

## Communication Barriers in Distance Education

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aytekin İŞMAN - Eastern Mediterranean University  
Senior Instructor Fahme DABAJ - Eastern Mediterranean University  
Research Assistant Fahriye ALTINAY - Eastern Mediterranean University  
Research Assistant Zehra ALTINAY - Eastern Mediterranean University

### Abstract

Communication is a key concept as being the major tool for people in order to satisfy their needs. It is an activity which refers as process and effective communication requires qualified communication with the elimination of communication barriers. As it is known, distance education is a new trend by following contemporary facilities and tools about teaching-learning process by embracing the technological improvements. Besides getting effective communication with traditional context, online courses become new options in order to catch flexibility. It is important that establishing the effective communication process depends on elimination obstacles during communication process. Therefore, being aware about communication barriers on distance education makes people to be more productive at their roles.

### Introduction

In order to understand the meaning of the communication in education and distance-learning, we should define the brief history of distance education which is quite popular of the new education trends in all contemporary countries or education system. Within the education communication and understanding each other's of participants are very necessary. Also the communication between teacher and student is a vital element of successful distance education as well. For a successful learning and understanding of the students or instructors, there should be no barriers between sender, receiver and in a message. Therefore, all strategies of learning, teaching during the instruction should not reflect the barriers limitations (Nasseh, 1997).

Creating effective communication among people and establishing contacts are the survival needs of human being. People cannot live without communicating. Therefore communication makes connections for creating effective understanding, knowing information and expressing feelings. As Myers mentioned that as toothpaste and mouthwash is really not the key to social success, people should get the skills of communication by being aware of effective form of communication and its media. Sending and receiving feedback require effective communication. On the other hand, communication affects the people's personal, social and economic needs. Communication is an activity, which can be learned, and media is a key factor that provides bridge between the communicator and receiver as being technology (Dimbleby, et al., 1992). In order to improve quality of communication, we should clarify meaning of communication and its effects on people's lives and also education that is major concept on the basis of structured society. As it is known, communication is a process that includes three dimensions as linear, interactive and transactional views in different perspectives. Linear view refers one-way communication, as being process that people could not get feedback. On the other hand, interactive view includes two-way communication by emphasizing nonverbal communication also. But it does not include simultaneously sending-receiving feedback that transactional view underlines. Three of the views contribute people to communicate under the communication process. All of them also realize the communication barriers that are obstacles to create effective communication (Adler, et al., 1993). Creating mutual understanding, while doing communication depends on eliminating physical, psychological and semantic barriers.

Communication is vital action at all areas of people's life. Organization, schools should handle way handle way of effective communication in order to increase productivity at their works. Especially in education that is a tool for welfare of society in order to make people socialized, communication is needed to make people as doing desired behaviors. Because of these reasons, more clarified field of experience between sender and receiver is necessary which means preventing the barriers in communicating. People should find common points by analyzing our encoding, decoding stages and channel with eliminating our prejudice about backgrounds in order to create meaningful understanding. It is inevitable that there is no perfect communication; creating qualified communication process is needed to create permanent understanding especially in teaching-learning process and establishing reasonable communication improve meaningful learning of the students.

Today with the effect of technology, traditional teaching styles gave their roles to technology-based teaching as known e-learning or distance education. Distance education is new trend in education that facilitates to everyone in order to get educated and gives options to learn better under the constructivist approach. Technological equipments become a major necessity for distance education like; audiocassette, telephone, compact disc, etc. It gives a light of flexibility but on the other hand it is a dimension of loss of motivation due to

lack of face-to-face contact with teachers. Therefore, it does not mean that people can communicate without facing any barriers on distance education. There are many barriers on distance education at its teaching learning process (Galusha, 2001). Basic barriers are occupied with being unaware of roles as teachers and students. While analyzing the roles of educators understanding the diversity before acting to students is necessary and realizing the contextual environment rather than tradition. Reports realized that there are distinct categories under the barriers of distance education which are; cost, motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation, lack of experience and training. On the other hand there are faculty and organizational barriers due to have lack of information about their roles on distance education. In addition to this, courses content should be updated on distance education as being another barrier too (Galusha, 2001). Main consideration is to be evaluated that eliminating communication barriers should be handled in order to create effective and qualified distance education and it is basic step to define communication barriers as being survival needs of students and teachers like interpersonal communication process.

It is obvious that there are some differences among the communication in all distance learning from classroom-based learning. First of students and teachers can have psychological problems by having anxiety while they are engaging distance education. On the other hand, students and teachers can have technical barriers during communicating by having lack of experiences about technology and they can have semantic barriers in their communication by misunderstanding announcements (Perreault, et al., 2002). Therefore eliminating communication barriers is most vital and first step in order to get qualified and effective distance education.

### **Aim of the Research**

Communication is vital activity that takes major place on people's life. While analyzing the forms of communication which is a way of communicating such as speaking or writing, on the other hand at the medium side of communication which is a means of communicating which combines different forms (Dimpleby, et al., 1992). As it is known, major goal of human being is to live to reach out to others, which means establishing communication process in order to get another self as acting in relationships. Communication as being human being's nature demand provides all people to satisfy their personal, social and other needs. Communication among people is a process in which everyone receives, sends, interprets and infers all at the same time and there is no beginning and no end (Johnson, 1993). Effective communication can be established with providing effective communication process, which includes diminishing communicational barriers. These barriers are semantic which starts in language problems, psychological barriers that refer backgrounds of students and some stereotyped culture which are the basic of miscommunication and physical barriers which emphasis technological facilities during communication process (Dimpleby, et al., 1992). Effective communication is vital at interpersonal communication, intercommunication and mass communication in order to create effective understanding among society by the elimination of communicational barriers. In addition to this, communication takes a great role in education especially on distance education because of improving understanding among participants. Distance education is a new picture in education by emphasizing the combination of new technological improvements and contemporary learning styles in education. It is a trend of overcoming great distances as being major barriers on people's psychology by giving opportunities for everyone get educated (Asirvatham, 2000). Distance Education gets collaborative effort between student and teacher and it offers real time internet courses rather than using pencil as traditional method. Teachers and students get different roles on distance education and distance education also facilitate learning with combination of audiovisual media. It is a sense of off-campus but normal communication takes place without having face-to-face communication. On the other hand, mass communication that includes media based instruction. Therefore, being aware of communication barriers besides other barriers makes people to get strategies as a pretest about program to overcome all difficulties. Clarifying all barriers makes people to improve mutual understanding and create an environment to increase productivity of all duties while they are engaging on distance education.

### **Importance of the Research**

Clarifying communicational barriers on distance education is major step to overcome all difficulties and it is necessary to get effective and meaningful communication for revamping the structure and affectivity of distance education. Because it is new action at universities and it is normal to have some kinds of barriers especially communicational barriers. Because of this reason, defining the communication barriers on distance education is the great statements as problem sentence of this research study. Communication barriers create negative dimensions to the communication process which limit the effectiveness of communication process. Therefore, communication barriers decrease the productivity of all facilities and opportunities. Up to today's, we should realize how much effective communication is required by analyzing the degrees of communicational barriers by the results of the concrete and approval literature reviews. In addition to this, the literature reviews and study based on articles was designed to get perspectives about distance education program system. At Europe, most of the distance education programs serve to the people who have no options to get educated

because of working and in developing countries; distance education is used for also to create diversity among marginalized people. Therefore, we should analyze what kind of communication barriers are in distance education.

### **Related Researches**

There are some related researches on communication barriers in distance education, some of them are summarized as below:

Galusha (2001) pointed out that distance education is an excellent method of reaching the adult learner. Adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility. The structure of distance learning gives adult greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education; however it is not without problems. Loss of student motivation due to the lack of face to face communication, potentially prohibitive start up costs and lack of faculty support are all barriers to create successful distance learning.

Heidi, et al. (2002) examined that distance education offers the ideal combination of self paced learning and interactivity. This style of learning requires online discussions, email support collaboration and interactive presentation for students. On the other hand, there should be health communication between participants and design groups for overcoming barriers to successful delivery of distance learning courses.

Asirvatham (2000) pointed out that all companies, industries struggle to produce educated work force. Everyone couldn't participate the classroom oriented learning atmosphere. Distance education is powerful advantage to overcome great distances among the access of the education and people. Alternative ways of technology provide to complement the place of healthy communication and interactions through the technical or groups performance. Whatever the some kinds of problems like lack of interaction, course technology occur, distance education is opportunity to compete with traditional classroom format.

Eisinger (2000) examined that the education evolution from the writing blackboard to the distance online learning activities. The study defines adult education and importance of understanding learner autonomy as being instructors. In addition to this, there are some problematic aspects like lack of non-verbal cues which creates misunderstanding through the global interaction. Also, every learning environment has different needs and expectations that create also challenges on distance education.

Cambre (1996) examined that the challenge of distance education from the cause of communicational problems. The article indicated that teachers and school administration, interaction between student and teacher, applicable technology for distance education affect the structure and fluency of distance education programs in some sense of communicational barriers. The lack of using ability of technology and not defining concrete role of students carry participants to unexpected problems.

Berge (2001) pointed out that organization or administration requires some problematic applications toward use of distance education from different barriers. The study searched out if there is any unknown barrier on distance education which is different from technical, interaction problems. The search study focused on designers or organization of distance education and their reflective action on distance education.

Kinross (2000) reflected that technology breaks down all barriers by facilitating easier use of knowledge and creating commonplace for everyone. It is also reflected that technology become representative which creates home schooling rather than unique learning under the dimension of flexibility. The research study suggests some kind of educational strategies under the idea of technology-based instruction.

Therefore, the above research papers pointed out that there are some communication barriers in distance education. To design effective distance education, the communication barriers should be solved, or at least minimized.

### **Findings and Results**

By the light of related researches and a lot of reflections about distance education, it is obvious that communication is key concept as being needed factors of human being especially education. In order to get effective teaching-learning process at education system mostly at distance education that is contemporary option for everyone to get educated, establishing and maintaining effective communication is needed by eliminating barriers in communication. Distance education is a new trend that creates alternatives about online courses to all students which is done technology based teaching by giving different roles to students and teachers under the combination of perspective of constructivist and behaviorist. In addition to this, presenting importance to the media in order to provide effective teaching learning with creating efficient communication has changed

teaching equipments. Minimizing barriers in distance education is needed to create effective distance education system. Especially communication between teacher and student is vital element of successful distance education for providing to all participants to satisfy their needs. Communication process takes place between receiver and sender whom are students and teachers at distance education, which face-to-face communication is difficult to take place.

Distance education provides participants flexibility by enhancing productivity of learning and teaching. Besides of these issues, there are many barriers at distance education which barriers can be areas of communication between participants as being major factor to enhance distance education.

Capability of students and teachers are needed to get effective distance education. The reason of learning that may be undertaken either individually or in groups creates physical absences of teachers and also requires qualified teachers in order to create efficient learning.

There is another issue that is adaptability of students and teachers to the new trend as a being a change from traditional context to contemporary education system.

There are four types of interactive problem areas that are:

1. Personal contact between primary instructor which students have no direct and ongoing contact with their instructors.
2. Having instructor-limited time creates some problems.
3. Personal contact between the on-site instructor and the student and
4. Boundaries between the on-site role and the needs of the students and creating individualistic atmosphere in distance education (Abrahamson, 1998).

As it is known that is distance education is anew education structure by being high degree of flexibility and provides options of controlling over the time, place and pace of education to the students. But it does not mean that it is not without problems. Loss of students motivation due to the lack of face to face contact with teachers and peers, cost, lack of faculty support are the required barriers that effect successful distance learning and education. First barrier is related with participants' factors that people try to adapt and understand individuals' contextual situation and also distance learning becomes students centered learning by having potential barriers not giving guarantee to satisfy all needs of participants and match program to their characteristics.

On the other hand, lack of feedback or contact with participants and not having face-to-face contacts create difficulty about evaluating participants to each other. In addition to this, technological barriers under the communication barriers also require difficulty to contribute effective distance education program. Therefore, having support and services such as tutors, academic planners, and technical assistance also cause some part of barriers at distance education. Basic and vital barrier that effect ongoing success of this education is the feelings of alienation and isolation at distance education. Because individualistic perspective causes being away from the community. All these aspects are the basic of personal sources that cause obstacles in distance education. In addition to this, there is also faculty barrier by not giving support and not providing any qualified teachers whose have no basic skills about distance education, not presenting human resources to the participants. On the other hand, teacher's acceptance to distance learning programs is another barrier (Galusha, 2001).

All these reflections represent faculty and participants barriers through distance education. As it is required that, all problems can be occurred under the basis of ineffective communication barriers. It is obvious sources of all these barriers are communicational barriers and using ineffective communication process. In order to get effective communication, we should get nonverbal and verbal reactions together and gain all actions in a simultaneously. Therefore, getting effective distance education system depends on eliminating communicational barriers. These barriers are technological, physical, semantic and psychological.

### **Recommendations**

In order to remove these barriers and getting effective distance education making students aware of and comfortable with patterns, learning about students' backgrounds and experiences, being sensitive to different communication styles and varying cultures are the options of enhancing distance education system by eliminating communicational barriers. In addition to this, remembering that students must take an active role in distance education, assisting students in becoming familiar and comfortable with delivery, preparing students to resolve the technical problems, being aware of students' needs and using effective interactions and feedback strategies, integrating variety of delivery system for interaction and feedback, contacting each side, making

detailed comments and developing strategies for students reinforcement, reviews, repetition and personalizing instructor involvement are the statements to enhance the quality of distance education on behalf of eliminating any kind of barriers.

### References

- Adler, Ronald. (1993). "Looking out/Looking in: Interpersonal Communication". Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc in United States of America.
- Asirvatham, Sandy. (2000). Beyond the distance barrier. *Journal of Property Management* v. 65 no5, p. 42-8.
- Berge, Zane L. et al. (2001). Obstacles faced at various stages of capability regarding distance education in institutions of higher education. *TechTrends* v.45 no4, p. 40-5.
- Cambre, Marjorie et al. (1996). The Challenge of Distance Education. *Journal of Staff Development* v.17, p. 38-41.
- Dimbleby, Richard et al. (1992) "More than words: An Introduction to Communication". Routledge in Newyork.
- Eisinger, Jane. (2000). Education Evolution. *Association Management* v.52 no13, p. 52-9.
- Frost, Charles H. (Spring 1998). Distance Education for Developing Countries. *International Education* v. 27 no2, p.56-67.
- Galusha, M. Jill. (2001). Barriers to Learning in Distance Education. <http://www.infrastruction.com/barriers.htm>
- Johnson, W. David. (1993). "Reaching out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self-actualization". A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. in United States of America.
- Kader, Shereen Abdel et al. (2002). Problems and recommendations: enhancing communication with culturally and linguistically diverse students. *Reading Improvement* v.39 no1, p. 43-51.
- Kinross, Louise. (2000). Technology breaks down barriers. *The Exceptional Parent* v.30 no6, p. 56-60.
- Mielke, Dan. (2001). Effective Teaching in Distance Education. [http://www.ericsp.org/pages/digests/effective\\_teaching.html](http://www.ericsp.org/pages/digests/effective_teaching.html).
- Nasseh, Bizhan. (1997 ). "A Brief History of Distance Education". <http://www.seniornet.org/edu/art/history.html>
- Perreault, Heidi et al. (2002). Overcoming Barriers to Successful Delivery of Distance Courses. *Journal of Education for Business* v. 77 no6, p. 313-1.
- Willis, Barry. (1992). "Strategies for Teaching Distance." [http://www.ihets.org/consortium/ipse/fdhandbook/inst\\_d.html](http://www.ihets.org/consortium/ipse/fdhandbook/inst_d.html)