

Gondwana that existed 180 million years ago, and literally gave birth to South America, Antarctica, India, Africa, New Zealand, Madagascar and Brazil? Or why not in zoology class ask the students to come up with an explanation why whales have legs and why whales and dolphins swim using an up-and-down pattern as opposed to a side-to-side movement which is relevant to fish, and later clarify some facts of the theory of evolution that states that we all share a common ancestor? Would the students not be motivated to look into those branches of science? I think they would.

The process of science is exciting, it is way more than a simple compilation of knowledge, it is also a way of thinking and looking at things. If somebody sits you at the table and tells you that he will tell your future and the past by placing his hand on a crystal ball... It will be wrong to dismiss that statement right away and it will be equally wrong to take it on faith. The scientific way to look at it will be by asking questions about the chemical composition of the crystal, about where that crystal comes from and whether any double blind testing has been carried out and whether there is any true evidence supported by facts and careful observation that it is actually possible to do that at all, etc. By the time you go through all these questions, you will surely dismiss that statement as sheer fraud. That is how science and critical thinking work. People should always practice skepticism in their education, otherwise they are not masters of their lives, but they have masters who tell them what to do, what to think, what to eat, what clothes to wear, what books to read and what movies to watch, what church to go to... Does that not seem sad and pathetic enough? Critical thinking and intellectualism must always be encouraged, not discouraged. When was the last time that you saw a real scientist or a public intellectual on public television? If science is the foundation of future development, leads to prosperity and forms the spirit of the nation, raises everybody's expectations of what is possible academically, and from manufacturing standpoint, then why do we not publicize it enough?

Science and critical thinking always go side by side, therefore the answers to the most important questions like why are we here, what is the meaning of our existence, what is beautiful, what is moral and what is immoral, what is true and what is not will always be debated and it is our duty to allow that discussion to happen in a civilized and intellectual manner.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING AND WAYS TO AVOID THEM

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Being an essential part of everyday life, communication is inescapable; this relates to communication in the world of business as well as communication in the world of academia. Good communication skills boost employability; they help build up relationships and raise our self-esteem, thereby keeping up our emotional and physical health. Communication, however, is irreversible and seems challenging at times. University lecturers and instructors are expected to be showcase communicators

and to teach students to communicate effectively, if success is at play; but do these expectations always secure a desired outcome?

A study was carried out among first-, second- and third-year students to assess the effectiveness of teacher-student interaction at SBMT, to identify communication barriers and, consequently, to seek ways of improving the communication process in academic settings. A questionnaire was designed for these purposes, which helped in the evaluation of communication competences based on the qualitative and quantitative data raised from the experiences of teachers and students.

Communication as a Process

In most general terms, the communication process is described as follows: the sender, or source, generates an idea and conveys a certain message to a person or a group with a view to render a particular impact on the receiver. The message is encoded with the help of verbal and/or non-verbal signs and transmitted via a channel of communication [2, c. 5–7]; the channel can be a tangible or intangible (real or imaginary) medium [1, c. 51]. The receiver decodes the message to infer its meaning. Communication implies feedback which allows the sender to confirm the message has reached the recipient and has been interpreted appropriately, as verbal and nonverbal signs can mean different things to different people [2, c. 5–7].

Communication in the classroom is seen as a circular process (in accordance with the circular communication model introduced by Osgood and Schramm): a lecturer or an instructor acts as the primary sender of various types of messages to a class while students provide feedback in the form of answers, and students become senders of messages when they make presentations at seminars and practicals and turn in various written assignments while instructors give feedback in the form of comments and grades. Within this circle, there are challenges all along, and participants in the communication process need to be able to deal with numerous factors that hinder communication.

In communication theory, factors that cause miscommunication are referred to as “interferences” or “barriers to effective communication” [3, c. 7]. Brian Wilson, College of Marin, in his *Barriers to Effective Communication* lecture sums them up as follows: encoding barriers (lack of sensitivity to receiver, lack of basic communication skills, insufficient knowledge of the subject, information overload, emotional interference); transmitting barriers (physical distractions, conflicting messages, channel barriers, long communication chain); decoding barriers (lack of interest, knowledge or communication skills, emotional or physical distractions); responding barriers (no provision for feedback, inadequate feedback) [3].

Communication Issues in the Business School

An insight into the teacher-student communication processes inside and outside of the classroom reveals that both parties are not completely satisfied with the interaction. It makes us wonder why it happens and how to prevent, eliminate, and minimize the ineffectiveness. The analysis and discussion with the faculty and the students taking a course of business communication have disclosed a number of factors that hinder the communication process in the business school. Obviously, problems occur at various stages and in relation to various elements of the communication process. Looking at them from the communication theory perspective, we can have a

deeper penetration into and understanding of the process and draw some conclusions regarding its improvement.

Differences in educational level and experience increase the complexity of encoding and decoding a message. Lecturers' expectations are not always aligned with the real life situation in terms of students' educational backgrounds and attitudes; lack of certain knowledge areas is not always taken into consideration. Among other things, ineffectiveness of verbal communication is accounted for by the use of terminology or complicated language unfamiliar to students. On the other hand, the content of some lectures and the assignments at practicals is neither up-to-date and new nor relevant to the students' future business activity as they see it. Lack of or inappropriate feedback to written and, to a lesser degree, oral assignments can also add to lacking interest.

Physical interferences occurring in the communication channel include a noisy environment, for example, students' whispering, chatting and exchanging comments, or interruptions, for example, by latecomers. Uncomfortable environment, namely, low temperature in the classroom, also adds to distracted attention. Mental distractions, such as students' preoccupation with other matters, particularly, texting others and even playing games on the cell phone, and lack of effective listening skills, result in failure to grasp significant information. It is getting increasingly critical now when some students would not follow the policy of non-using their cell phones during tests and examinations.

Ample availability of digital projectors and laptops, whiteboards and screens to view a PowerPoint presentation or to demonstrate a video does not always ensure the qualitative perception of information while listening to lectures and doing assignments. Inappropriate use of visuals may mislead or puzzle the students or, alternatively, distract their attention. Lecturers sometimes flip through the slides too quickly or without an explanation.

Increasing the Effectiveness of Communication

Making communication in academic settings more effective and enjoyable is simple, straightforward, and far from time-consuming.

First, the message should be clearly put, with its aims being obvious and specific, or easily inferred and deducible. The aims of the lecture or a practical need to be communicated for the student to realize they are of value. The information presented in a lecture or a study manual should be interesting and understandable; moreover, it should be relevant to an aspect of a student's life and/or their future line of work. Instructions should be formulated explicitly, assignments feasible. Students would appreciate having in advance a glossary of terms, foreign words and abbreviations used.

Second, PowerPoint presentations need to be easily comprehensible; illustrations and graphs should be top quality and meaningful, their number limited on a single slide. The text on the slide should be seen from the back rows, simple, non-decorative fonts of a large size preferable, with no more than 10 lines and of contrasting colours. The speech of a lecturer should be synchronized with the slides being demonstrated, neither too fast nor too slow.

Third, regular and constructive feedback of various types is essential. Of course, teachers provide feedback through grading, but not every assignment is graded. What students expect are clear responses to what they say and do in class, as well as to their

written assignments; it should help evaluate the knowledge and skills acquired by the student and guarantee further progress. Besides, lecturers and instructors can get a mid-semester feedback from students regarding their teaching; anonymous on-line surveys will be of value for improving the course material, the methods of teaching, and the communication style for the remaining part of the course.

Finally, classroom cell phone policies should be implemented throughout the school. The cell phone is an indispensable tool when used for educational purposes and when appropriate. We need to have access to relevant resources and to be able to search for relevant information: facts, texts, dictionaries, video/audio tracks, educational games, data sharing platforms, etc. So, it is not a good idea to ban the phone use, but at the same time everyone's right to work and study in a noise-free environment should be respected.

To sum it up, a lot of problems in professional and personal lives result from miscommunication. By being aware of the elements of the communication process and existing barriers to successful communication in academic settings, both students and teachers can focus on removing interferences, improving their communication styles and interactions, which in turn will lead to creating a quality learning environment and providing education outcomes of top standards. Moreover, it will contribute to the promotion of an effective corporate culture appreciated by the university community.

Literature

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MODERNIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: KEY TECHNOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS

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The higher education landscape is undergoing significant change as a result of an introduction of technological innovations. In a new hi-tech era the introduction of new technologies into higher education has an enormous potential to create change. Technological innovations applied to university settings allow schools to meet a broader range of learners' needs, by adapting traditional teaching methods to new requirements and expectations, and offering a mix of classroom and online learning possibilities, which provide students with opportunity to learn anywhere, anytime.

In today's fast-changing discourse keeping pace with the most recent developments becomes more and more difficult for higher education institutions. As during a time of a new teaching method trial and adoption it might already become