

# How to improve the quality of teaching in higher education?

## The application of the feedback conversation for the effectiveness of interpersonal communication

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This paper presents a process of instruction to improve the teaching quality of lecturers in higher education through the development of communication skills. One of the main instruments in the process of the personal instruction of lecturers is the filming of lessons. The lesson is observed both by the lecturer and the observer. Then a conversation that includes feedback and reflection constitutes the tool for changing behaviors and improving the quality of the interpersonal communication. The instrument is aimed at the empowerment and personal growth of the lecturer and is not focused on assessment. The observation tool using lesson filming and personal conversation can contribute to reducing fears of feedback and to improving the lecturer's reflective ability and interpersonal communication.

**KEYWORDS:** feedback, feedback conversation, higher education, interpersonal communication, reflective.

### Introduction

In higher education, the lecturer is found in constant interpersonal interaction with students. The topic of the quality of teaching and especially the way in which lecturers convey the content of the lesson is of interest to both students and lecturers. Faculty development programs in institutions of higher education began to develop in the 1970s and since then have steadily gained momentum. These programs focus on teaching and include the provision of

teaching skills to lecturers. However, in most institutions, teaching is still in second place after research (Henard, 2009). Excellence in research is considered the leading criterion, if not the main one, for the remuneration and advancement of lecturers. In recent years in Israel, the goals of the higher education system have been broadening, and the place of teaching is steadily becoming more prominent. The tension between research and teaching is found in the discourse of the Council of Higher Education and in the institutional discourse in Israel (Council for Higher Education, website, 2015; 2019).

Therefore, to give teaching its appropriate place, it is important to research the

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field and define what quality teaching is and the measures for its assessment (Landsberger, 2007).

Research studies show that in institutions of higher education, lecturers are more aware of the lack of pedagogical training. They want to be better and have students look at them with satisfaction when they leave the lecture hall. Therefore, when institutions begin to address teaching, many lecturers are interested in improving and in being improved (Bakutes, 1998; Dotolo, 1999).

### Higher education

Institutions of higher education are expected to produce new knowledge. To do this, they must recruit and retain the best researchers in every field. However, in parallel they must convey the knowledge onwards through quality teaching to train the future generations of researchers in academia and the academically educated workers who hold senior roles in society and the economy. Therefore, the system of higher education has two main roles: research and teaching. The tension between research and teaching is found in the discourse of the Council of Higher Education and in institutional discourse. Higher education institutions are required to ensure good education and good learning and to aspire to constant improvement (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2015; Henard, 2009; Henard and Roseveare, 2012).

Higher education, responsible for creating new information in modern society, has gone through a series of changes deriving from domestic and global cultural, social, and economic processes that are related primarily to access to education, students' profiles, dynamism in employment and inclusion, as well as technological progress, such as the personal computer (PC), the worldwide web, the transition to distance learning, and the drastic rise in the number of academic

students (Cybal-Michalska, 2018, Kfir, Miro-Yaffe, and Nuriel, 2012).

The center of gravity in academic teaching has shifted from the traditional approach that sees learning as a process of passive knowledge reception from a figure of authority to a learning-centered approach that sees learning as an active process in which learners go through a process of change (Davidovitch, 2013; Gehart, 2011).

On the institutional level, universities and colleges invest considerable resources in the promotion of quality teaching by providing different instruments to the faculty of lecturers. In many countries (USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, and others), including Israel, there are centers for the promotion of teaching quality on the institutional level or on the state level. In addition, there is a global umbrella organization that operates to develop teaching in the academic system, ICED, the International Consortium for Educational Development, of which Israel is a member (Kfir, Miro-Yaffe and Nuriel 2012).

The Council for Higher Education is a state institution working on higher education issues in Israel. It outlines higher education policy. The Council for Higher Education attributes great importance to the advancement and improvement of the quality of instruction in higher education institutions. This topic is even included in the objectives determined in the multi-year program for the years 2017-2022. Criteria were defined for faculty training, which include: accompanying and mentoring new faculty members for the first three years of their work in teaching, the active instruction of faculty members, activities for lecturers who are weak in teaching (personal meetings, accompaniment, mentoring, workshops, etc.), and at least once a year holding a departmental seminar on issues of the quality and improvement of teaching (Higher Education Council website, 2015; 2019).

### Quality of teaching

Attempts have been made in higher education to define quality teaching using quantitative and qualitative approaches and different outlooks, both those of students and those of lecturers, yet there is no universal definition (Devlin and Samarawickrema, 2010). Research defines the quality of teaching as learning-focused teaching. Students are at the center of the learning process, and their needs are taken into consideration (Hativa, 2014; Henard, 2009). Effective interpersonal communication between a lecturer and students is an essential condition for effective teaching (Jankowiak, 2015; Graham, 1997; Gruber, Reppel, and Voss, 2010,). Many of the obstacles to effectively holding the attention of lecture participants lie in the lecturer and in the way the message is conveyed. These include noise in the form of a long and awkward message, ambiguity and internal contradictions, deficient logical sequence, monotonous and unimaginative presentation of the message, and ignoring the characteristics of the target audience (Hativa, 2014). Obstacles to holding attention also lie in the disruptions deriving from the students. However, a good lecturer who takes the initiative to communicate better during the lesson can help in the process of holding attention by organizing lessons according to students' needs, ensuring that the messages are clear, and displaying an interest in the target audience, the students (Zamir, 2006).

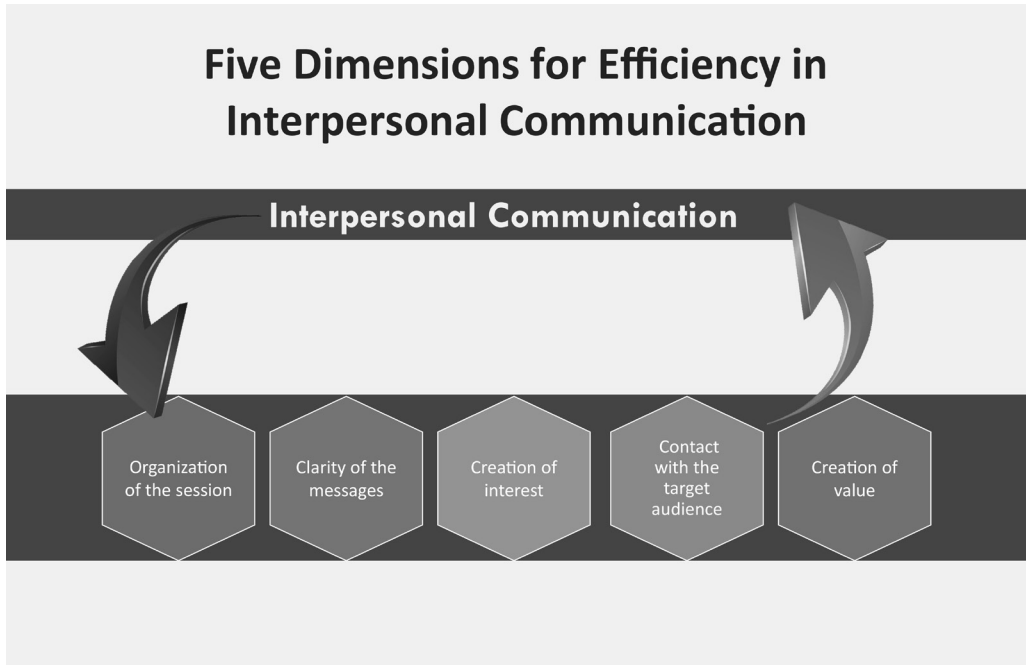
Five dimensions relating to interpersonal communication were defined as important by both students and lecturers (Garrett, 2009; Hativa, 2005; Reis, 2011).

1. Organization of the lesson. Students know what has been learned until now, what is being learned now, and what will be learned in the next stage. In addition, the time spent on the lesson is utilized

well for learning. The organization of the lesson by the lecturer helps the students remember and understand the material and gives them confidence.

2. Clarity of the messages. The lecturer presents clear and understandable explanations that enable students to understand what is learned and to perform the tasks and assignments required in the lesson and between the lessons.
3. Creation of interest. The lesson is interesting and strengthens attention and concentration. The lecturer succeeds in preserving students' concentration and their involvement in the learning during the lesson through a variety of techniques and behaviors such as diversifying the teaching methods, changing the tone of speech, moving around in the room, and giving examples.
4. Contact with the target audience, the students. The lecturer responds to what is happening in the "here and now" to create a positive and pleasant atmosphere. The lecturer is attentive to the verbal and nonverbal (body language) messages of the students and holds positive and beneficial interactions with students, such as encouraging them to ask questions and responding adequately to their questions.
5. Creation of value. The students understand the value of the course and its contribution to their knowledge and are aware of their ability to implement the learned knowledge outside of the class.

Figure 1. Five dimensions for efficiency in interpersonal communications in higher education.



Source: Garrett, 2009; Hativa 2005; Reis, 2011.

Interpersonal communication is a skill required from lecturers to convey the desired meaning. In the information world of today, the attention and patience of the audience have changed dramatically. There is far more “noise”, and the lecturer needs to know how to capture the audience’s attention and retain it over time (Zamir, 2006, 2014).

The main instrument today for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the transfer of content is feedback. Feedback primarily addresses the satisfaction of the target audience and does not provide information for the sender that will help him improve the skill (Hativa, 2014). Studies conducted on teaching surveys in the world support their validity and reliability as a tool for measuring students’ satisfaction with the teaching. The findings of global research show that the information provided about teaching in

such surveys is not sufficient (Hativa, 2014; HEFCE, 2011).

The personal instruction process addresses the enhancement of teaching in higher education by developing an instrument to improve the quality of the lecturer’s interpersonal communication with students. The results of this research study can be implemented in different organizations. In higher education, the lecturer is found in constant interpersonal interaction with students. The topic of teaching quality and especially the way in which lesson content is conveyed by lecturers is of interest to both students and lecturers. Lecturers in college maintain that today they are competing for the student’s attention with the laptop, the mobile phone, the Internet, and Facebook. Both lecturers and students agree that if the lesson is not relevant and interesting, then “technology wins”.

### **Feedback and reflection to improve teaching**

The use of filming lessons as an observation tool to improve teaching quality has greatly developed in recent years, following the dedicated efforts in understanding teaching, the knowledge of lecturers, the dynamics of lessons, in different content areas, and so on (Borko, Koellner, Jacobs, and Seago, 2011). Research from recent years indicates the possibilities of the beneficial use of tapes of lessons as a professional learning opportunity for lecturers, but that this also has limitations and even risks. The introduction of a camera into the lesson can influence the processes that occur in it and sometimes even disrupt the learning process. However, the tapes of the lessons can be a means of learning and improving the teaching. The tapes of the lessons, like feedback on teaching quality, do not directly promote teaching but may promote reflection on the teaching. Filming can provide a more reliable source than memory for the lecturer's reflection. In addition, filming enables information on the teaching to be obtained from other professionals, supportive feedback intended to increase a desired behavior, and corrective feedback intended to change behavior that is not effective through alternatives to achieve the desired behavior (Tlanker, 2013).

Feedback is a response to an action that has the goal of providing awareness, understanding, and information on the performed action. The goal is for the feedback to help reduce the gap between the existing situation and the desired situation (Arharad, 2010). Reflection is not only observation, but also the creation of a delayed space between the experience and its explanation. In this space,

reflection means observing the action while doing the action. This is a dual action, which preserves the dual movement of directing attention inwards and outwards and distance from the experience while examining it up close. It is the act that exists between knowledge and not-knowledge. Reflection is also acting to create relations, context, and meanings. In this lies its importance to the processes of learning and change (Kedem, Bochblater, and Freund, 2012).

By using films for the lesson observation instrument and feedback conversation, it is possible to preserve behaviors that promote interpersonal communication and to change a lecturer's behaviors that make interpersonal communication difficult (Glickman, 2002, pp. 24-25). Using the tool, it is possible to provide the information required by the organization on the lecturer's professional development (Moffett and Zhou, 2009, pp. 9-13; Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1998). Despite the concerns, many lecturers expect that their work will be assessed, observed, documented, and commented upon (Cortland, 2010).

Sullivan and Glanz (2013) found that the improvement of school teaching depends on teaching observations and the feedback conversation about the observed lesson. The study of Taylor and Taylor (2012) found that teachers changed their teaching from the feedback discussions that took place after an observation. Therefore, it is advisable to examine the impact of feedback after observation among higher education lecturers.

### **Feedback conversation**

Guidelines for an effective feedback conversation include the following elements. Following these guidelines can protect lecturers and the person providing

the feedback from doing it incorrectly and ineffectively (Gotterman, 2007, 2010).

- Trust. Transparency in the process, discretion, separation between the assessment process and the growth and cultivation of skills for effective communication in teaching.
- Consistency. Use of the tool of observation and conversation at set periods of time, memorandum of understanding the importance of process.
- Empathy. Understanding the objective difficulties of the lecturers and the complexity of managing the lesson, aspiration to create positive and growing experiences.
- Knowledge of interpersonal communication. The observer must recognize approaches of good interpersonal communication.
- Growing language. Use of empowering words (success, planning, achievements). Expressions that focus the conversation on the speaker and not on the lecturer will be removed from use (“I enjoyed”, “I liked”, etc.), as well as statements such as “If I were in your place”, “If you had done ...”, and “it was possible to do...”

### **Personal instruction process**

The instruction programs for lecturers are intended to improve their knowledge and abilities. Research shows that it is necessary to develop an adult’s skills using a set of different methods and tools (Zakarevičius and Župerkienė, 2008). A number of models for adult skills development have been created. One of these is the training cycle proposed by Kolb (1992) encompassing four stages: actions, thinking, understanding, and checking.

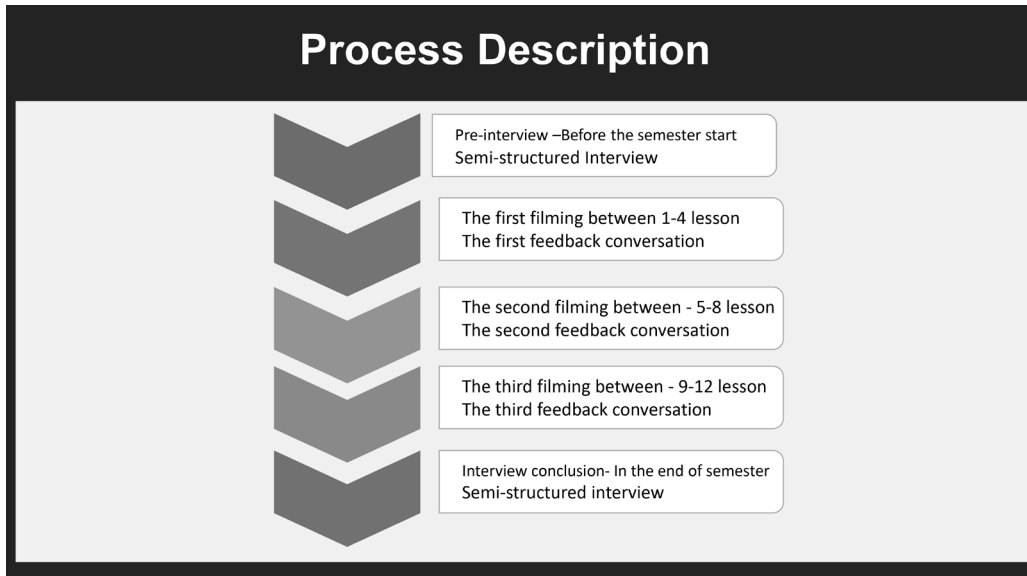
Lecturers are adults, and therefore the principles of adult learning (Oreg and Sverdlik, 2011) are recommended in the

instruction process. Lecturers’ partnership and involvement in the instruction process will be expressed in the definition of the goals and the ways of achieving them. The creation of a safe space with the re-definition of success through open conversation will reduce the objections derived from the fear of exposure. Lecturers must choose to be in the instruction process voluntarily. An open conversation on the goals of the process can help.

The patterns of behavior and ways of thinking derived from the lecturer’s experience sometimes obstruct learning. During instruction, identifying these patterns and implementing practices to overcome them are recommended. The relevance of the information and the learned abilities are most essential to the lecturers. It is important to connect them to the content world of the lecturers and ensure that they relate to the work world. Adult learners are resistant when the “what” and the “how” of the learning process are dictated to them. Therefore, an open conversation with lecturers is needed to clarify their needs and to determine together the goals and process of the instruction. Adult learners evaluate their progress, and therefore clear feedback will help them implement the learned skills.

Personal instruction can incorporate the principles of adult learning and reduce objections. Personal instruction is a series of personal meetings with the lecturer that addresses personal and professional development. Personal instruction is intended to provide a response to the lecturer’s unique needs and to accompany and support him in the process of improving communication skills (Oreg and Sverdlik, 2011).

Figure 2. Personal instruction process.



Source: own elaboration based on a literature review (Glickman, Calhoun, and Roberts, 1993; Gotterman, 2007)

Extensive investigation has not identified any existing process tool and therefore the development of such a process is innovative. The feedback process is a practical tool through which lecturers can improve their interpersonal communication with students. The process enables the lecturer to diagnose himself throughout the process and receive professional feedback and to try again, using the tools he acquired. Feedback provided throughout the process, and not only once, allows the lecturer to examine his improvements and thereby promote the transmission of messages and content in the lessons so that they will be more organized, clear, interesting and relevant to the students. The lecturer's involvement throughout the personal process, using a reflective assessment tool, which is a central and significant tool for development, will enable the improvement and promotion of teaching skills. The lecturer will be able to see results in the short term.

It is possible to address the personal guidance program as training accepted in modern

didactics for adults. The training is intended to develop and improve performance. The trainer listens, observes, asks questions, performs observations, reflects, and makes suggestions that help the person undergoing the training to grow and develop. The feedback given in the process is performed through active discussion (Gold, 2012; Harwell-Kee, 2019). Kolb's cycle of training is an example of the training process intended to improve the interpersonal communication of a lecturer in higher education and thus to improve his quality of teaching (Kolb, 1992).

### The stages in the process

The stages in the process are the researcher's own elaboration based on a literature review (Glickman, Calhoun and Roberts, 1993; Gotterman, 2007; Ho and Kane, 2013; Sullivan and Glanz, 2013).

The process includes notes made by the observer. The first note is called: "feedback conversation after the film". After viewing



the filmed lesson, the observer writes about each of the five dimensions (in the different categories of each dimension) and reviews the behaviors that should be maintained and those requiring improvement and change. This note is the basis for the feedback conversation. The second note is called: "Table of links". It is a summary of the feedback conversation that includes the lecturer's reference

to each of the five dimensions of interpersonal communication as expressed in the filmed lesson and the emotions and thoughts conveyed during the feedback session. At the end of the conversation, the lecturer sets goals for the next lesson to be filmed. The goals include defining the dimensions for improvement and what actions to take to achieve this. The lecturer receives the notes.

Table 1

*Personal instruction process description*

Stage	Descriptions
1 Pre-observation meeting	The process is presented to the lecturer The lecturer's familiarity with the dimensions of interpersonal communication constituting the aspects of the teaching performance that will be analyzed Coordination of expectations for the process between the lecturer and the observer The lecturer determines the lessons to be filmed and the dates for the ones at the beginning of the semester, the middle of the semester, and the end of the semester
2 Observation of the lesson and data collection	The lecturer films the lesson The lecturer watches the filmed lesson The observer watches the filmed lesson and writes note no. 1 "feedback conversation after the film"
3 Analysis of the lesson and setting objectives for the feedback	The observer analyzes the filmed session in accordance with the five dimensions of interpersonal communication in teaching and writes note no. 1 "feedback conversation after the film"
4 Feedback conversation about the observation	The lecturer and the observer meet for a feedback conversation after they both have viewed the filmed lesson The lecturer shares his experience of watching, what he thinks of his teaching in accordance with the five dimensions The observer presents the data from the lesson prepared in note no. 1 There is a discussion about the data collected The lecturer and the observer analyze the data in reference to emotions, insights, and actions. Together they set ways to handle behaviors that the lecturer wants to change The lecturer chooses a target for improvement or change for the next lesson to be filmed The observer writes note no. 2 "Table of links"
	Stage 2-4 repeat themselves in the second and third filming
5 Conclusion conversation	The lecturer shares his experience of the process and summarizes what is being learned in the process The observer summarizes the process

Source: own elaboration based on a literature review (Glickman, Calhoun, and Roberts, 1993; Gotterman, 2007; Ho and Kane, 2013; Sullivan and Glanz, 2013).



### **Challenges for the lecturer and for the observer during the process**

The purpose of the process is to improve the lecturer's teaching and not to assess the lecturer. Nevertheless, the lecturer and observer face challenges arising from the process itself. The lecturer is very exposed in the process. It requires him to have high self-awareness and the ability to reflect on the one hand and to receive feedback on the other hand. The lecturer is required to do something new in a new way, and this is a challenge. Sometimes there is a gap between the understanding and the ability to perform. It can be frustrating, and it is important that the lecturer has the ability to talk about this.

The observer is required to create a supportive atmosphere for a process that requires great exposure and to preserve the lecturer's privacy throughout the process. It is important that the observer finds positive aspects in the observed dimensions and presents the dimensions that require improvement in a way that is accessible to the lecturer so that he can accept the feedback. The observer must be attentive to his own verbal and non-verbal communication and that of the lecturer during the feedback conversations and avoid judgment.

### **Conclusions**

Quality teaching is required today in higher education, and therefore it is necessary for the academic faculty to have pedagogical training and instruction to improve the teaching. The aspect of interpersonal communication is essential to effective teaching, and thus the proposed process addresses the improvement of a lecturer's interpersonal communication during lessons in the five dimensions defined as most important both by lecturers and students: the organization of the lesson, clarity of the messages, contact with the target audience, the creation of

interest, and the creation of value. Feedback is a significant component that occurs in the process of training and instruction. Feedback is a complex social interaction influenced by the person providing feedback, the person receiving feedback, and the context. Therefore, it is possible that feedback could be given in an erroneous and ineffective manner. Hence, the observer must be attentive to his own verbal and nonverbal communication as well as that of the lecturer during the feedback conversation and must cope with the challenges posed by the instruction process.

The use of the feedback conversation in higher education provides an effective learning experience for the lecturer and its purpose is to enable change by acquiring knowledge, skills and insights. It is also important that the feedback conversation address the issue of the effectiveness of interpersonal communication between the lecturer and the students because this is an essential condition for quality teaching.

Filming lessons should be a powerful tool for the provision of feedback and reflection by the lecturers. The feedback provided by filming the lessons will enable the normalization of the phenomena occurring during the lesson, ventilation, a focus on successes, the joint investigation of difficulties, with all its complexity, and weighing a variety of alternatives with their advantages and disadvantages.

Filming will enable lecturers to examine their practice in a more effective manner. Alongside the advantages of filming, there are some challenges for both the observer and the lecturer. Therefore, the challenge is to create a space for conversation and learning in order to improve interpersonal interaction during the lessons, cultivate feedback norms, and promote reflection among the lecturers.

The focus on only five dimensions of interpersonal communication throughout the entire process can enable the observer and lecturer to focus on what needs to be

improved and implemented during the lesson. A personal instruction process that relates to the authentic lessons of the lecturers, discusses fixed dimensions, and focuses on improving skills reduces resistance to change among lecturers and enables immediate change.

The proposed process allows the lecturer to obtain feedback to improve interpersonal communication skills through professional instruction, which integrates advanced filming technology. A designated study will be held on the construction of an instrument for the improvement of the teaching quality in higher education in Israel. The Council for Higher Education in Israel should raise the rank of teaching itself, and communication is an unquestionable foundation of teaching.

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