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## Effective Communication for Higher Education: Identifying Barriers between Student-Educator Relationship in Cebu Technological University

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### ABSTRACT

This comprehensive case study examines the communication challenges that arise between students and professors within Cebu Technological University (CTU). Focused on understanding the dynamics of communication hindrances in higher education, the study aims to identify and analyze the factors influencing effective communication. By exploring various aspects such as generational differences, power dynamics, and technological influences, this research contributes to the development of strategies for fostering improved communication between students and professors.

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### INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is pivotal in the academic environment for successful teaching and learning experiences. However, students and professors often face unique challenges that impact their ability to communicate and connect within the educational context. This case study seeks to uncover and analyze these hindrances, acknowledging the significance of power dynamics, generational disparities, and technological influences in shaping effective communication.

**POWER DYNAMICS:** Professors, as educators and authority figures, wield influence, occasionally creating a perceived barrier to open communication. Conversely, students, often navigating the intricacies of academia, may hesitate to express their thoughts or seek clarification due to this perceived power imbalance. Recognizing and addressing this power dynamic is crucial for fostering an environment where students feel empowered to engage actively in communication.

**GENERATIONAL DISPARITIES:** This dynamic interaction is further compounded by generational disparities, where distinct communication styles and expectations may exist between educators and the younger generation of students. These differences can affect how they prefer to communicate, emphasizing the importance of understanding age-related dynamics for fostering better communication in education. Bridging this generational gap requires a two-way approach, encouraging educators to adapt to evolving communication styles while guiding students in navigating traditional communication norms.

**TECHNOLOGICAL INFLUENCES:** The omnipresence of technology introduces both opportunities and challenges, as the use of digital platforms and communication tools can either enhance or hinder effective communication. The advent of virtual classrooms, online discussions, and asynchronous communication methods can either bridge gaps or exacerbate miscommunication. Embracing these technological shifts necessitates a nuanced approach to ensure they enhance rather than hinder the student-educator relationship. Moreover, the potential for misinterpretation in digital communication underscores the importance of fostering clarity and intentionality in technological interactions within the educational context. Leveraging technology for educational purposes requires a balance between accessibility, inclusivity, and the preservation of essential face-to-face communication elements.

Understanding the multifaceted nature of student-educator communication is paramount for addressing the unique challenges within the educational context. Thus, this study particularly seeks to determine which of the three above-mentioned communication hindrances has the most negative effect on the student-educator relationship.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature highlights the complex nature of communication between students and professors. Works by scholars like Chick and Hass emphasize the impact of power differentials and the need for inclusive communication practices. Research on generational differences by Twenge and Campbell provides insights into the evolving communication styles of students and professors, shaping the theoretical foundation for understanding effective communication strategies.

Effective education depends on the proper use of communication skills. Teachers use their knowledge and teaching skills using texts establishing the right environment, will lead to student learning. Faculty characteristics that can facilitate the learning process and even textbooks and lack of educational facilities to compensate for the defect or vice versa, the subject teaching positions with the inability develop a good relationship with the inactivated and non-attractive (Shabani, 2000).

There is empirical evidence suggesting that communication apprehension is an impediment regarding students' communication with their professors. "Our society and our teachers continue to examine the fears of communicating in a variety of contexts and ways to lessen these fears" (Civikly-Powell, 1999, p. 65).

There are many students who feel rather intimidated to face their professors and effectively communicate. Martin and Martinez (2010) indicated that, "Students entering professional programs are expected to assume greater responsibility for their own learning and academic needs. However, many are not comfortable voicing questions and suggestions to faculty who will evaluate their academic progress" (p. 7).

It is a fact that social media has increasingly become one of the most popular avenues to communicate with people nowadays. The current generation of college students in particular, are glued to social media. Hence, social media is a great tool at the disposal of professors and students for communication in higher education. Evans (2014) noted that: Social media tools facilitate media and information sharing, collaboration and participation. This makes them obvious technologies for application to higher education. The growing base of online educational resources includes websites, videos, podcasts, blogs and wikis. The challenge for educationalists is to facilitate the connection between learners and relevant resources and to help learners make sense of those resources. (Evans, 2014, p. 903)

The digital age we live in has made information available at any time and almost any place, so learning has become more of a delocalized, individual experience. Although we learn individually, we are also members of online communities, as digital media encourages user participation and online community building. The youth are the ones most sensitive to this new reality, as George Barna's study illustrates: "they were born and raised in a global society where consumerism and capitalism are natural conditions and go largely unchallenged. To them, technology is their natural ally, a necessity rather than a luxury, the solution to all imaginable problems" (Barna, 1995, p.46).

Helsper (2010, p.353) compares the X Generation with the Y Generation, stating that the latter grew up "in a completely different ICT environment than their parents, and these generational differences will no doubt influence how they use the Internet".

Sources showed that the Internet technologies can support and facilitate the academic process comes from the study of Lowe and Laffey, who report the use of Twitter in education as "a refreshing, useful tool that can add value to the student learning experience by bringing real-world examples into the classroom in a timely fashion" (Lowe & La" ey, 2011, p.188)

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## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a structured methodology centered around quantitative survey questions to investigate the influence of power dynamics, generational disparities, and technological influences on the student-educator relationship. Participants will be selected from Cebu Technological University (CTU) to ensure a well-rounded representation of experiences.

The survey comprises targeted questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions of power dynamics, generational disparities, and the role of technology in communication within the educational context. This quantitative approach allows for the systematic collection of data, enabling statistical analyses to identify patterns and correlations.

The survey responses will be analyzed using statistical tools mainly Google Forms and Microsoft Excel, providing quantitative insights into the prevalence and impact of each communication hindrance. While the methodology exclusively utilizes quantitative survey questions, the structured nature of the survey ensures a thorough exploration of participants' perspectives on the specified communication dynamics. The findings from this quantitative analysis aim to contribute valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of student-educator communication within CTU.

(See survey questionnaire below)

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree," please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. Power Dynamics:

- a. Professors create an environment that encourages open communication.
- b. I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts or concerns to my professors.

c. The perceived authority of professors influences my willingness to engage in communication.

## 2. Generational Disparities:

a. There are noticeable differences in communication styles between educators and students.

b. Generational gaps affect how educators and students prefer to communicate.

c. Bridging these generational differences is essential for effective communication in education.

## 3. Technological Influences:

a. Technology enhances communication between students and educators.

b. Virtual platforms and online tools facilitate meaningful interactions.

c. Miscommunication can arise from the use of technology in education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon analysis, participants consistently rated power dynamics lower compared to generational disparities and technological influences, indicating a perception that power dynamics have the most negative effect on the student-educator relationship.

Table 1. Power Dynamics

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Professors create an environment that encourages open communication.	41	5	1	2	1
b. I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts or concerns to my professors.	43	4	1	1	1
c. The perceived authority of professors influences my willingness to engage in communication.	38	6	2	2	2

Table 2. Generational Disparities

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. There are noticeable differences in communication styles between educators and students.	7	2	3	35	3
b. Generational gaps affect how educators and students prefer to communicate.	9	5	1	2	33
c. Bridging these generational differences is essential for effective communication in education.	0	0	0	8	42

Table 3. Technological Influences

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Technology enhances communication between students and educators.	4	5	4	4	33
b. Virtual platforms and online tools facilitate meaningful interactions.	12	8	8	12	10

c. Miscommunication can arise from the use of technology in education	2	9	2	7	30
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The survey findings consistently indicate that participants perceive power dynamics as having the most negative impact on student-educator communication within the educational context. The lower mean score for power dynamics suggests a shared sentiment among participants, underscoring the perceived barriers created by authority dynamics. This perception aligns with the notion that professors, as authority figures, may inadvertently create an environment that discourages open communication. The discomfort expressed by participants in expressing thoughts or concerns to professors highlights the inhibiting effect of power imbalances on the student-educator relationship. This could stem from reluctance on the part of students to engage with educators due to a perceived power imbalance. The results emphasize the need for interventions that address power dynamics within educational settings to foster a more open, inclusive and constructive communication environment. Addressing these authority barriers is crucial for enhancing the overall academic experience and ensuring that communication between students and educators is conducive to meaningful learning interactions.

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## CONCLUSION

After a thorough analysis of the gathered data that identified power dynamics as the most affecting factor that hinders effective communication between the students and professors of CTU, several targeted solutions have been recognized and can be implemented.

Professional development for educators plays a crucial role in recognizing the influential position of professors. Investing in programs that enhance interpersonal skills can be beneficial. Workshops focused on creating inclusive and approachable communication strategies contribute to mitigating the perceived power imbalance.

Establishing structured mechanisms for students to provide anonymous feedback is another effective solution. This empowers students to express concerns without fear of repercussions. Regular feedback sessions can serve as a channel for constructive communication and provide insights into improving the student-educator relationship.

Mentorship programs, pairing students with educators, offer a personalized approach to communication. These relationships provide a supportive environment that encourages students to express their thoughts and concerns more comfortably.

Encouraging active involvement of students in academic discussions, decision-making processes, and collaborative projects is a proactive approach. This fosters a sense of shared responsibility and inclusivity in educational interactions.

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