The Role of Educational Communication in Promoting a Student-Centered Learning Style in Multicultural Classrooms: A Reflective Essay on Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

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The Role of Educational Communication in Promoting a Student-Centered Learning Style in Multicultural Classrooms: A Reflective Essay on Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

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Abstract

This is a reflective essay on my own experience while learning and teaching in multicultural classroom in higher education in the UK. It emphasizes the indispensable relationship between the two fields of teaching–learning and communication processes in such heterogeneous environment. The essay focuses on how, in such context, teachers are key players, focused on excellent critical learning and teaching skills; these involve more than content expertise, or traditional methods, but becoming a student-centered, flexible and innovative teacher, going beyond the evaluation of feedback, to constantly exploring gaps in the learning and teaching process, and adjusting their teaching methods accordingly. Key emphasize is on how two-way, open communication endorses teachers' awareness of discrepancies within their student groups and offers alternative individualized learning styles. Reflecting on my own experience, outcomes form focus groups, and qualitative interviews, the paper concludes with that, by meeting essential physiological, pedagogical as well as belonging needs and esteem, educational communication leads our efforts in optimizing teaching technique in class management, students engagement, also guide our efforts to attain a motivational climate for interactive learning. Best practices in educational communication can boost teachers' efforts in employing the educational goals of HE, and recognize their societal impact.

Introduction

The indispensable relationship between the two fields of 'Learning and Teaching' (L&T) and 'communication' can be ascribed to the fact that "teachers are constantly imparting new knowledge or transmitting information" (Prozesky, 2000, p. 2). Many teachers, however, still believe that content expertise is all they need for effective teaching (Backlund, 2008), while others try to facilitate teaching by merely making traditional methods more accessible, rather than exploring new possibilities for supporting students' learning (Backlund, 2008). Accordingly, the demand for interactive L&T processes becomes a priority, in order to stimulate students' participation and critical thinking, also to attain positive change at the level of attitudes both for teachers, as operators of the educational system, and students as direct beneficiaries (Ndongko & Agu, 1985). One key concept that aids in integrating a class into a melting pot of interactive 'academic culture' is '*Educational*

Communication' (EC), a term that I found helpful to describe the way I am incorporating my expertise in the two fields of communication and education, while teaching multicultural/multilingual classrooms in higher education (HE). The term, however, is not new and basically used to refer to "an umbrella term that encompasses all speaking, listening, and relational constructs and concepts that relate to learning" (Rubin, 2011, p. 1). Relating to the recent advancements that have taken place in the education process, educational communication has gained more momentum in promoting the education process; it has extended to assimilate pivotal issues like the application of theories, principles and paradigms of communication in the process of education (UKEssays, 2018). The premise is that 'teaching – learning' process is an act of purposeful/oriented communication, in which teachers are key players (communicators). In this regard, Waldeck et al., (2001) maintains that effective communication has the capacity to concretely help teachers in employing the educational goals of HE, and recognize their societal impact -as the ultimate intended outcomes of the educational system.

The L&T process can be described as a sophisticated communication process, in which educational communication role is paramount (Muste, 2016a), "Whether it is teacher to student, student to student, teacher to teacher, communication is needed to make sure our students are successful" (Andrade, 2015). The interest in educational communication expanded to address the integration of communication innovations into new pedagogical methods and class activities. These initiatives aimed at facilitating an interactive classroom, where both teachers and students can fully participate in an evocative learning process (Waldeck et al., 2001). Students learn better through a multidimensional interactive approach "by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing" (Felder, 1988b, p. 674). Unequivocally, these are key attributes that competent educational communication nurtures, promotes and incorporates into the L&T process. For example, to attain the aforementioned aims stated by Waldeck et al., non-verbal communication (see Figure 1) provides a multidimensional, interactive and preferred learning approach. What is unique about this type of communication is that it's almost intuitive; "We use it without thinking about it; that is why we say that 'it is difficult to lie in body language" (Prozesky, 2000, p. 44). So through students' body language teachers feel when they are enthusiastic or bored. Correspondingly, teachers' body language let students impart the degrees to which teachers are confident with their responses. In both cases, two-way motivated feedback provides interactive guidance between teachers and learners.
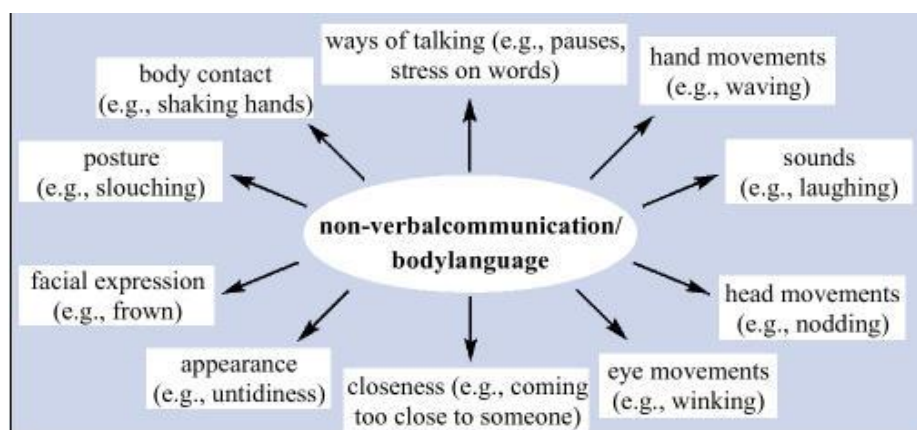

Figure 1. Non-verbal Communication/body Language (Prozesky, 2000)

At the University of Exeter (UoE) there is a pool of international/multicultural students within the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS). Classes at IAIS encompass students from wide-ranging backgrounds and learning styles. The premise is that *"There is a significant correlation between [… Two Way Symmetrical Communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984)] in the classroom and the academic performance of multicultural students"* (Ndongko & Agu, 1985, p. 205). Later on, Dozier et al (1995) developed the Two Way Mixed-Motive model of Communication (henceforth 2W-MMC), which applies to how a teacher uses communication to negotiate with his students and resolve issues, also promote mutual understanding and respect between him (as a stakeholder) and the students, through discussion and dialogue, so as to bring about symbiotic change in the attitudes and behaviours of both sides. In such contexts, two-way, open communication can promote teachers' awareness of disparities within their student groups and help identify 'individual learning styles', as well as coping with gaps pertaining to student participation (Felder & Brent, 2005) (see Figure 2). It offers a dynamic approach to overcome cross-cultural and lingual associated barriers by circulating feedback, to insure students' real understanding for what teachers put across (Prozesky, 2000).
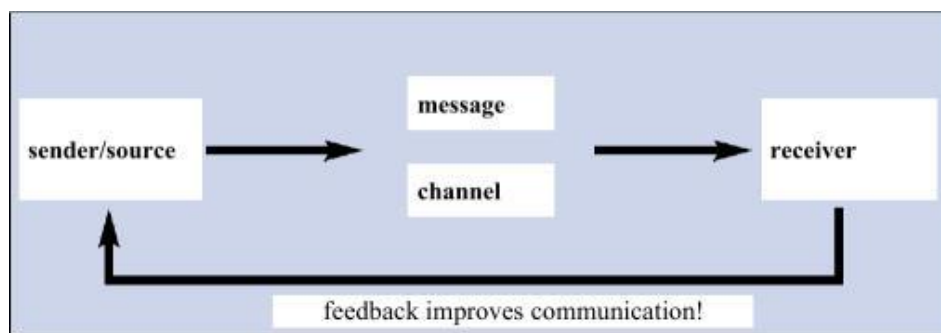

Figure 2. Two-way Communication (Prozesky, 2000)

Minding the Gap

The aforementioned '2W-MMC' model of communication enables teachers to identify "the ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information" (Felder & Henriques, 1995, p. 21). For example, gaps often occur between/within the learning styles of students and the teaching style of the instructor (Rahal & Palfreyman, 2009), which may further reinforce within multicultural classrooms due to shortcomings related to various lingual and cross-cultural communication deficiencies within students (Wahyudi, 2018). educational communication appropriately handled such gaps through several techniques like non-verbal communication, also efficient use of teaching aids within 2W-MMC; for instance visual communication can involve images, posters and presentations that can improve learning, maximize efficiency, also minimize adverse effects (like misinterpretation) on learning quality and outcomes (Felder & Henriques, 1995; Shabiralyani et al., 2015). 2W-MMC also helps teachers to minimize gaps between active learners (who learn better in situations that require them to interact), and reflective learners, those who learn better when teachers engage them to think about the information being presented (Felder, 1988b).

Prior to my recent teaching experience at the UoE, I was fortunate to have studied two majors in communication, as well as in education, with a Master in Communication. I have also worked as a teacher at

two universities in the Middle East (ME). So I seized a golden opportunity to utilize my experiences I gained while working as postgraduate teaching assistant (PTA) at IAIS, also as an auditor for postgraduate classes, as well as participator in the 2018's Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) Program held by the Reserch Development unit at UoE, which granted me the British Higher Education Fellowship. I also build on my new knowledge acquired during my work-based Master program in Teaching and Supporting Education in Higher Education at the School of Education - UoE, to identify key differences between Middle Eastern and Western HE environments. My aim was to mitigate the implications of any HE variations on ME and international students at IAIS. As such, my primary focus was on my skills that required adjustment based on classroom environment and student characteristics. Reflecting on my own teaching performance in ME Studies tutorials, alongside my study discussed below, I will now discuss the importance of educational communication as an efficient L&T facilitator, which is capable to promote improvements within the educational system (Brookfield, 1995; Pendrill & Carvalho, 2008; Muste, 2016b), both at IAIS -as a multicultural L&T environment in social science, as well as any other department at UoE. The discussion tries to find answers for a major inquiry for us as teachers, on how, and to what extent, an educational communication model/technique can be effective in engaging our students in the L&T process. This question guide our efforts on incorporating best ingredients of educational communication techniques to meet the minimum requirements we need for creating a motivational and innovative climate for learning.

Method

When the two-way communication occurs in a multicultural class, it directly turns to an interactive environment, in which results of the education process are more trusted. Teachers become more able to identify key characteristics of their students, also the best way for students to –individually- both acquire and utilize information. So I referred to the discussion through four focus groups of 10 -12. The groups included students from varied backgrounds within IAIS, college of engineering and college of medicine, with a special focus on ME students. Focus groups offer a fit technique to understand and assign –from a student perspective- any gaps might exist between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of their instructor.

One key emphasis during the discussion was on topics pertaining to physiological safety, belonging, in addition to student's needs of 'sympathy and esteem'. These needs provide teachers with initial indicators on the ways an educational communication method can be efficient in engaging students, and also to meet the minimum requirements in demand to create an interactive and motivational climate for learning. Additional focus targeted shortcomings related to various lingual and cross-cultural communication deficiencies that might exist among students. Further focus explored gaps between *active learners*, those who learn better through interaction, and *reflective learners,* who learn better when engaged to think about the information being presented. Additional attention was paid to the implications of any variations ME and international students might encountered at any of the targeted departments. In order to get a close insight about students' opinions and feelings concerning aforementioned issues, I formatted my open-ended questioning to explore participants' comments as regards the ways in which they usually acquire, retain, and retrieve information.

Another method I used in my qualitative study is the semi-structured interview. I used purposive sampling in

selecting my participants of twelve post graduate teaching assistants (PTAs), most of them were teaching in IAIS, others in engineering and medicine. I formulated a set of open-ended questions which primarily targeted the issues discussed in the focus groups, but from a teacher's perspective. I also referred to my previous observation during my teaching tasks that were all recorded immediately after classes and discussed with modules' conveners, and some other colleagues of PTAs. I employed the teaching principles which I acquired during a set of consecutive training sessions I attended before starting teaching, and continued throughout the LTHE program and the Work-based Master in education.

Both of focus groups and interviews concentrated on exploring the educational communication model that can be most effective in engaging our students. They were also focused on describing available, as well as in demand ingredients of educational communication techniques to meet the minimum requirements we need for creating a motivational climate for learning, in which student are effectively engaged in the learning process. Ultimately, the study tried to recognize any *gaps* occurring between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of the instructor; *shortcomings* related to various lingual and cross-cultural communication deficiencies within students; and the extent to which certain *teaching aids* were employed in minimizing gaps between different styles of learning among students.

Results

The essay outlines some of the academic and development arguments around the communication's role in education, and provides examples of its effectiveness in the L&T process. It focuses on the value of communication in supporting a student-centered teaching process, and identifies some of its returns and impacts from a teacher's first-hand experiment. The study reveals a number of key practical issues relating to educational communication role and impact on the L&T process in a multicultural classroom in higher education:

1. Cultural and lingual barriers are two issues that hinder student engagement, for which educational communication provides a remedy, simply by encouraging dialogue, recalling previous knowledge, accompanied by body language and leading hints.
2. Openly communicating with a mix of students with varied background in a class, makes an optimum way for them to perceive, organize and process new information.
3. The influence of academic backgrounds on Arab students versus their Western peers was evident in issues of concentration, discussion engagement and utilizing of available learning resources; the majority of Arab students are not accustomed to online educational systems, electronic libraries and other electronic self-service facilities. This also applies to any other multicultural classes at IAIS or within UoE as a whole.
4. Compared to Western students, Arab students are not accustomed to mixed gender classrooms, which – to some extent- limited the development of their ability to interact with other students in same groups or classrooms during exercises. Through interactive classroom environment, educational communication promotes a classroom that makes these exercises inclusive, fair and effective.

5. It is the teacher's role to ensure an adequate awareness of modern communication theories; by considering their teaching-learning activities as proactive communicational situations, teachers can make dynamic employment of a variety of educational communication principles and skills, which can both facilitate their task and maximize its value.

6. The powerful role of educational communication in promoting creative academic environment also applies to social science, as well as other fields of science as illustrated in the following discussion.

7. Educational communication provides added value for teachers to mitigate the gap resulting from the mismatch between the instructional styles of Western teachers and the inherited learning styles of Arab (as well as other international/non-Western students)s and vice versa for the overseas teachers.

8. Exploring the approaches students usually referred to in generating reasoning for issues they were exposed to, shows that conventional L&T methods mostly fail to achieve with the majority of students in multicultural classroom. Conventional L&T methods both failed with 'reasoning works from the more general to the more specific, or the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations (theories).

9. The emphasizing of students' diverse learning preferences by applying diverse teaching approaches is necessary for teachers and students alike, to interact in an optimal learning environment for the majority of students in class.

10. The communication process –as any process within the HE system- is a systematic and organized activity, which includes three phases of 'planning, performance and evaluation'.

Discussion

My interest in the value of educational communication emerged in 2017, whilst I was teaching seminars at IAIS for both Western and international students - addressing an unfamiliar context for Western students, also within a new environment for multicultural undergraduate students. In the next year I started auditing and facilitating seminars within graduate (Masters) Middle Eastern and international students. Within such unexperienced context during undergraduate sessions, I relied on my own systematic observations. So I referred to the Dozier et al '2W-MMC' model, where I utilized two-way traffic communication to introduce new learning to my students by engaging them in the discussion; I induced them to recall previous knowledge, kept engaging them forth and back by shifting talk to them through questions with leading hints. I also referred to –mutually- resolve issues emphasizing deference to wrong answers. I used this tactic to 'break the ice' when I felt student timid to engage; simply by starting a dialogue stimulated by questions that links to their previous knowledge, accompanied by body language, smiles and leading hints. I also sought to motivate students' critical and reflective participation to overcome the persistent degree of reluctance, due to unfamiliarity with ME communities (Brookfield, 1995). "The only wrong thing to do is to keep silent!! I said, showing interest and arousal, "You are here to learn, and a wrong answers is a good departure point for your colleague". I also found Dozier's model facilitating horizons of symbiotic change in the attitudes and behaviours of both me and my students. At this point also, I started feel success in my prepared lessons also believe more in the vitality of promoting a democratic communication environment, also in my capacity to tangibly facilitate satisfactory levels of achievement to meet my teaching goals. Finally students started to engage and set answers.

During my teaching of undergraduate tutorials for the POL1023 and ARA1010 modules in 2017, which relate to politics and economics in the contemporary Middle East, the challenge was to create inclusive classrooms that incorporated 23 - 25 students from varied backgrounds in each session – also ensure all of them felt fairly represented and welcomed. After discussing my aims and plans with the module conveners and two other Postgraduate Teaching Assistant (PTA) colleagues, I consulted Rahal and Palfreyman, in particular where they discussed the creation of a 'Learning Style Based Education' (Rahal & Palfreyman, 2009). In my efforts to keep integrating shy students and those reluctant to speak into an interactive class, I considered the engagement of students through different levels of 2W-MMC, discussing Western-Eastern sociopolitical and cultural discrepancies, as a strategy proposed by Fudeh, where he suggested that by *"incorporating their cultural traditions into lessons and actions, students feel understood, comfortable, and focused on learning"* (Fudeh, 2006, p. 67; see also: Backlund, 2008). My purpose was to involve students in the discussion through emphasizing contextual complexities and historical/colonial legacies, as well as cultural variations in ME communities versus those of Westerners. At the same time I highlighted their implications on today's ME sociopolitical and economic landscape and how that relates to the modules' intended learning objectives (ILOs).

Drawing upon holistic approach to learning, the 2W-MMC model, utilized in my student-centred approach, interestingly stresses Maslow's principles as a student basic –individual- needs and preferences as determiners that should be fulfilled, as part of the learning and teaching process, in order for the student to effectively engage in the learning process. Hence, in his model, Maslow referred to set of chronological concepts/patterns, which he considers necessary to attain the final level of 'self-actualization/realization' in an accumulative process aims to promote 'human motivation'; those are physiological, safety, belonging, in addition to love and esteem (Maslow, 1943). For us as teachers, such needs provide initial indicators on how and to what extent an educational communication model/technique can be effective in engaging our students. They further guide our efforts on incorporating best ingredients of educational communication techniques to meet the minimum requirements we need for creating a motivational climate for learning. And the best way to cultivate rich and relevant feedback is focus groups discussion.

While comparing my teaching experience to issue raised during the groups' discussions and also the interviews with other PTAs, I felt the extent to which in-class 'unobstructed' communication can be helpful for teachers as regards understanding our students' learning styles in a more holistic way. This not only succeeded in motivating student participation, but also in generating better student understanding and integration of new learning into previous knowledge. UoE used to regularly conduct an online student survey accompanied with observation evaluation sheets normally executed by each module convener alongside another senior lecturer. Despite these were solely for internal use (cannot link to as reference here), however, it's worth to mention here that both of the survey and evaluation sheets confirmed my results. In delivering my well-prepared sessions, I relied on my professional experience, as a 'teacher' and 'communicator', to cover my ILOs through context-oriented approach; I communicated/acted in ways suitable to the context (Middle East Studies); the situation (new teacher/multicultural class), also suitable to the norms and expectations of my students. This was an approach developed by Morreale et al. that explains how teachers with communication competence can achieve their desired goals based on the extent to which their communication techniques are fitting to the entire situation

(S. P. Morreale et al., 2012). After few sessions, most students became more proactive in class discussions. I also started to receive few emails from a number of students, discussing issues related to previous classes. Some students asked consultations and office hours' appointments in regard of an upcoming essay task. I compared these cases with similar peers in sessions of PTA colleagues, and we estimated that most of their queries came as a result of many reasons, basically fair of committing mistakes in front of other students, also reticence or apprehension to communicate openly.

Reflecting on my achievements, also the conclusions achieved through the interviews and focus groups, I recognize that these achievements mostly relate to the detailed understanding I gained about the students' academic backgrounds and learning attributes, which I found in their biographies. During after-class peer reflections, two of my colleagues commented upon and supported my thoughts. We recognized the importance of openly communicating with a mix of students, so as to ascertain the optimum way for them to perceive, organize and process new information (Muste, 2016b). This was an approach applied by Ndongko and Agu (1985), where they demonstrated how teachers can enable effective communication through identifying attributes and needs of their students. The two scholars stress the significance of "addressing these needs at the appropriate level, and creating a relaxed atmosphere in which a free, democratic flow of discussion is possible" (Ndongko & Agu, 1985, p. 205; See also: Ndethiu, 2019). These communicative attributes in L&T can be illustrated through a comparison of the influence of academic backgrounds on Arab students versus their Western peers at IAIS. This example would also apply to any other multicultural classes at IAIS or within UoE as a whole.

Compared to Western students, Arab students are not accustomed to mixed gender classrooms. First year Arab students complete their secondary schooling (10th to 12th grade) as the last pre-university stage of public education in the Arab World. Most of the students came from a single-sex school system, since high school education in most Arab countries is segregated based on learner also teacher gender (Al-Zarah, 2008; Atia, 2018). The majority of Arab students have attended government schools (large classes with Arabic as the medium of instruction and a traditional learning environment). Moreover, the prolonged reduction of joint work between the two sexes through single-sex education leads to both emotional as well as rational limitation of the development of their ability to interact between students in same groups or classrooms. In addition to cultural and lingual barriers, this was a key issue that several teachers and students mentioned during the interviews and focus group discussions. Within such context, educational communication provides a remedy; as discussed following, integrating the two sexes in classroom help each other to develop the ability to control oneself (primarily emotionally) and stimulate the learning skills they have in the environment of healthy education.

Furthermore, the majority of Arab students came to western universities unaccustomed to online educational systems, electronic libraries and other electronic self-service facilities. Unsurprisingly, most undergraduate students coming from the Arab world lack the requisite language levels and critical thinking skills needed for effective learning at the pace of their Western peers (Wilkens, 2011). This also applies for many graduate students coming from public/state universities in many ME and third world countries. Moreover, while "learning styles theories and inventories have become important tools of teaching and learning centers in much

of the western world (Rahal & Palfreyman, 2009, p. 2),” poor pay along with obstacles to conducting academic research in many Arab universities have undermined the recruitment and retention of quality teachers (Rita, 2014). Moreover, monitoring quality standards in educational institutions is not maintained adequately at the official level (Wilkens, 2011). Across the ME region, governance structures for secondary and HE have not adapted to modern demands for constant change (Wilkens, 2011; see also: Rita, 2014).

Given such circumstances, educational communication provides added value for teachers to mitigate the gap resulting from the mismatch between the instructional styles of IAIS teachers and the inherited learning styles of Arab and international students - and vice versa for the overseas teachers; this was a key finding in my study that is also supported by observations of Rahal and Palfreyman (2009). The core thesis proposed in the ‘Dunn and Dunn model’ proposes that “the use of instructional strategies that are responsive to students' learning styles will improve their academic achievement and attitude toward learning” (Rahal & Palfreyman, 2009). According to Rahal and Palfreyman; *“*Learning Style-based education holds high promise to improve the process of educational reform and research […] moving traditional educational practices from teacher to student-centered*”* (Rahal & Palfreyman, 2009, p. 17). According to Biggs & Tang (2011), the term “student-centered’ means that ‘ILOs are designed according to the students’ desires and academic capabilities, not what their teachers expect them to achieve*”* (p. 2). Such direction in the teaching process is recommended by several field scholars, those who acknowledge the failure of traditional teacher-based approaches in developing independent and empowered learners (Freire, 1973; Terenzini & Pascareua, 1994; Palmer, 1998; Komives, 2003; Garrett, 2008; Lathan, 2020), as these approaches fail to fully appreciate students' varied talents, learning styles/preferences and satisfaction levels, which are the very aspects that effective educational communication can address, promote and employ to enhance L&T processes.

For example, in exercising creativity and developing problem-solving skills, educational communication enables us to create a hospitable to creativity atmosphere, which endows students with opportunities to exercise and boost their natural creative abilities, those hindered by parriers that are mostly communicational in its origins. So through interactive classroom environment, educational communication promotes a classroom that makes these exercises inclusive, fair and effective is vital. Edward de Bono’s ‘Random stimulation’ is one educational communication techniques for teachers to use in stimulating ‘new ideas’ and further students’ interaction. De Bono (1985) recommends a class in which teachers communicate the idea that “The need to be right all the time is the biggest bar there is to new ideas.*”* Where teachers create a conviction that *“*It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong than to be always right by having no ideas at all.” A class that nurtures Maslow’s technique “Every really new idea looks crazy at first” (Cited in Felder, 1988a, p. 2).

The good news is that such communication skills are learnable and transferable (Ndongko & Agu, 1985; Newsom & Haynes, 2017). Today the most of universities in developed countries maintain quality control departments that are responsible for training teaching staff following guidance from other institutions and supervisory bodies. Within its commitments to update staff capacity, a reputable university’s policy provide valuable opportunities for teachers’ training regarding adopting teaching styles that contribute to the development of communication skills. It is then the teacher’s role to ensure an adequate awareness of modern

communication theories. By considering their teaching-learning activities as proactive communicational situations, teachers can make dynamic employment of a variety of educational communication skills, which can both facilitate their task and maximize its value. This of course applies to most colleges at UK as well as many other Western universities. In the ME, many Turkish and Qatari universities show good examples, while some other universities in the region are following in this direction.

From another angle, comparing the role of educational communication at IAIS (social sciences) with other academic programs at the UoE like engineering (applied science) for instance, shows educational communication's powerful role in promoting productive academic culture. As interpreted from the examples discussed in the focus groups and also the interviews, the powerful role of educational communication in promoting creative academic environment also applies to other fields of science. For example, both in social science and applied science (e.g. engineering), for innovative solutions to be achieved effectively, it is essential for the critical thinking environment to be boosted to its limits in initial stages of the process, which is an exclusive playground for educational communication. Felder (1988a) supports this idea stating that, "The problem-solver must feel free to advance any idea that occurs, regardless of its apparent practicality or lack of it" (p. 2). In this regard, and unlike in ME studies (social science), academic excellence in engineering education primarily involves solving problems with single correct answers (Felder, 1988b). Accordingly, both fields apply different approaches in producing genius solutions. This was evident in the answers of some PTAs who for example, discussed how *convergent reasoning* works better with engineering (producing single answers), contrariwise, *divergent reasoning* aptly fits with social science and ME studies (interpreting social critique/phenomenon). However, both fields utilize inductive and conductive approaches of reasoning (Felder, 1988b). The terms deductive and inductive reasoning are two research methods, in which "reasoning works from the more general to the more specific. Sometimes this is informally called a "top-down" approach, (like thinking up a theory about a topic of interest, then narrowing it down into more specific hypotheses that can be tested.) Inductive reasoning works the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories" (Trochim, 2006). In both approaches, however, conventional L&T methods mostly fail to fully achieve with the majority of students in multicultural classroom. As the answers of students during discussion show, the importance of educational communication so increases when considering how, for instance, engineering innovative student may lack analytical/evaluative ability to judge good from bad solutions (see Felder, 1988a), where competent educational communication facilitates the generation of 'the right answer' through 2W-MMC feedback. Scholars like Guilford also supports this finding from an early age of research on communication and education (1967; See also: Stevens, 1983; S. Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

Unlike ME studies, in engineering, facts and rules are most commonly taught through direct instruction (Rüütmann et al., 2011); tasks go more laboratory sessions where educational communication enables teachers to become more interactive in transmitting learning content, especially in problem-defining exercises. In social science however, indirect instruction and discussions (two-way open communication) works better in teaching ME's sociopolitical concepts and patterns. This is because problem solving (in engineering) and relationships' exegesis (in social science) are different types of L&T that require broad spectrum of interactive L&T styles (Rüütmann et al., 2011) (see Table 1). I mean styles that emphasize students' diverse learning preferences (to

say intuitive vs sensory perception), also apply fitting teaching approaches in which teachers and students interact in an optimal learning environment for the majority of students in class, if not all of them.

Table 1. Main dimensions of L&T styles (Felder, 1988b).

Preferred Learning Style		Corresponding Teaching Style	
sensory intuitive	perception	concrete abstract	content
visual auditory	input	visual verbal	presentation
inductive deductive	organization	inductive deductive	organization
active reflective	processing	active passive	student participation
sequential global	understanding	sequential global	perspective

One last, but substantial conclusion of this study is that, the communication process –as any process within the HE system- is a systematic and organized activity, which includes three phases of 'planning, performance and evaluation'. In this regard, Donsbach argues that "motivation, knowledge, and skills are the foundations of competent communication for every teacher" (2015, p. 2619). These foundations play major role within the three phases of educational communication. Accordingly, assessing our communication processes is important in measuring their success and value, and should be viewed as "a gestalt of the three foundational components of competence" (Donsbach, 2015, p. 2625).

Conclusions

This essay focuses on the role of educational communication as a multidisciplinary approach for innovative teaching and learning environment, and so contributes to the literature on teaching and learning support from a unique experimental angle and multidisciplinary approach. Reflecting on own experience, outcomes form discussions of focus groups and qualitative interviews, the paper concludes with that, by meeting essential physiological, pedagogical as well as belonging needs and esteem, educational communication can lead our efforts in optimizing teaching technique in class management, students engagement, also guide our efforts to attain a motivational climate for interactive learning. Best practices in educational communication can boost teachers' efforts in employing the educational goals of higher education, and recognize their societal impact. The study also illustrates with evidence how the teaching – learning process is an act of purposeful communication in which teachers are key players. The indispensable relationship between the two fields and communication stems from the fact that teachers are essentially communicating new information, in an innovative way, to induce and promote knowledge. Moreover, the essay examines the learning and teaching practice in the case study and explains how excellent critical approach in this process involves more than

content expertise, or merely tweaking traditional methods to make them more accessible. Becoming a student-centred, flexible and innovative teacher makes the core essence of educational communication. This involves going beyond merely the evaluation of feedback. It involves constantly exploring gaps in the learning and teaching process and adjusting our teaching methods accordingly by aligning the process to fit within heterogeneous/multicultural classroom (See: Brookfield, 1995).

In higher educational contexts that are challenged by cross-cultural and lingual associated barriers as in this case study, two-way, open communication endorses teachers' awareness of discrepancies within their student groups and offers alternative individualized learning styles. It offers teachers with a dynamic approach to better cope with gaps affecting students' participation. By meeting essential physiological as well as belonging needs of our students, in addition to resurrecting love and esteem, educational communication provides us, as teachers, with initial indicators on how and to what extent our teaching technique can be effective in engaging our students, mainly in classrooms with multicultural backgrounds. Meeting such needs further guide our efforts on incorporating best ingredients of class management techniques to meet the minimum requirements we need for creating a motivational climate for learning.

With its effective contributions, educational communication has the capacity to concretely help teachers to employ the educational goals of higher education, and recognize their societal impact as regards the intended outcomes of the educational system. To precisely illuminate the pivotal role of educational communication in higher education, I would conclude with his insightful comment for the founder of the first institution for higher learning in the Western world: "Do not train youths to learn by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each." –Plato.

Acknowledgements

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