

Effective Classroom Communication

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Abstract

There are many factors which affect the effectiveness of communication between people. In order to improve communication between people, and more particularly between teachers and learners, many barriers need to be overcome. Lack of interest and inability to listen well along with the cultural differences are among these obstacles.

In the pure context of the classroom, teachers can effectively communicate these messages if they master three components of classroom communication: communication pedagogy, developmental communication and instructional communication.

Knowing your interlocutor helps you communicate well. This is also true for teachers who wish to communicate knowledge in a good way. Learners come to school with individual differences and varied preferred learning styles which affect the way they communicate with teachers who must be aware of these peculiarities.

Some teaching practices which need to be taken into consideration by professional teachers who aspire to inspire learners include a relaxing and safe atmosphere, engaging learners in teamwork and mutual listening. Other proposed tips address constructive feedback to learners as well as body language which can support understanding between teacher and learners. After all, a smile can do a lot. With a bit of humor, teacher can bridge the gap between them and their learners. One more important thing that should not be ignored is the implementation of technology in our classes. Today's youth are tech-savvy, and their technological skills can make up for their incompetence in other skills.

Last, but not least, providing learners with some scaffolding gives them confidence and ability to put their ideas across more effectively.

Keywords: students, communication, teachers, classrooms.

الملخص:

هناك العديد من العوامل التي تؤثر في فعالية التواصل بين الناس، ولكي نؤكد على تحسين التواصل بين الناس وبشكل أكثر خصوصية بين المعلمين والمتعلمين، هناك العديد من الحواجز التي يجب التغلب عليها ومن أكثر هذه العوائق قلة الاهتمام، وعدم القدرة على الاستماع بشكل جيد، بالإضافة إلى التباين الثقافي. يستطيع المعلمون في سياق البيئة الصفية توصيل تلك الرسائل بشكل فعال وذلك إن استطاعوا التمكن من التعامل مع مكونات التواصل الصفّي وهي: تربية التواصل، التواصل التنموي والتواصل التعليمي . إن فهم ومعرفة من تخاطب يساعدك على التواصل بشكل كبير وهذا ينطبق بشكل صحيح أيضاً على المعلمين الذين يرغبون في توصيل المعرفة بطريقة جيدة، إذ يأتي المتعلمون إلى المدرسة بفروق فردية وأنماط تعلم مفضلة ومتنوعة تؤثر على طريقة تواصلهم مع المعلمين الذين يجب أن يكونوا على دراية بهذه السمات المميزة. تتضمن بعض ممارسات التدريس التي يجب أخذها في الاعتبار من قبل المعلمين المحترفين الذين يطمحون إلى إلهام المتعلمين توفير جو مريح وآمن ، وإشراك المتعلمين في العمل الجماعي والاستماع المتبادل. تتناول النصائح الأخرى المقترحة إعطاء التغذية الراجعة أو التعليقات البناءة للمتعلمين بالإضافة إلى لغة الجسد التي يمكن أن تدعم التفاهم بين المعلم والمتعلمين. ناهيك عن أن الابتسامة يمكن أن تفعل الكثير. مع القليل من الفكاهة ، يمكن للمدرس سد الفجوة بينهم وبين المتعلمين. هناك شيء آخر أكثر أهمية لا ينبغي تجاهله وهو تطبيق التكنولوجيا في فصولنا الدراسية. يتمتع شباب اليوم بالبراعة التكنولوجية ويمكن أن تعوض مهاراتهم التكنولوجية هذه عن عدم كفاءتهم في مهارات أخرى. أخيراً وليس آخراً، إن تزويد المتعلمين بشيء من المؤازرة يمنحهم الثقة والقدرة على فهم أفكارهم بشكل أكثر فعالية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاب ، التواصل ، المعلمين ، الغرف الصفية .

Introduction:

Communication is part of our daily life. In fact, it shapes many of our relations with our surrounding. The more effective communication is, the better these relations are and the longer they last. However, effective communication is not easy to reach. As Lawrence Robinson, Jeanne Segal, and Melinda Smith state, effective communication sounds like it should be instinctive. But all too often when we try to communicate with others something goes astray. We say one thing, the other person hears something else, and misunderstandings, frustration, and conflicts ensue. This can cause problems in your home, school, and work relationships. (Lawrence Robinson, Jeanne Segal, and Melinda Smith .2019)

For the purpose of this research, our focus will be on effective classroom communication, its nature, its challenges and how it can be improved. Before dwelling any further on the issue of classroom communication, let us describe in general terms what communication entails.

The Nature of Communication

Communication is primarily instinctive in the sense that all species use a certain way to send messages and communicate with each other. Humans use a system of communication which is highly more sophisticated than any other system of other species. For example, humans can communicate either verbally, non-verbally or in writing. Of course, each form of communication has its own function, purpose and context. As Kasia Mikoluk categorizes these forms of communication, she stresses the importance of verbal communication and mentions that “Non-verbal communication sets the tone of a conversation and can seriously undermine the message contained in your words if you are not careful to control it.” (Kasia Mikoluk, 2013) Hence, non-verbal communication is essential to support and clarify meaning. Without it, the message could be interpreted in many ways. As for written communication, Kasia Mikoluk comment that written communication is necessary for conveying complex information, such as statistics or other details, which would be difficult to convey through speech per se. Written communication also makes it possible for the recording of information so that it can be retrieved later. (Kasia Mikoluk, 2013)

Barriers to Effective Communication

No matter how clear your message is, there are other factors which may interfere and hinder effective communication. These factors may include psychological and emotional barriers such as lack of interest, tiredness or even failure to retain information for long.

Anne Converse Willkomm classifies these barriers to communication into six categories, namely:

Dissatisfaction or disinterest with one's job.

Inability to listen to others.

Lack of transparency & trust

Communication styles (when they differ)

Conflicts in the workplace

Cultural differences & language (Wilkomm, 2018).

Each of the above barriers can cause a communication break between people if not put into consideration and avoided. In the context of classroom communication, however, three of these are prominent barriers between the teacher and learners. They are the inability to listen to others, communication styles and cultural differences and language, although the latter does not manifest itself very clearly in the context of teaching English in Kuwait.

Having discussed the nature of communication, let us move to describe the features of classroom communication, its barriers and what makes it more effective.

Factors Affecting Classroom Communication Classroom communication is about all that happens inside the classroom between the teacher and learners. Cheri J. Simonds and Pamela J. Cooper (2014) describe three aspects governing the study of classroom communication.

“This field of study (of classroom communication) is composed of three domains: communication pedagogy, developmental communication, and instructional communication.” (Simonds & Cooper. 2014.p30) By communication pedagogy, the authors refer to that branch of study which investigates the strategies used to teach communicative competence; the learner’s ability to understand and use language appropriately to communicate in real social context.

Developmental communication refers to the use of communication to encourage social development. As for instructional communication, it focuses on the communication skills that teachers use to deliver their lesson.

As Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978) state, “The difference between knowing and teaching is communication”. This entails that what counts is the how you communicate, not the what. This explains why so many knowledgeable teachers fail to attract learners’ attention and engage them in the lesson.

Effective teachers should demonstrate a mastery of the three components of classroom communication. Other things of great importance also interfere in the quality of communication. These include participants (teacher and learners), the message, channel, interference, feedback, and context. A professional teacher manages to make the best match between all these elements.

Effective teachers should be fully aware of the different characteristics of their students. These students who come to class have their own experiences with the school subject, be it English or any other subject. Some students tend to enjoy a certain subject more than another according to their previous experience with the subject or the teacher who taught them that subject. They also come to class with varied goals and attitudes. There are those who are intrinsically motivated to study that subject and have a positive attitude towards it, and there are others who are obliged to attend those classes because they have to. If they had the choice, they would not have attended. All these factors affect communication in the classroom. Apart from these personal psychological factors, there are other factors which determine the effectiveness of communication in the classroom.

Individual Differences

People have different learning styles and types of intelligence. Howard Gardner proposed his model of “Multiple Intelligence” in his 1983 book: *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. This theory states that individuals have eight “intelligences”. According to Gardner (1983). " In order to capture the full range of abilities and talents that people possess, Gardner theorizes that people do not have just an intellectual capacity, but have many kinds of intelligence, including musical, interpersonal, spatial-visual, and linguistic intelligences.." (Cherry, 2019) Therefore, these types of intelligence that we are endowed with shape the type of communication we can excel at. Our preferred learning styles also come into consideration here. A commonly cited schema for assessing students’ learning preferences is termed by the acronym VARK:

Visualising modality Auditory modality Reading/Writing

Kinesthetic modality (educationonline, n.d.)

Knowing our learners better can help us better communicate with them.

Peripheral Conditions

In addition to all this, the channel used in communication is also important. Although in the case of classroom, the channel is always verbal transmission, it can be affected by other variables such as tone, pitch or even pronunciation. Sometimes noise outside the classroom can be a hindrance to effective communication. Communication, therefore, is not always easy. It can be easily affected by any interference.

Cheri J. Simonds and Pamela J. Cooper identified two types of interference. “Interference may be physical (someone tapping a pencil on a desk, students talking, noises from outside the classroom) or psychological (daydreaming, personal problems or ailments, attitudes or conflict). These are all distractions that can cause inaccuracy in communication” (Simonds & Cooper.2014 p 36)

Feedback is another important factor in the communication process. When you send a message, you expect a response to check the good reception of your message. The response can be verbal or non-verbal. A smile or just a nod is an indication of approval as much as a frowning is a sign of disapproval or confusion.

Furthermore, communication takes place in context. Time, place, and the social situation all bring necessary information to the communication act. Teachers know that the first period of the school day is not the same as the last one. The social context is also another determinant of effective communication.

Understanding how all these elements work together, we start building our own ideas of how we can make classroom communication effective.

In other words, if we put all these communication factors into consideration, we can create a favorable learning climate for all students regardless of their differences, interests and motivation.

How can teachers ensure effective communication in the classroom?

In fact, this must be the goal of each concerned teacher. It is true that it is a real challenge, but it is also a fundamental part of teaching. Keeping a few tips into practice can increase the chances of an effective communication in our classes.

First, teachers should work on creating a safe environment which supports learners and makes them feel at ease. Once relaxed, they are more liable to express their thoughts freely. Feeling safe, they will not hesitate to ask questions, comment, or express their own opinion.

The **second** strategy which can boost communication in the classroom is the implementation of teamwork. There are many benefits of teamwork or group work. In groups, students identify with their partners, cooperate, collaborate and communicate to achieve a common goal, completing a task.

The **third** tip concerns mutual listening which is mandatory for communication to be effective. Both participants need to listen well to each other. In the context of classroom, the teacher must listen to his students.

Listening implies showing interest in what students say and giving value to their opinions. In this way, the teacher shows he is supportive and caring to students. Consequently, students will be encouraged to express their ideas no matter how they may seem. In addition to this, learners, themselves, will do the same; listen carefully to the teacher and therefore learn something.

The **fourth** technique is to increase the efficiency of classroom communication is constructive feedback. Feedback can be positive or negative. Of course, what we are looking for here is the positive one. Sometimes negative feedback can yield positive results, especially if it pushes the receiver to do better to avoid such a feedback. However, positive feedback can function as an impetus to keep going on with the same good behavior and ultimately promote effective communication in the classroom.

Fifth, nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal communication, so teachers should make sure the messages they send through their body language are constructive, optimistic, and engaging. Having eye contact with students while talking to them, for example, demonstrates that the teacher is supportive and attentive. When giving a presentation to the entire class, teachers must maintain eye contact to encourage others to pay attention. This supports learning and makes learners feel interested.

Sixth, humor has been shown to enhance learning, self-motivation, and supportive relationships between students and teachers when used in the classroom (see (Nienaber, Abrams, & Segrist, 2019)). It enables teachers to build rapport with their students and keep them engaged in the lesson.

Seventh, teachers can, for example, tell jokes or funny anecdotes, or laugh at students' jokes. However, they should avoid using negative humor, which humiliates or embarrasses students, as well as humor that is unrelated to the lesson, disturbing, or abusive. Teachers should be careful about what humor to include in their classes.

Eighth, up-to-date teaching aids such as computers, videos, and multimedia tools can help to keep students involved and strengthen their understanding. They can also improve communication with students who have different learning styles. These online tools can support learners more than traditional ones. Teachers should integrate some of these resources into their daily lessons.

Ninth, understanding and being understood are key components of effective communication and teaching.

Consequently, teachers should always be straightforward and unambiguous in their messages and should tailor their language to their audience. This must be considered not only when preparing lesson plans, but also when interacting with students on the content of the lesson.

Finally, sufficient scaffolding need to be provided when asking students questions checking that they understand exactly what the teacher is asking. Good classroom communication cannot be overlooked; it can influence students' academic success, feelings of self-esteem and future social life.

Digital Communication in the Classroom

Thanks to technology, students and teachers interact and collaborate with each other outside the school building. The Internet has made it possible for us and students to communicate with each other regardless of the geographical distances between us.

Students who previously had to rely on textbooks or videos to learn about careers and other cultures now have the ability to interact and collaborate with their global peers. Allowing students to interact and collaborate in the modern world engages their learning process and provides an authentic context for real communication to take place. It is, therefore, important for teachers to implement these innovations in their lessons.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers must be aware of the nature of classroom communication, its challenges and how to adjust their content (message) to meet various learning styles, interests, preferences and abilities so that learners are inspired to learn. Effective classroom communication requires teachers to master communication pedagogy, developmental communication and instructional communication: teaching students how to communicate, using communication to build social relations and communication skills to deliver lessons, respectively.

Ensuring an effective classroom communication necessitates the development of positive relationships, creation of a safe and supportive learning environment, engagement of learners in teamwork, and incorporation technology in daily lessons.

The importance of effective communication between teachers and students cannot be overstated. It enables the teacher to do his job well, resulting in good outcomes for students.

The class will also use the effective teacher as a role model for developing their own communication skills, which are important for their success and future lifelong learning.

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