

## Students' Perspective on Communication Barriers in a Classroom Setting at College Level

Wajeeha Aurangzeb<sup>1</sup>, Taseer Rehman<sup>2</sup> & Hukamdad Malik<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

*A good classroom setting fosters teaching learning process and communication is one of the essential components to maintain effective classroom environment. Communication barriers negatively affect the learning process. This study aimed at exploring students' perspectives on existent communication barriers in classroom setting at college level. Listening barriers, perception barriers, oral barriers, speech and language difficulties, personality dynamics, peer pressure and boring classroom lessons were taken as independent variables. Results revealed that male and female students considered listening barriers and boring classrooms as major determinants. It was concluded that understanding students, giving them the confidence to speak without the fear of being wrong, understanding cultural diversity and language diversity of students can help to lessen communication barriers in classrooms. It was suggested to use blended learning strategies to minimize disruptions and provide training and counselling sessions to teachers and students for building effective classroom communication*

**Key words:** Communication barriers, classroom setting, college level, student perspective

### **Introduction**

Communication is a process of transferring information from one person to another which develops mutual understanding (Lunenburg, 2010). Communication is about conveying your message, thoughts or ideas in a way that is easily understandable. Today's world is the world of globalization and communication is happening at every step of life. In different ways we are connected to each other either through our phones, social media, face-to-face or indirect, likewise there are different types of communication. We use communication in our daily lives throughout the day from our home to school and where ever we go. Hence communication can be considered as a necessity of life. The importance of communication cannot be denied at any level of

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Manager QA/SA, NUML, Islamabad

<sup>2</sup> MPhil Scholar, Department of Education, NUML, Islamabad

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor/Head Education Department

life. It is one of the major requirements in any profession. Professionalism depends on effective communication skills. It is the key for successful professional life. Communication has a great impact on what it reveals in a classroom setting (Powell & Powell, 2015). Communication plays a vital role in teaching process. Effective communication is a key to effective learning and teaching process. A positive classroom climate focuses on all those factors which make teaching more effective. Communication is one of the factors which supports and elevates the levels of academic achievement.

Bouville (2010) indicated that cheating hinders the process of learning and it can be discouraged from a connected classroom environment in order to enhance student motivation. Zaineb (2016) suggested different communication barriers like perceptual barriers, emotional barriers, cultural barriers, language and emotional barriers can hinder organizational communication. In classroom setting different communication barriers may exist. Physical barriers which include classroom infrastructure, use of cell phones to the way teacher is positioned in the class. Sometimes teacher's gestures also lead to misunderstanding. Then there are Cultural barriers like making a perception regarding someone on the basis of their culture. This study develops understanding about communication and indicates different communication barriers which exist in a classroom scenario at college level. This study will also explore the ways to minimize communication barriers to strengthening teacher communication for better learning.

### **Review of Literature**

Communication is a continuous process of sending and receiving of messages. Cheney (2011) identified important elements in the communication process. The two most common elements amongst them are the sender and the receiver. In a classroom setting, Teacher is the sender whereas student is the receiver. Effective communication develops common understanding amongst teachers and students. Any sort of hindrance in this process can disturb the whole process of learning. Powell and Powell (2015) discussed classroom communication scenario which includes verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication includes language diversity barriers like students with bilingual education background face difficulty in communicating effectively in class. Environmental factors, Physical appearance, Paralanguage, kinesics and proxemics are considered as nonverbal communication barriers. Environmental factors include physical setting of the classroom which has no direct influence on the communication process. Physical appearance of the teacher, gestures, facial expressions, pronunciation and voice volume can cause miscommunication among students. Proxemics is the sensible study of space. If the classroom space is not utilized sensibly it can also become a communication obstacle in the process of learning.

Huang (2011) highlighted the role of nonverbal communication in college English classroom teaching. He identified Kinesics, Spatial language, Time language and Paralanguage as factors which hinder the practical applications of nonverbal communication in a classroom teaching. Kinesics includes body movement which directly influences the process of effective teaching. He divided Kinesics in five parts, Facial Expressions, Eye Contact, Gestures, Postures and Touch. Nonverbal sounds and pause and silence are components of paralanguage. Wu, Esther and Norma (2015) conducted a study on the adjustment and challenge of International students' at college level. They used qualitative interviews to examine students' experiences in academic and social cultural context. They explored student's academic, social and cultural barriers in communicating with university teachers. The results were analyzed in terms of social, cultural and academic setting of the university classroom. The study provides a good understanding of the academic barriers which students faced in their classrooms. The study also highlights social and cultural barriers of International students. Cultural diversity at times may lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings.

Antos (2011) described psychosocial barriers under three heading. Fields of experiences are the past experiences, beliefs or information of the people. Filtering is a way of perceiving things in our own way and not how they actually exist. Third is the psychological distance. If you are psychologically distant with someone the more physically distant you get in real. In today's global world one no one

can deny the use of ICT gadgets in classrooms. Unal and Ozturk (2012) identified teacher-level barriers and school-level barriers. Lack of confidence, lack of teacher competence and resistance to change are barriers in ICT which fall under teacher-level barriers. Whereas student-level barriers include: lack of effective training, lack of accessibility ICT- based resources and technical support in classroom setting. They further identified some physical factors like presence of ICT gadgets in classroom or availability of internet connection play significant role in affecting teachers' practices.

**Ways to overcome communication barriers:**

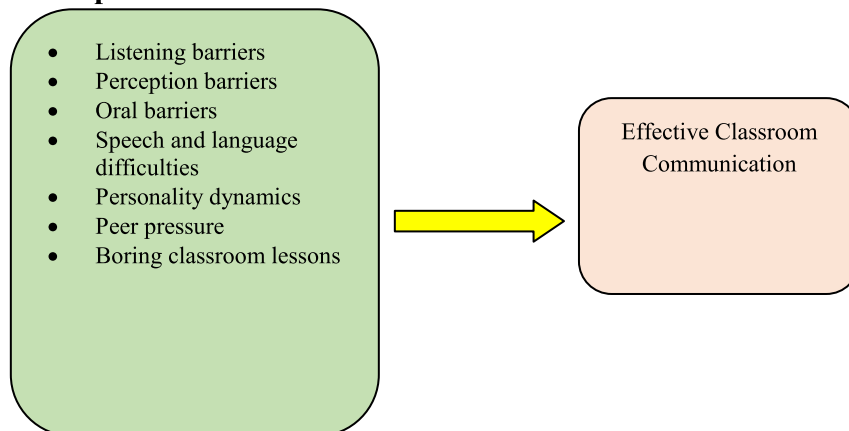
Sukris (2015) addressed the practical applications of nonverbal communication in a classroom teaching. He discussed the efficient use of kinesics, paralanguage and spatial language can minimize the communication barriers in classroom teaching. A simple smile on teacher's face and a pat on students' shoulder can influence and break down the communication barriers in a classroom setting. He further discussed kinesics under three main aspects. Facial Expression can promote and demote the process of communication in classroom. Sparkling facial expression can strengthen the process of communication in a classroom setting. Gestures are one of the simplest but yet very important type of nonverbal communication in a classroom. Wu, et al., (2015) recommended three ways to overcome communication barriers for International university students. Firstly, Language barriers should be minimized by offering English language courses and workshops to college and university students. The second recommendation was to introduce orientation programs about academic culture and local culture where students can interact and understand cultural diversity to create more learning opportunities. These orientations can help to overcome cultural barriers among college students.

Kneen (2011) recapitalized rules for receiver's responsibilities in communication process. These responsibilities include empathizing with others or to walk in other's shoes to understand their position. Controlling your temperament, being patient and listening with ease are some of the responsibilities identified.



This study was conducted to achieve these objectives; to explore communication barriers in a classroom setting at college level; to make a gender wise comparison of communication barriers in a classroom setting at college level and; to propose ways to overcome communication barriers at college level. Few hypotheses were also developed in order to keep the study on right track and satisfactory analysis of relationship which may exist in different constructs. These are; There is no significant relationship between listening barriers and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between perception barriers and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between oral barriers and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between speech and language difficulties and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between personality dynamics and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between peer pressure and effective classroom communication at college level; there is no significant relationship between boring classroom lessons and effective classroom communication at college level and ; there is no significant difference between male and female students' perspectives about communication barriers in a classroom setting at college level.

### **Conceptual Framework**



### **Research Methodology**

This study was qualitative in nature and explored college students' perspective on communication barriers existing in classroom setting at college level. Unit of analysis included male and female college students and data was collected through a self-constructed questionnaire. A good classroom setting fosters teaching learning process and communication is one of the essential components to maintain classroom environment. Communication barriers not only disturb the classroom setting but also affect the learning process. Hence, it is very important for teachers to understand communication barriers and find ways to minimize them for effective learning.

Population of the study comprised of all the male and female students studying in colleges of Islamabad. To test the research hypotheses, a randomly selected sample of 500 male and female students was used as sample size from 4 co-education public colleges of Islamabad. Male and female students studying in pre-medical, pre-engineering and humanities group were considered for data collection. Due attention was given to the following matching criteria: All the subjects of the study were students at college level; all the students from pre-engineering, pre-medical and humanities from public sector colleges were considered for sample selection; students from the same socio-economic background were taken as sample and; Demographics show that data was collected from 270 male students (54%) and 230 females (46%) from a total of 500 college level students.

### **Research Instrument**

Research data was collected through a self-made and self-administered questionnaire and 35 statements were recorded on a 3 point Likert scale; *true, partly true or not at all*. This questionnaire consisted of seven subscales as mentioned in conceptual framework of the study. Research data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation, co-relation, reliability analysis and t-test. The later statistical technique was carried out to make a gender wise comparison of communication barriers in a classroom setting at college level.

## Results and Findings

**Table 1 Alpha reliability coefficient of questionnaire (n=500)**

Subscales	Items	Alpha Coefficient
Listening barriers	05	.90*
Perception barriers	05	.86*
Oral barriers	05	.78*
Speech and language difficulties	05	.85*
Personality dynamics	05	.79*
Peer pressure	05	.89*
Boring classroom lessons	05	.88*
Overall Reliability ( Cronbach's Alpha)	35	.90*

Table 1 reveals the reliability of the research instrument. Self-constructed 35 statement questionnaire had an overall reliability of .90 significant at .05 level. Highest reliability of subscales was considered for listening barriers at .90, whereas  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 2: Relationship between classroom barriers (n=500)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Listening barriers							
1							
2 Perception barriers	.57*						
3 Oral barriers	.62*	.54*					
4 Speech difficulties	.49*	.58*	.52*				
5 Personality dynamics	.74*	.75*	.47**	.20*			
6 Peer pressure	.33*	.45*	.61*	.34*	.38*		
7 Boring class lessons	.79*	.63*	.17**	.52*	.78*	.53*	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This table reveals that listening barriers and boring classrooms have highest correlation ( $r = .79$ ), whereas peer pressure has lowest correlation ( $r = .33$ ) at 0.05 significance level. It means that students perceived boring classrooms as strongest cause of communication barrier in classrooms. Thus, we can reject the hypothesis that there is

no relationship between communication barriers and effective classroom communication.

Table 3: **Mean, Standard deviation and t-test on responses**

<i>Subscales</i>	<i>Mean and Standard Deviation</i>		<i>t-values</i> Male vs Female
	Male ( n 270)	Female ( n 230)	
<i>Listening barriers</i>	M=1.97 SD=0.45	M=1.90 SD=0.43	<b>4.83*</b>
<i>Perception barriers</i>	M=1.86 SD=0.40	M=1.88 SD=0.42	4.02*
<i>Oral barriers</i>	M=1.52 SD=0.24	M=1.65 SD=0.30	4.22*
<i>Speech and language difficulties</i>	M=1.71 SD=0.39	M=1.53 SD=0.25	3.88*
<i>Personality dynamics</i>	M=1.66 SD=0.30	M=1.73 SD=0.39	3.73*
<i>Peer pressure</i>	M=1.64 SD=0.26	M=1.44 SD=0.22	4.13*
<i>Boring classroom lessons</i>	M=1.56 SD=0.30	M=1.45 SD=0.35	3.97*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

It is evident from the result of Table 3 that there exists a significant difference in the responses of male and female students about barriers in effective communication. Significant difference ( $t=4.83$ ) exists between male and female responses. Difference in opinion was explored on all dimensions of the conceptual framework. So the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference regarding male and female students' perspectives about communication barriers in a classroom setting at college level was rejected.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The study addresses different communication barriers under the domains of listening, perception, oral speech, personality dynamics, peer pressure and boring classroom lessons. Misunderstanding at receiver and sender's end can cause miscommunication. It is very important to address these communication barriers for effective learning. Findings of this study are consistent with previous research studies. Kovar, Henry, and Mouson, (2013) have found out that perception barriers lead to oral, speech and language barriers in classrooms. Teachers need to pay attention to detail and avoid negative aspects of conversation. Research study of Okon, (2011) is in line with the findings of this study; thus suggesting a difference in male and

female responses about barriers in classroom communication. Peer pressure and personality dynamics can influence classroom communication so it is vital to reward positive peer behaviours in order to combat communication difficulties.

It can be concluded from this study that communication barriers hinder the process of communication and learning at different levels. In particular at college level these communication barriers effect students' achievement. In order to improve effective communication in college classrooms it is important for teachers to understand communication barriers and its causes. Understanding students, giving them the confidence to speak without the fear of being wrong, understanding cultural diversity and language diversity of students can help to lessen communication barriers in classrooms.

### **Recommendations**

The study gives a broader picture of communication barriers at college level. It further highlights the significance for understanding communication barriers and suggests ways to overcome communication barriers at college level.

- Teachers may construct their lesson plans according to the needs and interests of the students by using information and information technologies.
- Teachers may make classroom environment engaging through use of blended learning strategies.
- Non-Verbal communication may enrich verbal classroom communication, thus motivating and engaging students at college level.
- Teacher training program, workshops or in-service training may be recommended to enhance communication skills at college level.
- Student counseling may be provided by college teachers to strengthen teacher student relationship which may ease the communication process.

### **References:**

- Antos, G. (2011). *Preventing communication breakdowns*, Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Bouville, M. (2010). Why is cheating wrong? *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 29(1), 67-76.

- Cheney, G. (2011). *Organizational communication in an age of globalization: Issues, reflections, practices*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Huang, L. (2011). Nonverbal communication in College English classroom teaching. *Journal of Language and Teaching and Research*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 903-908. ISSN 1798-4769
- Kneen, J. (2011). *Essential skills: Essential speaking and listening skills*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kovar, K.A., Henry, A.L., & Mouson, M.J. (2013). *Can we do more with less? Examining Factors Influencing Student Ratings of Instruction (Presentation Paper)*. Southern Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting, Orlando, Florida.
- Lunenburg, F.C. (2010). Communication: The Process, Barriers, and Improving Effectiveness. *Schooling*, vol1:1-10.
- Okon, J.J. (2011). Role of Non Verbal Communication in Education. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(5).
- Paulley, J.A. (2010). *Communication: The key to effective leadership*. Milwaukee, WI: ASQ Quality Press.
- Powell, R.G, & Powell, L.D. (2015). *Classroom communication and diversity: Enhancing instructional practice*. Routledge.
- Sukris, S. (2015). The Role of Nonverbal Communication in English Teaching. "*TRANSFORMASI Jurnal Informasi & Pengembangan Iptek*", 11(1), 27-32.
- Unal, S., & Ozturk, I. H. (2012). Barriers to ICT integration into teachers' classroom practices: Lessons from a case study on social studies teachers in Turkey. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 18(7), 939-944.
- Wu, H., Esther G., & Norma G. (2015). "International Student's Challenge and Adjustment to College." *Education Research International* 2015(2015), 1-9
- Zaineb, A. (2016). *Barriers to effective communication in an organization and overcoming it*. Source: <http://blog.commlabindia.com/elearning-design/barriers-to-communication>.