

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND CONDUCT IN CLASS AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS TOWARDS EFFECTIVE TEACHING

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### Abstract

*The goal of teaching is to improve student learning by maximizing opportunities of learning and understanding in every lesson. In many cases lecturers fail to transfer knowledge to students effectively despite having sound technical knowledge in the subject area. The existence of knowledge stimulates the context of real life scenarios and real world experiences that assist understanding of theories (Heffernan et al., 2003). Teaching as a process of communicating and imparting basic knowledge as well as skills in a formal or informal situation bring about a change in behavior (Osakwe, 2009). Teaching is an interactive process between the instructor and the learners via the process of communication that directs learning activities. This paper attempts to identify students' view and perception of teachers based on two teaching characteristics - teacher's communication skills and conduct in class. A survey is distributed to students that enrolled in an undergraduate business related program of two private higher learning institutions. The results affirm that conduct in class as well as communication skills are perceived by students as the characteristics required in an effective teachers.*

**Keywords:** *conduct in class, communication skills, effective teaching, academic performance, students' perception*

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### 1. Introduction

Good teaching is about substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge. Knowledge refers to doing your best to be on top of your field, reading sources, inside and outside of your areas of expertise as well as being at the leading edge as often as possible (Leblanc, 1998). Our new world is all in favour of learners and learning but somewhat circumspect about teachers and teaching (Badley, 1999). There are still some questions needs to be answered with honest on the debate of effective teaching as the matter become interestingly discusses. One of the teaching methods that necessitate student activity, problem-solving and cooperative learning permit a degree of student control over learning and can thus accommodate individual differences in their preferred ways of reaching understanding (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2003). Today's institutions of higher learning are facing new challenges in their efforts to improve the quality of education. Teachers in higher education must focus on customer (i.e. students) needs in order to be successful. Qualified teachers must know how to organize and teach lessons in ways that assure students learn these subjects despite the expanding diversity (Thompson et al., 2004).

The higher tuition fees spurring interest in the study of quality assurance in higher education that motivates the need to focus on improving the quality of actions as well as interactions in teaching and learning process. This includes improvement in the areas of teaching methods, subject designs and objectives, course notes and books, resources, staff-student interactions, assessments and subject evaluations (Lee & Yeap, 2005). Learning is crucial in knowledge management as it provides an avenue for the organization to infuse new knowledge (Lee & Choi, 2003; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; See, 2002 cited by Gan et al., 2000). The quintessential of quality teaching is the ability of lecturers or educators delivering lessons effectively and competently. A competent lecturer is the culmination of having the appropriate qualifications, commitment and passion for teaching. Brocato and Potocki (1996) defined teaching as a student's education meeting the student's expectations. The implication of this definition to teachers is they need to thoroughly understand the content of their teaching (Adediwura and Tayo, 2007).

Research has shown that teaching is traditionally a predominant method of imparting knowledge in the classrooms in higher institutions of learning (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2003). In addition university lecturers and tutors in many institutions around world are appointed on the basis of academic ability with less regard to their capacity to communicate effectively to students on the knowledge that they possess (Moses & Mwangi, 2005). The reality in oriented environment exhibits communication as the most important determinants of success in promoting both relationship and understanding. Various studies in higher education show that students appreciate instruction that fits their learning habits and are not inclined to change their habitual patterns. Students are predominantly concerned with knowledge acquisition in traditional lectures that typically consist of monologue delivered by the lecturer (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2003). This paper is aim to identify that two of the characteristic of effective teaching namely communication skills and conduct in class improves students' performance.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Effective Teaching and Learning**

During the last decade considerable attention is set on the issue of effective teaching and learning (Hamid Hassanpour, 2008). Students' views on all aspects of higher education experiences are now being widely canvassed and regarded as essential to justify the effectiveness of monitoring in universities (Hill et al., 2003). This is owing to the general reflects on the quality of teaching that impact quality of learning in the higher education institutions (HEIs). The HEIs are accountable for the quality of education and other activities to the quality assurance agencies, the ministries of education as well as other stakeholders (Kettunen, 2008). The quality of education is the key factor in the invisible competition between the HEIs and become the common agenda within the educational circles as school and colleges has turn out to be the focus and scrutiny to meet up the expectations of human capital requirement. Therefore, Higher education is viewed as business-like enterprise where the student is a consumer that seeks a business-like relationship with the producer (lecturer) that delivers knowledge, skills and competencies (Newton, 2002 as cited by Chepchieng et al., 2006).

Effective teaching identifies and builds on prior knowledge, makes real-life connections, develops deep understanding and monitoring that reflects on learning experiences. In this context the goal of teaching is to improve student learning experiences by maximizing opportunities of learning in every lesson. Such improvement reduces wastage of university resources such as time, effort and money by producing students with the right skills and knowledge that delight future employers (Lee & Yeap, 2005). Laurillard (1997) as cited by Ngware & Ndirangu (2005) further points out that academic learning is not only concerned with acquiring knowledge but includes on how the student handles knowledge as well. The university teaching staff should therefore not only possess academic knowledge but as well aware of how to make students' learning possible. Trigwell et al. (1999) as cited by Van Dijk & Jochems (2003) shows that teaching approach adopted by teachers have distinct influence on the learning experiences of students.

A number of research works conducted in the area of quality of teachers, teachers' assessment, teachers' training describe that quality of teacher is the key of education system. Therefore, this implying the effectiveness of teaching depends on teaching preparation and presentation Mok (2002) as cited by Azizi & Siew Hee (2010). Mohd Hasni (1996), finds that a quality teacher is the teacher that manages to impart knowledge interestingly and effectively. Generally as noted by Rosnani (2001) majority of teachers have knowledge, skills and good attitude in teaching. However the challenges face by teachers or lecturers is in ensuring that the knowledge has been successfully understood and creates the environment of learning among students. Abd. Ghafar (2003) concludes teachers may have knowledge in the subject but does not have skills to transfer the knowledge to students

## **2.2. Effective Communication in Teaching**

The key to proper use of teaching techniques as many have learnt over the years is through communication (Rodrigues, 2004). Communication is the process that includes transferring of information to long-term memory requires attention, organization, and repetition (Cooperstein & Weidinger, 2004). While Pozo-Munoz et al (2000) contend that the ability to motivate or stimulate students and communication is part of the same conduit that emerges as a vital construct in achieving teaching effectiveness (Heffernan et al. 2003). Thus effective communication is essential to the success of both the student and the teacher (Osakwe, 2009). Using this as a fundamental condition discloses that the ability to communicate in a learning environment is fundamental. Heffernan et al. (2003) further states that both dynamism and friendliness influence communication effectiveness impacted teaching effectiveness. In fact effective communication has direct influence on teaching effectiveness by encouraging interest, making the subject easier to remember and teaching students in a way that they are able to understand. Hence effective is identified as the ability to convey information at an appropriate level of difficulty that segregates effective communication as clarity, style, level and experience.

Clarity reflected the lucidity of lecturers' presentations whereas styles include conducting lesson effectively and teachers should not only focus solely on one particular teaching approach. Instead teachers should utilize and integrate various approaches in their lessons to achieve the best learning of students. (Sulaiman et al., 2009). To communicate effectively include knowing the level of the students that is translated in the approach of teaching and to apply all of the aspect of communication in order to be effective relate to the amount of experience acquired by the teachers.

This led to communication intent as students valued lecturers that shows empathy and perceived friendly lecturer as someone who showed understanding as well as compassion for the student and their situation (Heffernan et al., 2003). Dynamic lecturers encouraged students to engage themselves and improve the effectiveness of their communication that emphasizes the importance of communication as identified by Pozo-Munoz et al. (2000) cited by Heffernan et al, 2003). In relations to classroom communications teachers should develop their knowledge or skills in teaching as creative generations are needed for the development of a country (Azizi & Siew Hee, 2010). Kuok Wong (2003) further concludes that the close rapport between students and lecturer has promoted better understanding between them.

Despite the advancement of communication technology and the use of online teaching, lecturers are still considered to be the greatest asset of universities (Hamid Hassanpour, 2008). Most people agree that good teachers are caring, supportive, concerned about the welfare of students, knowledgeable about their subject matter, able to get along with parents and genuinely excited about the work that they do as well as able to help students learning experience (Thompson et al., 2004). Lecturing can be an effective way of communicating by delivering a great deal of information not easily available or by demonstrating an analytic process (CTL, 1993). Lecturers may rely on conventional lectures to communicate information and concepts with their own perspective though there is possibility to help students fully grasp and assimilate the ideas that is being presented. Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf (2003) report that effective teachers are supportive of students in multiple ways and able to help to meet their needs for belonging and success. Having respect from students' means that lecturers are approachable that leads to superior learning outcomes (Heffernan et al., 2003).

### **2.3. Conduct of Educators in the Classrooms**

Most HEIs agree that lecturers have the greatest impact on students' changes in their aspirations, values, attitudes, beliefs and actions (Whitt et al., Nora, 2001; Chepchieng, 2004 as cited Chepchieng et al., 2006). Educators should be responsive to the needs and feelings of their students as Noddings writes, "*A caring teacher is someone who has demonstrated that she [he] can establish, more or less regularly, relations of care in a wide variety of situations...[and] will want the best for that person*" cited by Thompson et. al, (2004). Heffernan et al., (2003) report that the ability to express oneself clearly and fluently as well as the ability to motivate and stimulate interest as teaching competency. Seiler and Seiler (2002) interpret that the use of humour, originality, enthusiasm and encouragement of critical thinking in a learning environment relates to secondary professor characteristics. Whereas Pozo-Munoz et al (2000) identify "psychologically balanced" as teaching qualities. Ayers (2001) believes that good teacher is a teacher that always jokes or cheerful, treat students in same way, knowing class progression and believe that every student have their own level of learning. In addition, McDermott & Rothenberg (2000) state that students enjoy teachers with a sense of humor and found those teachers made learning fun. Thompson et al., (2004) and Cruickshank et al. (2003) also claimed that effective teachers should possess sense of humors as well as an enthusiastic and warmth persons. These characteristics as illustrated by many authors in view of effective teaching clearly link these personality traits to student success (Thompson et al., 2004). Success means students are motivated to learn in the conducive environment creates by the teachers or lecturer's that are warmth and receptive.

In a nutshell quality improvement in education requires continuous reflection by teachers about what they do and why they do it (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2003). Based on the research literature interactive lecturing is expected to initiate motivation, study behaviour and learning ability that produce benefits to the students. The outcome suggests that a change from traditional teaching approach in lectures towards a more interactive approach can be considered as valuable to the students (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2003). Enthusiasm and physical prowess of lecturer's is recognized as the ability to communicate effectively especially teaching in large hall with mass students. Teachers that are physically fit relate their excitement and passion create commitment to ensure effective learning outcomes. In contrast tired teachers communicate low expectations and unwillingness to provide appropriate consequences. From past researches reveal that communication skills as well as conduct in class of an educator are the characteristics of effective teaching and the outcome of an effective teaching eventually affect students' performance.

### **3. Methodology**

A survey is distributed to 400 students enroll in Business related program of two private higher education institutions. Out of 400 distributions, 364 are returned back and 323 are completed. The questionnaires are based on Likert scale of 1 to 5 with 1 as strongly disagrees and 5 as strongly agree. The basis of the questionnaires is to compile the elements of conduct in class and communication skills. The elements of conduct in class are clarity of explanation, presentation skill and responsiveness towards questions from learners whereas the ability to build up rapport, display fairness and being humorous are the elements of communication skills. The elements of conduct in class are the first construct and the elements of communication skills are the second construct of the questionnaires.

Hence the survey consists of four parts with the first part serves as the basis to validate communication skill as the characteristics of effective teachers. Respondents are expected to complete twelve questions for the first construct of conduct in class. The second part of the questionnaires serves as the basis to validate conduct in class as the characteristics of effective teachers and respondents are expected to complete twelve questions for the construct of communication skills. The third part of the questionnaires is to obtain the general information of respondents and the survey concludes with the fourth part that represents the perception of students' on the role of effective teaching towards academic performance. The total number of five questions is expected to be completed by respondents in this section.

### **4. Results**

The details of respondents involve in this study is reported in Table 1 while the general believe on the contribution of effective teachers towards academic performance is tabulated in Table 2. The outcome reports that 45% of respondents are male, 42% are second year students and 67% are local students. Regardless of the gender, most of male (40%) and female (47%) agrees that an effective teacher contributes to the improvement of their academic performance. Subsequently the majority of the second year students (41%) and the third year students (46%) also agree that effective teachers contribute to the improvement of academic performance.

		Level		Country		Total
		2nd year	3rd year	Malaysian	Foreigner	
Gender	Male	61	84	87	58	145
	Female	74	104	131	47	178
Total		135	188	218	105	323

		Performance					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	3	4	34	58	46	145
	Female	1	12	37	83	45	178
<b>Total</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>323</b>
Level	2nd year	1	7	27	55	45	135
	3rd year	3	9	44	86	46	188

The value of Cronbach's Alpha ranging from 0.584 to 0.711 in Table 3 suggest the acceptable level of reliability for each elements in the construct of conduct in class and communication skills. The value of KMO ranging from 0.656 to 0.686 in Table 4 suggest the acceptable level of validity for each elements in the construct of conduct in class and communication skills. The Eigenvalue ranging from 1.786 to 2.16 in Table 5 suggest the acceptable level to conclude the extraction of one component for each element in the construct of conduct in class and communication skills namely explanation, presentation and responsiveness for conduct in class and fairness, rapport and humorous for communication skills. Hence Table 6 and 7 reports the reliability, validity and extraction of one component for the construct of conduct in class and communication skills.

Details	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Clarity of Explanation	.630	.652	4
Presentation Skills	.581	.584	4
Responsiveness towards Questions	.608	.607	4
Display Fairness	.673	.682	4
Building Rapport	.707	.711	4
Being Humorous	.674	.695	4

Details	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items

		Explanation	Presentation	Responsiveness	Fairness	Rapport	Humor
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.669	.656	.686	.669	.682	.671
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	183.238*	117.080*	125.677*	214.375*	261.203*	247.363*
	Df	6	6	6	6	6	6

- \* Significant at 1%.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Explanation	1.970	49.249	49.249	1.970	49.249	49.249
Presentation	1.786	44.653	44.653	1.786	44.653	44.653
Responsiveness	1.840	45.993	45.993	1.840	45.993	45.993
Fairness	2.049	51.216	51.216	2.049	51.216	51.216
Rapport	2.160	53.997	53.997	2.160	53.997	53.997
Humor	2.114	52.861	52.861	2.114	52.861	52.861

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Details	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items/ df	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
					Approx. Chi-Square
Conduct	.731	.731	3	.649	212.927*
Communication	.656	.656	3	.633	137.362*

- \* Significant at 1%.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Conduct	1.954	65.135	65.135	1.954	65.135	65.135
Communication	1.781	59.351	59.351	1.781	59.351	59.351

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The acceptable value in Table 6 and 7 propose the pursuant of Pearson correlation test to identify the general association between conduct in class, communication skills and students' performance. The result of Pearson correlation in Table 8 suggest significant bi-variate relationship at 1% level between conduct in class and students' performance, communication skills and students' performance as well as conduct in class and communication skills. The outcomes indicate positive relationship between conduct in class and students' performance, communication skills and students' performance as well as conduct in class and communication skills. The ANOVA and simple linear regression reports in Table 9 confirm the positive relationship between conduct in class and communication skills as the p-value of t-statistics is less than 0.05. The model fitness less than 0.05 suggests acceptable level and the adjusted R-square of 0.271 suggests 27% change in conduct is explained by communication skills fulfill the acceptable level of 0.15.

		Performance	Conduct	Communication
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.523**	.272**
Conduct	Pearson Correlation		1	.170**
Communication	Pearson Correlation			1

- \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	85.025	1	85.025	116.897	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	226.207	311	.727		
	Total	311.232	312			
	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>.271</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>.523</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>10.812*</b>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Conduct

c. \* Significant at 1%.

The ANOVA and simple linear regression between conduct in class and performance in Table 9A reveals the outcome of the p-value of F-statistics as less than 0.05, the p-value of t-statistics is less

than 0.05 and an adjusted R square of 0.071. The findings suggest an acceptable level of model fitness, significant positive relationship between conduct in class and performance though reflects insufficient level of explained change in performance by conduct in class. Table 9B of the ANOVA and simple linear regression analysis between communication skills and performance report the outcome of the p-value of F-statistics as less than 0.05, the p-value of t-statistics is less than 0.05 and an adjusted R square of 0.026. Hence the findings as well suggest an acceptable level of model fitness, significant positive relationship between communication skills and performance though reflects insufficient level of explained change in performance by communication skills. These results form the basis that conduct in class and communication is not enough to impact the performance of students.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.762	1	18.762	25.355	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	234.579	317	.740		
	Total	253.342	318			
	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>.071</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>.272</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>5.035*</b>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conduct

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

c. \* Significant at 1%.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.486	1	7.486	9.406	.002 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	250.697	315	.796		
	Total	258.183	316			
	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>.026</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>.170</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>3.067*</b>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

c. \* Significant at 1%.

The multivariate regression analysis in Table 10 suggests the significant relationship between conduct in class and students' performance as the p-value of t-statistics is less than 0.05 that support the output in Table 9A. The result as well suggests the insignificant relationship between communication skills and students' performance based on the p-value of t-statistics at more than 0.05 contradicts the outcome of Table 9B despite the significant positive relationship between conduct in class and communication skills in Table 9. The VIF value of 1.376 suggests no serious multicollinearity problem

in the model while the p-value of F-statistic of less than 0.05 suggests acceptable level of model fitness. Nonetheless the adjusted R-square of 0.066 is less than acceptable level of 0.15 indicates the possibility that conduct in class and communication skills is still insufficient to explain the change in academic performance of students.

Model		Standardized Coefficients	t	Collinearity Statistics	
		Beta		Tolerance	VIF
	Communication	.053	.819	.727	1.376
	Conduct	.238	3.706*	.727	1.376
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>		<b>.066</b>	<b>F-Statistics</b>		<b>12.092*</b>

- \* Significant at 1%.
- Predictors: (Constant), Conduct, Communication
- Dependent Variable: Performance

To sum up, the results of correlation testing imply the positive relationship between conduct in class and communication skills, conduct in class and performance as well as communication skills and performance. The result of ANOVA again supports the initial relationship of Pearson correlation and further confirms by the simple linear regression analysis. To a greater extent, the adjusted R-square for both regression of conduct in class and communication skills with performance discloses the insufficiency of these characteristics to influence the change in performance on its own. Nonetheless the result of multivariate regression reveals that both characteristics are still insufficient to influence academic performance of students plus no significant relationship between communication skills and academic performance.

## 5. Conclusion

The study manages to prove that ability to explain, present and response to questions from students are elements of conduct in class. The result as well confirms that the effort to display fairness, build rapport and being humorous by educators to their students as the elements of communication skills. The contribution continues as the outcome proposes conduct in class as the elements of effective teaching and communication skills also as the element of effective teaching that improves academic performance of students. Nevertheless the outcome also suggested that these two elements are not sufficient to influence academic performance as well as indicates that the effect of communication skills is instead link to the effect of conduct in class rather than a direct effect. As such though the paper contributes to validating the elements of conduct in class and communication skills as well as effective teaching, further study is required to determine the indirect effect of communication skill as element of effective teaching. Moreover the results suggest expansion of elements for effective teaching such as knowledge and personal attributes.

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