective domain.	53	35	7	10	2	4.19	4.49
20.	Message in workshop is in accordance with student needs.	44	17	12	16	18	3.50	3.94

21.	Message in workshops is free of gender bias.	62	27	9	6	3	4.30	4.64
22.	Human factors are given due weightage during communication.	50	34	12	7	4	4.11	4.40
23.	Resource persons identify the strengths and weakness of the information on the subject matter.	48	25	11	10	13	3.79	4.28
24.	Resource persons explain the soundness of the analysis, arguments and evidence of the subject.	62	18	12	6	9	4.10	4.64
25.	Resource persons show trust in students.	57	31	14	3	2	4.29	4.56
26.	Resource persons have command on the topics.	67	12	13	8	7	4.16	4.70
27.	Resource persons have ability to communicate clearly.	33	43	8	12	11	3.70	4.02
28.	Resource person's feeling help to demonstrate their interest and command over the subject matter.	27	67	9	1	3	4.07	4.10
29.	Resource persons energize the workshop.	34	44	10	6	13	3.75	4.06

30.	Teachers demonstrate flexibility during communication.	22	25	12	30	18	3.03	3.24
31.	Resource persons create sample situation for illustration of subject.	55	32	8	6	6	4.16	4.53
32.	Flow of information from students is appreciated during workshops.	44	11	13	20	19	3.38	3.64
33.	Students realize that faculty is interested in the success of resource persons.	43	29	11	9	15	3.71	4.14
34.	Students receive the appropriate and focused feedback from resource persons.	52	31	9	7	8	4.05	4.45
35.	Student feels comfortable when the resource persons care about communicating with them.	21	33	8	25	20	3.09	3.52
36.	The message given by resource person is accurate.	40	35	13	10	9	3.81	4.11

Following are the conclusions of the study that the use of white board is legible; resource persons have command over the topic(s); resource persons use such words which have different meanings to different students, feedback is appreciated and is helpful to clear the subject matter; students share their ideas in the workshop; resource persons convey the message without any consideration of gender; and workshop is planned mutually by the students, and resource persons.

Recommendations

It is recommended that resource persons might study the non-verbal communication to attract student's attention; workshop might be planned mutually by the resource persons; and students, teachers may reflect flexibility during the communication so that individual learning styles may be catered, teachers might motivate students to give their view point/ discuss during workshops and resource persons should specifically consider their message/ discussion for completeness.

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