

TOPIC 6**COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF TEACHERS**

This topic discusses the importance of communication skills among teachers, non verbal and verbal communication, elements in oral communication, aspects of non verbal communication taking into consideration body language, messages through artifacts and symbols and music and sounds.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain the importance of communication skills among teachers
2. Compare and contrast between verbal and non verbal communication
3. Discuss the elements in oral skills that need to be mastered by teachers

6.0 Introduction

Communication means sending a text message either verbally or non verbally by a person to others and will have a response from the recipient of the message. (Noriati et.al,2011) Effective communication is when a message is delivered can be received by the addressee clearly. Beside sending messages, communication is associated with the received message skill. Message must be understood and able to provide the most accurate response in any situation. Communication is also the human interaction in sharing ideas, thoughts and feelings whether in word or through gestures or symbols. Effective communication can be used in many ways like speaking, using body language, writing, and through the use of certain tools such as computers, telephones and so on.

Communication is very important in classroom management. Communication and interaction are important to the success of teachers and pupils in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers need to use communication skills to influence the efficiency of the students to maintain motivation in learning

6.1 The importance of communication skills to teachers

As a teacher, the most important asset is the ability to deliver a message, wisely interpreting and analyzing the received message so that it gives a positive feedback and be able to respond effectively to a message. A teacher may be made manifest his or her thinking through the communicating of ideas and thoughts when it is understood and

given appropriate responses. The role of teachers is not only merely managing the teaching and learning in the classroom alone, but his or her role also encompasses other aspects such as connecting with others. Delivery of educational content does not rely solely on the subject presented by the teacher, but how teachers deliver their subject matter is very important in determining the effectiveness of teaching.

Teachers should be sensitive to students with special needs and ethnic students. They must ensure that they are able to deliver the message and the message is understood and accepted by the students. Every teacher needs to understand that their scope of work is more than teaching. The importance of communication skills of teachers can be seen in the various roles played by teachers in fulfilling the following responsibilities:

6.1.1 Instructor

Teachers should be skillfull in relating and explaining the content to students during teaching and learning process. Achievement of learning outcomes depends very much on teachers' ability to convey and disseminate knowledge to students. This is because the communication between teachers and students are among the most important factors that influence the learning process. Teachers should be sensitive to the environment and background of students in order to be able to determine the forms, communication and strategies be used among students.

Woolfolk (2001:55) states that teachers are able to maintain students' interest in the learning as well as to expand the capacity to master the learning skills if teachers are aware of students' learning environment.

6.1.2 Educators

Besides teaching, teacher's main task is to educate people. Educating is an important role to transform human into a perfect person as claimed by the religion and aligned with the family, society and country. Therefore the role of teachers in performing their task require teachers to possess good communication skills in order to communicate with students. As an educator, teacher must set the best example and work closely with students. The way teachers communicate can influence students. Every teacher's action and behavior is observed by the student and how teachers relate with other parties are

also being observed and become examples to students. The way teachers communicate with students influence the students into accepting the rules while in the classroom. Thus, there are teachers who are able to control classroom discipline problems as compared to some teachers who lost control of maintaining control in the classroom and this disrupts the teaching and learning process.

6.1.3 Agent of Change

Teachers are agents of change. As an agent of change, teachers need to successfully influence the students to change from being lazy to hardworking, low motivation to excel. As an agent of change, the ability to explain the importance of a change, for example, able to change a student from lazy to hardworking and also help poor students from rural areas to be successful when the teacher provides the motivation and attention as well as guidance with sincerity to the students. Teachers must know how to arouse curiosity and enthusiasm by using communication skills to influence student's thinking in order to accept the changes recommended by the teacher. It is not only confined to the pupils but also, to parents who are in remote areas where they worked.

6.1.4 Leader

As a leader, it is important for teachers to master communication skills to ensure that their leadership style is accepted by parents and the community. According to the Jan Zieger (2007, as cited in Noriati et. al., 2011), relationship between teachers and parents help to solve a lot of problems of students in school. Teacher's communication skills can influence the parent's view on the roles and leadership styles of teachers. A teacher who can communicate very well will be respected by parents and this influenced the development of character building and academic progress of students. Similarly, teachers with good communication skill can influence the parents to involved in school activities. It can also determine the extent to which planned activities have the support and cooperation from parents.

6.1.5 Agent of Socialization

Teachers are the agent of socialization especially among students. Communication skills of the teacher enable them to conduct activities geared towards inculcating awareness and social responsibility in line with the values of Malaysia where each individual is different and allows us to be able to share values.

Goodfellow and Lamy (1999, as cited in Noriati et. al., 2011) emphasize that interaction contingency in the model of social relationship that give equal opportunities to its members to participate, to communicate and provide an opportunity for each member to take part and play the role played by such teachers. Therefore, teachers need to master communication skills to enable each message, directions and descriptions to be understood by students from diverse backgrounds.

6.1.6 Moderator

According to Noriati et. al (2011), teacher is a moderator in conveying the philosophy and thinking on the truth and correct way of life . This role is very important in explaining something that should be controlled and achieved by students through teaching. Teachers need to differentiate the forms of communication to students and should be pitched at appropriate levels. This is to avoid negative implications on the development of student learning and social emotion of students. Besides educating students, teachers are also moderators for parents and community. Teacher’s ability to communicate with parents will develop a better understanding on education system among parents. Teacher’s ability to explain depends ver much on teachers' skills in communicating with the parents and the community. If teachers are unable to communicate well, then all the objectives of providing services as stated in the national education policies will not be achieved.



Stop and Ponder:

Based on your experience as a teacher, can you share with your partner on some of the problems faced when communicating with your students and colleagues both in and out of the classrooms.

6.2 Elements of Communication skills

Communication skills may include some other basic skills. In communication, some elements are of utmost importance and every communicator should be aware that communication skills will be incomplete if we rely solely on the ability to speak. Some elements of skills must be mastered in order for communication skills of a person to be complete. Among the elements that need to be mastered in communication skills is as follows:

6.2.1 Listening Skills

Communication can be more effective to those who are good listeners. Not everyone can be a good listener. The main goal of listening is to listen actively and reflectively. Active and reflective listening involves verification of the information received. These conditions ensure that the recipient understands what the speakers is talking about. Active and reflective listener does not mean merely agreeing with what was said by the speaker. Teachers need to acquire skills in an active and reflective listening to ensure that there is commitment in seeking the truth. Teachers also need to show an interest in all conversation with students in the classroom.

Teachers need to:

- Be open minded; Avoid negative attitudes and prejudices. Always have good opinion of others. Avoid emotional feelings and accept students with an open mind.
- Listen actively and reflectively. Stop doing any other work and give full attention to what being said.
- Use eye contact and be more sensitive to gestures of the speaker concerned.
- Show empathy and do not make any judgements.
- Be honest - if you are confused and do not understand, be honest tell students to explain again.
- Get feedback through questioning. They did not expect answers. Teachers who are sensitive have to refrain from answering questions that do not expect an answer.
- Focus on what is said. Listen to every word actively. Do not think too much of what is spoken.
- Be patient when attending students especially students who are young.

- Do not interrupt students while they are talking. Instead, teachers should show interest in what is being said by the student.
- Do not hasty. Avoid giving respond because it may affect students' thoughts and emotions. This is to prevent teachers from making the wrong interpretation
- Use questioning skills that is using open-ended and close-ended questions.
- Use non-verbal language; friendly expression encourages friendly relationship. It can build confidence and motivate the students.
- Let the child talks freely until the child is satisfied that she/he has shared the story with others .

6.2.2 Getting Audience's Attention

A good communicator will not make his/her listeners bored by his/her talk. In fact, people will follow and listen to the messge with great interest.

Characteristics of effective communication:

- Elements of humour: teachers need to insert sense of humour in teaching; provided they do not using offensive words or action that may hurt student's feeling. Sense of humour can make students laugh while at the same time, they are learning.
- Identify the interests of students and select a topic related to students' interest.
- Be a sensitive listener so that they can also give their views on issues that are being discussed.
- Teachers should always allow students to question on anything that they want to know. Students be given chances to ask questions and each questions should be answered by the teacher. This will make learning more meaningful and students would be happy.

6.3 Oral Skills

The ability to speak is the first language skill mastered by humans. Before humans mastered the writing skill, elders usually will narrate stories to the younger generation through oral skills. Traditional society depends entirely on verbal ability to convey a message and narrate a story. It was when people are able to create words and start writing letters, message and story were passed down through reading.

Language starts as a tool external to the child used for social interaction. The child guides personal behavior by using this tool in a kind of self-talk or "thinking out loud." Initially, self-talk is very much a tool of social interaction and this tapers to negligible levels when the child is alone or with deaf children. Gradually, self-talk is used more as a tool for self-directed and self-regulating behavior. Because speaking has been appropriated and internalized, self-talk is no longer present around the time the child starts school. Self-talk "develops along a rising not a declining, curve; it goes through an evolution, not an involution. In the end, it becomes inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1987, pg 57)

Children's communication skills grow when children mingle with other people, either within the family, neighbourhood or in school. Ability of the human in verbal skills is preceded by listening skill. This would mean that teachers must create a teaching and learning environment that will allow students to discuss and talk among themselves in order to develop their oral skills.

6.4 Oral Skills of Teacher in the Culturally friendly Classroom

Students learn through imitation. Thus, children develop their social skills through social interaction with others when they begin to practice every single thing that they learn from the people around them especially parents and teachers. Therefore teachers need excellent verbal skills and ability to use words and effective strategy to communicate with students.

Among the skills needed by teachers in verbal skills are as follows:

6.4.1 Pronunciation

A teacher in Malaysia will be confronted with the diversity of student ethnicity and background. Therefore, teachers need to connect with students from different ethnic groups through language, especially the Malay language as the medium of communication in Malaysia. Pronunciation should be clear and precise and this is not limited only to teachers who teach subjects in Malay language. All teachers, regardless of which ever subjects they mastered must use correct pronunciation. This is in line with the concept of "language across curriculum". In the Malay language, the use of '*Bahasa Baku*' is very necessary to avoid regional dialects being used in teaching and learning situations in the classroom.

6.4.2 Clear and Structured

Messages and ideas can be understood when presented in a clear and structured manner. Explanation from teachers to students should be in accordance with the level of language proficiency and students' background. Selection of appropriate words to ensure students understand and listen with great interest. The students can understand better when the teacher has the skills in questioning, answering and explaining things clearly.

6.4.3 Intonation

Teachers need to know how to adjust their voice intonation when interacting with students and it should be adapted to the context of conversation and its purpose. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of intonation through the following guidelines, namely:

- Be enthusiastic in delivering any message so that the listener understand the message clearly
- Avoid using a flat voice tone (monotone). This type of tones cannot motivate the students.
- high and low intonation can help students to understand the messages conveyed by the teacher. When teacher is able to express messages through the tone very well, student can appreciate them better

6.5 Non Verbal Skills

Non-verbal skills is a communication process that involves the transmission of messages through a variety of ways without using words. Teachers need to learn non-verbal behavior to be one of the features of communication skills to teachers because teachers are educators and agents of social relations. Therefore, teachers need to master the knowledge of the cultural background and ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Every teacher must understand the culture of ethnic groups to enable teachers to play his/her role effectively, especially teachers who are placed in the rural areas. For example, in the Orang Asli community or in remote areas of Sabah and Sarawak. Teachers need to learn and understand the purpose and meaning of messages delivered through non-verbal behavior.

Teachers need to understand the behavior of non-verbal elements to enable teachers to create a culturally friendly classroom environment. Effective communication involves not only verbal language alone, but communication involves many elements in other cultures. Non-verbal communication can be divided into several forms. Among them are as follows:

6.5.1 Body Language

Body language includes facial expressions, gestures or body movements that gives meaning or signal of something, posture or body position, eye contact, facial expression, position, and the distance between listener and speaker. An ethnic group may have certain body language to convey a different message and may even have different values. Body language has three main roles, which are helping people to send message without utterance, replacing the role of verbal language in conveying meaning more effectively and also to convey emotions and feelings that are can sometimes be spoken through words.(Noriati et.al,2011)

Facial expression can describe the state of a person whether he was not happy, worried or bored. Gestures or body movements also have different interpretation. Teachers need to be careful in using gestures . This to avoid wrong interpretation. Pupils should be exposed and given explanation on certain behaviour that is unintentional but is prohibited in certain communities. Adoption of the values of respect and understanding is very important to students from various ethnic groups.

Touch also provides meaning in people's lives. Patting the back of the students as a sign of warmth and care is to motivate the students may be best done by a male teacher to male students, or a female teacher to male students in pre-school. But this action should be limited, especially between men and women from the East. In addition, eye contact also plays a role in conveying meaning.



Think and Pair:

In pairs, describe the different body language, gestures and facial expressions you have come across in the classroom that bring different meanings to different ethnic group.

6.5.2 Message Through Symbols and Artifacts

Artifacts play a role in conveying the clear message and easily accepted by society. Verbal skills are also related to the symbol. A society has a symbol that conveys implicit meaning. Teachers must understand the meaning of symbols used in an ethnic community. Clothing is a form of non-verbal communication. The clothing worn can also carry specific meaning or message. How to dress according to code or etiquette is a no less important in life. Thus, one has to wear appropriate attire according to the cultural practices and beliefs of a society. Teacher's image also depends on how he/she dresses up and every teacher should know how to select an appropriate attire when put in a different community.

6.5.3 Message Through Music and Sounds

Tones or sounds, whether the sounds of a gong or drum may indicate a feeling of a community or ethnic group. For the Iban community, the sounds during the wedding night is believed to be a sign, whether good or bad and the Iban usually believe it. Similarly, different sounds and music played during certain occasions will bring different meanings to different ethnic groups.

6.6 Language style

Haliday (1973) divides the language style into three dimensions, context, strategy in delivery and delivery style. There are two forms of language style, the normal language style and specific language style. The difference between the two forms of language style is in the selection of vocabulary, grammar and style of delivery. Normal language style used in normal circumstances, no technical terms and easily understood. While the specific language style is related to specific areas. Abdullah Hasan (1997) divides the language style into several types: general, technical, legal, religious, classic, creative, children and advertisement.

Teachers need to choose an appropriate language style to accommodate the level of the students. The language style should be focused on the use of terminology appropriate to the subject taught to the students. When students progress, lesson content increase and level of mastery steadily increase, teachers need to increase the use of language style.

Characteristics of language style:

- Vocabulary consisting of main words, concrete nouns, verbs and adjectives.
- Number of vocabulary are less that can be used by children compared to an adult.
- Sentence structure consisting of an active singular structure.
- Symbolic flowery language and implicit language are not in use.

6.7 Politeness in communication

Politeness is a set of value or calibrated by society and the image of a person depends on the value of politeness that is in the individual. Politeness can be divided into two forms: verbal and non verbal.

6.7.1 Teachers and etiquette

Politeness is one of the main features in communication skills. Teachers must be aware of the taboos of different ethnic groups. Teachers must also be able to manage himself, exhibit politeness and should be practiced. In addition, teachers should master politeness in using language such as selection of word, using proper phrases, speaking in the correct context and using grammatically correct sentences.

Teachers need to be a role model as good language users and do not allow children use incorrect language. Teachers need to know the language style and strategies used in accordance to the context and situation. Teachers' ability to use polite language, selection prompt and effective words, soft voice intonation, and good eye contact will enable teachers to handle students well. Facial expression in politeness should be used by the teacher in ensuring effective communication.

6.8 Summary

Communication skills of teachers are of utmost importance to teachers in carrying out the duties and responsibilities. Speaking and listening skills are emphasized as they are key aspects of communication. Verbal and non verbal communication skills need to be acquired by teachers in order to create a conducive culturally friendly classroom. Teachers have to be aware and sensitive of the different messages conveyed through various means as each message convey different meanings to each ethnic group.



Refer to the list of books for further readings:

Goodfellow,R.& Lamy,M.M.(1999). *Reflective conversation*. In The virtual classroom language learning and technology,2. Retrieved from <http://polyglot.cal.msy.edu/ilc/vol2num2/article2/index.html>

Halliday,M.A.K.(1973). *Exploration in the function of language*. London:Edward Arnord,

Noriati, A.R., Boon,P.Y.,Sharifah Fakhriah & Zuraidah. A.M.(2011). *Budaya dan pembelajaran*. Shah Alam: Oxford Fajar Sdn Bhd.

Salhah Ainon Mohd Abdullah.(2005) *Teachers as Professional Mentor*. Kuabtan : PTS