



## Teacher – Students' Academic Communication Patterns at Higher Education Level: A Descriptive Survey

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**Abstract:** Communication is considered a vital factor for university-level students as it influences as a catalyst in the process of teaching and learning as well as the quality of the academic process. The study aimed to identify the communication level of university teachers and students to identify the ways and means utilized by both parties to develop effective and efficient communication. The study covered five public sector universities in Islamabad. The faculty of social sciences was selected as an accessible population. The sample of the study consisted of 860 students. Data was collected through a questionnaire for survey. For this purpose, the questionnaire was converted to google forms and the link was shared with the students for the response. The findings of the study show that more effective and efficient communication between teachers and students can enhance the quality of academic activities. It was also concluded that teachers who have formed and are following ethical guidelines get more involvement from their students. It was recommended that teachers need to set ethical boundaries of communication with their students to get more enhanced and focused academic activity among students and teachers.

**Key Words:** Communication Means, University Students, Ethical Frame, Teachers, Higher Education

### Introduction

Communication is considered a very important skill rather need for human beings individually and in a social setting as well. Communication is generally defined as the process of exchanging ideas, emotions, and information as well. In the context of teaching and learning, communication covers the process of transferring and transforming knowledge, skills, behaviors and the creation of meanings (Dökmen, 1994, Bolat, 1990). Pearson and Nelson (2000) defined communication as the process to facilitate understanding and to share

the meanings deducted from the understanding. Chen (1990) highlighted another aspect of communication as the execution of the communication to get desired behavior. This behavior is also affected by the environment. This definition unpacked the two-dimensional nature of communication by including the responsiveness of the respondent in the communication process. The communicator not only has to effectively transfer the message their mind to the mind of the receiver. Rather they also need to assess the effectiveness of communication through the response of the listener. Though

communication is very important for every human being, communication is more important for children and especially students, as they depend on their teachers for information, support and guidelines. This communication needs to be effective as it becomes responsible for building the future generations of a nation. Education is considered the preparation for practical life and teaching can be taken as the other name of communication practice and preparation. [Kavçar \(2003\)](#) further states that teachers are a very important element of the academic process as they are directly connected with students and affect their behavior directly and indirectly. Communication is an important channel that integrates people and nations ([Shehu, 2013](#)). Communication between teachers, students and other academic personnel is an important factor in enhancing the quality of education, especially in a pandemic situation. Many studies have proved that communication skills at the university level become more complex as it requires a combination of many general skills as students are not only communicating with the teachers and academic personnel but also they need to connect with many elements in the university environment as well. These opportunities help students to develop their communication skills better as these require a positive and supportive attitude from the teacher specifically and other elements generally. ([Cleland, Foster and Moffat, 2005](#). Tinggi, K, P 2006. [Ihmeideh, Ahmad and Dababneh, 2010](#)). Teachers, Head of Departments, Deans and university administration is responsible for creating such an open and supportive environment where the future professionals can communicate their thinking, feelings and use their communication to analyze their thoughts in an open and unbiased manner for analysis, problem-solving and creating new ideas that will be a very important requirement from them in future. These future professionals require many skills that are indirectly required for communication within the organization and in general life as well. These skills include patience, global citizenship, acceptance towards members of other cultures and avoiding biasedness towards

some specific people ([Shehu 2013](#)). Ethical considerations while communicating are also an important element that needs to be taken into view. In this respect, teachers play a vital role by communicating in an ethical manner with their students. [Ihmeideh, Ahmad and Dababneh, 2010](#). concluded that students at the university level could adopt attitudes towards communication from their teachers and other academic personnel. They also suggested that students need to be provided with the opportunity to communicate in various settings about different matters in multiple ways. It will give them a good amount of practice in their personal as well as professional life. [Ihmeideh, et al. \(2010\)](#) further states that not only university students but also teachers need to put the effort in developing their personal as well as professional communication skills. Zanaton et al. (2012) identified four dimensions of communication in general and in a professional setting specifically. These consist of the use of language, cultural consideration, politeness, and the ability to negotiate. In the globalized society of the modern era, it becomes even more important to learn communication skills for freedom of expression, ideas and knowledge. University students are even more expected to exhibit these skills after being exposed to a higher level of education and teachers. The world is getting globalized and university students are expected to master not only their own local communication styles as well as diverse cultural contexts ([Penbek, Yurdakul, & Cerit, 2009](#)).

University students are considered to be near-future professionals, so [Harlak \(2009\)](#) proposed that students at this level should get not only academic area knowledge and training rather they should also be trained in proficient communication as well. Communication skills, ICT, managerial training and language create a tool kit that can help professionals to excel in their professional as well as personal life ([Komba, 2012](#)). So university students whether from any field, should be equipped with this combination of skills.

## Objectives

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1. Assess academic communication patterns of university students

## Specific Objectives

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1. Assess the level of effectiveness of students in classrooms.
2. Evaluation of the communication effectiveness in seminar settings.
3. Assessment of group cooperation in academic communication.

## Methodology and data Collection Procedures

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The study was quantitative in nature with a descriptive survey design. Questionnaires were used as a data collection tool for this study. Overall, three public sector universities were included in the study. The total number of students in the sample was 845. The demographic distribution of the sample shows that 67% of respondents were males while 33% of respondents were females. All these students were studying at undergraduate and graduate levels of different programs in the social sciences departments of these universities. The tool of data collection was adopted from another study titled "Issues of Communication between Academic Staff and Students in the Higher Education Institutions of Albania-a Descriptive Approach." The questionnaire initially had 34 items covering the aspects of communication, morality, and students' participation in class discussions, lectures and seminars. For analysis of data, descriptive techniques such as mean scores and tabulations and for analysis of the advanced relationship, the technique of regression was utilized to get a meaningful conclusion from the collected data.

## Findings

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1. The findings of the data analysis show that 98% of students agree with the fact that communication is considered an important factor for better performance at the university level. This response can be considered an indicator of students'

awareness and consideration of communication at the university level.

2. When students were asked about the frequency of communication of teachers and academic staff for sharing information about courses they are dealing with, 54% of students responded that teachers sometimes connect with them through online medium, while 29% responded in the form of frequently and 17% presented the view that teachers never use communication for the solution of problems during academic sessions. This finding indicates a moderate communication level between teachers and students for solving academic problems. It requires frequent and seamless connectivity between teachers and students and also academic staff to get connected with students for the provision of a supportive and problem-free environment for students. In this respect role of departmental heads also needs to be revisited as they need to maintain a close connection with the students for the provision of a supportive pedagogical and social environment within their department. Heads need to get connected with class representators, and conduct departmental surveys and students' opinions for a deeper and real understanding of problems faced by students.
3. When students were asked about "effective ways for drawing thought," their responses were 18% responded that departmental surveys are an effective way, while 74% thought that a face to face meeting with teachers and the head of the department is an effective way of sorting their problems while only 9% students considered class representators as an effective source of communicating their problems to teachers and administrative staff. So the findings of this item show that students were more comfortable in sharing their ideas directly with the heads and

- teachers rather than depending upon class representators or any other means.
4. The response of students to the question of whether surveys are organized in the department to find out the areas in which students have some complaints about departmental matters? The response of students shows that departments sometimes arrange such opportunities. When students are asked to provide a reason for such practice, they think that the head of the department either is too busy with other departmental tasks or they do not believe in the authenticity of students' complaints.
  5. Analysis of the curriculum of BS programs of different universities shows that "communication skills" are considered an important area at the university level and are included in many courses.
  6. When students were asked about the level of communication they receive at university, students thought that 46% of students rated it as well, while 18% of students rated it as very good. These responses indicate a satisfactory effort on parts of higher education institutions' administration in the development of soft skills of their students along with their content area.
  7. Students' opinion about the ethical communication pattern about teachers towards students' complaints was that they believe that teachers frequently communicate in an ethical manner was an idea supported by 45% of students, while 35% presented the idea that teachers always communicate in an ethical manner with students. This finding indicates the ethical level of university faculty is very good.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Student's Responses to their communication practices

	NUML	IIUI	AIOU	AAU	QAU	FJWU	Total
Communication as a key factor							
Yes	130	81	89	131	216	213	860
No	1		1	0	1	4	7
Communication staff student							
Never	24	17	8	11	40	23	12
Sometimes	63	41	32	71	123	111	435
Frequently	41	13	29	33	46	60	230
Always	7	4	13	18	11	20	67
Effective communication method							
Survey	27	21	18	32	19	37	140
Direct meetings	104	55	47	81	169	167	626
Meetings with elected representatives	7	5	08	31	25	21	88
Are surveys organized?							
Never	37	34	21	55	102	58	300
Sometimes	64	32	42	63	94	109	400
Frequently	27	7	16	18	23	28	120
Always	9	0	5	2	3	15	34
Knowledge							
Limited	12	11	04	27	32	30	114
Sufficient	31	12	17	48	77	48	235
Good	64	35	43	47	84	106	376
Very good	32	13	24	09	25	31	129

	NUML	IIUI	AIOU	AAU	QAU	FJWU	Total
Communication ethics							
Never	01	02	01	03	03	02	12
Sometimes	21	23	17	20	36	52	166
Frequently	52	26	32	44	99	97	357
Always	62	23	25	56	77	74	319
Total	139	73	82	132	220	214	860

The second section of the article covered the individual factors affecting the communication skills of students. Along with the organizational and institutional factors affecting the communication of students, the individual factor that affects the communication skills training of students includes their own motivation and commitment to the process. In this regard, the most effective factors listed by some studies include students' responsive behavior during classes and active participation in the learning process. It is also considered important that students need to get motivation from teachers' responses about their responses.

1. The response of students about their participation during classroom activities, students responded as they always participate got 56% repose while 31% of students responded as they frequently participate in lectures and other classroom activities.
2. Responses of students about their participation in classroom discourses and discussions 46% of students responded that they frequently participate in such activities, while 31% responded that they always participate in such activities. The high response rate in these options indicates the teachers encouraging behavior for students' participation in such activities.
3. Students were asked about the feedback mechanism of the teachers' lectures and the quality of the activities. The response from the students indicates that 29% of teachers are frequently concerned about getting feedback from their students, while 12% of teachers are always concerned about getting feedback from their students about their performance. The results indicate that teachers and

instructors are less concerned about getting feedback about lectures and activities in the classroom.

4. Assessment of students is one of the key objectives of educationists and teachers as a feedback mechanism for the achievement of predefined objectives. But assessment becomes useless if it is not objective. Students were asked to rate their level of engagement in the complaining activity about the biasedness and unfair assessment. In response to this item, 27% of students reported that they were victims of unfair assessment but they never reported it. 72% of respondents responded as they sometimes tried to convey the situation to their teachers and administration. The responses indicate that students either did not complain. But in their comments, they stated their belief that their highlighting the problem would not affect the teachers' practices.
5. Group communication can be a source of improvement of communication skills among students. In the course of their studies, they need to communicate for classroom activities, assignments and projects. Engagement in these activities is meant to enhance their communication skills along with their relationship-building with each other. When st5udents were asked about their integrity and cooperation with their group fellows, the responses of the students were that 45% of students sometimes feel this cooperation, while 32% frequently feel and enjoy this cooperative attitude of co-students, while 15% of students responded about always enjoying this cooperation and integrity. Data interpretation shows a

lower level of cooperation among students at the university level.

6. In response to the question about their openness towards acceptance of ideas that are opposite to or different from their point of view. 34% of students responded as they frequently accept differences of thoughts in groups, while 29% of respondents responded as they always accept and respect differences of opinion and thoughts. In the Pakistani setting, students need to have the courage and patience to express their

concerns to their teachers and academic administration.

7. In response to the item about their class representatives helping them in communicating their problems and concerns with teachers and administration, 67% responded as the class representations never communicate the real picture of opinions to the teachers, while 21% responded as sometimes they share comments and opinion to the teachers.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Student's Responses to their communication practices (Continued)

	NUML	IIUI	AIOU	AAU	QU	FJWU	Total
Lecture attendance							
Never			2	6	5	4	17
Sometimes	25	6	11	27	44	28	137
Frequently	39	13	41	27	61	65	244
Always	71	56	22	79	9	117	456
Participation in debates							
Never	3	0	7	8	4	4	26
Sometimes	53	16	10	33	59	52	223
Frequently	53	26	34	49	97	101	360
Always	33	26	27	44	57	59	245
Do professors ask for your suggestions?							
Never	6	10	12	15	29	23	96
Sometimes	42	46	18	72	8	116	422
Frequently	56	8	35	33	54	54	241
Always	35	4	16	9	13	18	95
Evaluation by the professor							
Never	22	28	15	43	73	65	244
Sometimes	116	42	65	83	16	147	603
Frequently			2	1		1	5
Always	1			1	0		2
Group cooperation							
Never	8	6	2	9	15	12	51
Sometimes	59	33	34	48	19	103	396
Frequently	52	18	34	52	73	59	288
Always	17	16	17	17	24	30	121
Accept alternative ideas?							
Never	3		7	5	3	4	22
Sometimes	37	23	26	37	46	64	234
Frequently	55	18	31	52	79	71	306
Always	46	28	13	39	92	75	293
Total	139	71	80	130	220	214	860

Along with quantitative responses, students were asked to provide qualitative responses for the reasons, reflections and explanations. Thus very few responses were recorded by students but these were very helpful for the interpretation of quantitative responses.

The following findings are made on the basis of the comments and ideas expressed by students.

1. The classroom representations thus represent the students of their class but sometimes, due to teachers' pressure or due to their personal benefits such as getting undue grades or other benefits in attendance, they do not communicate the real picture to teachers.
2. Teachers and administration sometimes ask students to provide feedback, but they do not always believe in providing the desired level of activities, practices and facilities to the students.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

On the basis of data collected from the students of different universities in Islamabad, the conclusion can be drawn that not only do teachers and instructors need to maintain a good level of communication, rather the head of departments, deans and other administrative staff may also maintain some mechanism to get connected with students to get feedback and also know about their opinion about decisions and facilities provided to them. They mostly focus on the communication of rules and guidelines that students need to follow. But as far as complaints of students are concerned, they need to follow a proper channel, that is, classroom representators, teachers, head of the department, and dean etc.

It is recommended that Heads of departments, teachers and other people in the hierarchy needs to be concerned towards

students' needs in general and complain specifically as a source of providing a conducive environment to students and also enhance the quality of service provided to society. Teachers and departmental heads need to encourage students to provide an honest and sincere opinion without any consequences. They need to use this information to enhance the quality and solution of problems faced by students by teachers and other administration. For this purpose, institutes need to devise proper systems as assessment Performa about teachers and courses that is commonly used in some universities. It is also needed that students may be given the confidence that their opinion will not be communicated to their teachers. Rather, I will be used for the improvement of the system. This communication system and mechanism can also be enhanced by creating support and solidarity between teachers and students with the system as a whole. An effective communication mechanism system will also require the acceptance of viewpoints of co-students and teachers. But acceptance of diversity does not mean removal or discouragement of the discussion about the difference of ideas and opinions, as it is the essence of creativity. Vice-chancellors, rectors, deans and departmental heads need to be very ethical and should follow some moral guidelines while communicating to students and class representations as it will be transmitted to them as a hidden curriculum. Administrative and academic staff needs to arrange meetings with students regularly and institutional and departmental surveys may be devised and conducted to have a fair view of students about the policies and services provided to them. As practiced in other countries, the student senate can also be encouraged to get fair feedback as well as empower students in the solution of their problems.

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