

REVIEW

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNICATING PEACEFULLY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Social media usage has grown exponentially in the contemporary communication landscape. This increase in usage and openness in speech results in public concern about existing practices in social networks. Social media misuse and abuse is a growing challenge in the online space and a primary concern for parents, educators, and social media activists. The consequences include public tension, intolerance, and violence and it has resulted in psychological and emotional upheavals among users. This paper reviews some of the challenges and issues in peace education, and how communicative peace is central to peace education. It also evaluates the idea of communicative competence in strengthening young people's capacity to exploit modern-day communication media to communicate for peace and make an impact in their communities. This paper concludes that teaching and learning to communicate peacefully is not only a universal educational prerequisite but has become very crucial if we are to fulfill our communicative roles and obligations with justice, and above all, peace.

Introduction

Social media usage has grown exponentially in the contemporary communication landscape. In many regions, there is a noticeable growth in the usage of social media platforms and the penetration may reach more than 90% of the population in some countries. For example, in Malaysia, there are 30.25 million social media users as of January 2022, or almost 94% of the population. The UAE, South Korea, Netherlands, and Sweden have also recorded more than 90% penetration rate in 2022. Globally, however, around 58% of the world population use social media in 2022 but this figure is expected to rise to 74% by 2026.

This increase in usage and openness in speech results in public concern about existing practices in social networks. Social media misuse and abuse such as hateful comments, spreading fake news, cyberbullying, and cybercrime are a growing challenge in the online space and a primary concern for parents, educators, and social media activists. It is also a concern for social media developers, marketers, and law enforcement authorities. The consequences of social media misuse and abuse include public tension, intolerance and violence (Iacus et al., 2020). It has also resulted in psychological and emotional upheavals among users (Al-Hassan & Al-Dossari, 2019).

Social media misuse and abuse especially hate speech has become one of the most common ways of spreading divisive rhetoric that threatens peace within a community and nation as well as around the world. United Nations launched its Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech on 18 June 2019 to tackle the problem holistically by collaborating with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations, media outlets, tech companies and social media platforms.

According to its document, hate speech is any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses discriminatory or pejorative language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of their identity factors such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, colour, descent, or gender. According to this document, there are several strategies recommended including using education as a tool for addressing and countering hate speech. In this case, UN entities are encouraged to take action in formal and informal education to implement SDG4, promote the values and skills of Global Citizenship Education and enhance Media and Information Literacy.

This paper intends to review some of the challenges and issues in peace education, and how communicative peace is central to peace education. It also evaluates the idea of communicative competence in strengthening young people's capacity to exploit modern-day communication media to communicate for peace and make an impact in their communities.

Role of Education in Peacebuilding

The role of education in peacebuilding has been deeply studied and reviewed (UNICEF, 2011). There are few well-established and emerging approaches to teaching the culture of peace and tolerance in general. Peace Studies, for example, has begun in the 1960s and it has branched out into other subspecialties such as Peace Education, Peace Psychology, and a newer study, Peace Linguistics.

There is also multicultural education that promotes intercultural understanding along with education for personal and national identity, citizenship, and the global environment. This is an education that recognises, accepts, values, and promotes diversity in a pluralistic society.

In Media, Language, and Business Studies, the courses on Intercultural Communication, Peace Journalism, Conflict Management, Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution have been in the university curriculum.

According to some researchers, peace education is comprehensive, interdisciplinary in nature, and embraces a wide range of programs and initiatives. Some researchers classified it under general headings namely environment education, human rights education, international education, development education, and conflict resolution education. Others categorise Peace Study under the groupings of global peace education, conflict resolution programs, violence prevention programs, development education, nonviolence education, and communication programs.

At the school level, there have been educational packages and curriculums for children and youth aiming at teaching the culture of peace and tolerance. Teachers and educators can choose which topics and contents to focus on and to include in their local syllabi, in audio-visual, or textual resources, and in classroom activities. They can also choose which teaching methods or approaches to use, adapt or develop to meet their objectives.

The school plays an important role in the construction of communities that are focusing on enhancing peaceful relationships between people and with nature. From the constructivist perspective of Peace Education, school is a powerful venue to develop capacities and promote positive coexistence. Addressing peace in the school should at first refer to the immediate group of people sharing the community, that is, the classroom itself. The focus here should be on the promotion of attitudes towards enhancing coexistence between individuals, in and beyond the classroom.

But how many schools fulfill the actual purpose and objectives of teaching the culture of peace and tolerance? In case it does, how does it bring about changes to improve attitudes towards others or with others? While some people have argued that peace education is an essential element of quality education, in reality, it is often perceived as a supplement or has been relegated to other programs such as social studies, or treated as separate lessons. Another obstacle lies with the teachers themselves. Many are skeptical of its value in developing academic skills and building a unified national community. Some are doubtful about the feasibility of its implementation.

Communicative Competence

With the rise of social media, peace education needs to provide young people with communicative competence and this can be achieved through communicative peace. The term 'communicative competence' was first used by Dell Hymes in 1966 and, then it was published as a paper entitled 'On Communicative Competence' in 1972 and it was republished in 2001. But it was Chomsky, who was one of the first scholars to use the term competence in connection with learning languages. In *Theory of Syntax* (1965) he distinguishes between two concepts, competence, and performance. In his view, competence is "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language" and performance is "the actual use of language in concrete situations."

For Hymes (1972), communicative competence does not only represent the grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic competence. He defined communicative competence as “the tacit knowledge” of the language and “the ability to use it for communication”. For him, it is a necessary grammatical competence along with the ability to use this competence in various communicative situations. Several other researchers have also offered their definitions of communicative competence.

There are various models of communicative competence developed by researchers such as Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996).

I will review the most recent model which was created by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006). The framework of communicative competence for this model contains five components, namely, discourse, linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural, and strategic competence. Discourse competence consists of four language skills (i.e. listening, reading, writing, and speaking) as the authors believe that “the fact of being able to interpret and produce a spoken or written piece of discourse is the means to achieve successful communication.”

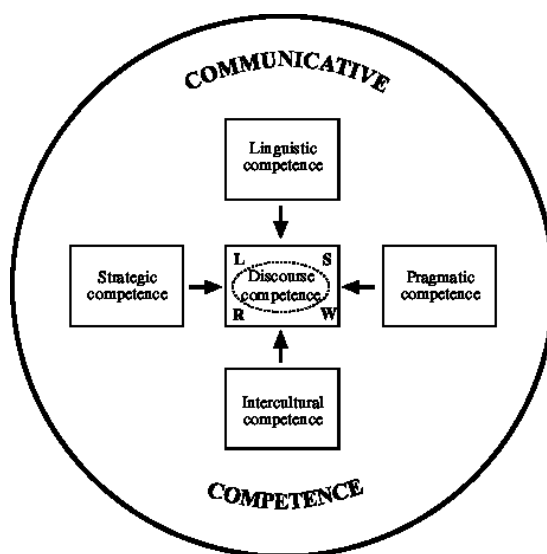


Figure 1: Communicative Competence Model by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006).

As for the role of discourse competence, it “is located in a position where the rest of the components (i.e., linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic) serve to build this competence which, in turn, shapes each of the other competencies.” All components are also said to be related to each other in the sense that an increase in one component brings an increase in all the remaining components of communicative competence.

The core of this framework, discourse competence, is defined as “the selection and sequencing of utterances or sentences to achieve a cohesive and coherent spoken or written text given a particular purpose and situational context”.

Pragmatic competence is seen as the knowledge of functions and appropriacy in a given context while intercultural competence adds the aspect of sociocultural habits and cross-cultural differences that also have an impact on communication act. Strategic competence then comprises of two elements: the knowledge of communication strategies used for avoiding communication failures and the knowledge of learning the language. The authors are emphasising the four language skills since they are understood as the manifestations of interpreting and producing a spoken or written piece of discourse which is considered the core competence of the model.

To summarise the main ideas of communicative competence, it has been mentioned that “the nature of communicative competence is not static but dynamic, it is more interpersonal than intrapersonal and relative rather than absolute.” Another related term that has been used is communicative language ability, which comprises language proficiency and the ability to use the language appropriately based on the context.

Communicative competence that includes a peacebuilding mentality can guide educators and teachers to work towards the imperative of promoting peace locally and globally, for both the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Communicative Peace

The term ‘communicative peace’ was coined by Brazilian scholar Francisco Gomes de Matos in his 1991 article ‘What the world needs now: Communicative peace’. Gomes de Matos has been preoccupied with the issue of humanising language teaching and learning and some of the questions he posed were: How can language users be more linguistically humanised and how can teachers, students, teaching methods and materials be more humanising? He firmly believes that teachers should be transformative agents, which he calls *humanisers*, who are instilling the ideals and principles of human rights, justice, and peace and are committed to applying them in their actions by communicating accurately, fluently and appropriately.

However, in his view, it was not sufficient as he believes we need to communicate constructively and in ways that foster well-being. Gomes de Matos’ concept belongs to the important area of ‘peace linguistics’, which was first formally defined by David Crystal in 1999 [see Curtis (2017)]. This is an interdisciplinary field guided by the goal of promoting peace and peacebuilding through systematic study, deliberate teaching, and conscious use of languages spoken, written, and signed. Gomes de Matos saw communicative peace as an extension of communicative competence and this concept received attention from other researchers.

Intolerant uses of language such as hate speech or inflammatory speech in the media is on the rise. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have become instruments to incite violence, divide societies, promote hatred and as a key recruitment tool for armed groups. Especially insults and hate speech can and do lead to all kinds of physical, psychological, social, and cultural violence (e.g. bullying, suicide, rape, honor killings, exploitation, detention, genocides, wars).

But at the same time social media can become important tools to resolve conflicts peacefully, or create conditions for peace and for public diplomacy. With the growth of social media, many young people will, unfortunately, come across hate speech online, and through communicative peace, they will be able to deal with these issues.

Intolerant uses of language in communication, interactions, narratives, and other discourses directly affect the self-esteem and self-worth of the receivers and have very real impacts on mental well-being. Intolerant uses of language in communication may include sexist, classist, ableist, ageist, racist, nationalistic, nativist, or otherwise.

Most of the media platforms have reporting processes and each has its own guidelines around hate speech and incitement to violence or abuse. Policymakers have created important documents like the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), sustainable quality peace agreements, and effective multilingual policies. But this is insufficient, and communicative peace can play an important role in reducing or improving the handling of conflict, and violence more positively, by building and sustaining peace.

Developing communicative competence is an aim that students are expected to achieve. There are several communication-based and task-based activities for enhancing language learning. These activities usually play a crucial role in developing communicative competence and enabling communication skills in comparison to those strategies of imitation, memorisation, and repetition drills that mainly concern language and its structures rather than the use of that language.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning to communicate peacefully is not only a universal educational prerequisite but has become very crucial if we are to fulfill our communicative roles and obligations with justice, and above all, peace. A peaceful future depends on our everyday acts and communication. It is crucial that we educate our young people about tolerance and peace, not only in schools but also in our homes, communities, workplace, and most of all in our hearts and minds.

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