Investigating Barriers of Oral Communication between University Teachers and Students: English Department Students as a Case Study

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Abstract
Oral communication skills, especially speaking, are significant for university students' life and future careers. Students' participation in any successful communicative activity is based on many factors. However, some barriers can violate this communication in the classroom (linguistics, psychological, cultural, social). Detailed literature indicated that previous studies focused only on students' linguistic knowledge and ignored other factors such as social, cultural, and psychological problems. Therefore, this research investigates barriers that suffocate university students' oral communication interaction with their teachers and suggests some solutions to discard these obstacles. The study adopted a quantitative method based on a self-administered closed and open-ended questionnaire. Students were asked to tick the reasons that hinder them from communicating in the class with their teachers. The study addressed 107 third-year students at the English Department at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Morocco. The obtained results indicated that social barriers constituted the major challenge that hinders or blocks students from oral participation with their teachers. Next, linguistics knowledge came as a second barrier, and finally, physical barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1.BACKGROUND

Communication interaction is sharing our ideas, opinions, and feelings with others, and it can be intellectual, personal, spoken, or written in nature. Communication is a two-way process. That is to say, it inspires, motivates, informs, shows, orders, and shows our existence to establish better relationships to understand and be understood. Previous research showed that "oral communication is a complex and multifaceted process" (Murphy, 1991, p. 51). This communication can be interactive and felicitous when the communicators are linguistically competent. However, this communication can be infelicitous or unsuccessful due to some barriers (linguistic, cultural, social, and psychological). Therefore, the development of

speaking skills is fundamental for developing students' communication competence. In this way, Hall and Marchenkova (2004) indicated that most learners could barely communicate via the target language. They can hardly express themselves with their own words. Hence, speaking is one of the most important and challenging elements of oral communication in the language.

Furthermore, researchers (Richard, 2008; Senel, 2012, among others) found that students are disinclined or reluctant to participate in the classroom due to some barriers such as deficiency, demotivation, and cultural learning patterns. Other studies concluded that linguistic knowledge was the main reason for students' oral communication failure. Thus, This research focuses on third-year students (semesters 5 and 6) at the department of English at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes to determine these barriers that hinder communication interaction between students and teachers in the classroom. Also, the study will suggest some remedies to reduce these challenges for teachers and students.

1.2. The Objectives of the Study

This research is twofold: First, it aims to investigate barriers to oral communication between university teachers and students. Second, it offers some pedagogical solutions for both teachers and teachers to discard this problem.

1.3. Research questions

This research sets out to answer the following questions:

- What are the barriers that suffocate university students from participation in the classroom?
- How can teachers and students work to get rid of these barriers?

1.4. The significance of the study

This research was conducted to shed more light on the issue of oral communication, especially speaking, to understand the barriers that prevent university students from participating with their teachers in the classroom. The study results could be profitable for pedagogies, teachers, and students to consider these barriers and work on enhancing students' participation and building a trust-learning environment.

2. THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary purposes of communication are to share ideas and feelings mutually. It covers interaction and encourages the exchange of thoughts until all the experiences become a common profession. To put the study in the proper context, a large and growing body of

literature has concluded that the teaching and learning process is based on effective communication between the teacher and the students in the classroom because pedagogies think that effective classroom communication occurs ensures that learning takes place. Therefore, effective communication is a crucial factor in effective language learning performance. On the other hand, poor communication has led to students' demotivation, poor performance, mistrust, misunderstandings, and many other negative factors that block or hinder classroom participation (Lunenburg, 2010). Being a good speaker of English is the principal dream that motivates a large number of students to study at the university. Still, many language learners perceive communicating in the target language, especially with their university teacher, as the utmost challenging skill to master. Indeed, communicating in English can challenge most learners. This research aims to shed light on the obstacles that hamper university students from communicating interactively with their teachers and suggests some pedagogical implications to help students overcome these barriers in communication.

2.1. Oral communication and students' needs

Any research about communication will not cover all the aspects of communication interaction without talking about oral skills. For example, some students, despite their limited knowledge of English, can communicate interactively with their teachers because they rely on their coping strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to talk about this skill to cover the maximum data about communication interaction to understand better the nature and causes of these difficulties students face in communicating effectively in English.

Oral communication in L2 is defined as the spoken words utilized in communication. It is a verbal form of communication where you communicate your ideas and thoughts, share information, and build trust and reliability among students and teachers. Also, oral communication related to student talk can be described as focused group conversations or collaborative conversations that are usually facilitated and monitored by a teacher. To state it differently, inciting student talk enhances oral language practice to show their competence and comprehension of an idea or a discussed topic. Consequently, it is not just knowledgeable peers sharing answers, but it uses language as a tool to build meaning. According to Vygotsky (1978), "talk is one of the primary tools for communication". Communication, in particular, helps students negotiate to mean and connect prior knowledge, resulting in the development of thought and practice (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, Bygate (1987, p. 1) states, "Our students often require to communicate with confidence to convey their transactions. It is the skill by which they are most frequently judged and through which they make or lose friends."

It is worthy to state that L2 oral communication is based on a systematic perspective. In this approach, oral communication is a socially constructed system requiring three subsystems to

function effectively: Communicators, the symbolic meaning (creating a message, responding), and the context. Thus, university students must communicate effectively with each other or with their teachers to create a fruitful learning atmosphere. Unfortunately, many students fail to achieve one of the primary objectives of learning English at the university (speaking skill) due to many barriers. This article tries to probe it by shedding light on them and suggesting some solutions to overcome these problems.

2.2. Challenges to oral communication

The ability to communicate verbally is challenging to master. Since the speech cannot be prepared in advance in a conversation, the students need quick language usage, and what is being said must agree with some criteria (linguistic, topic, the place). By way of explanation, "it must conform to the speaker's aim, the role relationships between the interactants, the setting, topic, linguistic context, etc." (Johnson, 1999, p. 11). Different barriers in real-life situations can disturb or destroy the communication process. Previous studies (Malek, Ibrahim, Adnan, Abd Rahim, 2016; Rani, 2016; Lunenburg, 2010) found many variables that hinder students from communicating inside their classrooms, such as:

Physical (environmental conditions such as classroom size, time, the distance between communicators, seating arrangement, etc.).

- Social (different class groups, different genders, different racial or ethnic groups, different social roles and norms, dominance, status, and power).

- Psychological (the feelings and moods of the participant bring to communication, intimacy, and willingness to make commitments).

- Cultural (the beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, and the roles of a group of people).

- Historical and relationship (background of past communication between communicators, relationship type)between the students, their views towards the relationship, the way it started, and its purpose).

- Additionally, other studies found other barriers that cause miscommunication between teachers and students, such as:

- Semantic barriers' are any communication barriers due to language-based difficulties (poor vocabulary, usage of vague vocabulary...).

- Socio-physical barriers include opinions, attitudes, status consciousness, emotions, distrust between the students and the teacher, feelings, and self-centred attitudes.

- Personal barriers are concerned with the variables related to the sender and receiver and act as a hindrance in the communication process. These variables include students'

experiences, the acquired attitudes toward others, and constraining emotions that block students from exchanging their ideas and thoughts with their teachers.

It is worth mentioning that there are other significant variables related to personal barriers such as anxiety, motivation, shyness, poor listening and retention, lack of attention, and some students are not sociable (Khan, 2010; Kay, 2012).

- Physical barriers are the context where and by which communication occurs either felicitously or infelicitously. These variables incorporate noise (simplicity and clarity of the spoken words), time, and the distance between the interactions.

- Linguistic knowledge barriers comprise knowledge saturation such as grammar knowledge, vocabulary pronunciation of some English words, and the use of inappropriate words or expressions related to the discussed topic.

- Researchers have a consensus on the gap between what the students say and what the teachers understand. It is the primary cause of the breakdown in communication. These barriers are considered significant variables that help communication make or block it. This paper examines which of these barriers affects students more in their communication process. It is vital because these barriers are identified then suitable measures can be suggested to overcome these barriers, and thus, effective communication can be ensured in classrooms. When classroom communication is effective, teaching and learning will be fruitful.

2.3. The classroom environment

Communication is a vital key in the classroom. The quality of the environment and how it supports communication can be considered an independent variable that helps communication be interactive and successful. The classroom environment is the classroom climate or the social climate, the physical and the emotional features of the classroom. This environment can be defined as the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional environment where students learn effectively. To state it differently, students' behavior significantly influences interaction--the responsibility of influencing these behaviors is placed with the teacher. The way they organize the classroom should lead to a positive environment rather than a destructive and/or an environment that does not motivate students to communicate with their teachers. Some studies have concluded that students' success is directly related to interactive, engaging teaching environments formed by able teachers (Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant & Howes, 2008).

Additionally, how teachers communicate with their students can positively affect their perceptions of the university, their role in the classroom, their abilities, and their motivation to

succeed (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). Creating a positive learning atmosphere is based on the teacher's skills to communicate, motivate, negotiate, and be present to sustain their attention, listen to and resolve their questions or problems, and build trust with students.

In conclusion, we may say that the classroom climate is regarded as a significant determiner of classroom learning and behaviour. Therefore, understanding how to set up and build a positive classroom climate is fundamental to improving students' communication.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1.   Research design

The first chapter presented the literature review about communication barriers and their effects on students' oral communication skill. This chapter will be devoted to the methodology and the research design used in the presented study; it includes research design, data about the participants, data collection, and data analysis.

3.2.   Participants

One hundred seven third-year students from Moulay Ismail University participated in the present study. They belong to the department of English in which males presented 38%, and females presented 62%, as seen in the below figure. Their ages range between19 and 28. The year of studying English at the university is a significant independent variable.
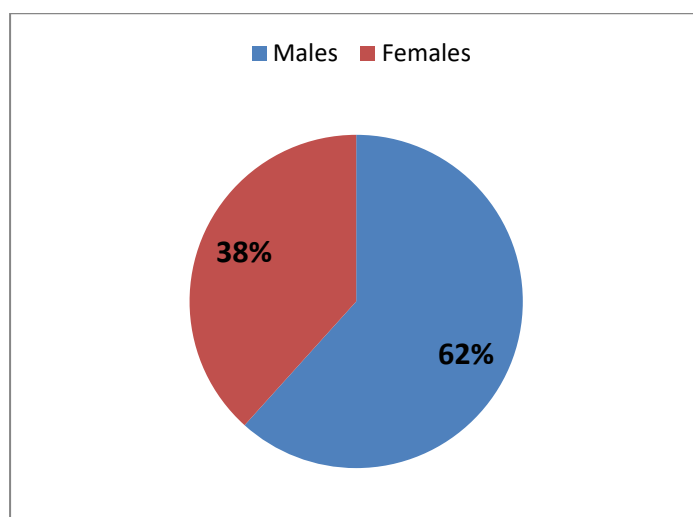

Figure 1: Males and females participation.

3.3.   Data Collection

The presented research data was collected through a self-administered closed and open-ended questionnaire. The proposed research adopted a quantitative study that addressed 107 3rd students at the English Department at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes. It aims to

investigate a fresh area that is worth researching: communication barriers that hinder students from communicating interactively in the classroom. A questionnaire is distributed to students asking them to tick the reasons that hinder them from communicating in the class with their teachers. The questionnaire was distributed in the classroom during their courses in 2022.

3.4. Data analysis

For the validity and reliability of this research, the questionnaire was distributed to gather the maximum data about the causes that block students from communicating interactively. They were advised to carefully reflect on the questions by linking them to classroom experiences. Before distributing the questionnaire, the investigator explained to the students that the aim of answering this questionnaire is for scientific research, and it will be confidential. Also, they were asked to tick the correct choice independently without consulting each other. The researcher himself conducted the entire questionnaire, and all the students participated by their willingness. All the instructions were written in English since our target population was EFL third-year students.

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Based on the data collection and the processing procedures outlined in the previuous chapter, this chapter will shed light on the results of our research questions. Feedback from the questionnaires and participant observations were carefully analyzed. Related to the first research question of the study about the communication barriers that suffocate students from participation with their teacher. The gathered results indicate that these barriers between the students and the teachers are the same as those discussed in the literature review. These barriers are elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1: The communication barriers identified and the number of respondents

Communication barriers	Percentage
Linguistic knowledge barriers	15%
Physical barriers	5%
Social barriers	40%
Cultural barriers	2%
Psychological barriers	2%
Interpersonal/ Relationship barriers	2%

From Table 1, it can be seen that 40% of respondents have selected social barriers as the most significant barrier that hinder students from participating with their teachers. That is to

say, 40% of students do not participate because of shyness, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, or fear of making mistakes in front of their colleagues. Linguistic knowledge barriers come as a second challenge that breaks down communication, presenting 15%. To elaborate, many students do not participate because of their linguistic shortage, especially the use of incorrect grammar structure, poor vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and inappropriate or ambiguous words or expressions (language-based difficulties).

To compare the study's results with the studies presented in the literature review, we can say that our results disconfirm the studies conducted by (Malek, Ibrahim, Adnan, Abd Rahim, 2016 who claim in their research that linguistic barriers are the most dominant challenges that hinder Malaysian students from communication. On the other hand, Rani's study (2006) concluded that both linguistic and social barriers significantly impact students' engagement at any activity in the classroom and not just linguistic ones.

Additionally, the presented study found physical barriers as the third barriers, which contributes 05 %. It incorporates the distance between the students and the teachers (the relationship between the teacher and the students), the suggestions of the teacher inside the classroom (body language or any inappropriate posture or gesture that fails to deliver the message to the students), classroom management, their attitudes towards the subject and the teacher and finally, the time of the sessions. Other barriers did have significant effects on learners' communication. It is worth mentioning that the results indicated that gender as an independent variable has a significant impact on communication. For example, girls (around 92% of them) are more afraid than boys of participating in the classroom because of timidity and less self-confidence. In light of these unexpected results, we conclude that our result goes in line with Rani's result. Therefore, social barriers will be the answer to our first research question, hence should be taken into consideration by teachers and students in order to treat these barriers that challenge students from oral participation, especially speaking skill.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After the ongoing investigation, the presented research came up with some implications that could be implemented or adapted in the classroom to boost and encourage the university partners, especially students, to communicate interactively and help students get rid of the discussed communication barriers. First, starting with the most dominant barriers which are social, we suggest organizing some T group sessions moderated either by teachers or specialists in soft skills or by the students themselves. These sessions might help students overcome the fear of speaking in public (glossophobia). This suggestion will also help students be self-confident, get rid of their anxiety, identify their problem areas, develop their listening skills,

therefore, train their understanding. Second, for linguistic barriers, we suggest that teachers need to be more possessive about students' feedback and develop the accuracy of the messages by using a language that describes, motivates, and evaluates students' competence. Additionally, students must perceive that one of their main goals is to communicate effectively with their colleagues and teachers in the target language. Therefore, grammar competence is highly required for students to produce correct sentences in their communication and avoid any negative feedback or embarrassed reaction from their teachers or colleagues.

It is worthy to state that the language that teachers use in addressing the students can harm the sentiments of the people and distract them from having the desire to listen and participate. My contribution can be seen in the change that can bring to the Moroccan context (university level) by giving more attention to students' social background as a vital variable that directly or indirectly affects their oral communication.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion to what has been discussed so far, the presented study aimed to investigate communication barriers that hinder students from participating with their teachers in the classroom. The study found that social barriers are the most significant challenge university students suffer from in their communication, not only linguistic ones. Thus, overcoming these barriers will help both teachers motivate students to participate more and learners to speak and communicate effectively in the target language. However, oral communication is inevitably fraught with many many challenges. Developing the process of stdents' speaking skill is perplexing and impacted by many other factors. Thus, much research is needed to be related to this fresh area to determine which factor(s)is significant and to point out if there are other factors the study and the previous ones did not pay attention to that could impact university students' oral communication.

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