NAVIGATING DIGITAL DIALOGUE: ASNAF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS IN HIGH POWER DISTANCE CONTEXTS

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Abstract:

In Malaysian schools, high power distance often shapes communication between students and teachers. This phenomenological study explores how this dynamic affects *asnaf* students, a financially disadvantaged group, through qualitative interviews with 10 students aged 13 to 17 in a Perlis boarding school. The study examines three objectives: (a) the nature of two-way communication, (b) the channels through which it occurs, and (c) how channel characteristics affect communication quality. The findings revealed a central theme based on the three objectives: *Hierarchical Communication Culture*, with subthemes: *Reluctance to Initiate*, *Dependence on Indirect Channels*, and *Digital Spaces as Safe Zones*. Communication was often unidirectional in face-to-face settings, but mediated more freely through digital tools. These results emphasize the role of communication tools in overcoming cultural communication barriers. The study offers practical implications for educators to design communication systems that are sensitive to power dynamics and cultural expectations.

Keywords:

Asnaf Students, High Power Distance Culture, Phenomenological Study.

Themes and Sub Themes of High Power Distance Communication in Interactions Between *asnaf* Students and Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

Introduction

Communication between students and teachers plays a crucial role in shaping the educational experience, influencing not only academic achievement but also students' confidence, engagement, and emotional well-being. However, in cultures characterized by high power distance—where authority figures are viewed as superior and unchallengeable—student–teacher communication is often asymmetrical. In such settings, students may feel reluctant to voice opinions, ask questions, or provide feedback, especially when they belong to marginalized or economically disadvantaged groups. This dynamic is particularly evident among *asnaf* students in Malaysia, a group identified under Islamic principles as eligible for zakat due to financial hardship and social vulnerability.

Malaysia's collectivist and hierarchical cultural context reinforces power distance in educational institutions, often leading to teacher-centered communication styles. Within schools, where discipline and hierarchy are emphasized, *asnaf* students may experience even greater difficulty in expressing themselves. Despite national education policies promoting inclusive and student-centered pedagogy, socio-cultural norms continue to shape classroom interactions in ways that may inhibit two-way communication, particularly for students from underprivileged backgrounds.

Understanding these interactions is critical for developing more inclusive communication strategies that recognize cultural sensitivities while empowering students to participate meaningfully in their education.

Problem Statement

In many Asian and Middle Eastern contexts characterized by high power distance, teachers are perceived as authoritative figures, prompting students to communicate formally and confine their interaction to academic content to avoid offending their teachers (Zhang, 2013). This hierarchical structure often leads to heightened student anxiety, dependency on educators, and teacher-directed discourse—factors documented to hinder critical thinking, creativity, and meaningful engagement (Peng et al., 2023).

With the rise of digital education post-COVID-19, these power imbalances can become more pronounced. Blended learning studies report that high teacher-student power distance exacerbates teacher-centered instruction, limiting student autonomy and interaction (Wadhwa et al., 2022). Similarly, in online learning setups, learners often defer to instructors as the primary knowledge source and feel reluctant to engage due to perceived authority (Zhang, 2013; Enguerra & Carretero, 2022).

Research on Generation Z students in Malaysia further reveals that when digital platforms visually reinforce authority—through institutional branding or formal design—students' engagement is adversely affected (Nordin et al., 2022). Moreover, adults with high power distance beliefs express significantly less communication with authority figures due to fear, undermining effective interaction (Li et al., 2022).

Given the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of asnaf students, it is imperative to investigate how they experience digital communication in high power-distance educational environments. Understanding these dynamics can help design inclusive pedagogies that alleviate hierarchical anxiety and promote equitable interaction.

Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions:

1. How do *asnaf* students perceive and engage in two-way communication with teachers online?
2. What types of communication platforms do students and teachers use most frequently?
3. What specific features of these platforms help or hinder effective communication?

Research Objectives:

1. To explore the lived experience of *asnaf* students communicating with teachers via digital platforms.
2. To identify digital communication channels in use and their relevance in high power distance environments.
3. To examine the characteristics of these channels that either support or obstruct meaningful interaction.

Literature Review

According to Hofstede (2023), Malaysia has the highest score of power distance index at 100%. Which means that people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification (Hofstede, 2023). Hofstede (2023) added that hierarchy in an organisation is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat. Challenges to the leadership are not well-received (Hofstede, 2023).
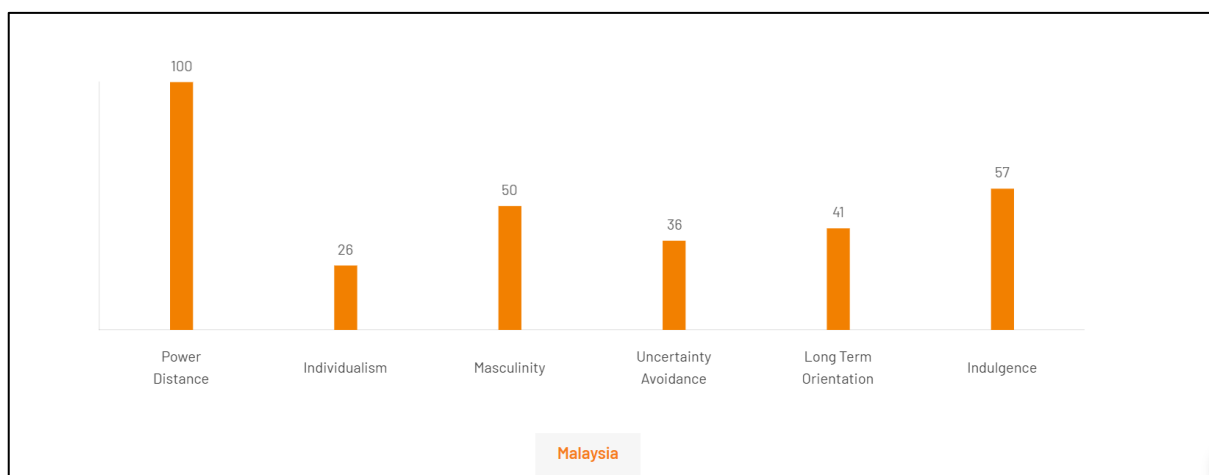

Figure 1: Power Distance Index: Malaysia
(Source: https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-legacy?countries=malaysia)

Communication between teachers and students is a critical determinant of educational effectiveness, especially in high power distance societies such as Malaysia. In these cultural contexts, classroom relationships are shaped by hierarchical norms where teachers are perceived as unquestionable authorities and students are conditioned to adopt a passive, obedient stance (Xu & Fan, 2023). This structural deference is more pronounced among students from marginalized backgrounds, including *asnaf* students—underprivileged youth eligible for zakat assistance—who face a dual burden of socioeconomic and cultural subordination (Seman et al., 2023).

High power distance cultures tend to discourage open dialogue and critical questioning in classrooms, often leading to one-way communication that inhibits student engagement and limits dialogic teaching practices (Azman & Mahmud, 2023). For *asnaf* students, the situation is compounded by a lack of technological access, digital literacy, and institutional support mechanisms, especially in boarding school settings where digital platforms such as Google Classroom are not yet adopted. This leads to an educational environment where student voices are silenced, teacher authority remains unchallenged, and reciprocal communication is rare (Seman et al., 2023).

There is still a significant knowledge vacuum on how communication patterns operate when economic hardship and cultural hierarchy are mixed, despite continuous attempts in Malaysia to address educational disparities. In order to close this gap, the current study investigates the communicative dynamics between teachers and asnaf students using three emerging themes: (1) Two-Way Communication Practices, (2) Communication Channels Used, and (3) Communication Channel Characteristics. This study adds to discussions on inclusive educational methods and culturally sensitive pedagogy in this way. In order to develop more equitable communication tactics for vulnerable student populations in high-power distant contexts, it also challenges the assumption of communication neutrality by placing classroom interactions within larger sociocultural systems.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach:
This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological design based on Moustakas, C. (1994), focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals in their natural context.

Site Selection:
The study is conducted in one of a boarding school in Perlis, Malaysia, with high enrolment of *asnaf* students.

Informants:
10 *asnaf* students (5 males and 5 females) aged 13 to 17 were selected using purposive sampling. This aligns with Moustakas., C. (1994) recommendation of 5 to 25 informants in phenomenological studies.

Data Collection Procedures:

Informant Selection:
Sampling Strategy: Purposive sampling to select 10 *asnaf* students (5 male, 5 female) aged 13 to 17 who are willing to share their lived experiences relevant to the research question. The informants must be identified as *asnaf* (eligible zakat recipients).

Interview Structure (In-Depth Interviews)
Interview Type: Semi-structured in-depth interviews (phenomenological emphasis on lived experience). Language: Use the students' first language (Malay). Duration: 15 to 20 minutes per informant. Tools: Audio recorder (with permission), field notes, and interview guide.

Researchers' Reflexivity
The researchers' positionality and awareness of their influence on the research process are crucial to ensuring transparency and integrity. As investigators exploring power distance communication among *asnaf* students and teachers, the researchers acknowledge that backgrounds, perspectives, and roles may have shaped both the data collection process and its interpretation.

Both researchers have previous teaching experience at public universities and identify as lecturers. The formulation of research questions and the interpretation of results were influenced by this familiarity with regional educational norms and cultural values, such as deference to authority and the importance of Islamic customs. Although interaction with the informants and contextual comprehension were aided by this insider viewpoint, there was a chance that it might assume shared meanings or minimise students' uneasiness in hierarchical relationships. In order to overcome this, the researchers maintained a critical self-awareness during the interviews and took a non-judgmental approach, urging informants to talk openly and share their experiences without worrying about the consequences.

The researchers also acknowledged the ethical obligation to establish a secure, courteous, and empowering atmosphere given the vulnerable condition of the *asnaf* students. Age-appropriate language was used, voluntary involvement was ensured, and interviews were performed with awareness of the power dynamics present in adult-child relationships.

In the end, this reflective method improved the study's credibility by enabling us to acknowledge the informants' lived experiences while navigating cultural complexities.

Ethical Considerations:
Qualitative research requires ethical rigour, especially when working with vulnerable groups like school-aged *asnaf* pupils. To ensure the rights, welfare, and dignity of each informant, this study was planned and carried out strictly in compliance with ethical research guidelines. Informed consent was given by each informant. Pseudonyms and safe digital record storage were used to guarantee anonymity and secrecy.

The administration of the boarding school provided informed consent prior to data collection. The goal of the study, the voluntary nature of involvement, the freedom to discontinue participation at any moment without repercussions, and the intended use of their data were all

explained verbally to informants. Age-appropriate language was used to guarantee understanding.

To protect informant privacy, pseudonyms were assigned and used throughout the transcription Pseudonyms were assigned and utilised during the transcription and reporting process to keep the privacy of the informants. Any identifying information, such the name of the school, the names of the teachers, or any special personal traits, was left out or oversimplified. Consent forms, interview notes, and audio recordings were safely kept and only the research team had access to them. In compliance with university data retention policies, data were anonymised during transcribing and safely erased at the end of the research.

Given the study's focus on power dynamics and the young age of informants, careful steps were taken to mitigate potential discomfort or coercion. Interviews were conducted in a private, familiar setting within the school, during non-academic hours, and without the presence of teachers or authority figures. Questions were framed to invite reflection rather than judgment. Emotional well-being was prioritized, and a referral pathway was prepared in case any student exhibited signs of distress though none was triggered during the process.

Data Collection Methods
Data collection involved one-on-one interviews between 15 to 20 minutes, digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes and informant reflections supplemented primary data, ensuring triangulation and richer insight.

Data Analysis
This study employed the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach to identify and interpret meaning patterns in the lived experiences of *asnaf* students when communicating with their teachers in high power distance settings. Through phenomenological inquiry, the focus was not only on what was said, but how students interpreted and emotionally processed their communication encounters.

Familiarization with the Data
The researchers began by transcribing and repeatedly reading interview data collected from *asnaf* students. During this process, recurring expressions such as hesitation, silence, indirect speech, and emotional tension emerged — which are indicative of high power distance communication patterns.

For example:

- Students frequently delayed responses or used deferential language when discussing teachers.
- There was emotional weight when discussing "respect" or "fear," hinting at internalized cultural norms that discourage upward communication.

These early insights helped researchers emotionally and cognitively immerse themselves in the students' lived realities, allowing organic identification of dominant power-based dynamics in the classroom.

Generating Initial Codes

Initial codes were developed by extracting direct meanings from student statements, while also remaining sensitive to non-verbal cues or underlying implications in the transcripts. The codes reflected the structural power gaps between students and teachers.

Example codes:

"I'm scared to ask questions" → Fear of Teacher Judgment

"Only the smart students talk" → Unequal Participation Norms

"We just listen, cannot say much" → Top-down Communication Norms

"Sometimes the teacher scolds if we ask again" → Communication Punishment Perception

Codes were grouped to reflect emerging behavioral patterns such as reluctance to question authority, silence in class, and fear of misunderstanding instructions.

Searching for Themes

Initial codes were then collated into broader sub-themes and overarching themes to capture the full scope of student-teacher interaction within high power distance settings.

Main Theme 1: Hierarchical Communication Culture
• Sub-theme 1.1: Fear of Asking Questions
• Sub-theme 1.2: Teacher as Sole Authority
• Sub-theme 1.3: Passive Classroom Participation
Main Theme 2: Cultural and Social Mediation of Voice
• Sub-theme 2.1: Respect vs Fear in Student Perception
• Sub-theme 2.2: Peer Influence on Expression
• Sub-theme 2.3: Language Use and Code-switching

Table 1: Initial Codes Main Theme 1 and Main Theme 2

These themes demonstrate that *asnaf* students' interactions were not only shaped by classroom norms, but also by their socioeconomic position, linguistic comfort, and cultural values of respect toward authority.

Reviewing Themes

Themes were refined and validated against the raw data to ensure each was:

Distinct and not overlapping.
Rooted in the phenomenological accounts of the students.
Representing meaningful psychological or sociocultural patterns.

For instance:
Differentiation between Respect-based Silence vs Fear-based Silence was clarified, as both are common in high power distance but driven by different internal narratives.

The sub-theme Peer Influence was reviewed to distinguish between peer pressure to conform and peer modeling of voice/assertiveness.

Themes were retained only if strongly supported by multiple informants and if they represented shared experiences, not isolated cases.

Defining and Naming Themes
Themes were named to capture their essence, reflecting both the content of what students experienced and the contextual tension created by power dynamics.
Examples:

"Fear of Asking Questions" — describes not just anxiety, but the perception of questioning as a sign of disobedience or incompetence.

"Teacher as Sole Authority" — reflects unidirectional communication where teachers dominate discourse, and students remain silent.

"Respect vs Fear" — highlights how *asnaf* students conflate deference with intimidation, shaped by cultural and religious values.

Definitions were kept concise to maintain clarity for readers and to align with phenomenological rigor.

Producing the Report
The final write-up integrated themes and sub-themes into a coherent narrative, backed by verbatim quotes that illustrated emotional tone, context, and underlying meanings.
Example of integrated narrative:

"I want to ask, but I feel scared. Maybe the teacher will say I'm not listening."

This quote reveals dual layers of power distance: emotional hesitation from the student and perceived teacher intolerance. It supports both Sub-theme 1.1: *Fear of Asking Questions*, and Sub-theme 1.2: *Teacher as Sole Authority*.

This approach allowed the research report to give voice to the voiceless, showcasing how *asnaf* students navigate silence, respect, and fear within hierarchical educational systems.

Validity and Reliability (Reinforced for Context)
Trustworthiness was ensured by aligning with Lincoln & Guba's criteria for qualitative rigor:

Member Checking: Participants confirmed the accuracy and intent behind their transcribed words.

Peer Debriefing: Peer researchers discussed the coding structure to avoid personal bias.

Triangulation: Data from interviews, field notes, and reflexive journals provided a multidimensional view.

Audit Trail: NVivo software documented all decisions, theme development, and researcher reflections to ensure transparency and accountability.

Research Findings
Initial Categories and Codes

Category	Code
2 way communication	Student hesitation
	Teacher authority
	Fear of asking questions
	Student participation
	Teacher feedback style
	Classroom communication
	Hierarchical communication
	Trust level
	Emotional support
	Group vs. one-on-one interaction
	Motivation to communicate
	Communication breakdown
	Lack of confidence
	Teacher dominance
	Language barriers
	Cultural respect for authority
	Gender dynamics
	Peer pressure
	Perceived social status gap
	Self-censorship
	Peer support
	Teacher intimidation
	Silence as a strategy
Types of communication channels	Use of social media
	WhatsApp communication
	Verbal vs. non-verbal cues
Characteristics of communication channels	Formal/informal tone
	Code-switching (language/dialect)
	Emotional support
	Peer support
	Family background influence
	Accessibility of teachers
	Teacher intimidation
	Preference for private communication
	Technological barriers
	Digital literacy
	Communication training or exposure

Table 2: Initial Categories and Codes

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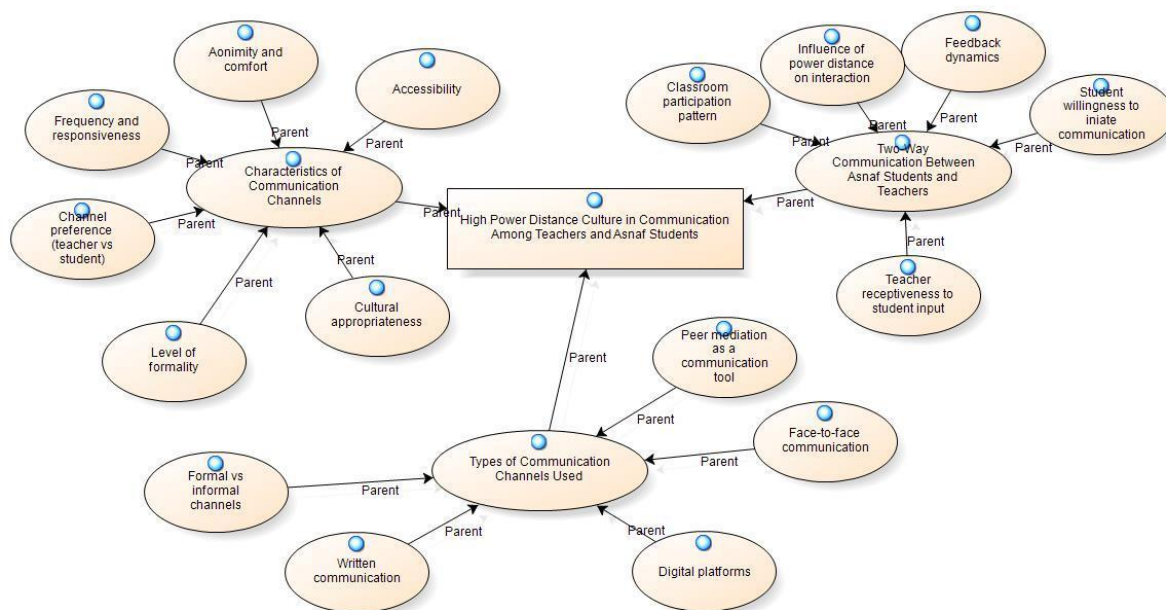## Main Theme and Subthemes

Figure 2: The Main Theme and Sub-themes

Sub theme: Two-Way Communication Between Asnaf Students and Teachers

This theme captures the communicative interplay between teachers and *asnaf* students, reflecting deep-seated tensions between educational ideals of mutual engagement and the lived realities of hierarchical power structures. Drawing on rich narratives from *asnaf* student informants, five interwoven sub-themes were identified, each illustrating the socio-cultural and psychological conditions that shape, limit, or enable dialogic interaction in classroom settings.

Student Willingness to Initiate Communication

Due to cultural deference and inferiority complexes, *asnaf* student informants regularly expressed a considerable reluctance to approach professors. Feeling "unworthy" or "afraid of saying the wrong thing" were common descriptions. One student, Informant 1, for example, stated: "There are instances when I know the answer, but I'm afraid to say it. I don't want the instructor to believe that I'm attempting to correct them or being impolite. Their perceived social identification as aid recipients (*asnaf*), which they felt put them in a worse moral and intellectual standing than their classmates, was frequently linked to this self-censorship. The reluctance to speak up was a result of a strong internalisation of positional inferiority exacerbated by high-power distance cultural norms, not a lack of knowledge.

Teacher Receptiveness to Student Input

The information also showed that perceived instructor receptiveness influenced *asnaf* pupils' communication readiness. According to informants, some professors were "approachable," but only in specific contexts, frequently limited by mood or time. "Some teachers say we can ask questions, but when we do, they look annoyed or just say 'Later,' so I stop trying," said Informant 7. Students were in a state of communication ambiguity as a result of the teacher's inconsistent responsiveness, uncertain as to whether their suggestions would be accepted or criticised. The ambiguity reinforced student compliance and withdrawal.

Feedback Dynamics

Although informants regarded feedback as primarily one-directional, it emerged as a crucial tool for teacher-student contact. Instructors gave students constructive criticism or evaluations, but they hardly ever asked them to answer, think, or question. According to Informant 5, "The teacher simply tells me the right answer when I get things wrong." That's all. I'm not allowed to share my thoughts. Such feedback techniques were perceived as judgemental rather than developmental by *asnaf* pupils, whose self-perception is already influenced by societal marginalisation, further silencing their voice.

Influence of Power Distance on Interaction

Almost all of the interactions that the *asnaf* informants described included power distance norms. Teachers should not be questioned, according to students, and disagreement, even when it takes the form of explanation, could be interpreted as insubordination. "Educators are similar to parents." We can't doubt their statements," Informant 4 clarified. For these kids, the classroom was a controlled environment where status and power determined the parameters of communication rather than a democratic setting. These disparities in power generated a culture of communication that prioritised conformity above inquiry.

Classroom Participation Patterns

As a result of the combined effects of reluctance, perceived instructor distance, and power-laden feedback systems, *asnaf* students exhibited clear patterns of minimal classroom participation. Informants revealed that they tended to avoid critical or impromptu involvement but frequently participated in ritualised ways, such as answering in unison or repeating important terms. "I only respond when the teacher points at me," recalled Informant 7. Otherwise, I simply remain silent. This pattern demonstrates how student silence and educational contact are shaped by systemic and cultural limitations rather than personal motivation.

Sub Theme: Communication Channels Used

This theme explores the diverse communication modalities employed by *asnaf* students in their interaction with teachers. Rather than functioning as neutral tools, these channels are imbued with relational and cultural meaning, often mediating access to power, legitimacy, and emotional safety. *Asnaf* student informants articulated how each channel—whether traditional or digital—either expanded or constrained their capacity to engage with educators. Five sub-themes emerged, reflecting the strategic, affective, and situational dimensions of channel usage in high-power distance contexts.

Face-to-Face Communication

Face-to-face interaction remains the primary and most institutionalized form of communication between *asnaf* students and teachers. Yet, for many informants, this channel is fraught with anxiety and self-censorship. Informant 4 expressed: "Talking to the teacher directly is stressful. I worry about how I sound or if I say something wrong." Physical presence intensified their perceived inferiority and fear of negative judgment. Eye contact, tone, and body language—key elements in face-to-face communication—were experienced as high-stakes indicators of discipline and authority. Consequently, students often avoided initiating direct contact unless absolutely necessary, especially in front of peers.

Digital Platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Classroom)

Digital platforms introduced an alternative, less intimidating avenue for communication. Informants described messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram as "easier" and "less scary" because they allowed more time to compose thoughts and reduced the emotional pressure of real-time interaction. Informant 7 stated: "If I text the teacher, I can think first. I'm not scared like when talking face to face." However, digital communication also came with limitations. Some students noted that not all teachers responded promptly, while others maintained rigid digital boundaries, often using these platforms solely for one-way announcements. Still, digital tools were widely regarded as critical enablers of student-teacher engagement—particularly for those who lacked confidence or verbal fluency.

Written Communication

Another way that *asnaf* students expressed their questions or concerns was through written communication, especially in the form of exercise books, feedback sheets, or journals. Teachers frequently gave written comments, but they hardly ever asked for written answers, according to informants. However, other students talked of utilising writing as a covert means of creative expression. "I occasionally write my question at the bottom of my homework page," revealed Informant 9. At least I tried, even when the teacher doesn't always respond. This approach demonstrates the *asnaf* students' silent agency as they looked for secure communication areas even in traditional settings. Because written formats provided psychological distance, students could participate without running the risk of direct conflict or public scrutiny.

Peer Mediation as a Communication Tool

Peers frequently acted as vital go-betweens for students and teachers, especially those with greater socioemotional capital or academic status. *Asnaf* student informants often depended on their peers to interpret teacher instructions or to pose queries on their behalf. According to Informant 4, "I ask my friend to ask the teacher for me if I don't understand something." I'm embarrassed to ask myself. Both a coping mechanism and an adjustment to power imbalances are evident in this indirect communication style. Peer mediation decreased direct exposure, but it also created dependency, which raised questions about voice equity and the sincerity of student-teacher communication.

Formal vs. Informal Channels

Formal (like class meetings, Google Classroom forums) and informal (like discussions in the hallway, voice notes on WhatsApp) modes of communication were distinguished in a subtle way. According to *asnaf* student informants, people felt more at ease and had more freedom to express themselves in casual settings. Informant 7 observed: "We can ask more freely outside of class when the teacher is feeling upbeat. It seems excessively formal in class. While formal settings were subject to rigid behavioural norms, informal interactions frequently happened naturally and were perceived as more humanising. Nevertheless, the availability of informal engagement was highly contingent on the openness and personality of the teacher, making such possibilities erratic and precarious.

Sub theme: Characteristics of Communication Channels

This theme looks at the communication opportunities and limitations present in several channels of communication between *asnaf* students and their teachers who live in hostels. These channels are socio culturally formed environments where power, trust, and involvement

are negotiated rather than acting as neutral conduits. The results show that accessibility, formality, comfort level, responsiveness, user preference, and cultural appropriateness—all of which are intricately linked to the lived realities of *asnaf* students navigating hierarchical school environments—determine a channel's usability in addition to its medium.

Accessibility

The communication options available to *asnaf* students living in dorms are mainly limited to in-person interactions and, when allowed, simple mobile messaging apps like WhatsApp or SMS. Students said they had little access to their own gadgets, and they frequently had to rely on shared dormitory phones or set timeslots for contact. "We can only use the public phone at certain times," explained Informant 10. Sometimes I just wait till I see the teacher if I have an urgent question. Students' capacity to start or maintain conversations outside of scheduled class times was hampered by their restricted access to technology.

Level of Formality

Students perceived certain communication channels as carrying higher degrees of formality, which in turn affected their willingness to engage. Formal interactions, such as those conducted during class sessions or school assemblies, were seen as structured and rigid, often invoking a fear of saying something "wrong" or "disrespectful." Informant 9 shared: "In class, I sit quietly unless the teacher asks me. It's not a place to speak freely." Informal encounters—such as brief chats during hostel activities or while walking to the dining hall—were more conducive to authentic communication. The level of formality embedded in a channel either suppressed or encouraged students' self-expression.

Anonymity and Comfort

Channels that offered some degree of personal distance or anonymity—such as indirect messages through senior students or short written notes—were viewed by *asnaf* students as emotionally safer. These strategies reduced the intensity of direct confrontation with authority. Informant 2 revealed: "Sometimes I ask my friend to tell the teacher for me. It's easier that way." The desire to avoid embarrassment or public correction shaped preferences for channels that offered psychological buffer zones. Such choices reflect a culturally conditioned sensitivity to shame, hierarchy, and group reputation.

Frequency and Responsiveness

Students emphasized that the value of any communication channel depended on how consistently and responsively it was used by teachers. While some teachers made themselves accessible during hostel rounds or co-curricular activities, others maintained strict professional boundaries. Informant 4 noted: "One teacher always talks to us after prep. I can ask questions then. But another teacher only talks in class. That's it." Students expressed appreciation for predictable, responsive interaction, and reported feelings of exclusion when their communicative efforts were ignored or delayed.

Channel Preference (Teacher vs. Student)

A mismatch often existed between teacher-favoured and student-favoured communication channels. While teachers tended to prefer formal, scheduled interactions (e.g., in class, during official hostel sessions), students showed a clear preference for spontaneous, informal contact moments—such as during sports, prayer sessions, or free periods. Informant 9 explained: "It's easier to talk during hostel time. The teacher is more relaxed then." These findings underscore

the importance of aligning communicative spaces with the socio-emotional rhythms of students' daily routines, especially within residential schooling environments.

Cultural Appropriateness

The selection and use of communication channels by *asnaf* students was significantly influenced by cultural norms pertaining to hierarchy, politeness, and respect. For concern that doing so would be construed as impolite, the majority of informants refrained from making contact through avenues that were thought to be "too direct" or "too casual." When asked about messaging instructors, Informant 10 stated, "We must speak properly, not like talking to friends." Students used deeply ingrained cultural scripts that value deference and restraint, particularly when interacting with authoritative figures, to restrict their communication even when there were informal or digital chances.

Conclusions

The lived experiences of *asnaf* students managing communication with their teachers in a boarding school setting have been examined in this study. Using a phenomenological approach, the results showed that both external dynamics like teacher authority, cultural norms, and digital access, as well as internal elements like student confidence and anxiety, had a significant impact on communication. The nature of two-way communication between students and teachers, the range of communication channels utilised, and the traits that influence these channels' efficacy were the three main issues that surfaced.

The findings highlight the critical role of power distance, peer influence, and cultural The results demonstrate how important peer pressure, power distance, and cultural norms are in determining how *asnaf* students interact—or avoid—with their teachers. Crucially, although digital tools provide different channels for communication, their usefulness is still constrained by problems like privacy, digital literacy, and technological obstacles. Whether or not students feel heard and encouraged is largely determined by the emotional component of communication, especially comfort and trust.

This study emphasises the necessity of more culturally sensitive, compassionate, and inclusive communication methods in boarding schools, particularly for marginalised populations like *asnaf* pupils. Teachers should be prepared to identify the minor obstacles that prevent candid communication and take the initiative to establish secure, receptive environments where students can express themselves. In the end, enhancing communication involves changing the relational dynamics that underpin it as well as expanding the channels available.

Acknowledgment

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