



Multifaceted Impact of Teachers' Communication Skill on Students' Learning and Development

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Received: 22 November 2021 **Accepted:** 15 February 2022 **Published:** 21 March 2022

Abstract: *This article reflects the insights and experiences on the role of teacher's communication skill on child's learning and development as acquired over teaching for more than a decade and being a student from pre-primary grade to master degree. It is intended to ignite thought among teacher colleagues to reflect and consider the essentiality of positive and effective communication skills for teachers, the multifaceted impact on children's learning and developmental process and influence it makes on the life of learners. Having this idea, teachers will be encouraged to work on developing this effective communication skills as their professional requisite to better communicate with their learners and expand their delivery skills. The teacher training institutions can work to incorporate courses for enhancing communication skills for trainee teachers and relevant stakeholders can develop and provide professional development programs to in-service teachers on this inevitable soft skill. This paper particularly looks at the three modes of communication that teacher uses in the classroom and the five dimensions.*

Keywords: *Behavioural Communication, Communication Skills, Dimensions of Communication, Linguistic Communication, Visual Communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an integral part of survival for any social beings. The minutest micro-organism to the largest creature in the world uses it as a means to express their needs, emotions and feelings and to convey and exchange information, knowledge, ideas and skills. Human as social-organism extensively use communication in its multifaceted resourcefulness and educational occupation requires the highest proficiency in this skill because as Selma and Sentürk (2018) posits, school is not only a place to acquire knowledge but is one of the environments where the communication process takes place most intensively. School is also very important place for the acquisition of interpersonal communication skills through classroom learning engagement or co-curricular activities beyond the four walls. Sutiya



(2018) asserts that classroom teaching, in essence, is an activity of communication between teachers and students by means of information transmission.

Educational experiences, whether in the institutional setting of classroom or private tutorial programs are more impracticable to achieve progressive outcome without effective communication skills. A teacher equipped with effective communication skills can engage learners effectively with motivation, inspiration and enthuse with sense of humour. As the education system embraces digitalization across the globe through blended learning, virtual learning and computer mediated learning, the communication skill has become even more imperative for teachers to learn, develop, adopt and adapt in the 21st century teaching-learning environment. Teacher's communication skill will have multifaceted impact on student's learning and development either positively or negatively not only in academics but moral values, psychology and behaviour. This paper attempts to discuss three modes of teacher's communication extended by five dimensions.

The Modes of Teachers' Communication

The fundamental job of teaching profession is imparting knowledge and information which is exchange of communication. In agreement to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016) that defines communication as "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, sounds and behaviours," teachers' communication skills can be broadly categorized to be shown through the following three modes:

Linguistic communication: The term "linguistic" in this paper does not apply to the scientific study of language rather it elucidates on the functional role of the language proficiency in teacher's professional communication process. This can be defined as interaction and exchange of information using language verbally as well as textually. The skills involved in this communication are speaking, listening, reading and writing. A professional teacher must be proficient in these language skills- fluent speaker with colossal repertoire of vocabulary to reach diverse ability of learners. Choice of words and manner of word use may either motivate and inspire the learners or demotivate and provoke negative reactions. This occurs while interacting with the students through verbal communication and providing written feedback in their assignments.

Satiyatno (2018) asserts teachers to use the words carefully to be successful in teaching as each word provokes a feeling in people, specific emotions, and distinct function. Appropriate words should be applied in proper place and situation which will affect the soul and body of audience immediately. For instance, some teachers label their learners by nick names, describing their appearances, manner of dressing or learning ability. They even go to the extent of referring to their parents and domestic background, throwing sarcasm, ridiculing and humiliating. Such verbal communication is unacceptable and unexpected from a professional teacher. This will have long lasting impact on child's psychology and develop hatred toward the teacher and subject, depriving them of learning productively.

Teachers too must be active and empathetic listener to heed to students' need. Learners may feel neglected or ignored if the teacher fails to listen and positively respond to their queries, opinion and suggestions. Consequently, it may lead to low self-esteem in a student, develop reluctances, and anxiety to participate in educational activities both within and outside the classroom.



Teachers must be ardent and analytical reader who comprehends various genre of reading materials to be interpreted and presented to the learners. Moreover, they must also possess exceptionally good writing skill as to enable them to put their teaching materials, ideas and experiences onto paper. This include not only composition skill but also calligraphic skill. Teachers' legible and elegant handwriting on the chalkboard or chart presentation captures learners' enthusiasm which influences their writing style too.

Tsang (2017) in the qualitative research found out that teachers' general linguistic competence plays a crucial role in ELT classrooms with other factors in contributing to the teaching effectiveness. In agreement, as English expands across the educational spectrum all around the world the role of Teacher's English competence is fundamental in transforming the education system on the way (Freeman, 2017). Cahn and Renandya (2017) observed a complex relationship between teacher's general language proficiency and their ability to make use of their proficiency to support student learning in L2 classroom. They concluded that while teacher's general proficiency significantly affects the way they use language in the classroom to promote learning, their classroom proficiency is at least as important as their general proficiency.

Behavioral communication: Bambaeroo and Shokrpour (2017) appositely defines non-verbal communication as “behaviours performed in the presence of others or perceived either consciously or unconsciously.” Sutiyatno (2018) attributes (Caswell, 1993; Barmaki 2014, p. 441) communication as more than words, and it is vital for teachers to understand the nonverbal messages they are sending and receiving in the classroom. Further, restates (Miller, 2005 cited in Barmaki, 2014, p. 441) that nonverbal messages include facial expressions, eye contact or lack of eye contact, proximity, and closeness, hand gestures, and body language. Although explicit message is exchanged through verbal communication, more importantly, the implicit information is portrayed through behavioural exhibition. It is the individual personality arrayed to the outside world. Even our attitudinal patterns are revealed through our manners. Thus, as a teacher, it is crucial to maintain and exhibit appropriate disposition. It ranges from the manner we speak, the facial expression we wear and gestures we display, the way we dress to hairstyle and any outward demonstration of the self, intentionally or unintentionally. This mode of communication either builds positive psychological construct and reaction or destructive and negatively motivated learning and developmental progress

Visual communication: Whether it is a use of multimedia, power point presentation, chart paper display or simple flash cards, or any exhibition the teacher brings into the class it is prerequisite to be neatly prepared and well-organized. Teachers' skill in this art of presentation is detrimental in capturing students' attention and inquisitiveness to augment active engagement, enhance their skill of graphic interpretation and creative and critical thinking.

According to Cappello (2017) “Twenty-first century literacy requires students to analyse and create images for communication across and within academic disciplines.” Similarly, in the modern education scenario, Silverman and Piedmont (2016) points that students are increasingly asked to create visual representations of ideas and information. Slideshows, infographics, and websites have become nearly as common as text documents. Thus, teachers today are responsibly required to support students to engage with visual text for which teachers must first be proficient in visual communication skills themselves. “We must



carefully and intentionally choose images for teaching practice and consider the reader, instructional task, and visual text complexity” Cappello (2017) reminds. It mandates teachers’ industry, patience and artistic dexterity in preparing these visually communicative resources considering from the print or handwriting on the charts and flashcards to technologically enriched presentations. Incorporation of “Visual Learning” (Raiyn, 2016) is most productive and meaningful strategy that improves high-order thinking (HOT) skills. Smilan (2016) supports “learning experiences that integrate studio-based inquiry” develops “discipline skills” as well as “communication skills of deciphering visual cues and de/re-constructing visual metaphor.” Teachers’ inadequate skill reflects the ineffectiveness of structuring their teaching-learning experiences and decelerate the learning and developmental progress of the learners.

In addition, as per Centinkanat (1997) as cited in Selma and Sentürk (2018) teachers’ communication skills in the classroom manifest in five dimensions as under;

Empathy: Empathy is the foundational skill in the communication process that builds bridges between individuals, understand each other’s intricate emotions, comprehend a diverse perspective, and empower relationships for collaboration and progress. Teacher’s empathetic communication intensifies teaching-learning collaboration.

Transparency: A teacher who share their feeling, thoughts and ideas without any reservation builds good closeness and simplicity in the classroom communication revealing humanistic and reflective attributes as a teacher. This too enables students to adapt with the teaching style and understand the educational philosophies of the teacher and gain greater motivation.

Equality: A teacher must create conducive learning atmosphere in the class by eliminating any sign of psychological distance between teacher and students and among students themselves. Otherwise, maintaining status distance between teacher and students and social and intellectual distance among students themselves deteriorates interactive learning process. Teachers must be mindful of diversity and inclusivity in various aspects of student’s background such as racial, linguistics, cultural and socio-economic.

Effectiveness: This skill is teacher’s communicative performance in action. Teacher’s primary goal in the classroom is to bring out a positive and progressive change in students learning behaviour, ignite intellectual capacity and enrich academic experiences. A teacher who is skilled in effective communication ensures to realize these goals.

Competence: Besides being academically competent and professionally proficient, a teacher must be able to establish communication process with students while delivering the knowledge. Teaching profession is deficient without competency of effective communication skill.

Teachers’ competency to effectively employ these three modes of communications infused with five dimensions can create wonder in the classroom interaction, learners’ motivation and learning progress. As teachers, it is advisable to do some self-reflection and examine whether one’s communication encompasses those dimensions, observe and notice whether learners get motivated.



Context in Bhutan: Developing Teachers' Communication Skills.

There are two teachers' colleges in Bhutan under the banner of Royal University of Bhutan, Samtse College of Education and Paro College of education. The colleges incorporate two modules each in every semester in communicative language- Dzongkha for communication, the national Language of Bhutan and English for communication which is the medium of discourse in Bhutan. These courses are expected to equip the trainee teachers with linguistic skills ranging from writing skills, grammar and phonetics.

Ministry of Education, Bhutan realized that communication skill is one of the core skills that a teacher must be equipped with to enhance his professional skill which consequently would increase learners' academic performance. A month-long nationwide teacher professional development program title, "English for Effective communication for Teachers" and "Dzongkha Language Proficiency" were conducted in 2017 covering more than nine thousand teachers. Every in-service teacher attended a week-long course in successive cohorts. Fifty two weeks take-home learning tasks were also shared in electronic version.

With the advent of modern technology, computer literacy is deemed unavoidable. Infusing ICT (information and communication technology) in the curriculum is mandatory for which all in-service teachers were awarded a week-long computer training through Chiphen Rigpel project while trainee teachers are taught a module on FIT (functional information technology) in two colleges. Some in-service teachers also availed training in G-Suite for Education on Google application.

In Bhutan, various agencies under the Ministry of Education of Bhutan plan, initiate and conduct multitude of professional development programs to keep the teachers abreast of global educational innovations and revolutions. However, the development of the skill depends on the individual teacher's learning initiatives and motivation- the time they devote to learning project and consistency of their application makes the vast difference.

2. SUGGESTIONS

The authors perceive that academic competency and communication skills in combination makes the teaching-learning process productive and efficient. Okoli (2017) too observed that in addition to other attributes, content knowledge and communication skills have paramount importance on teaching occupation and insists teacher education to emphasize in both of these aspects as one cannot achieve without other. Individually as a teacher, one must take initiative to advance one's professional and academic proficiency by exploring, innovating and participating in various in-service teachers' professional development programs.

Studies conducted by Simonds, Lippert, Hunt, Angell, and Moore (2018) observed that teacher education programs have increasingly been blamed for not providing pre-service teachers communication skills training. They too suggest that such training is essential to address diversity in the classroom and to meet the day-to-day functioning of teachers which teacher training institutes can provide for teacher certification. The relevant stakeholders must investigate the communication skills of the in-service teachers and plan and organize professional enrichment programs. Teachers training colleges can revisit their study modules and revamp their course content.



3. CONCLUSION

To put it succinctly, if communication is transfer and exchange of information, teaching profession is communication in its entirety. Teachers' effective communication skill has paramount impact on learners' learning and developmental process, academically, psychologically, behaviourally, and linguistically. The three modes of teachers' communication coupled with five dimensions brings immediacy and clarity in the active communication process which teachers must be mindful of. Assurances must be provided by relevant agencies and higher education institutions to train teachers with required skill competence. Most importantly, teachers need to consistently and constantly work towards developing and enhancing their communication competence through reading, writing and availing professional development programs.

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