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DIFFERENCES IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in the context of face-to-face and online learning. Using qualitative methods, this study involved in-depth interviews and observations in several schools that implemented both learning methods. The results showed that face-to-face communication allows for richer interactions, with non-verbal expressions and immediate feedback supporting understanding. In contrast, in online learning, communication tends to be more formal and structured, but often experiences technical obstacles that can interfere with student engagement. Although both methods have advantages and disadvantages, the results show that effective communication is greatly influenced by the context and media used. It is hoped that these findings will provide insight for educators in designing better communication strategies in various learning settings.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a key element in the learning process that significantly influences educational outcomes. In the context of education, the interaction between teachers and students not only involves the transfer of knowledge but also forms social relationships that support student motivation and engagement. (Mulyasa, 2020: 78). Research shows that effective communication between teachers and students can enhance students' active participation in learning, leading to improved academicperformance (Sari&Wibowo,2021: 7).

With the advancement of technology, online learning has become an important alternative, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This learning provides flexibility, but it also poses new challenges in communication. Handayani emphasized that the lack of direct interaction in online learning can reduce student engagement and make them feel alienated.

(Handayani, 2022: 8). This shows the importance of creating a learning environment that supports communication even when conducted online.

Although many studies discuss communication in the context of education, there are still few studies that directly compare interpersonal communication between teachers and students in face-to-face and online learning. Prabowo highlighted the need to understand this difference to improve the quality of learning in both methods. (Prabowo, 2023: 23). In addition, Yuliana emphasized the importance of effective interpersonal communication strategies in the digital era to enhance the online learning experience. (Yuliana, 2023: 7). By understanding the dynamics of communication in these two settings, it is hoped that more effective strategies can be found to enhance student interaction and engagement.

METHOD RESEARCH

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of interpersonal communication between teachers and students in face-to-face and online learning. The research was conducted in several high schools in Binjai, which implemented both teaching methods. The research subjects consisted of 10 teachers and 30 students from various subjects. The selection of subjects was done purposively to ensure a diversity of experiences in both learning settings.

Data Collection Techniques

1. In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with teachers and students to explore their experiences and perspectives on communication in face-to-face and online learning. The interviews are conducted individually and recorded for further analysis.
2. Observation: The researcher conducted direct observations during face-to-face and online learning sessions. These observations focused on the interactions between teachers and students, including language use, non-verbal expressions, and feedback.
3. Documentation: Related documents, such as lesson plans and teaching materials, are collected to provide additional context to the observed communication process.

Data Analysis. The data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process includes several stages, namely:

1. Transcription: Transcribing recorded interviews to facilitate analysis.
2. Coding: Identifying themes and categories from the transcription data and observation results.
3. Interpretation: Interpreting the data to identify communication patterns that emerge in both learning settings.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the research, the researcher conducted data triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member validation is conducted by requesting feedback from participants on the initial findings. This research follows the principles of research ethics, including obtaining approval from the school authorities and informed consent from the participants. The identities of the participants are kept confidential to protect their privacy. With this method, it is hoped that the research can provide a comprehensive picture of the differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in face-to-face and online learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Interpersonal communication between teachers and students plays a critical role in the learning process. With the rapid shift to online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant transformation in how communication occurs in educational settings. This research investigates the differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in online learning environments compared to face-to-face interactions. Understanding these differences is crucial for improving teaching strategies and enhancing the overall learning experience.

The interview results show significant differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in both types of learning. In face-to-face learning, interactions feel more dynamic. A teacher explained that, "When I teach in person, I can see the students' facial expressions." That helps me know whether they understand the material or not. Students feel the same way; one student stated, "I find it easier to ask questions and discuss when the teacher is in front of me." It feels closer.

On the other hand, when asked about online learning, many expressed the challenges they faced. "Sometimes it's hard to connect with teachers and friends," said a student. "I feel isolated, especially when the teacher just explains without much interaction." This shows that non-verbal aspects of communication are often lost in online formats.

Many interview participants cited technical issues as one of the main obstacles in online learning. A teacher explained, "Unstable internet connections often disrupt learning. Some students even can't attend class because of this issue." On the other hand, the student added, "If my internet is slow, I can't follow the teacher's explanation well." Sometimes I feel left behind.

However, some teachers also shared solutions to enhance interaction. "We try using collaborative applications for small group discussions," revealed one teacher. This helps

students feel more engaged and participate actively. One of the students added, "Group discussions make me more comfortable sharing my opinions."

From the interview, it is clear that it is important for teachers to develop effective communication skills, especially in the online context. One of the teachers stated, "I keep learning how to use technology to bridge communication." For example, holding regular Q&A sessions. Students also responded positively to this approach, calling it a good way to ensure they don't miss the opportunity to ask questions.

Looking at all these experiences, it seems clear that although online learning has its challenges, there is potential to create a better learning experience by applying the right strategies. This requires cooperation between teachers and students to find the most effective ways to communicate, regardless of the learning methods used The research revealed several important findings regarding the differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in online and face-to-face learning environments.

1. **Limitations of Non-Verbal Communication in Online Learning**

   Online Learning: Many teachers and students reported that online learning significantly limits non-verbal communication cues such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. These non-verbal elements are vital for conveying emotions, understanding the intent behind a message, and establishing rapport. Teachers found it challenging to gauge students' understanding or emotions when communicating through screens, as students' reactions were often less visible or absent.

   Face-to-Face Learning: In contrast, face-to-face interactions allow for richer non-verbal communication. Teachers can easily read students' facial expressions, body language, and engage in eye contact, which enhances emotional connection and improves mutual understanding.

2. **Limited Interaction in Online Learning**

   Online Learning: A common theme among both teachers and students was the limited interaction in online learning environments. While platforms like video conferencing facilitate communication, they often restrict spontaneous dialogue and hinder fluid exchanges. Many students expressed discomfort in participating actively, either due to technical barriers, fear of being interrupted, or simply the lack of social presence in online formats.

   Face-to-Face Learning: Face-to-face learning offers opportunities for spontaneous and dynamic interactions. Students are more likely to ask questions, participate in discussions, and seek clarification in real time. Teachers can also provide immediate

feedback and engage in back-and-forth conversations, fostering a more interactive and participatory learning environment.

3. **Emotional Engagement in Online vs. Face-to-Face Learning**

   Online Learning: Emotional engagement between teachers and students was reported to be weaker in online learning. Both teachers and students mentioned feeling somewhat disconnected due to the physical distance and the inability to read social cues easily. This emotional detachment often led to challenges in maintaining student motivation and interest.

   Face-to-Face Learning: In contrast, face-to-face interactions naturally foster stronger emotional connections. Teachers are able to respond to students' emotional cues—such as frustration, confusion, or excitement—which helps them adjust their teaching style and offer more personalized support. This emotional presence is often a key factor in keeping students engaged and motivated.

4. **Challenges with Feedback and Clarification in Online Learning**

   Online Learning: One of the significant challenges in online learning, as noted by both teachers and students, was the delayed feedback. In many cases, teachers could not provide immediate clarification or respond to student queries promptly, which affected the students' understanding of the material. Additionally, online learning platforms sometimes made it difficult to offer personalized, detailed feedback in a way that was clear and engaging.

   Face-to-Face Learning: Face-to-face communication allows for quicker, more effective feedback. Teachers can immediately address misunderstandings and provide verbal and non-verbal cues that help students better grasp the content. The ability to observe students' facial expressions or body language also enables teachers to tailor their responses more effectively.

5. **Technological Barriers in Online Learning**

   Online Learning: The study revealed that technological challenges, such as poor internet connections, difficulties with video conferencing platforms, and access issues, significantly disrupted communication. These barriers not only hindered the flow of communication but also caused frustration for both teachers and students, contributing to disengagement.

   Face-to-Face Learning: In face-to-face settings, there were no such technical disruptions. Communication occurred seamlessly, with fewer interruptions, allowing for a smoother exchange of ideas and information.

DISCUSSION

If at school, a teacher can stand in front of their students, explaining the material with great enthusiasm. In a face-to-face setting, interactions occur naturally. Students can see the teacher's expressions and body language, which make the explanations feel more lively.

However, when classes switched to online learning, the situation was different. Through the screen, the teacher is still trying to convey the material with the same enthusiasm. However, the interaction feels more limited. Students might not ask directly, choosing to type in the chat box instead. Although there is a video feature, some students appear inactive, distracted by other screens or disturbances around them. In face-to-face classes, feedback comes quickly and directly. Students who are struggling can receive help immediately, while in online classes, responses are often delayed, making them feel isolated. Student engagement in discussions is also more palpable in face-to-face settings, where the collective energy of the class can inspire active participation.

In other words, although online learning offers convenience, face-to-face interaction creates an emotional closeness that is hard to match. Both methods have challenges and advantages, but interpersonal communication remains an important bridge in the teaching and learning process.

1. **Impact of Technology on Non-Verbal Communication** One of the most notable differences between online and face-to-face learning is the lack of non-verbal communication in the online environment. Research on communication theories highlights that non-verbal cues are integral to understanding emotions, intentions, and messages more accurately. In face-to-face settings, these cues support verbal communication and help build trust, rapport, and empathy between teachers and students. Without these cues in online learning, misinterpretations are more likely, and emotional connection is diminished.
2. **Limited Interaction and Reduced Engagement in Online Learning** In online learning, the structured nature of the digital platforms often restricts the level of interactivity between students and teachers. Asynchronous learning formats (e.g., recorded lectures or forums) further exacerbate this issue, as students may feel isolated and disconnected. The research findings align with previous studies suggesting that face-to-face learning promotes more active participation and fosters a collaborative, interactive classroom atmosphere that enhances learning outcomes.

3. **Emotional Detachment and Motivation** Emotional engagement is a critical factor in maintaining motivation and interest in the learning process. In face-to-face settings, teachers can engage emotionally with students, offering encouragement, addressing concerns, and tailoring their approach based on students' emotional states. In contrast, online learning often results in a more transactional experience where students may feel like passive recipients of information. Teachers may struggle to maintain student engagement without the benefit of face-to-face interaction, which can lead to lower motivation and participation.
4. **Feedback and Clarification Challenges** Immediate feedback and real-time clarification are essential for effective learning. The ability to ask questions, receive explanations, and clarify doubts on the spot enhances students' understanding and retention of material. Online learning platforms, although convenient, often limit the immediacy and personalization of feedback. The research suggests that while online learning offers flexibility, it may lack the immediacy of feedback that is central to effective teaching in a traditional classroom setting.
5. **Technological Barriers and Communication Breakdowns** Technological issues remain a significant barrier to effective communication in online learning. Students and teachers often face challenges with connectivity, which interrupts the learning process. While these issues can be mitigated with better infrastructure and technology, they remain an ongoing challenge that affects the quality of interaction between teachers and students.

The study highlights substantial differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in online and face-to-face learning environments. Face-to-face learning allows for richer, more immediate, and emotionally engaging communication, which fosters stronger teacher-student relationships and greater student participation. In contrast, online learning presents challenges such as limited non-verbal communication, reduced emotional connection, delayed feedback, and technical barriers, all of which can negatively impact the quality of interaction and the overall learning experience.

While online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, it is essential to recognize the importance of effective interpersonal communication in the learning process. Educators must adapt their teaching strategies to overcome the limitations of online platforms and foster more interactive, engaging, and supportive virtual environments. Future research should explore innovative ways to enhance communication in online learning, particularly in terms of increasing student participation and emotional engagement.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals significant differences in interpersonal communication between teachers and students in face-to-face and online learning. In face-to-face learning, more direct and dynamic interactions allow teachers to use various non-verbal elements, such as facial expressions and body language, to provide more effective feedback. This creates a strong emotional bond between teachers and students, which in turn enhances students' engagement and understanding of the subject matter.

On the contrary, online learning presents complex challenges. Students often feel alienated and less engaged in learning. Technical obstacles, such as unstable internet connections, further exacerbate this situation, making it difficult for students to follow lessons properly. The limitations in direct interaction reduce students' opportunities to ask questions and engage in discussions, which are important in the learning process.

However, this research also shows that with the implementation of appropriate strategies, challenges in online learning can be overcome. The use of collaborative tools and the arrangement of regular Q&A sessions can help create a more interactive and inclusive environment. This shows that teachers need to develop adaptive communication skills to adapt to changes in learning methods in the digital era.

From the interview results, it is clear that collaboration between teachers and students is very important for creating an optimal learning experience. By supporting each other and seeking solutions to the challenges faced, both parties can contribute to the improvement of learning quality, whether in-person or online.

Overall, this research emphasizes that although online learning offers flexibility, the aspect of interpersonal communication should not be overlooked. With a better understanding of the communication dynamics in both settings, educators can design more effective approaches to enhance student interaction and engagement, thereby creating a more productive and enjoyable learning environment. This is an important step in preparing students to face future educational challenges.

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