

# 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,

