

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INTERPRETATIONS OF DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Liana CRIȘAN-TĂUȘAN, Ph.D.,
Specialized Department with Psycho-Pedagogical Profile
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
lianatausan@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The educational process, as a communication relationship, involves the teacher-student interaction as well as the transmission of messages between them. The success of the pedagogical act is largely conditioned by the success of the communication act. The conduct of teaching activities in the past two years in which, globally, humanity has been facing the coronavirus pandemic, has undergone changes imposed by the need to replace or supplement the classic educational action of face-to-face teaching through online teaching activities.*

The problem we submit for analysis is the effectiveness of didactic communication carried out in the conditions of instructive-educational activities in the online environment, reflected in aspects such as: teacher-student interaction, feedback, and educational message. Following a semi-structured interview applied to groups of first- and second-year students, we devised the items of a questionnaire through which we aimed to identify the students' perception of the effectiveness of didactic communication in the context of online instructive-educational activities. The aim of the investigation was to identify the extent to which the elements that ensure the premises of effective didactic communication are also found at the level of instructive-educational activities carried out in the online environment. The students' answers highlight their observation that, in the online teaching activities, the didactic communication between teachers and students takes place within certain limits: the nonverbal communication cannot be present or visible most of the

time; the transmission of messages from teacher to student predominates to the detriment of teacher-student and student-student communication, interactions. The changes that occur in didactic communication within the context of teaching activities conducted online are natural consequences of the specificity of this manner of carrying out instructive-educational activities.

Keywords: *didactic communication; instructive-educational process; online environment; online teaching activities; the nonverbal communication; feedback.*

Introduction

Didactic communication is seen today as one of the main resources of the instructive-educational process. It represents a part of the latent contents of the formative process, having the power to either diminish or potentiate the formal contents. A good teacher must have not only a thorough knowledge of the subject but also the ability to transmit knowledge logically and convincingly, in order to ensure the development of the students' intellect and their interest in knowledge.

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Characteristics and significance of the didactic communication

Didactic communication is an instrumental type of communication achieved through verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal means, and it is directly involved in supporting a systematic learning process. It is a distinct form, required in conveying certain contents, specific to a systematic and assisted learning act. (Agabrian, 2008). From the perspective of formal education, didactic communication is the basis of the teaching-learning process within

the institutionalized framework of the school and between partners with determined status roles: teachers, pupils/students, etc.

Didactic communication is a specific form of communication that differs from other types of communication, a fact which confers a certain specificity to it (Postelnicu, 2000; Cosmovici, Iacob, 1998; Enache, 2019; Şoitu, 2002):

- It is a type of classroom communication, taking place in certain school circumstances, i.e., it is subordinated to the requirements and rules within the educational process;
- It aims at achieving precise instructive-educational objectives by assimilating the informational content and respecting the didactic principles (communication is permanently subordinated to the pursued didactic objective);
- It has a bilateral character - that is, each of the two poles (transmitter and receiver) can transmit and receive information, knowledge; however, the transmission and reception have different meanings and roles from one pole to the other;
- It takes place multimodally: frontally, in groups, or individually.

Furthermore, didactic communication is a relationship of intentions with a dual purpose: its goal is the correct transmission and reception of the content, but it also aims at ensuring that the message reverberates within the receiver, forming or triggering intellectual operations or certain emotional states at the level of the receiver, thus having an educational effect. The didactic message has a semantic component (knowledge) and an ecto-semantic one (affective states, attitudes, ways of appreciation, etc.). The semantic side is expressed mainly through linguistic means (words, sentences, phrases) but also through certain conventional signs; meanwhile, the ecto-semantic side is expressed through nonverbal means (mime, pantomime) and paraverbal means (accent, intonation, tone).

At the same time, a learning, educational, and developmental effect can be observed through the active involvement of the student. Didactic communication is complex, involving different forms and types of communication: verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal. It is organized and spontaneous at the same time. However, due to the socio-professional difference between the partners, it is also asymmetrical. This is where the danger of transferring the authority of status (which is normal at the level of the educator's relationship with the class) over the contents, in the form of the authority's argument. Thus, there is a risk, especially for young students, of

considering something as true or false simply because it comes from a source with "authority" (Pânișoară, 2003, 2008; Abric, 2022).

The message is carefully selected and structured following the pedagogical logic and the logic of the corresponding science. Respecting the pedagogical logic intends to facilitate the understanding of a truth and not just its simple statement. In this regard, the teacher must make considerable efforts for the truths in their field of specialty to be understood and accepted by the children as "personal symbolic goods". In the structuring of the contents of the school curricula and the presentation of the information in the communication act, priority is given to the pedagogical logic (which aims for understanding), over the scientific one (aims for the truth), or the historical one (aims for the chronology of the scientific truths' discovery). The message is conveyed to the students through teaching methods appropriate to their level of intellectual development and level of training (Bougnoux, 2000 ; De Peretti, A., Legrand, J.A., Boniface, J., 2001).

Didactic discourse has a pronounced explanatory character, targeting primarily the comprehension of what is transmitted. The premise of effective learning is the understanding of the proposed content, this being the obligatory condition for the continuation of the learning process. Regarding the scientific contents that they will convey, teachers have an active role, because they act as a filter that selects, organizes, and personalizes the contents. We also note the personalization of the didactic communication itself, which refers to the fact that the same institutional framework, the same formal content, and the same human resources will be exploited differently and with distinct results by different teachers. Thus, the teacher will choose to emphasize one or another of the dimensions of communication: informative, relational, pragmatic, etc.

There is a permanent blend of vertical and horizontal communication, in organized or spontaneous forms, as well as a certain level of quantitative and qualitative redundancy imposed by the need for a complete comprehension of the message.

Didactic communication requires an adaptation to the context and the partner through an effort that involves evaluation, self-evaluation, regulation, and self-regulation. The process of didactic communication is regulated and controlled with the help of retrospective actions such as: feedback and feed-forward.

Methodology

The conduct of teaching activities in the past two years in which, globally, humanity has been facing the coronavirus pandemic, has undergone changes imposed by the need to replace or supplement the classic educational action of face-to-face teaching through online teaching activities.

The problem we submit for analysis is the effectiveness of didactic communication carried out in the conditions of instructive-educational activities in the online environment, reflected in aspects such as: teacher-student interaction, feedback, and educational message.

Following a semi-structured interview applied to groups of first- and second-year students, we devised the items of a questionnaire through which we aimed to identify the students' perception of the effectiveness of didactic communication in the context of online instructive-educational activities.

The items in the questionnaire through which we investigated these issues are:

- *I believe that, in online teaching activities, the didactic communication between teachers and students is carried out with certain limitations (such as: nonverbal communication cannot be present; unilateral communication from teacher to student predominates to the detriment of teacher-student or student-student interactions, etc).*
- *In traditional teaching activities, we would receive constant feedback from teachers to confirm or correct the information being discussed, while this is more difficult to do in online activities.*
- *I find that the explanations in the face-to-face teaching-learning activities are more effective because they are adapted to the needs of the students as a direct result of the interaction with them, while in the case of online activities the explanations are not as frequent.*
- *Traditional face-to-face didactic activities have a higher effectiveness due to: the presence of teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions; prompt and frequent feedback; additional explanations from the teacher.*

The aim of the investigation was to identify the extent to which the elements that ensure the premises of effective didactic communication are also found at the level of instructive-educational activities carried out in the online environment.

Research objectives:

- Identifying the characteristics of didactic communication carried out in an online context;
- Identifying the difficulties in achieving an effective didactic communication in an online environment;
- Identifying possible ways of optimizing didactic communication in an online environment.

Research hypothesis: we assume that, in the context of conducting teaching activities in an online environment, didactic communication – as the main resource of the instructive-educational process – acquires different characteristics which can influence the effectiveness of the teaching-learning activities.

Target group: the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 100 students in the first and second year of their studies at several faculties from a university in Cluj-Napoca.

Results and discussions

From the application of the items of the questionnaire intended to evaluate the students' perception regarding the effectiveness of didactic communication in the context of online instructive-educational activities, we recorded the following results:

Table no. 1: I believe that, in online teaching activities, the didactic communication between teachers and students is carried out with certain limitations

	Frequency	%
I agree	63	63
I partially agree	15	15
I do not agree	18	18
I do not know/No answer	4	5
Total	100	100,0

Table no. 2: In traditional teaching activities we would receive constant feedback from teachers to confirm or correct the information being discussed, while in online activities this is more difficult.

	Frequency	%
I agree	59	59
I partially agree	28	28
I do not agree	10	10
I do not know/No answer	3	3
Total	100	100,0

Table no. 3: I find that the explanations in the face-to-face teaching-learning activities are more effective because they are adapted to the needs of the students as a direct result of the interaction with them, while in the case of online activities the explanations are not as frequent.

	Frequency	%
I agree	73	73
I partially agree	9	9
I do not agree	12	12
I do not know/No answer	6	6
Total	100	100,0

Table no. 4: Traditional didactic activities that take place face-to-face have a higher effectiveness due to: the presence of the teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions; prompt and frequent feedback; additional explanations from the teacher.

	Frequency	%
I agree	68	68
I partially agree	12	12

I do not agree	16	16
I do not know/No answer	4	4
Total	100	100,0

The students' answers highlight their observation that, in the online teaching activities, the didactic communication between teachers and students takes place within certain limits: the nonverbal communication cannot be present or visible most of the time; the transmission of messages from teacher to student predominates to the detriment of teacher-student and student-student communication, interactions, etc. The impossibility to perceive nonverbal messages weakens the significance of the didactic communication, with direct effects on the understanding of the transmitted message, the motivation of the educated ones, and the ability to focus their attention during the educational activity. Nonverbal communication is a component of didactic communication and a condition for its effectiveness. The information is coded and transmitted through means represented by posture, movement, gestures, facial expressions, and appearance of the partners. Their reception is done visually. Eye contact is the strongest nonverbal element, considering that subjects look at each other 60-70% of the time during a conversation. Eye contact regulates the flow of the conversation, providing feedback to the subjects, expressing emotions, and providing information about the nature of their relationship. The nonverbal components of communication reinforce and refine the message conveyed through verbal utterances. These means are used especially when trying to convey emotional states or attitudes, thus contributing to the development of the relational dimension of the communication act.

Didactic communication encompasses the phenomenon of *retrospective actions* that designates recurrent actions propagated in the opposite direction – from effects to causes, from results to initial plans. These are the main ways that allow the participants to adapt to each other, to the situation, and to the intended aim. The role of feedback is to balance, streamline, and adapt structures. Among the forms of retrospective actions

present in didactic communication, two are worth mentioning: feedback and feedforward.

The inverse connection, or feedback, expresses the reciprocal conditions that are established between the behavioural manifestations of the educator and the learner's behaviour, providing the educator with information about how the transmitted messages were assimilated in order to regulate the strategy that they will adopt in the future. The information and the communication relationship is reversed - from the receiver (student) to the sender (educator). Feedback consists of the transmission of information verbally and non-verbally from students to the educator intending to regulate and self-regulate the educational process. It is the means through which aims become causalities again. Depending on the information obtained regarding the quality of the teaching-learning results, the educator adopts the appropriate measures necessary to remove the distortions, difficulties, or gaps found by: using other teaching methods and procedures; changing teaching style; presenting new explanations and examples; reiterating the explanation of the elements that have not been understood yet.

From the perspective of didactic communication, feedback can be considered as communication about communication and learning. This is explained by the fact that the didactic act requires the existence of two feedbacks:

- Feedback I: brings information from receiver to transmitter and regulates the activity of transmitting information (this can be found in any type of human communication);
- Feedback II: it is provided by the sender to the receiver in order to regulate the activity of the latter (this is particular to a communication aiming at systematic learning).

The importance and functions of the two feedbacks derive from the dual status of the sender and the receiver in didactic situations. Thus, the sender is not only a source of information but also an educator concerned with transforming the receiver based on the information provided. In turn, the student is not only a receiver of information but also a person available for transformation and educable, following a learning process that incorporates the information received as well. This is where feedback II intervenes and acts as a means of directing the learning act.

If the communication situation allows an optimal presence of each of the two feedbacks, we find:

- An increase in the effectiveness of the message/learning act;
- The establishment of a secure climate, both for the teacher (who knows how their message is received) and for the students (they can self-regulate their learning act based on the guidelines offered by the teacher);
- An improvement in the interpersonal relationship between those involved in the didactic act.

Feedforward, or anticipated feedback, occurs when the actions to solve learning tasks precede the communication of information. In this case, the students are encouraged to take the appropriate steps to obtain the necessary information: to search, research, experiment, select and retain the essential information, to formulate and verify hypotheses, to ask questions of the educator, and to ask for help.

In the context of conducting the teaching activity in an online environment, the significance of feedback is limited due to the lower frequency of teacher-student interactions. Corrections, completions, approval, or disapproval of answers may no longer be activities that permanently accompany the conduct of teaching-learning activities. The results of the students' work are visible only after longer periods of time, materializing in completed applications, elaborated works, etc., which will be evaluated by the teacher, but the results of the evaluations do not reach the student as promptly as in the case of face-to-face didactic activities. The timely identification of learning obstacles and the degree of adequacy of learning aimed at regulating the activity of the teacher, but also of the student, leads to effects such as: increasing the effectiveness of the message/act of learning; establishing a secure climate, both for the teacher (knows how their message is being received) and for the students (they can self-regulate their learning act based on the indications offered by the teacher); improving the interpersonal relationship between those involved in the didactic act.

Conclusions

The changes that occur in didactic communication within the context of teaching activities conducted online are natural consequences of the specificity of this manner of carrying out instructive-educational activities. Finding specific ways of conducting online activities that would streamline communication through fostering two-way interactions (teacher-student, student-teacher), through the permanent presence of feedback as a way to

regulate the teaching and learning activity, and through knowledge of the specific learning needs of the students and adaptation of the elements of didactic communication to them should be the desideratum of each teacher in such situations. We consider that the conduct of online teaching activities should remain as only an alternative imposed by an imperative situation for a limited period of time or a complementary way of conducting instructive-educational activities.

Biographical note

The teaching and research activities carried out currently as a Associate professor, on the major field of education sciences, materialized in teaching / evaluation educational actions (for the initial training of the future teachers), preparation of training materials (courses, guides, etc.), but also in designing and implementing research / development / training projects (especially sighting the continuous training, the primary and secondary education teachers' improvement), and in carrying out researches on topics directly related to certain issues of school education, and also in a scientific contribution materialized in a series of articles, studies published in famous national and international journals, are especially focused on the following areas of interest: General Pedagogy, Curriculum Theory, Classroom Management, Educational Communication, Educational Policies, Theory and Practice of Evaluation.

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