The Communication Barriers And Their Impacts On The Academic Performance Of The Graduate Students

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Abstract

Communication is an effective skill to convey information, persuade people and achieve targeted goals. The study examined the impact of communication barriers on the academic performance of Graduate Students (Education department) students at Sindh Madrassatul Islam University Karachi. The main objective of the study was to examine the impact of a lack of communication on the academic performance of students. The qualitative ethnographic research design was selected to gather and analyze the data through real classroom observations and interviews by developing a checklist of some communicative rubrics. The data was collected from 20 students; who were registered in the Graduate program. The results of the study showed that the lack of communicative competence of students at the Graduate level affects their academic performance in class. The recommendation of this study will help policymakers, university teachers, academicians, and university students.

Key Words: communication, Barriers, graduate, impacts.

Introduction:

Rao, (2019) analyzed that people require language to express their views and feelings. In order to convey their stance effectively one needs command over the respective language.in order to be adept in any language one needs to be skillful in all four skills regarding a particular language which is reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Out of these four skills, speaking is the most effective skill to express one's ideas and desires. Rao, (2019) also implies that the English language holds the status of lingua franca.

Status of English in Pakistan:

English being the language of the global market has made it the reason for the language of academics in Pakistan making it to a part of the policy (Shamim 2011). English is of indispensable value in Pakistan because of its wide importance as a law, government, and education language. It is considered a lingua franca by its proponents. (Akram & Mehmood. A. 2007).

Communication Barriers:

Rani. K.U. (2016) has illuminated the idea of communication barriers. She describes it as a hurdle in the way of a smooth flow of messages

being conveyed and received. The factors that contribute as barriers to effective communication are cultural barriers, behavioral barriers, attitudinal barriers, and language barriers. (Rani .K.U.2016).

Relationship between language competency and academic growth:

Phonsguwan, (1997) authenticated the relationship between college satisfaction and language ability and academic performance of international students and validated the fact that there is a positive relationship between language proficiency and satisfaction with an academic contribution. Students with language competency are more likely to get better GPAs.

Sometimes students suffer from anxiety and fear of failure because of an unknown environment Riedlinger (2008). Wang and Frank (2002) proposed that students resist raising understanding concerns in a class because they don't want to indulge in-class participation since they lack language competence. Even if they don't understand the lecture, students don't show it to the teacher. They suffer from myriads of academic pressures, some of them are language proficiency, pronunciation, and accent. They also suffer from poor listening issues. Students do not understand teachers' lectures and instruction because of poor listening and understanding Grayson identifies that international and national students in universities face language issues that lead to poor academic performance. Laad & Rudy (1999) also identified that students face a tough time understanding teachers' instructions. Communication is the most important skill that is required in every field of life. We need communication skills to express ourselves effectively, no matter how much knowledge we have but if we cannot express that knowledge through words it is useless. In order to express ourselves effectively we require a command of a particular language which decides our proficiency level in communication. In Pakistan,

English is the language of academics in higher studies. Different coursework contributes to better academic performance such as class assignments, oral presentations, and class participation to show teachers that you understand the concept effectively (Maria 2013). Even if students understand the lecture they hesitate to participate because of their poor communication skills (Forssmann – Johnson (1996). Student's academic performance is directly associated with their effective communication. Communication is affected by linguistic barriers such as grammar, vocabulary, and lack of grammar structures competence such as we -questions, passive sentences, reported speech, and so on. Pathan A.K. (2013).

Roy – Campbell and Qorro (1997) stressed that language is an indispensable part of academic achievement as all the academic instructions are imparted through language. In addition ADEA (2005) asserted that "Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education" (p. 5). Malekela (2013) added to it by giving the strong reason that learning can't be carried out as long as the learner/student is not familiar with language of instructions. In order to have the learning environment both learner and teacher should be conversing with each other and this communication between a teacher and student is not possible without language.

The problem Statement:

English is a medium of instruction in our educational institutes especially in higher studies. All the presentations & assignments are delivered in English. Students who are not adept in English communication face challenges. English has the status of lingua franca in Pakistan among the provinces. It is used officially in Pakistan in all professional works and documentation in different fields such as law, education, govt, and technology It is also considered as an international language by its proponents. (Akram,

M., & Mahmood, A. 2007). The research aims to find out the impacts of communication barriers because of a lack of English language proficiency on the academic performance of students.

Objectives:

1.   to explore the reasons behind the poor English language communication among postgraduate students
2.   To explore the academic issues/experiences because of postgraduate students' poor English language communication skills.
3.   To recommend strategies to overcome their academic issues related to poor communication.

Research Questions:

1.   What are the factors that make students poor in English language communication?
2.   What academic issues do they face because of poor English language communication?
3.   What are the academic problems faced by ESL learners in Speaking English?

Theoretical framework:

Hymes (1972) explained that communicative competence is the ability of a person to speak and understand language in a particular context. It means communicative competence means effective listening and effective communication. Hymes (1972) elaborated on the communicative user's capabilities and explained that the user is aware of what to speak and where to speak formula and understands how words impact rather than uttering just the right grammatical structures. Canale and Swain (1980) brought forward the model of communicative competence which shows the association between communicative competence and sociolinguistic competence and grammatical competence. The model of Canale and swain (1980) has three basic domains which are grammatical competence,

which is the proficiency of the rules of a language, sociolinguistic competence which is the comprehension of language in particular social contexts, and strategic competence which is effectiveness and meaningfulness of communication.

Bachman (1990) presented his framework of Communicative language ability, it has three parts i.e. language competence, Psychological mechanism, and strategic competence. Bachman (1990) described language competence as a language of workplace competence and practical life competence and in order to get these two competencies one needs to develop grammatical competence and textual competence which deals with writing with accuracy. For Bachman, psychological mechanisms and strategic competencies require grammatical competence and an understanding sociolinguistic context of language and to give it a textual format. So Bachman feels writing is a powerful form of communication.

Macro (1997) brought forward a concept of language competence for the sake of teachers. This says that teachers need to focus on the meaningfulness of a sentence rather than just grammatical correctness furthermore he gives more credit to speaking and listening than reading and writing like Bachman. Macro (1990) also suggested to teachers, explore new information rather than focusing on pre-existing information.

Communicative competence is to be proficient in all four skills i.e. speaking, listening, reading, and writing to thrive in your career and to spend

Methodology

Ethnographic research:

Ethnographic research is a kind of research in which people's behaviors are studied in a real setting rather than an artificial or fabricated environment. In this kind of research data is

collected mainly through observations and interviews (Hamersley, M. 2016).

The qualitative ethnographic research design was selected to gather and analyze the data through real classroom observations and interviews.

Research tool:

The interview is one of the data collection tools in qualitative research. Kvalve, (1996) describes that qualitative research means to get the meaning of an interviewee. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. The researcher selected interviews as a research tool to gather data.

Observation:

In applied linguistics Observation is a close eye on the language of participants within a classroom or any naturalistic setting to see how language functions (Cowie, N. 2009).

I conducted real classroom observation after the consent of the teacher to know the level of participation of students to check their comprehension of lectures and their language command. To keep the record, written notes were made. For observation, one needs to know the area of observation and the way it will be saved for referring it back to Simpson, M., & Tuson, J. (2003).

Procedure:

The students who were to be observed were made to sit on front benches and the researcher sat facing them so that their body language, and facial expressions and listen to them clearly. To assess their language competency and its effects on their performance. Two classes in a week were observed. A total of 04 classes were observed.

Semi-structured Interview:

Semi-structured interviews are best for small-scale research. In it, people have quite reasonable freedom to speak as much and whatever they want to speak other than asked questions. It is supple technique Drever, E. (1995). .

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data other than observations. Only observations were not enough to get the personal experiences of students. At the same time, the validity of the observation could not be confirmed only by observation so the semi-structured interview was taken with the participants All together 10 open-ended questions were asked and they were free to decline the question.

Data collection procedure:

The participants were interviewed within the premises of SMIU. Oral consent was taken from the participants. Interviews lasted for 30 minutes.

Population

The population of this study is comprised on 20 postgraduate students who are currently registered and going through their coursework at SMIU Karachi. The population is divided into two main categories; as 10 males and 10 females with no other classification i.e. age gender or culture etc. Rather they are selected on the basis of their enrollment in the Postgraduate program.

Sampling

The study is based on the sample of 10 postgraduate students divided into two main categories as 05 males and 05 females with no other classification i.e. age, gender or culture etc. Rather they are selected on the basis of their enrollment in the Postgraduate program. Purposive random sampling has been used for the collection of data.

Interview analysis technique: The basic purpose of the research was to explore the communication barrier impacting the academic performance of post graduate students .First of all the responses received; were transcribed then themes were

developed after coding, chunking, and clustering. Thomas (2009) suggested that themes reveal the main content of the data. This technique of themes making to unravel and analyze data was picked. Grove (1998), and Glasser & Strauss (2006) proposed to make themes to interpret qualitative research interviews in order to get effective results.

Ethical consideration:

Permission was taken through consent forms from University authorities and class teachers to observe the classes and to take interviews with the students to collect data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis:

Vaismoradi, et, al,. (2016 ")Theme is used as attribute, descriptor, element, and concept. As an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas, it enables researchers to answer the study question. It contains codes that have a common point of reference and has a high degree of generality that unifies ideas regarding the subject of inquiry"

After the analysis, the following themes were observed.

1. Communication competence:

a. Lack of vocabulary

Effective spoken skill is indispensable to thrive in a career and to shine academically. Unfortunately, Student's fluent and effective communication is hindered by communication barriers like lack of vocabulary, right pronunciation, syntactic barriers, and lexical barriers. Pathan A.K. (2013) highlighted the same communication barriers like insufficient vocabulary and lexical and syntactic barriers in tertiary students in his research. He advocates the importance of oral communication skills to

perform well in academics and to work effectively in the workplace.

The first major theme was the linguistic barrier. It was observed that students didn't participate much in the classes where the teacher was speaking totally in English. Students were participating ardently in the classes where bilingualism was allowed. As one of the respondents highlighted:

"We belong to interior Sindh. In our schools, English is taught as a subject. We do not get much chance to practice it in speaking. We suffer from a lack of spoken fluency. (respondent, 2)

Another participant also shared:

I do not have enough vocabulary to express my thoughts clearly as in our Sindhi schools we do not speak English. I fumble for words and do not get the words according to the situation (Respondent 3)

b. Poor grammar knowledge:

Pathan, A. K. (2013) found that students have trouble speaking English because of inadequate command over syntax e.g. WH questions, Passive forms, reported structures, etc.

One of the participants added:

"I belong to interior Sindh, where English is not practiced in schools and colleges, In addition, there is no culture of English that's why I feel trouble using the right structures and picking up the right tense to speak effectively (Respondent 4)

c. Poor Pronunciation;

Communication is essentially connected to pronunciation because due to wrong pronunciation, the meaning of the words is changed totally. Pronunciation is considered one of the basics of speaking and communication skills. For most of the world, a lack of good

pronunciation has caused lots of misunderstandings (Yong, 2004).

One of the participants acknowledged:

I belong to the rural area of Sindh, our teachers did not have a specific focus on phonological aspects of the words, and rather their own pronunciation was not good. They spoke in a typical Sindhi tone so I developed the same wrong pronunciation because of that input. I usually mispronounce the words and people laugh at me and I feel ashamed and remain silent during class participations. (Participant 1)

Psychological barriers:

a. Anxiety:

Anxiety is a peculiar emotion that erupts in foreign language classes. Researchers have explored that one-third of people suffer from foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). Horwitz, and Cope (1986) further dig into foreign language anxiety and explored three more anxieties related to it that are: communication apprehension (McCroskey,1970), fear of negative evaluation

(Watson & Friend,1969), and test anxiety (Sarason,1978).

Anxiety due to foreign language results in fear of speaking to students and this fear arises because of fear of insult in class in the form of negative evaluation by the teacher. There is another reason that comes as a communication barrier which is the anxiety of being tested.

One of the respondents underlined:

 I can't communicate in classes because of the fear of being judged as I am not proficient in English and I have bad pronunciation I have a fear of mockery of odd and local pronunciation style. (Respondent 5)

Whereas, another participant also added:

 In classes where teachers speak totally in English and expect to reply in English, I feel stressed and anxious and suffer from a lack of confidence, and a lack of self-esteem in making mistakes. (Respondents R4)

Personality factors:

The research highlighted that student with personality factors like introvert and shy remained less confident so they avoid taking part in class activities or peer, group activities. Participants acknowledged that their nature of shyness caused them to be open to silence and avoidance of sharing their ideas openly.

One of the participants agreed:

I studied in a Boys' College and did not have any exposure to co-education so I usually remain stressed while sharing my views with students of the opposite gender. This aspect of my personality impacts my communication skill. (Respondents R6)

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The studies revealed that English competency is an important skill that is required to perform effectively in higher studies. Students need to be fluent in all four areas of language speaking, listening .reading, and writing for a smooth flow of higher studies. Writing and reading competency is important to understand the articles and to write research dissertations and scholarly articles. At the same time speaking and listening skills are equally important to impart information and to defend their thesis and research work.

It is revealed that students face difficulty in English communication and eventually have trouble in their studies. Students suffer from poor grammar, lack of pronunciation, vocabulary, and anxiety on fear of mockery, and

low confidence.

For dissertations, students need grammar, lexical, and syntactic commands. To fix this issue language modules should be introduced at a higher level to compensate for the needs of students from the poor educational background so

that they can pursue higher education with the facility.

A conducive environment is required to mitigate their fear and anxiety to bring them into speaking practice.

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