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Comunicare și interacțiune eficientă profesor-educabil – o scurtă trecere în
revistă a literaturii de specialitate

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EFFECTIVE TEACHER-LEARNER COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION – A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Teaching is a social activity with a formative impact on learners, an activity in which communication plays a pivotal role. To aid the delivery of the information, a teacher can rely on both verbal and non-verbal elements. These are useful tools to provide feedback to the students and some can be used in a virtual teaching and learning environment. While distance education may have various limits in ensuring effective communication between the learners and their instructor, there are ways of combating the lack of elements that can lead to ineffective communication. Our mixed method-based literature review will try to identify the ways in which successful and constructive communication can be established between the learners and the teachers.

Keywords: effective communication, interaction, literature review, non-verbal communication, verbal communication.

Rezumat

Predarea este o activitate socială cu impact formativ asupra educabililor, o activitate în care comunicarea joacă un rol esențial. Pentru a asigura livrarea

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informațiilor, un profesor poate utiliza atât elemente verbale, cât și non-verbale. Acestea sunt instrumente utile pentru a oferi feedback educabililor, unele dintre ele putând fi utilizate în mediul virtual de predare și învățare. În timp ce învățământul la distanță se poate confrunta cu diverse limite în asigurarea unei comunicări eficiente între cursanți și profesori, există modalități de combatere a lipsei de elemente care pot conduce la o comunicare ineficientă. Această analiză a literaturii cu metode mixte va încerca să identifice modalitățile prin care se poate stabili o comunicare de succes și constructiv între cursanți și profesori.

Cuvinte-cheie: *comunicare eficientă, comunicare non-verbală, comunicare verbală, interacțiune, trecere în revistă.*

1. Introduction

Communication is essentially a human activity, a key concept of the 20th century. It is at the core of contemplations on freedom, love, hatred, warring, education, and everything else that life implies. Communication has been an outstanding instrument for various activists, philosophers, fiction writers, feminists, advocates of diverse convictions, but has oftentimes failed to remove diverse boundaries such as race, age, gender, religion, beliefs, or language. The currently ongoing armed conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and all the accompanying attempts of negotiations (as of late February 2022) is one such unfortunate example of failed communication.

If Aristotle named humans speaking animals, we have come a rather long way to start defining our ability to communicate with one another. As a central and essential feature of human activity, communication in the classroom is meant to facilitate learning, to engage learners, to diminish numerous barriers such as linguistic, semantic, intercultural, psychological, to name a few.

This systematic literature review draws on previous literature on teacher-learner communication. A literature search was performed in Clarivate Analytics, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases in order to retrieve articles based on keywords such as effective communication, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, communication in the classroom. Over one hundred articles were retrieved and were subjected to the following inclusion criteria: type of document (article or proceedings

paper), language (English), publication years (2000–2022). The remaining articles were scanned, keywords were coded with ATLAS.ti for Mac version 9.1.1 (2021), and relevant quotations were marked and extracted. Apart from the generated report, the articles were also processed manually.

2. Communication

2.1. Non-verbal communication

More often than not, non-verbal communication happens automatically and unconsciously, and many educators are unaware of the fact that non-verbal gestures transmit a potent message (Sutiyaatno, 2018). It relies on the presence of a sender, a receiver, directed behaviour, and non-linguistic information (Maloney, Freeman & Wohn, 2020). Non-verbal communication is able to transmit over 65% of the concepts occurring in a dialogue, supposedly because more than half of our face-to-face occurrences of communication relies on non-verbal language (Bambaeeroo & Shokrpour, 2017; Pan, 2014). All forms of non-verbal communication significantly impact student performance (Khan & Réhman, 2015).

Proxemics, kinetics, or haptics are all subcategories through which non-verbal communication can occur. In terms of proxemics, the use of space in a given circumstance, four distances can be distinguished: intimate (0-15 cm), personal (15-40 cm), social (40 cm-4 m), and public (4-25 m) (Pan, 2014; Shekhawat, 2020). Each of these ranges allows for various types of communication (Maloney, Freeman & Wohn, 2020). Kinetics includes a wide range of body movements: eye contact, gesture, posture.

The prerogatives of non-verbal communication occurrence are teacher immediacy and teacher enthusiasm (Okon, 2011). While teacher immediacy has been studied mostly in face-to-face environments, there is little research on immediacy in an online setting (Ghamdi et al., 2016). Immediacy is characterised by body movement and posture comprising gestures, leaning forward, moving, smiling, eye contact, gaze, along with humour, vocal variety outside non-verbal communication. If immediacy and enthusiasm are beneficial for learning outcomes, at the other pole, non-immediacy implies

reading from notes, using monotony in delivery, keeping a significant distance between the teacher and the learners. Facial expressions, mimics, tone of voice, movement, and gestures occurring at the beginning of a lesson will set the mood and tenor for it and will have a strong influence on the class. Such gestures and postures occur unconsciously and are beyond the control of the teacher after having been used for a long time (Sutiyatno, 2018). It is important to remember that teacher immediacy enhances student participation in the classroom (Ghamdi et al., 2016).

Body language, as a means of non-verbal communication, comprises expressive movements of the body, whereas paralanguage implies non-verbal cues in the voice: rhythm, intonation, stress. A person's state and intention can be delivered with the aid of universal facial expressions that denote happiness, anger, contempt, surprise, etc. (Maloney, Freeman & Wohn, 2020). Object communication, that is clothing, hairstyle, along with environment communication, namely temperature, noise, furniture, chromatics, are all features of non-verbal communication (Pan, 2014).

Non-verbal communication enforces cognitive learning, reinforces emotional connections among the participants to the learning process, and sets an organisational tone for the classroom (Okon, 2011). Non-verbal communication elements delivered by the teacher are able to convey instant feedback on the students' performance, answer, reply, etc., whereas congruent and reinforcing verbal and non-verbal communication patterns will provide students with various degrees of confidence in their actions (Okon, 2011). According to the Sutiyatno study, non-verbal communication yields a significant positive effect on the investigated group of English learners. However, erroneously decoded gestures or body movements can easily lead to a misunderstanding and the subsequent inhibition of communication (Paranduk & Karisi, 2021).

What is essential to keep in mind is the fact that non-verbal communication differs across cultures, from person to person, from a profession to another (Dinic , 2014).

When non-verbal communication is supportive of isolated and non-assertive students, their involvement in group and team activities will be higher than in

the absence of non-verbal communication elements (Bambaeeroo & Shokrpour, 2017).

Improving non-verbal communication has positive effects on learning outcomes. From the point of view of proxemics, a desirable way is to deliver the lecture from an interpersonal distance, using posture or leaning forward when students answer questions and displaying interest and attention (Pan, 2014). Moreover, the classroom can be rearranged in a different manner in order for the teacher to be close to as many students as possible.

In an online environment, communication tools such as asynchronous discussion forums or synchronous chats may not maximise communication, on the contrary, participants may display reluctance towards using them (Meletiou-Mavrotheris, Mavrou & Rebelo, 2021). While technology can facilitate learning, not to mention the fact that it was the only viable solution to education worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is rather restrictive as regards non-verbal communication (Khan & Réhman, 2015). Non-verbal communication in the classroom has recently had a somewhat dramatic setback due to the SARS-CoV-2 infection, commonly termed COVID-19. If non-verbal communication has had to suffer, it is because countries worldwide introduced social distancing and the wearing of face mask in public places. Face mask conceal facial expressions and are a disadvantage to interpersonal communication (Dragomir, F rca iu & imon, 2021), because it is the lower part of the face which is able to convey non-verbal signs. As a result, listeners are forced to focus on the eyes of the speaker and to record other types of paralanguage more accurately than in the absence of face masks.

2.2. Verbal communication

Humans are social creatures who cannot leave alone and need to interact with peers. Unlike non-verbal communication, the verbal one relies solely on two forms: spoken and written (Pan, 2014). In the spoken form, individuals convey information with the aid of vocal sounds.

Although verbal communication is improved by the non-verbal one, in terms

of transfer of knowledge, the role and supremacy of verbal communication cannot be questioned. Effective verbal communication between a teacher and a learner helps to build a strong relationship between the two for cognitive development.

For effective teaching to occur, verbal communication is of paramount importance. Effective communication implies that the teacher and the learners are able to send and receive messages accurately. As such, teachers should be careful in choosing their words for successful teaching to occur, and should resort to clear, concise, and accurate terms so as to render the desired message to the learners. In interpersonal communication, negatives, discouraging, or impolite phrases should be avoided (Bambaeeroo & Shokrpour, 2017).

In-class conversation relies on practices such as encouraging students to talk, asking for viewpoints, or providing personal examples. Out-of-class communication, on the other hand, implies the availability of the teacher to communicate with the learners outside the classroom and has positive affective learning outcomes (Georgakopoulos & Guerrero, 2010).

2.3. Cultural aspects of communication

Care should be employed when using non-verbal communication elements in a culturally diverse classroom since non-verbal communication can oftentimes be unconscious and biased which can lead to undesirable conflicts. One way of avoiding conflict and reducing the threat of it is to study the non-verbal communication elements in culturally diverse groups and to understand the different needs of the parties who are involved (Okon, 2011). Gestures and movement vary tremendously across cultures in terms of intensity and extensiveness, thus, European cultures have restrained non-verbal displays compared to African ones (Okon, 2011). While some non-verbal communication elements are perceived as universal (Maloney, Freeman & Wohn, 2020; Okon, 2011), these may not be recognised in exactly the same manner in different cultures.

Moreover, there are other dissimilarities regarding teacher expectations. While

European teachers would conduct a class discussion in the manner of students raising their hands, African American students are inclined to making loud emotional comments while another person is speaking (Brown, 2005). Facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and many other features of both verbal and non-verbal communication displayed and employed by a teacher are carefully studied by the learners starting the first day of their interaction (Brown, 2005).

2.4. The presence or the lack of communication in online and distance education

Communication is a vital element in distance education (van Rooyen, 2010) which is characterised by a physical separation (Ghamdi et al., 2016). A lack of or insufficient communication can be noted in the case of distance education via MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platforms. MOOCs heavily rely on asynchronous learning, as such, student-teacher interaction is either insignificant or totally absent (Cárdenas et al., 2021). This may also be a reason for the high drop-out rate encountered both in MOOCs, distance education, and in higher education institutions (van Rooyen, 2010).

On the other hand, online education is also characterised by less engagement in collaborative learning, in student-teacher communication, and communication with peers (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021).

Online education can occur synchronously via LMS (Learning Management System) and asynchronously via Web 2.0 collaborative tools (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). Much of the education process during the aforementioned COVID-19 pandemic took place synchronously with the aid of LMSs as well as other online conferencing tools. One of the greatest disadvantages of online education is that it almost entirely lacks non-verbal communication. Direct eye-contact is in fact substituted by screen-focused gaze (Nichol & Watson, 2000). Although non-verbal communication elements can be, to some extent, integrated in various ways into chat messages or reactions, briefly displayed on the screen of the participants, which some LMSs allow, these emoticons may not always fully convey the intended message.

Moreover, for effective online communication to happen, feedback has to be immediate, something that not all instructors can provide due to various factors such as group size, difficulty of the task, delays occurring because of connection issues, etc.

The lack of non-verbal cues may be detrimental in the case of distance or online education. Conveying non-verbal elements in the case of online teaching is highly limited, eye contact and emotional interchange can barely be achieved (Korochentseva & Terekhin, 2021). However, teacher verbal and non-verbal immediacy can be contextualised for online classrooms (Ghamdi et al., 2016). On the other hand, traditional methods of online teaching which rely heavily on audio, video, and text-based communication have limited ability in transmitting non-verbal communication (Khan & Réhman, 2015). Instruction in higher education relies on maintaining eye contact as a key element in the teaching-learning process (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). Nevertheless, gaze rate can indicate concentration and engagement, and a high rate of gaze sustenance in videoconferencing will be an effective method of communication (Nichol & Watson, 2000).

3. Conclusion

In order for effective communication between the teacher and the learners to be attained, a combination of both non-verbal and verbal communication elements is important. Non-verbal cues, such as a gaze, a head nod, or a head shake can provide instant and useful feedback to the learner and some can also be used in videoconferencing type of teaching (Khan & Réhman, 2015). To boost learning performance, several factors play vital roles: positive classroom environment, sharing achievement, as well as effective communication (Shan et al., 2014). Effective communication, and, as a result, effective teaching can be achieved by dialogue that prevails over monologue, and using such verbal elements that are in line with the non-verbal ones displayed by the teacher (Shekhawat, 2020). In the case of synchronous online teaching, students should receive immediate feedback and be able to express their ideas regarding the task or the problem with the aid of the tools provided by the learning platform, may that be chat messages, emoticons, or various other visuals such as virtual thumbs up (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019).

In my opinion and based on my personal experience, there are situations in which one type of communication, either verbal or non-verbal, prevails. The number of instances of one or the other type of communication greatly depends on the age and level of the learners. With young-age groups, non-verbal elements may be more often used to elicit answers or provide instant feedback. With older age learners, on the other hand, verbal feedback is preferred.

I consider that a major drawback of videoconferencing in online education is the fact that non-verbal gestures or facial expressions may be misunderstood or misinterpreted if they are not captured in their entirety by the receiver. This may be because the gaze of the receiver is pointed towards another part of their screen, the receiver may be focusing on a worksheet that they are displaying in full screen mode, or simply because the receiver is checking their handwritten notes, cases which may also occur in face-to-face education.

One limitation of this study would be the investigation of exclusively theoretical grounds. The inclusion of non-scholarly papers would have shed some light on more practical issues because the teaching and learning process should be analysed from the point of view of practicality. Another limitation would be the fact that aspects of verbal or non-verbal communication were not investigated according to criteria such as age of learners, type of education enrolment or subject matter.

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