



## Student-Centred Communication in an Intercultural Educational Context

Olga Alcaz<sup>1</sup>

**Objectives** This paper examines the role of student-centred communication in addressing cultural and linguistic diversity in technical and vocational education. It aims to demonstrate why communication oriented toward learners' experiences is essential for inclusive and effective teaching in heterogeneous educational contexts. **Prior Work** The study builds on established research in student-centred pedagogy, intercultural education, and teacher – student interaction, which emphasises participation, dialogue, and cultural responsiveness as key conditions for meaningful learning. **Approach** A qualitative theoretical analysis was conducted, based on a systematic review and synthesis of international academic literature focusing on communication practices, intercultural competences, and learning resources in vocational and technical education. **Results** The analysis indicates that student-centred communication enhances learner engagement, supports the effective use of learning resources, and improves educational interactions in culturally diverse settings. It also identifies persistent challenges, including language barriers and limited pedagogical preparation for diversity. **Implications** The findings highlight the need to strengthen intercultural and communication competences within initial and continuing teacher education, particularly for vocational and technical educators. **Value** The paper offers an integrated conceptual perspective that connects student-centred communication with intercultural education in technical and vocational contexts, contributing original insights for inclusive pedagogical practice.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence; learning engagement; pedagogical communication; cultural diversity

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<sup>1</sup> PhD student, Ion Creanga State Pedagogical University of Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, olga.alcaz@ail.com.



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Contemporary education is undergoing an accelerated process of transformation driven by complex social, economic, and cultural dynamics, among which globalisation, human mobility, and digitalisation play a central role. These processes have led to a significant diversification of the student population, manifested through increasingly pronounced cultural, linguistic, and socio-educational differences. In particular, technical and vocational education and training institutions are characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity, as they bring together learners with discontinuous educational trajectories, migration experiences, unequal linguistic competences, and diverse expectations regarding both the educational institution and the learning process (Hangartner, Toyokawa & Ramírez, 2025).

This reality calls into question the effectiveness of traditional pedagogical models, which are typically based on standardisation, centralised control, and predominantly unidirectional communication. The specialised literature indicates that such models tend to assume an artificial homogeneity of learner groups, overlooking real differences among students and frequently leading to symbolic exclusion, demotivation, and lower educational outcomes for vulnerable categories (Biesta, 2015). In this context, communication emerges as a key element of pedagogical practice, as it mediates the relationship between curriculum, learning resources, and the learner's subjective educational experience.

Educational communication cannot be reduced to the simple transmission of information; rather, it should be understood as a complex social process in which meaning is constructed through interaction, negotiation, and mutual recognition. The quality of teacher–student interaction directly influences learners' cognitive and emotional engagement, as well as their relationship with the educational institution and their own learning trajectories (Freeman et al., 2014). In culturally and linguistically diverse educational environments, this relational dimension becomes even more significant, as communication is shaped by differences in language use, cultural norms, and power relations.

Within this framework, student-centred communication emerges as a fundamental pedagogical orientation that responds to the need to adapt educational practices to the real diversity of learners. This approach entails recognising students as active participants in the learning process, whose experiences, identities, and socio-cultural contexts legitimately influence how educational messages are received and interpreted. Student-centred communication integrates dialogue, feedback, and pedagogical flexibility, thereby contributing to the creation of an inclusive and participatory educational climate (Bartolomé, Castañeda & Adell, 2018).

At the same time, recent research warns against the risk of equating student-centred communication with the forms of personalisation promoted in contemporary technological discourses. In the context of educational digitalisation and the expansion of data infrastructures, the notion of “student-centredness” is often associated with the algorithmic adaptation of content based on the collection and analysis of educational data. Although such practices promise efficiency and individualisation, studies show that they may lead to hidden forms of standardisation and to the instrumentalisation of education when not grounded in robust pedagogical principles (Knox, Williamson & Bayne, 2020). Under these conditions, the educational relationship risks being reduced to a set of measurable indicators, while communication is perceived merely as a channel for delivering instructions.

In contrast to these reductive tendencies, student-centred communication emphasises the relational dimension of education. Learning is conceptualised as a socially and culturally situated process that takes place through interaction and participation. From this perspective, communication is not merely a vehicle for content delivery, but a space for meaning-making in which learners can express their perspectives, ask questions, and reflect on their own learning experiences. This approach is particularly relevant in technical and vocational education, where learning is closely connected to practice and real-world work contexts.

Intercultural education provides the theoretical framework necessary for deepening this perspective. It is based on the premise that cultural and linguistic diversity constitutes a structural feature of contemporary societies and, implicitly, of educational systems. Communication is inherently culturally situated, being influenced by norms, values, and expectations specific to different social groups. Ignoring this dimension may generate misunderstandings, symbolic conflicts, and educational exclusion, particularly for learners from migrant or minority backgrounds (Banks, 2015).

Within an intercultural education framework, student-centred communication assumes a particularly important function, as it contributes to recognising diversity as an educational resource. By adapting language use, employing culturally relevant examples, and valuing learners’ personal experiences, teachers can create conditions that foster active participation and a sense of belonging. In this way, communication becomes a tool for inclusion and educational equity, supporting equal access to learning opportunities.

At the same time, research on the platformisation and datafication of education draws attention to profound transformations in learning environments. Digital

infrastructures and educational platforms reshape pedagogical practices by introducing new forms of communicative mediation and new power relations among educational actors (Gulson & Sellar, 2019). While these technologies can support rapid feedback and learning monitoring, they may also amplify inequalities and reduce communication to strictly instrumental dimensions if they are not integrated into a pedagogical vision centred on human relationships.

In this context, the role of the teacher becomes crucial. Implementing student-centred communication in an intercultural setting requires the development of solid intercultural competences, which include not only knowledge of cultural diversity but also the capacity for critical reflection on one's own practices and the ability to adapt pedagogical strategies. The literature emphasises that such competences are not innate, but must be systematically developed through initial and continuing teacher education (Swissuniversities, 2022).

Many teachers report difficulties in managing cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly under institutional pressures and in contexts marked by the growing use of digital technologies and educational data. Insufficient preparation may lead to rigid communicative practices that fail to address learners' real needs and may even exacerbate existing disparities (Central Council of Education, 2021). Consequently, teacher education programmes need to explicitly incorporate intercultural communication and student-centred pedagogy as core components of professional competence.

In technical and vocational education, these challenges are further intensified by the specificity of applied learning. Communication in workshops, laboratories, or work-based learning contexts is closely linked to action, safety, and professional performance. Explaining procedures, demonstrating techniques, and providing feedback require clarity, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity. Student-centred communication supports the transfer of competences and the development of professional autonomy, facilitating learners' integration into the communities of practice characteristic of vocational fields.

This perspective naturally opens the analysis toward the examination of pedagogical interaction, learner engagement, and the communicative mediation of learning resources in intercultural contexts, aspects that will be further developed in the continuation of this chapter.

This relational orientation naturally leads to a closer examination of pedagogical interaction itself and of how it shapes learner engagement and the use of learning

resources. Teacher–student interaction constitutes the core of the educational process, as it enables not only the transmission of knowledge but also the construction of meaning, the validation of learners’ identities, and the establishment of a climate of trust. Research in education indicates that interactions grounded in dialogue, feedback, and mutual recognition are associated with higher levels of cognitive and emotional engagement, as well as with more positive attitudes toward learning (Freeman et al., 2014).

In contexts characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity, educational interaction is often weakened by communication barriers, differences in participation styles, and divergent expectations regarding the roles of teachers and learners. Student-centred communication helps to overcome these difficulties by creating dialogic spaces in which learners are encouraged to express their views, formulate questions, and actively participate in the co-construction of knowledge. Through continuous checks for understanding and the adaptive adjustment of pedagogical discourse, teachers reduce the risk of symbolic exclusion and support equitable access to learning opportunities.

This communicative orientation is closely linked to the adoption of adaptive pedagogical practices that allow teaching strategies and interactional forms to be adjusted to learners’ needs. Adaptation should not be understood as a lowering of academic standards, but rather as a flexible approach to achieving learning objectives through multiple pathways. The literature highlights the importance of differentiated instruction, language scaffolding, and the use of visual and practical resources in supporting learners with diverse profiles (Tomlinson, 2014). Through such practices, communication becomes more accessible and learners are better able to gradually construct understanding and competences.

In technical and vocational education, the relevance of adaptive practices is further amplified by the specificity of applied learning. Activities carried out in workshops, laboratories, or work-based learning environments require coordination, precision, and strict adherence to safety norms, all of which are mediated through communication. Rigid or insufficiently adapted communication may lead to confusion, errors, and demotivation. By contrast, student-centred communication, characterised by clarity, immediate feedback, and dialogue, supports the development of professional competences and facilitates learners’ integration into vocational communities of practice.

Learner engagement represents another essential dimension in the analysis of student-centred communication. Engagement is a multidimensional construct

encompassing behavioural, cognitive, and emotional components, and it is significantly influenced by the communicative climate of the learning environment. Studies show that learners are more willing to participate actively and invest effort in learning when communication is perceived as respectful, relevant, and responsive to their needs (Freeman et al., 2014). In this regard, student-centred communication contributes to the creation of educational environments in which learners feel recognised and valued.

From an intercultural perspective, engagement is closely linked to identity and belonging. Learners from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds may display reluctance toward active participation, particularly when previous educational experiences have involved exclusion or stigmatisation. By valuing personal experiences and recognising diversity, student-centred communication helps to reduce these barriers and to strengthen learners' relationships with educational institutions. Engagement thus emerges not merely as an individual motivational factor, but as an outcome shaped by the communicative context established by teachers.

Within this framework, learning resources acquire particular significance. Textbooks, digital tools, practical equipment, and instructional materials are essential components of the educational process; however, their effectiveness depends largely on how they are integrated and mediated through communication. In intercultural contexts, the mere availability of resources does not guarantee equitable access to learning. Communicative mediation is required to ensure both linguistic accessibility and cultural relevance (OECD, 2018).

Student-centred communication supports the effective use of learning resources by clarifying their purposes and modes of use, adapting language, and engaging learners in reflection and evaluation activities. When learners are encouraged to interact actively with resources and to relate them to their own experiences, these resources become dialogic tools rather than mere informational supports. In technical and vocational education, such an approach strengthens the connection between theory and practice and contributes to the development of transferable competences.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of student-centred communication in intercultural educational contexts is not without challenges. Language barriers remain among the most frequent obstacles, particularly in technical fields where specialised terminology may be difficult for learners studying in a second language.

Without adaptive communication strategies, these barriers may lead to exclusion and reduced educational performance.

In addition, cultural stereotypes and implicit biases may influence teachers' expectations and interaction patterns. The literature indicates that such subtle mechanisms can negatively affect educational relationships and reproduce structural inequalities (Banks, 2015). Student-centred communication therefore requires a reflexive dimension, encouraging teachers to critically examine their own assumptions and practices.

Institutional constraints also play a significant role. Rigid curricula, standardised assessment systems, and performance pressures may limit pedagogical flexibility and discourage the adoption of student-centred communicative practices. Moreover, contemporary trends toward the datafication and platformisation of education risk reducing communication to measurable indicators, thereby diminishing the relational dimension of teaching and learning. Research warns that an excessive focus on data use may contribute to the instrumentalisation of communication and to the erosion of pedagogical autonomy (Knox, Williamson & Bayne, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the importance of initial and continuing teacher education becomes evident. The development of intercultural competences and student-centred communication skills should be prioritised within teacher education programmes, particularly for educators working in technical and vocational contexts. Such training needs to go beyond theoretical instruction and incorporate practical components based on reflection, case analysis, and authentic experiences in diverse educational settings (Swissuniversities, 2022).

Continuing professional development also plays a crucial role in supporting teachers' adaptation to evolving educational realities. Increasing learner diversity and rapid technological change require ongoing updates of professional competences. Through participation in professional learning programmes and communities of practice, teachers can enhance their ability to manage diversity and to develop flexible, inclusive communicative strategies.

Overall, the analysis of student-centred communication in an intercultural educational context underscores its complex and multidimensional character. Communication should not be viewed merely as a means of transmitting information, but as a culturally situated, relational process that profoundly shapes learners' educational experiences. By integrating the principles of student-centred communication with those of intercultural education, educators can create learning environments that are more equitable, relevant, and effective.

In conclusion, student-centred communication represents a fundamental pedagogical principle for addressing cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary education. In technical and vocational education, where applied learning and learner heterogeneity intersect, this principle acquires particular significance. Its successful implementation depends on teachers' intercultural competences, the flexibility of pedagogical practices, and the presence of supportive institutional frameworks. The systematic integration of student-centred communication into initial and continuing teacher education is therefore essential for the development of inclusive educational practices capable of responding to the challenges of today's diverse societies.

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