

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS, SOCIAL COMPARISON AND GOAL ADJUSTMENT IN STUDENTS FROM GILGIT BALTISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship of communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment in students from Gilgit Baltistan. Gilgit Baltistan students studying in other Pakistani provinces often struggle to achieve their goals due to language barriers, cultural transition shock, and challenges with co-education. These factors hinder their ability to adjust and succeed academically. Understanding the psychological phenomena contributing to goal adjustment failure is crucial for addressing these issues effectively. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a negative relationship of communication barriers and social comparison with goal adjustment. Through correlational research design and non-probability purposive sampling technique a sample of (N=120) Gilgit Baltistan students (n=69 males, n=51 females) with age range of 17-30 years (M=22.40, SD= 2.43.) was recruited. For this purpose, Personal Report of Interethnic Communication Apprehension Scale (PRECA), Social Comparison Scale (SCS) and Goal Adjustment Scale (GAS) were utilized. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship among demographics and study variables. Furthermore, Mediation Analysis was used to investigate the mediating role of social comparison. Additional analysis, independent sample T-test was used to investigate the significant gender differences between study variables. The results of this research showed that Communication Barriers and Social Comparison had a significant inverse relationship with Goal Adjustment and Social Comparison had a mediating role in understanding the relationship of Communication Barriers and Goal Adjustment. The present study suggests that Communication barriers leads to poor adjustment of goals in the presence of social comparison. Therefore, to improve goal adjustment in students of different cultures will require multidimensional approaches, such as supporting each other, improving communication skills, and maintaining an interpersonal relationship with Gilgit-Baltistan students.

Keywords: Communication Barriers, Social Comparison, Goal Adjustment, Gender Differences, Gilgit Baltistan.

INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to explore the relationship among communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment among Gilgit Baltistan students. Gilgit-Baltistan is the northernmost area of Pakistan and it is a rigid society with very conservative values, beliefs and social duties. It has harsh living conditions for almost seven months in a year. In these conditions, the education sector suffers a lot and

quality and competitive education are not easily accessible for the natives of Gilgit Baltistan. As there are the least educational facilities in these areas, students mostly visit other provinces of Pakistan to continue higher education. These students face many problems in other provinces due to cultural and communication barriers. These barriers lead toward self-comparison with other students from other provinces of Pakistan

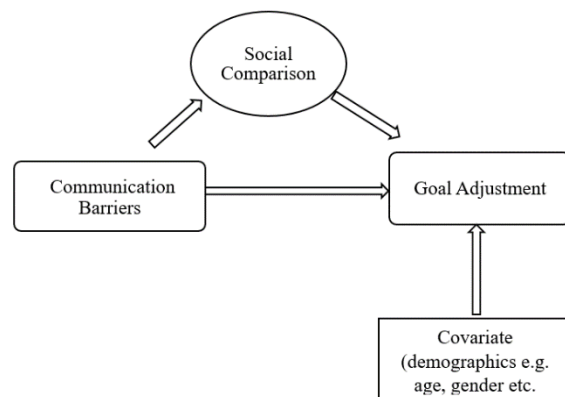
who are sometimes more confident and have effective communication skills. Self-comparison with other students results in difficulty in their goal adjustment. Most Gilgit Baltistan students who study in other Pakistan provinces have not been able to achieve their goals. There are many reasons behind this failure. One of these major reasons is the variability of many languages which act as barrier. Another reason of this failure is the transition from a relatively rigid cultural society to a more flexible society of Punjab or urban Sindh. These students also have to face problems related to co-education as they have never been in such a gender-mixed environment. So, after identifying these major issues of GB students, the researcher is interested in finding out the possible psychological phenomena playing role in failure of goal adjustment. In this way, the results of this research will be applicable to the educational settings of Gilgit Baltistan and will help in effectively dealing with problems of students who belong to Gilgit Baltistan.

Social Comparison Theory by Leon Festinger. Festinger. (1954) planned the primary systematic theory of comparison. Festinger suggested that people have an innate drive to evaluate themselves, often in comparison to others. People make all kinds of judgments about themselves, and one of the key ways that we do this is through social comparison, or analyzing the self in relation to others. Social comparison is a ubiquitous social phenomenon. Virtually everyone does it from time to time, mostly because it can serve a very fundamental purpose: providing useful information about where one stands in one's social world. The present study has its basis on this theory suggesting that students belonging from different cultures compare themselves with other students on a lot of things specifically in classroom settings where they are not given the same importance as the rest students are given. This comparison of belonging to other cultures and considering themselves lower than other students generate low self-esteem resulting into communication barriers with their peers. Those communication barriers and social comparison unconsciously or consciously build them assert their opinions or behaviors on themselves which ends into poor adjustment of their goals.

The existing body of literature underscores the association among communication barriers, social comparison, and goal adjustment. The study revealed a negative correlation between social comparison and goal adjustment, suggesting that increased social comparison tends to decrease goal adjustment. Previous research has highlighted the multifaceted role of language beyond mere communication (Imberti, 2007; Lauring, 2008), particularly in influencing goal adjustment across different cultural contexts. Social comparison has been linked to various components including cooperative decision making, individual life satisfaction, and emotional well-being (Gong & Sanfey, 2017; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Butzer & Kuiper, 2006). This negative relationship between social comparison and goal adjustment aligns with prior findings (Su & Zeng, 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Furthermore, the study observed a higher prevalence of communication barriers compared to social comparison, consistent with existing literature (Zou et al., 2012).

The hypotheses for this study are based on the complex relationship among communication barriers, social comparison, and goal adjustment. It is hypothesized that Communication barriers and social comparison is likely to have an inverse relationship with goal adjustment. Additionally, it is hypothesized that Communication barriers is likely to have indirect effect on goal adjustment through social comparison. Furthermore, sociodemographic of current study are likely to have different score on communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment.

The proposed research model demonstrates the direction of relationship among Communication Barriers, Social Comparison and Goal adjustment. In my research the independent variable is communication barriers, mediator is social comparison and dependent variable is goal adjustment. This given model is showing the relationship of all the variables with each other and their interdependence is being shown in the given model in a clear-cut manner.



MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this study, co-relational research methods have been employed for the present study. The present study was carried out to explore the association between communication barriers, social comparison as well as goal adjustment in Gilgit Baltistan students. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used for the recruitment of sample to explore communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment in students from Gilgit Baltistan. 120 participants were selected through purposive sampling strategy. 69 male students and 51 female students were included in this research. The data was collected from the students of Gilgit Baltistan who are studying in other provinces of Pakistan. The age range will be 17-30 years old.

For the demographics representations the sample include 69 male and 51 female students. This demographic sheet includes the age of the students, education and history of family, participant's birth order, no of siblings, social structure, socioeconomic status, monthly family income, fathers and mother's education and their occupation. This demographic sheet has been used for further analysis and study variable discussion.

To assess social comparison, the social comparison scale (SCS) was used. Allan and Gilbert (1995) have developed this scale to calculate both social rank self-perception and relativity. The scale uses the technique of semantic disparities and includes 12 bipolar constructs showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. Participants are expected to compare themselves

internationally with others and to measure themselves in a ten-point scale.

Communication barriers was measured by using Personal report of interethnic communication apprehension scale (PRECA). The scale has been developed by (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2013). This scale (Personal Assessment of Apprehension in Interethnic Contact (PRECA) contains 14 objects. The 14 statements are often discussed by people on contact with people from other ethnic groups and has good reliability value of 0.84. Participants were asked to show how much they agree with certain statements by labeling a number reflecting your answer to each statements using following choices: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; unsure = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5

Goal adjustment scale (GAS) was used to evaluate the goal adjustment in students. This scale has been established in 2013 by Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver. It includes ten items. Ten items demonstrate that people are not always able to accomplish what they want, and are often compelled to avoid following the goals they set in their life. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha values for the 2 dimensions ranging between .72 and .81. This measure allows to understand how participants feel when this happens to them. Participants were asked to show how much they agree with those statements by labeling a number reflecting your answer to each statement using the following choices: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; unsure = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5

Data analysis was done by using SPSS 20.0 was used to analyse the data. Descriptive

statistic was calculated and reliabilities of tools were accessed. To figure out the relationship between communication barriers, social comparison, goal adjustment and demographic variables, the Pearson product moment correlation was used. Mediation analysis was applied to assess the role of social comparison in

communication barriers and goal adjustment. Independent Sample t-Test to assess gender difference will also be used to study the relationship communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment in students from Gilgit Baltistan.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Research Variables (N = 120)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>Potential Range</i> (Min-max)	<i>Actual Range</i> (Min-max)
Goal Adjustment	17.83	5.23	10	.67	10-50	20-43
Goal Disengagement	11.05	1.91	4	.78	4-50	5-16
Goal Reengagement	18.95	4.41	6	.85	6-30	9-30
Communication Barriers	39.20	10.40	14	.76	14-70	14-64
Social Comparison	63.39	19.55	11	.94	11-110	20-110

Note. M=Mean; S.D=Standard deviation; α= Cronbach alpha; k= no. of items

The Cronbach alpha reliability values of Communication barriers and social comparison is .76 and .94 respectively which indicates very good reliability. Goal Adjustment Scale’s overall

reliability is .67 which is good and its subscales reliabilities are as follows: Goal Disengagement .78 and Goal reengagement .85 all subscales of Goal adjustment have reliabilities above .5 which indicates good reliability.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis assessing the relationship among Communication Barriers, Social Comparison and Goal Adjustment in GB students (N=120)

S.#	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1.	Age	-	.15	.22*	.02	.16	-.09	-.05	-.29**	-.00	.08	.04	.03	.00	.16	.11*	-.16	.19*	-.13	.01
2.	Gender	-	-	.08	.14	.27**	.01	-.19*	-.19*	-.23**	.20*	-.13	-.01	-.16	.17	.04*	-.18*	.12	-.29**	.15
3.	Education	-	-	-	.00	.09	-.08	-.11	.04	-.05	.13	-.07	-.09	-.07	.12	.10	.01	.10	-.04	.06
4.	Semester	-	-	-	-	-.09	-.04	-.11	-.20**	-.05	-.00	.00	.11	-.02	.02	-.01	-.14	.04	-.14	.27**
5.	No Of Siblings	-	-	-	-	-	.35**	-.11	-.15	.03	.18*	-.14	-.13	.03	.42**	.02	-.09	.06	-.14	.06
6.	Birth-order	-	-	-	-	-	-	.01	.01	.06	.04	.01	.01	.03	-.04	-.00	-.04	-.07	.20*	.01
7.	CGPA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.02	.09	-.09	.14	.21*	.03	-.08	.54	-.05	.08	-.07	.07
8.	Field Selection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.03	.10	-.08	-.19*	.10	-.14	-.09	.02	-.11	.22*	-.13
9.	Availing any Scholarship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.00	.17	-.02	.02	-.05	-.07	.06	-.11	.15	-.19*
10.	Family System	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.12	-.01	-.10	.15	-.09	.06	-.13	-.03	.07
11.	Regional Affiliation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.23**	.09	-.10	.13	.08	.10	.00	.04
12.	Socio-Economic Status	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	.02	.12	-.00	.14	-.22*	.13
13.	Family Monthly Income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.08	-.10	.09	.07	-.01	.05
14.	No of dependent	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	-.00	.15	-.23**	.12
15.	Goal Adjustment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.37**	.91**	-.27**	-.28**
16.	Goal Disengagement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.02	.20*	-.26**
17.	Goal Reengagement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.38**	-.41**
18.	Communication Barrier	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.70**
19.	Social Comparison	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M	22.40	1.57	2.58	4.52	4.79	2.15	3.30	1.09	1.76	1.56	.30	.91	85700	6.05	.30	11.05	18.95	39.20	63.39
	SD	2.43	0.49	.94	2.14	1.99	.72	.33	.28	.42	.49	.46	.30	106186.50	3.62	4.76	1.91	4.41	10.40	19.55

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Gender (1=Female, 2= Male), Education (BA/BSc=1, MA/MSc=2, BS=3, MPhil/MS=4), Birth-order(First=1, Middle=2, Last=3), Field Selection(By choice=1, By force=2), Availing any scholarship(yes=1, no=2), Family type (Nuclear=1, Joint=2), Family Background (Rural=0, Urban=1), Socioeconomic status (low=1, middle=2, high=3)

Table 3 revealed that age had a positive relationship with Goal Adjustment. The relationship of age with 2 subscales of Goal Adjustment showed that Subscale ‘Goal Reengagement’ had positive relationship with age and the other subscale ‘Goal Disengagement’ has no relationship with age. Age has no relationship with Communication Barriers and Social Comparison. Gender has negative relationship with Communication Barriers. Gender showed positive relation relationship with Goal Adjustment.

Semester had a positive relationship with Social Comparison while those who were availing scholarship had a negative relationship with social comparison. CGPA has a positive

relation with communication barriers. Higher the CGPA, higher would be the barriers in communication. Socioeconomic status has a negative relationship with communication barriers. Lower socioeconomic status infer higher barriers in communication. Education, Family system and Regional affiliation played no important role in this study. As these demographics has no relationship with Goal Adjustment, Communication Barriers and Social Comparison.

Furthermore, Communication Barriers and Social Comparison had a significant negative relationship with Goal Adjustment. The two subscales of Goal Adjustment (i) *Goal Disengagement* had a positive relationship with communication barriers and negative relationship with social comparison. (ii) *Goal Reengagement* has a negative relationship with Communication barriers and social comparison.

Moreover, Communication Barriers and Social comparison had a significant negative relationship with Goal Adjustment. Thus, hypothesis 1 has been proved.

Table 3

Mediating Role of Social Comparison for Communication Barriers in predicting Goal Adjustment (N=120)

Variables	B	T	F	P	R ²	ΔR ²	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Direct Effect of CB on GA	-.27	-3.14	9.87	.00	.07	.06	-.20	-.04
Direct Effect of CB on SC	-.70	-10.91	119.14	.00	.50	.49	-1.57	-1.09
Direct Effect of SC on GA	.28	3.20	10.25	.00	.08	.07	.02	.11
Mediation of SC b/w CB & GA	.17	1.38	5.92	.17	.09	.07	-.01	.10

Note. CI= Confidence Intervals; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; SC= Social Comparison; CB= Communication Barriers; GA= Goal Adjustment.

Results in Table 3 showed that communication barriers and social comparison positively predict goal adjustment, which is confirming the hypothesis. Mediation results are not in expected direction; social comparison (indirect effect) does not mediate the relationship between

communication barriers and goal adjustment with $\beta = .17$; 95% CI (-.01, .10). Communication barriers (direct effect) significantly predicts goal adjustment and social comparison. Moreover, Social comparison (direct effect) also predicts goal adjustment. Hence, it was found that Social Comparison fully mediate the relationship between communication barriers and goal adjustment.

Table 4

Independent Sample t test representing gender differences in communication barriers, social comparison and goal adjustment along its subscales (N=120)

Variables	Male (n=69)		Female (n=51)		t	p	95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Goal Adjustment	30.17	4.87	29.76	4.65	-.46	.64	-2.15	1.33	0.08
Goal Disengagement	10.75	1.97	11.45	1.76	1.99	.04	.006	1.38	0.37
Goal Reengagement	19.42	4.64	18.31	4.05	-1.36	.17	-2.71	.50	0.25
Communication Barriers	36.60	10.88	42.72	8.62	3.43	.00	2.58	9.64	0.62
Social Comparison	66.02	21.29	59.82	16.43	.11	.04	-13.29	.88	0.32

Note. * $p < .05$; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; CI=Confidence Interval; LL=Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit.

Results showed that there were significant gender differences in Communication Barriers and Social Comparison. Moreover, there were no significant gender differences in Goal Adjustment and its subscale Goal reengagement. Men and women are likely to have different scores on

communication barriers, social comparison and Goal Disengagement. Difference was found with males having more mean scores on social comparison than females which states that males socially compare more as compared to females. Furthermore, the mean scores of communication barriers are more of females than males which revealed that females faced more barriers while communicating as compared to males.

DISCUSSION

The present study was intended to investigate the relationship between Communication Barriers, Social Comparison and Goal Adjustment among Gilgit-Baltistan students. Another aim of the study was to find out the mediating effect of social comparison on communication barriers and goal adjustment. Moreover, differences in gender were also assessed for communication barrier, social comparison and goal adjustment of Gilgit-Baltistan student.

The study's findings revealed a negative correlation between Communication Barriers and Social Comparison with Goal Adjustment (Imberti, 2007; Luring, 2008). Increased communication barriers were associated with decreased goal adjustment, mirroring previous research findings (Zou et al., 2012). Similarly, higher levels of social comparison were linked to diminished goal adjustment, consistent with prior literature (Gong & Sanfey, 2017; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Previous studies emphasized the multifaceted role of language beyond communication, particularly in diverse cultural contexts (Imberti, 2007; Luring, 2008). Social comparison's influence extended to various aspects of decision making, life satisfaction, and emotional well-being (Butzer & Kuiper, 2006; Suls & Miller, 1979). The study highlighted inconsistencies in the relationship between different comparison orientations and social adaptation, adding nuance to existing knowledge (Su & Zeng, 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Participants reported higher scores in communication barriers compared to social comparison, aligning with prior research findings (Zou et al., 2012).

The cited research underscores the significance of effective intercultural communication for fostering positive intergroup relations (Dodd, 1995; Gudykunst, 1986; Hall, 1976; Kim, 1986; Martin, 1993). Factors such as cultural knowledge, communication skills, and tolerance for ambiguity are pivotal in intercultural communication competence, influencing goal adjustment among students from diverse cultures (Giles & Johnson, 1981; Lustig & Koester, 1996). Interactions with culturally different individuals often evoke negative emotional responses and trigger social comparison (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Yook & Albert, 1999). Despite frequent contact, difficulties in intercultural communication persist,

indicating that mere exposure to out-group members does not guarantee improved relations (Amir, 1976; Dovidio et al., 1996; Kim, 1986). Moreover, ethnic group membership influences the emotional tone of intercultural communication and goal adjustment among students, reflecting biases toward similar immigrant groups (Stephan et al., 1998)

The current study hypothesized that Communication barriers indirectly influence Goal adjustment through social comparison, which was supported by mediation analysis. This finding contrasts with Li & Gasser (2005), who proposed social comparison as a mediator between ethnic identity and goal adjustment in culturally diverse students. Additionally, Church (1982) noted that heightened social comparison among Asian students may contribute to low self-esteem and communication barriers, hindering goal adjustment. Another study by Hirschi et al. (2013) explored social comparison as a mediator between social support and career adaptability, suggesting that it fosters negative career development. Conversely, Wang & Fu (2015) found that social comparison does not mediate social factors and career development, presenting inconsistencies with our study's findings.

The third hypothesis aimed to explore gender differences in communication barriers, social comparison, and goal adjustment, but findings contradicted expectations. Females demonstrated significantly higher mean scores on communication barriers, possibly due to style differences favoring information gathering and seeking advice, contrasting with males' product-driven communication style (Kelly, 2008). Conversely, males scored significantly higher on social comparison, reflecting their goal-oriented nature and societal expectations to excel and provide for their families. This aligns with Deb et al. (2015) who found similar gender differences. Psychologists attribute these differences to ingrained sex disparities in personality traits and communication approaches shaped by socialization and developmental experiences (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Maccoby, 1988). In contexts like Gilgit-Baltistan, where male interaction surpasses females', women may face additional challenges in communication, necessitating extra effort to succeed (Chiliwniak, 1997).

Significant gender differences in social comparison were evident, with males displaying higher levels compared to females. This trend may stem from

societal pressures, where males constantly compare themselves with peers, particularly in academic settings like Gilgit-Baltistan, leading to feelings of inferiority (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994). Studies support the "invariance hypothesis," suggesting men consistently exhibit greater social comparison tendencies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Moreover, gender differences in self-construals further mediate the effect of social comparison (Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, et al., 2006). While gender's role in social comparison has received limited attention, recent research highlights its significance in understanding psychological effects and group dynamics (Chatard, Guimond, & Selimbegovic, 2007; Guimond, Chatard, & Kang, 2010). Further exploration of these dynamics is crucial for comprehensive understanding and implications in various contexts.

CONCLUSION

Communication is recognized as one of the most significant mechanisms to be built in all structures. If it's an organization, communication between members of family, social networks, individuals and thus so on, it matters not how strong the communication mechanisms are and the how well designed as well as well-established they are, the obstacles also occur in the process of communication. The obstacles that occur in the process of communication are unwanted as well as unfortunate; every person wants to be able to operate smoothly without barriers. (Kapur, 2016). The findings of the present study highlighted many key points that are very important to consider in this fast-moving life. The study had concluded that Communication barriers and goal adjustment have an indirect relationship. Social comparison had a mediating role between communication barriers and goal adjustment. The model hypothesized was proven. The present study suggests that Communication barriers leads to poor adjustment of goals in the presence of social comparison. Therefore, to improve goal adjustment in students of different cultures will require multidimensional approaches, such as supporting each other, improving communication skills, and maintaining an interpersonal relationship with Gilgit-Baltistan students. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between Communication Barriers, Social Comparison and Goal Adjustment among Gilgit Baltistan students by using quantitative

method to generalize the findings to a large population. The study confirms the view that Communication barriers and social comparison are negative predictors of Goal adjustment.

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