From theory to practice: the barriers to efficient communication in teacher-student relationship

Nicoleta Duta\textsuperscript{a,*}

\textsuperscript{a}Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, 90 Panduri Rd., Bucharest 050663, Romania

Abstract
This paper addresses an important and timely topic in theoretical and practical area of higher education and modern teaching. Purpose of study consisted in the analyses of barriers to efficient communication in teacher-student relationship and identify of suggestions, recommendations regarding to valorisation experiences of communication. It is a descriptive case research based on teaching experience in higher education. Was analyzed the population of students, aged between 18 and 28 years in higher education. Results show that students consider as fundamental barriers: physical discomfort, disinterest due to the lack of teaching materials, excessive verbalism and anxiety. Communicate effectively is an art.

Keywords: Efficient communication, university teachers, barriers, teacher-student relationship, Higher Education.

1. Introduction

Certainly theme of communication in higher education has been and will constitute the in future a topic of interest and the significant contributions and significant steps have been made in this respect, concretized in many studies and publications. “Effective communication is essential to the success of both the student and the teacher. In the educational system, teachers and learners play a vital role in the communication process, in other words, it is possible to find a situation where two people say exactly the same thing to a given audience, using exactly the same language, even the same words, but the two will end up passing two different messages” (Abura, 1998 in Osakwe, 2009, p. 58).

\* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: nico.duta1@gmail.com
2. Theoretical framework

Starting from the study of the recent literature (Aniței, 2010; Cazan & Aniței, 2010; Lunenburg, 2010; Barna & Barna, 2012; Chraif & Aniței, 2012; Stan, 2012; Liberante, 2012; Seghedin, 2012; Freiberger, et al. 2012; Friedrich et al. 2013; Smith, 2013; Sheveleva, 2014; Fenn, 2014; Mehrabian, 2014), we shall expand upon a series of important aspects for teacher-student relationship and barriers to efficient communication that may interfere.

Communication can be defined as the process by which ideas, information, opinions, attitudes and feelings are conveyed from one person to another. The communicator or sender is the person who initiates communication by sending a message. The receiver is the person who completes the communication by receiving the message and responding to it. Communication is a vital skill for almost any profession, especially for teachers, in teacher-student relationship. It is worth noting the following points (Center for Excellence in Teaching, 1999, p. 21):

- Communicating effectively often means using a variety of modes (spoken, visual etc.) to reach students who learn in different ways;
- Our body language and other non-verbal cues are important modes of communication, and we can harness these to promote a positive classroom environment;
- While technology can make communication easier and more convenient, students generally value the opportunity for personal contact and conversation with the teacher as well.

The qualities for a positive relationship can vary to set a learning experience approachable and inviting the students to learn. A teacher and student who have the qualities of good communications, respect in a classroom, and show interest in teaching from the point of view of the teacher and learning from a student will establish a positive relationship in the classroom. So, communication is an indispensable factor in the teaching-learning process. According to Fenn (2014) it is necessary that the process of communication is understood mutually by the teacher and the student to make the teaching-learning process effective. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word Communication as ‘the act of imparting, especially news’, or ‘the science and practice of transmitting information’. These definitions clearly show the link between ‘teaching’ and ‘communication’. Teachers impart new knowledge constantly, or transmit information to the students. In fact, the reverse also holds good especially in today’s context of enormous materials available to all through the Internet (in Fenn, 2014, 53).

According to Liberante (2012) “the teacher–student relationship is one of the most powerful elements within the learning environment. A major factor affecting students’ development, school engagement and academic motivation, teacher–student relationships form the basis of the social context in which learning takes place” (Hughes & Chen, 2011; Roorda et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011 cited by Liberante, 2012, p. 2).

James A. Kelly (2002 in Seghedin, 2012, p. 352) asserts that among the numerous professional competences of the teacher, the communication abilities have a very important role in the cognitive and psycho-affective development of the students: the teacher creates situations that favor the teacher-student and student-student communication; the teacher uses interactive, participatory strategies to stimulate cooperation and interrelationship among the students; the teacher uses efficient verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal language; the teacher has the ability to make the information given to the students more accessible; the teacher permanently motivates and stimulates students to learn. Emphasizing the role of communication in the teaching and learning process, the instructional communication authors Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978, p. 3 in Beebe, 2012) noted “communication is the crucial link between a knowledgeable teacher and a learning student. Teaching and learning cannot occur without communication”. Another study by Osakwe (2009) focuses on the dimensions of communication as predictors of effective classroom interaction. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between teachers’ attitude, knowledge base, communication skills and effective classroom interaction. It was concluded that attitude, knowledge base, and communication skills were significant correlates and predictors of effective classroom interaction. The study also suggested that teachers should be provided with opportunities where they develop such attributes. Communication barriers in the educational process reveal themselves as difficulties that students encounter solving educational problems, which falls back their learning activity performance.

More than that, Stan (2012) in his study “proposed the identification of the maturity profiles at the age of 6–7 years by analyzing the features of the dynamics of social and emotional factors with the aim of identifying the socio-emotional predictors of the school success at the end of the first grade” (Stan, 2012, p. 806).
Okorodudu (2006, in Osakwe, 2009) ascertained that teachers who possess positive work attitude will enhance teaching learning process leading to the achievement of educational objectives. Thus, negative attitude posed by the teacher (source) definitely will affect the outcome of the message and may eventually lead to wrong misinterpretation and reception. The knowledge base of the teachers is a source of effective classroom interaction. This is because if the source (teacher) of knowledge does not have adequate information about the audience (learners) the interaction will not be effective (in Osakwe, 2009, p. 58). If teacher’s exhibit hostility and repugnance and distaste during communication with the students, students will certainly become afraid, withdraw from participating in class activities and eventually be unwilling to interact with the teacher.

When we talk, we tend to erect barriers that hinder our ability to communicate. There are seven of these types of barriers to effective communication (Smith, 2013):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of barriers to effective communication</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical barriers</td>
<td>are easy to spot – doors that are closed, walls that are erected, and distance between people all work against the goal of effective communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual barriers</td>
<td>are internal barriers that occur within a person’s mind when the person believes or perceives that the other person that they are going to speak with will not understand or be interested in what they have to say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional barriers</td>
<td>are emotional factors that impede a speaker's ability to deliver a clear message or a receiver's ability to hear a message effectively. Common emotions, such as anger, love, joy, frustration, disappointment and sadness can all create emotional barriers that negatively affect communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural barriers</td>
<td>are a result of living in an ever shrinking world. Different cultures, whether they be a societal culture of a race or simply the work culture of an institution, can hinder developed communication if two different cultures clash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barriers</td>
<td>seem pretty self-inherent, but there are often hidden language barriers that we aren’t always aware of. However, even when communicating in the same language, the terminology used in a message may act as a barrier if it is not fully understood by the receiver(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender barriers</td>
<td>have become less of an issue in recent years, but there is still the possibility for a man to misconstrue the words of a woman, or vice versa. Men and women tend to form their thoughts differently, and this must be taken into account when communicating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal barriers</td>
<td>occur due to the inappropriate transaction of words between two or more people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author Smith (2013) he concluded “to have others open up to you, you must be open yourself. By overcoming these barriers to communication, you can ensure that the statement you are making is not just heard, but also understood, by the person you are speaking with. In this way, you can be confident that your point has been expressed”. According to Eisenberg there are four types of barriers: process barriers, physical barriers, semantic barriers, and psychosocial barriers (Eisenberg, 2010 in Lunenburg, 2010, p. 3). Communication is an open system, highly influenced by many factors; therefore, author Pânişoară (2008) asserts when referring to the concept of communication barrier in the process, things are not so simple. First, the difficulty lies in the need for a processual vision and, above all, progressive over these elements, otherwise important components of the communication process itself. G. Kelly identifies four emotional states as psychological barriers: anxiety, guilt, threat and hostility. “Anxiety is defined as the realization that the events experienced by a person are out of range of his/her construct system applicability. Guilt occurs when a person's behavior contradicts his/her perception of him/herself. Threat is viewed as the realization that the person’s construct system can be significantly changed under the influence of some events. It is presented as a kind of personal psychological violence. Hostility is an attempt to follow the invalid construct facing a contradictory factor” (Kelly, 1991 in Sheveleva et., 2014). Richmond (1990, p. 194) in his study suggests “the critical link between teachers’ communicative behaviors and student learning may be the impact of those behaviors on student motivation. It is probable that motivation and learning are mutually causal, those who are more motivated learn more and those who learn more become more motivated. If this is the case, the role of communication in the classroom is much more than simply the means of transmitting content and messages of control”.

3. Methodology of research

3.1. Objective and participants

This study intends to analysis of barriers to efficient communication in teacher-student relationship and identify of suggestions, recommendations, proposals, solutions, possible evolutions regarding practice valorisation of experiences of communication. Was analyzed the population of students, aged between 18 and 28 years in university in Romania. Participants were selected by purposive sampling, a method known in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). The sample included a total of 120 students from various faculties at University of Bucharest (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Geography</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13,33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11,67</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of History</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9,17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15,83</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Biology</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5,83</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19,17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43,33</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>56,67</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Instrument and procedure

The data were collected by applying a written questionnaire to subjects. It is a descriptive case research based on our teaching experience in higher education that focuses in knowing which are the opinions of students on the of barriers to efficient communication in teaching and possible evolutions, suggestions regarding practice valorisation of experiences of communication.

4. Results

The analysis of the data offers following results. Because the answers to the others items from the questionnaire have been varied, were grouped into categories:

1. disinterest arises among the students due to the lack of available teaching materials (86 responses, 71,66%);
2. lack of interaction – lack of activization of students by stimulating auditory and visual by using means and teaching materials and integrating information and communication technologies in the educational process (91 responses, 75,83%);
3. lack of feedback – excessive verbalism, “is necessary feedback from those who wish them to communicate something - thing that often gets personal - a thought, an experience, a new discovery, an idea - and then we try to understand it or to dribble we go through our own system of values” (98 responses, 81,66%);
4. distance created between teacher-students - “is necessary adapt the teaching style according on the specifics the classroom, educational requirements”, “this is true even in situations where a student doesn’t understand what the teacher is saying and needs clarification” (81 responses, 67,5%);
5. physical barriers – noise, physical discomfort, ergonomics the classroom, temperature (46 responses, 38,33%);
6. psychological barriers – inattention, individualistic behavior, emotions, collective interlocutor, self, anxiety (74 responses, 61,66%);
7. cognitive barriers – transmission channel, the specific subjects studied, “linguistic deficit” or “linguistic difference”, message redundantly, stereotyping, labeling, comparison with others or “social comparison” (41 responses, 34,16%);
8. socio-attitudinal barriers – social attitudes, Pygmalion effect, the solitude (60 responses, 50%).

We conducted a rank hierarchy and it was showed that in the opinion of the subjects the following barriers impede the communication in teacher-student relationship: lack of feedback (rank I, 81,66%), lack of interaction
(rank II, 75.83%), disinterest arises among the students due to the lack of available teaching materials (rank III, 71.66%), the distance created between teacher-students (rank IV, 67.5%), psychological barriers (if a student is anxious and unsure (rank V, 61.66%), socio-attitudinal barriers (rank VI, 50%) (see Fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. Distribution of responses regarding communication barriers](image)

How Mehrabian et al. (2014) say “teachers are responsible for teaching the students, and improving the teaching quality plays an essential role in the efficiency of the student and teacher”.

5. Conclusions

It is necessary that these types of barriers should be considered in a classroom for proper communication between students and teachers. According to Barna & Barna (2012) communication is also a requisite in what orientation towards a career is concerned, being the best way by which we can share our qualities, knowledge, skills with others, being (un)accepted and (un)requited accordingly. As we mentioned before and in agreement with recent literature, concerning the optimization of communication, as asserts Seghedin (2012), we have to admit that, not rarely, the teacher lives under the impression that his words and message get to the destination in the proper way, that they are received by the students with the exactly same meaning, the same significance which he gave them. Unfortunately, things don’t always work that way, received messages tend to be more or less close from the issued or original meaning, and sometimes to be different from those. An open communication, without the certain restrictions, increases the confidence of members in group and therefore the productivity and motivation of the group. It is an art you to communicate effectively. The Communication, both the didactical as well as the at the society level, remain an open problem for research.

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References


