

THE EFFECTS OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (IIUM)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of classroom communication and students' academic performance at the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). This study involves two lecturers who are classified as excellent and average in their respective sections. Specifically, the researchers are interested in observing the classroom communication practice of the two lecturers involved and the effects it has on the students' academic performance. The findings of the study show that both lecturers are equally good in their classroom communication practice. There were no significant effects of classroom communication and students' academic performances in the two sections involved. However, students in both sections agreed that effective classroom communication is important in ensuring that teaching and learning take place.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning require communication. Ornstein (1990) indicates that most classroom activities involve communication. Effective classroom communication ensures that learning takes place. Thus, all elements of communication such as verbal and non-verbal communication within the classroom setting should be observed. For instance, it is important for a lecturer to generate different volumes, tones and inflections while delivering his lectures. According to Lang, McBeath & Hebert (1995), a lecturer should not slip into a monotone during class lessons. Different tones and inflections are useful in attracting students to focus on the lectures conducted. Non-verbal communication is also a fundamental criterion for class lectures. A good communicator should be able to express non-verbal cues well. Lang, McBeath & Hebert (1995) indicate that basic nonverbal skills include the awareness of eye contact, facial expression, motion, gestures, physical contact and silence. Different gestures and expressions may indicate different meanings. Therefore, it is vital for an educator to possess such knowledge and skills in order to communicate better with the students and to take charge of the class as a whole.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) consists of students who come from various parts of the world. These students come here armed with different cultures, norms and values. Although the majority of the students are Muslims, they are affected by their social environment. Even the practices of Islam are affected by the diversity of the social environment that they are in. Diversity in cultures, norms and values requires lecturers to be sensitive to the needs and necessities of the students. Lecturers should cater to their different needs so as to ensure that they are able to maximize their benefits from the class. This includes the ability to communicate well in class. Another important concern is students' inability to participate and communicate well in class. Some students tend to communicate among themselves (intrapersonal) rather than to express their views or opinions during class. This may be the result of students' inadequacy in the field of communication.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are situations in which lecturers fail to deliver their class lectures effectively due to their inability to communicate efficiently. There is no assurance that lecturers who are well-versed in their respective fields can communicate effectively to their students. They might find the encoding process rather difficult. In such circumstances, thoughts and ideas may fail to materialize into spoken words. The possibility is that such thoughts and ideas fail to be converted into something meaningful. Then there are lecturers who are unable to recognize students' communication styles and this would hinder effective teaching and learning as well. Another problem is the inability of lecturers to identify the nonverbal behaviour of students and this would result in the failure to comprehend the needs of their students. Asian students are more likely to express themselves by using non-verbal cues when compared to students who come from western countries.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims at comparing the effects of the classroom communication practices of an excellent lecturer with that of an average one. The purpose of the study is to observe differences in patterns and communication practices between an excellent and an average lecturer and to see if any relationship exists between their classroom communication practices and students' academic performance. Specifically, the study addresses four important aspects, (a) the nature of students' talk in the classroom in both classes conducted by the excellent and the average lecturer, (b) the nature of lecturers' talk in both classes conducted by the excellent and the average lecturer, (c) students' academic performances from the classes of the excellent and the average lecturer and (d) the nature of students' perceptions pertaining to the importance of classroom communication in the classes belonging to the excellent and the average lecturer.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the classes of the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to the nature of students' talk in the classroom?
2. Is there a significant difference between the classes conducted by the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to the nature of lecturers' talk?

3. Is there a significant difference in the academic performance of students from the classes conducted by the excellent and the average lecturer?
4. How do students' from both the excellent and average lecturers' classes perceive the classroom communication practices of their respective lecturers?

The following hypotheses (alternatives) were tested in relation to the four questions above:

1. The classes of the excellent lecturer have more students' talk compared to the classes of the average lecturer.
2. The excellent lecturer is better in his communication skills compared to the average lecturer.
3. There is a significant difference in students' academic performance between the classes of the excellent and the average lecturer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed method procedure was used in which survey and observation were employed throughout the study. The survey was important to find out students' perceptions relating to classroom communication, and its necessity and importance for academic performance. Classroom observations were necessary to investigate the classroom communication practices of lecturers and students.

Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) (Appendix A) was used as the main instrument in this study. Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) is an effective instrument usually used to evaluate classroom interaction. Esler and William (1983) studied teaching behaviours and their relationship to student performance by using Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) as their main instrument.

The survey was another instrument used in this study. In such a study, a survey is essential as it could be used to analyze the perceptions of the students regarding the needs and importance of classroom communication. A questionnaire was used for this survey (Appendix B).

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study involved lecturers and students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The subjects of the study comprised lecturers and students of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS). Therefore the outcome of the study can only be generalized to lecturers and students of the Kulliyah Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS) or to others who are in a similar situation.

DISCUSSION

Is There a Significant Difference between Classes conducted by the Excellent and the Average Lecturer in Relation to the Nature of Students' Talk in the Classroom?

A comparison of students' talk (response) shows that the students from the excellent lecturer's class (section 7) responded with more frequency compared to students from the average lecturer (section 4). The results (Table 1) show that there is a significant difference between classes under the excellent lecturer and those under the average lecturer in relation to the nature of

students' talk (response) in the classroom. ($t = -2.49$, $p = 0.038 < 0.05$). This shows that the excellent lecturer's class provided better responses i.e. students' responses to the lecturer, compared to the average lecturer's class.

A comparison of the students' talk (initiation) shows that students from the excellent lecturer's class initiated communication more frequently when compared to students under the average lecturer. Even though students who were taught by the excellent lecturer initiated more communication than students who were taught by the average lecturer, the results ($t = -1.26$, $p = 0.245 > 0.05$) show that there is no significant difference between both classes under the excellent and those under the average lecturer in relation to the nature of students' talk (initiation), that is talk initiated by students in the classroom.

Table 1

Independent sample t-tests for difference of means in students' talk (response & initiation) by lecturer

Students' Talk	Section	N	Mean	s.d	df	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Response	Ave (4)	5	30	12.22	8	-2.49	0.38
	Excel (7)	5	52	15.79			
Initiation	Ave (4)	5	2.0	2.35	8	-1.26	.245
	Excel (7)	5	7.2	8.96			

- Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Is There a Significant Difference between Classes of the Excellent and the Average Lecturer in Relation to the Nature of Lecturers' Talk?

Lecturers' talk (response) shows that the average lecturer provided more responses compared to the excellent lecturer (Table 2). But the results ($t = 1.40$, $p = 0.174 > 0.05$) show that there is no significant difference between the classes of the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to the nature of lecturers' talk (response), that is accepting feelings, praising and encouraging and accepting or using the ideas of students. On the other hand, the excellent lecturer asked more questions in class compared to the average lecturer. Still the results ($t = -.807$, $p = 0.443 > 0.05$) show that there is no significant difference between both classes of the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to asking questions in class.

Table 2

Independent sample t-tests for difference of means in lecturers' talk (response), asking questions and lecturers' talk (initiation)

Lecturers' Talk	Section	N	Mean	s.d	df	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Response	Ave (4)	15	7.33	8.96	28	1.40	.174
	Excel (7)	15	3.53	5.58			
Asking Questions	Ave (4)	5	24.4	9.86	8	-.807	.443
	Excel (7)	5	30.2	12.68			
Initiation	Ave (4)	15	257.67	322.69	28	.198	.845
	Excel (7)	15	235.87	279.02			

- Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Lecturers' talk (initiation) shows that the average lecturer initiated communication more compared to the excellent lecturer. But the results ($t = .198$, $p = 0.845 > 0.05$) show that there is no significant difference between both classes of the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to the nature of lecturers' talk initiation.

Is There a Significant Difference in Students' Academic Performance in the Classes of the Excellent and the Average Lecturer?

The students' final examination grades for Introduction to Sociology (SOCA1010) were used as an indicator of students' academic achievement. Students in both sections performed equally well in the final exam. This is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent Sample t-test for students' academic performance by section

Academic Performance	Section	N	Mean	s.d	df	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Final examination result	Ave (4)	52	60.92	9.92	101	.788	.433
	Excel (7)	51	59.10	13.36			

- Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

The results ($t = .788$, $p = 0.433 > 0.05$) show that there were no significant differences between the classes of the excellent and the average lecturer in relation to students' academic performance.

How Do Students' of Both the Excellent and the Average Lecturer Perceive the Classroom Communication Practices of Their Respective Lecturers?

A survey was conducted with the main aim of gathering students' opinions regarding the importance of classroom communication. The survey was divided into five different dimensions. The five different dimensions were students' views of lecturers' response in the classroom, students' views of lecturers' initiations in the classroom, students' views of their classroom communication practices, students' views of ideal classroom communication practices and students' views of the effects of classroom communication practices.

The study showed that almost all students in both sections agreed to the importance of classroom communication. They believed that lecturers should be able to communicate effectively during lectures. Being an exceptional communicator is an indicator of an outstanding lecturer.

The study on the effects of classroom communication practices indicated that the majority of students in both sections agreed that they attended lectures regularly. But the students of the excellent lecturer were more motivated and believed that they benefited more from the lessons compared to the students of the average lecturer. Even though most of the items asked in the survey favored the excellent lecturer, still, the results of the final examination indicated that there was no significant difference in terms of academic performance among students from both sections.

CONCLUSION

Various studies have been conducted in relation to classroom communication practices. This study showed the importance of integrating the needs of classroom communication and students' academic performance. Even though there was no direct correlation between effective classroom communication and students' performance, two-way communication in the classroom is essential in assuring that effective teaching and learning can take place. It is very important for local higher institutions of learning to improve communication practices among lecturers. More studies in the area of classroom communication in the Malaysian context, with specific focus on ways to stimulate students' communication during class lectures should be carried out in order to improve teaching and learning practices.

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APPENDIX A

FLANDERS' INTERACTION ANALYSIS CATEGORIES (FIAC)

Teacher Talk	Response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Accept feeling</i> – Accepts and clarifies an attitude or the feeling or tone of a student in a non-threatening manner. Feelings may be positive or negative. Predicting and recalling feelings are included. 2. <i>Praises or encourages</i> – Praises or encourages student action or behaviour. Jokes that release tension, but not at the expense of another individual; nodding the head or saying 'Um hm?' or 'go on' are included. 3. <i>Accepts or uses ideas of students</i> – Clarifying, building or developing ideas suggested by students. Teacher extensions of student ideas are included but as the teacher brings more of his own ideas into play, shift to category five.
Teacher Talk		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. <i>Asks questions</i> – Asking a question about content or procedure, based on teacher ideas, with the intent of eliciting an answer.
Teacher Talk	Initiation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. <i>Lecturing</i> – Giving facts or opinions about content or procedures; expressing his own ideas, giving his own explanation, or citing an authority other than a student. 6. <i>Giving direction</i> – Directions, commands, or

		orders which students are expected to comply with. 7. <i>Criticizing or justifying authority</i> – Statements intended to change student behaviour from non-acceptable to acceptable patterns; bawling someone out; stating why the teacher is doing what he is doing; extreme self-reference.
Pupil Talk	Response	8. <i>Pupil-talk – Response</i> – Talk by students in response to the teacher. Teacher initiates the contact or solicits student statement or structures the situation. Freedom to express own ideas is limited.
Pupil Talk	Initiation	9. <i>Pupil-talk – Initiation</i> – Talk by students which they initiate. Expressing own ideas; initiating a new topic; freedom to develop opinions and a line of thought, asking thoughtful questions; going beyond the existing structure.
Silence		10. <i>Silence or confusion</i> – Pauses, short periods of silence and periods of confusion in which communication cannot be understood by the observer.

Source: Croll (1986) p. 40

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

Objective: The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify the perception of students regarding the importance of classroom communication. This questionnaire would serve as indicator of students' expectations in relation to classroom communication.

Instruction: Please answer the following questions as sincerely and as honestly as possible. Circle the relevant option that reflects your opinion.

Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; D = Disagree;
SD = Strongly Disagree

A. Student's Background

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. Nationality
 - a. Malaysian
 - b. International (Please State):.....
3. Age
 - a. Below 20
 - b. 20-21
 - c. 22-23
 - d. 24-25
 - e. 26 and above
4. Course of study
 - a. Human Sciences (HS)
Please specify specialization:.....
 - b. Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Heritage (IRKH)
Please specify specialization:.....
 - c. English Language & Literature (BENL)
 - d. Arabic Language & Literature (BARB)
5. Level of study
 - a. 1st year
 - b. 2nd year
 - c. 3rd year
 - d. 4th year
6. Last semester's CGPA
 - a. 2.0 and below
 - b. 2.1-2.5
 - c. 2.6-3.0
 - d. 3.1-3.5
 - e. 3.6 and above

B. Student's Perception On Classroom Communication

1. My course instructor speaks clearly in class.

SA A NS D SD

2. My course instructor acknowledges students ideas during class.

SA A NS D SD

3. My course instructor praises students' ideas during class.

SA A NS D SD

4. My course instructor frequently asks questions to students during class.

SA A NS D SD

5. My course instructor provides responses to students' questions, ideas and comments.

SA A NS D SD

6. My course instructor promotes two way communications during class.

SA A NS D SD

7. My course instructor encourages students' participations during class session.

SA A NS D SD

8. My course instructor uses body languages (body movement, body postures etc.) and eye contacts during class.

SA A NS D SD

9. My course instructor teaches the lesson effectively to students during class session.

SA A NS D SD

10. My course instructor communicates effectively with students during class session.

SA A NS D SD

11. I attend my class sessions regularly.

SA A NS D SD

12. I always feel motivated to attend my class sessions.

SA A NS D SD

13. I frequently ask questions during class session.

SA A NS D SD

14. I am always involved in classroom discussions during class session.

SA A NS D SD

15. I believe in the importance of two ways communication in class.

SA A NS D SD

16. I believe that the course instructor should be able to encourage students' participation during class session.

SA A NS D SD

17. I believe that the course instructor should be able to communicate effectively in class during class session.

SA A NS D SD

18. I believe that a good communicator is an important indicator of a good course instructor.

SA A NS D SD

19. I really think that my class is interesting and I benefit from the class lessons

SA A NS D SD