

BARRIERS TO CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Communication is an integral part of teaching-learning process and its effectiveness is one of the factors which determines the degree to which the intended learning outcomes will be achieved. The process of communication is not always free from hindrances. There are a number of factors related to teacher, message, methods and media, students and learning environment that act as barriers in the process of classroom communication and reduce its effectiveness. These barriers need to be eliminated to increase effectiveness of classroom communication.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Communication plays an important role in teaching-learning process. The higher the effectiveness of communication, better are the chances of achieving the intended learning outcomes of instruction. Effectiveness of classroom communication depends on five major factors namely teacher, students, message, methods and media and learning environment. These factors, if do not possess the right kind of qualities or attributes create hindrances in the process of communication and thus decrease its effectiveness.

2. BARRIERS TO CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION :

On the basis of barriers to communication discussed by Wehrich and Koontz, (1993) ; Cole and Chan (1987), Devito (1978), Michael and Jones (1973) the barriers to classroom communication can be grouped under the following five major factors

- Barriers related to teachers
- Barriers related to message
- Barriers related to methods and media
- Barriers related to students

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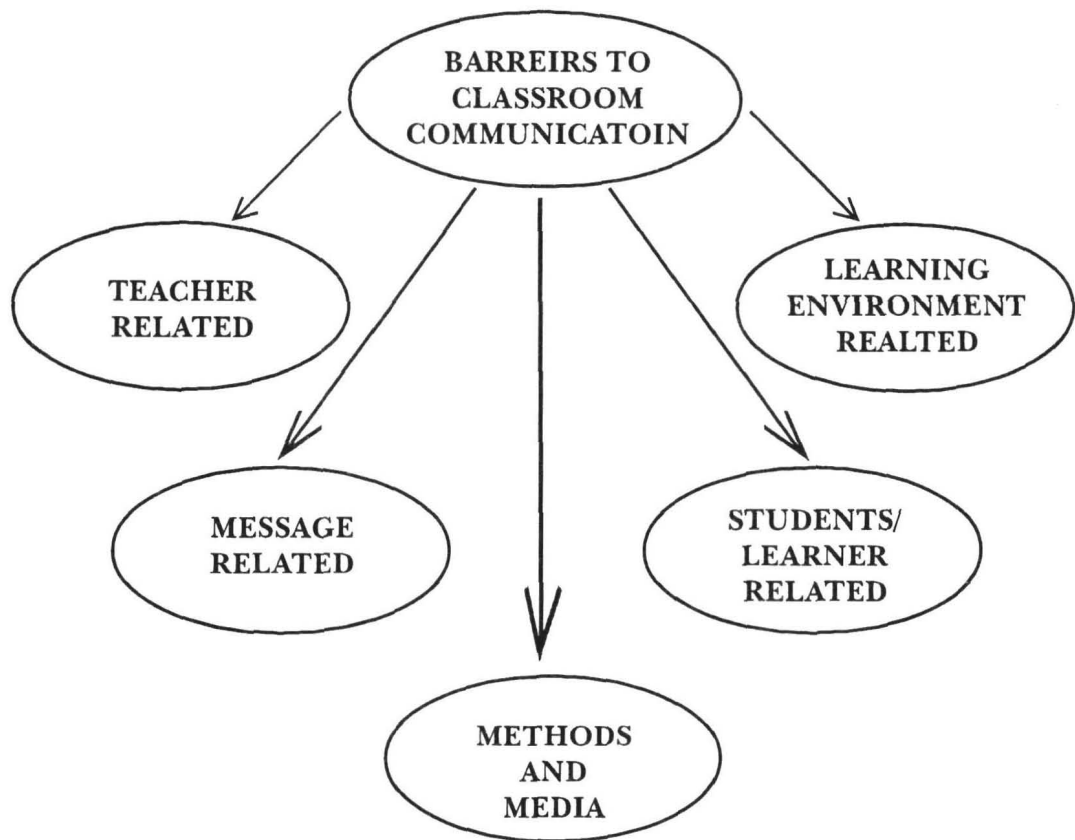


FIG. 1 : BARRIERS TO CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

- Barriers related to learning environment.

(See Fig.1.)

2.1 TEACHER RELATED BARRIERS.

(Fig .2) depicts the teacher related barriers to classroom communication :

- **These include Unrealistic Self-Concept :**

The self-concept is who the person is and encompasses that individual's values, attitudes, and beliefs about self and the environment. It colours

the perceptions and subsequent behaviours that arise from these basic attitudes and beliefs about the self (Pietrofessa et al.1980). A teacher who is having negative self concept will not be open, reject feedback contrary to his/ her beliefs and will not be willing to change. This leads to difficulties in communication.

- **Inadequate Knowledge and skills :** The communication in classroom becomes ineffective, if a teacher lacks knowledge and skills related to

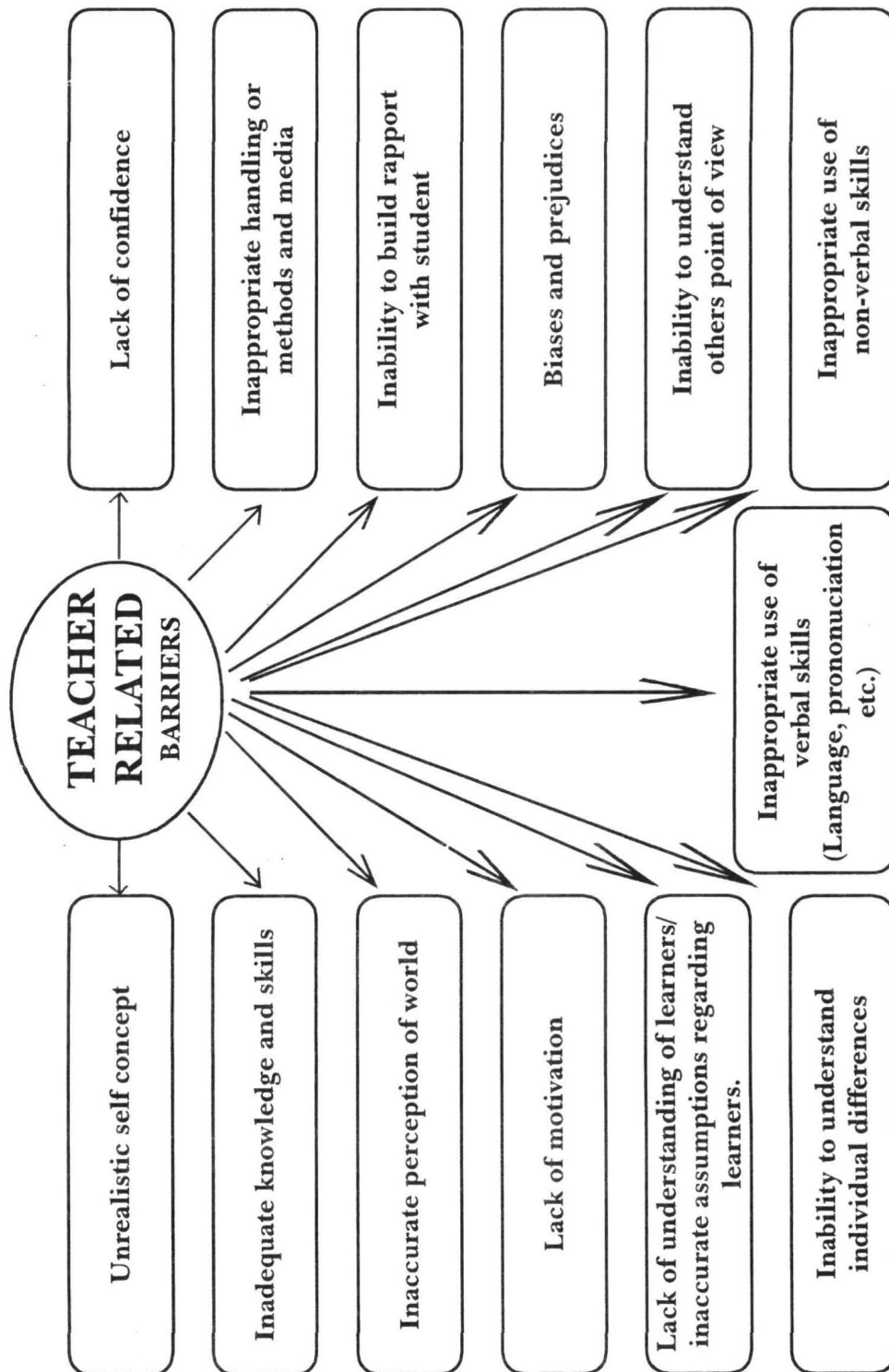


FIG. 2 : BARRIERS RELATED TO TEACHER

the subject he is teaching and pedagogical skills. Both are essential for effective communication.

- **Inaccurate Perception of World :** If a teacher perceives the world around him not worth living or useless, he will sound pessimistic and lack enthusiasm and zeal essential for classroom communication. Such teacher will be unable to motivate learners for learning and develop wrong attitudes among them .
- **Lack of Motivation :** Lack of motivation to teach, explore, acquire more knowledge or to communicate, on the part of the teacher will restrict him to participate actively or encourage student participation in teaching -learning process and adversely effect communication.
- **Lack of Understanding of Learners:** In order to facilitate learning among learners, the understanding of learners their characteristics, cognitive styles, learning styles, previous knowledge, readiness level, motivation, etc. is essential. A teacher who lacks knowledge about his learners will be unable to pitch his lesson as per the needs of the learners and thus makes the communication ineffective.
- **Inability to Understand Individual Differences :** A teacher is unable to provide variety in methods, media and techniques if he fails to understand individual differences which exist among the learners w.r.t a large number of variables. The effectiveness of communication decreases.
- **Inappropriate Use of Verbal Communication Skills** Inability to use appropriate language, pronunciation, syntax, grammar etc. acts as barrier to effective communication in classroom.
- **Inappropriate Use of Non-Verbal Communication Skills :** Inappropriate use of facial expression, eye-contact, gestures, postures, proximity, artifacts etc. act as barrier in communication process. For example, a teacher with stern face and who maintains distance from learners will not be able to establish rapport with them and the communication will thus not be open and learners will hesitate in asking questions, clarifying doubts or providing feedback to the teacher.
- **Inability to Understand Others Point of View** If a teacher fails to accept view point of others, he creates a very closed environment which restrict learners from actively participating in classroom.
- **Biases and Prejudices :** Biases and prejudices w.r.t class, creed,sex, etc. adversely effect communication.
- **Inability to Build Rapport with Students** Lack of rapport between the students and teacher leads to restricted communication without concern for each other and feedback.
- **Inappropriate Handling of**

Methods and media :If a teacher lacks competence to handle methods, media and techniques, his communication is ineffective and he will not be able to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

- **Lack of Confidence** : Lack of confidence in himself, subject or handling methods, media and techniques act as barrier to effective communication. A teacher who lacks confidence in himself may become very authoritarian or restrict himself in communication or maintains distance form learners.

2.2 MESSAGE RELATED BARRIERS:

Message related barriers (Fig 3) include :

- **Lack of Clarity of Objectives** : If instructional objectives are not clearly specified in the beginning of the class, students will not know as to what is expected of them at the end of instruction or why should they learn a particular topic. The necessary expectancy level is not aroused among learners and they will not be adèquately motivated to learn. Another difficulty in communication will be reflected in selection of content which may not match the objectives.
- **Inappropriate Sequencing of Content Matter** : Sequencing of content matter without taking into consideration the logical hierarchy of concepts, or principles or psychological principles of

learning i.e. known to unknown, easy to difficult, simple to complex, observation to reasoning, concrete to abstract makes learning a difficult process and acts as a barrier to effective communication.

- **Inappropriate Use of Language and symbols** : The message designed using difficult language, not comprehensible to learners, and symbols with which learners are not familiar or are technically inaccurate or are not standardized ones, create hindrance . in communication process.
- **Irrelevant Information** : Message that contains irrelevant pieces of information fails to sustain the necessary motivation and interest of the learners and inhibit them from attending, listening and comprehending the message.
- **Technical Jargon** : If a message contains technical jargon and learners are not made familiar with it before hand acts as a barrier to communication by reducing interest and motivation of learners..
- **Heavy Emphasis on Text** : Too much dependence on text makes the message boring .
- **Lack of Supporting Materials** : Supporting materials include student guides, instructional or job sheets, workbooks, set of instructions etc. If a message is not accompanied by appropriate support materials to guide or to direct learners as to how to go about learning the message,

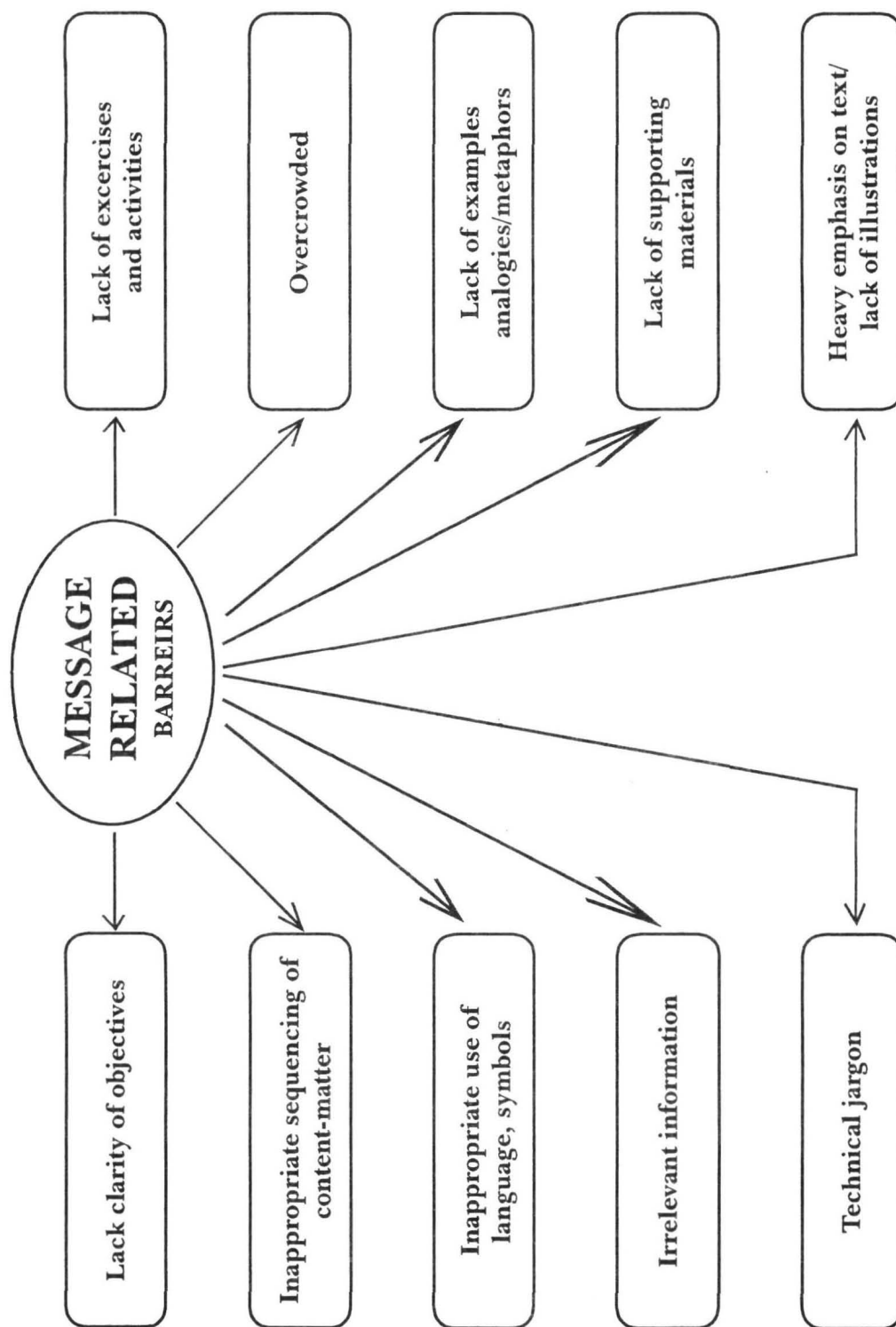


FIG.3 : BARRIERS RELATED TO MESSAGE

it creates problems.

- **Lack of Examples, Analogies and Metaphors:** Lack of use of examples from daily life and world of work, analogies and metaphors in message makes it difficult for the learner to learn it meaningfully and participate actively in classroom communication.
- **Overcrowdedness:** Too much information in a message causes problems for both teachers and learners. Teacher's pace may become fast or he fails to cover details to the extent needed. For learners, comprehension becomes a problem. Thus, overcrowded messages act as barrier to communication.
- **Lack of Exercises and Activities:** Message if not accompanied by relevant exercises or activities does not provide an opportunity to teacher to assure himself of learner's understanding and sustain learner's interest and motivation and to actively involve them in teaching learning process thus making classroom communication ineffective.
- **Poor Quality of Media:** The quality of selected media if poor, creates hindrances in the process of communication. Say for example, transparencies being used by teacher are overcrowded, font size is small or contain too many colours or the quality of audio or video in video film being used is poor will cause communication difficulties.
- **Emphasis on Conventional Methods and Media:** Too much emphasis on conventional methods and media leads to boredom, monotony and lack of interest among learners, making the communication ineffective.
- **Too much Dependence on Media:** Too much dependence on any one type of medium or media without proper synchronization leads to ineffective communication.
- **Lack of Integration of Media in Teaching-Learning:** Lack of integration of media in teaching-learning makes its use irrelevant and confuse learners and thus cause problems in communication.

2.3 METHODS AND MEDIA RELATED BARRIERS:

(Fig. 4) Shows the barriers related to methods, media and techniques. These are:

- **Inappropriate Selection:** Methods, media and techniques selected if irrelevant to objectives, nature of learners, nature of content, context

or size of the class act as barrier and make the communication ineffective.

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2.4 STUDENTS / LEARNER RELATED BARRIERS:

Students/learner related barriers (Fig. 5) are:

- **Unrealistic Self-Concept:** Like teachers, if students do possess unrealistic self-concept there are difficulties in communication. Self

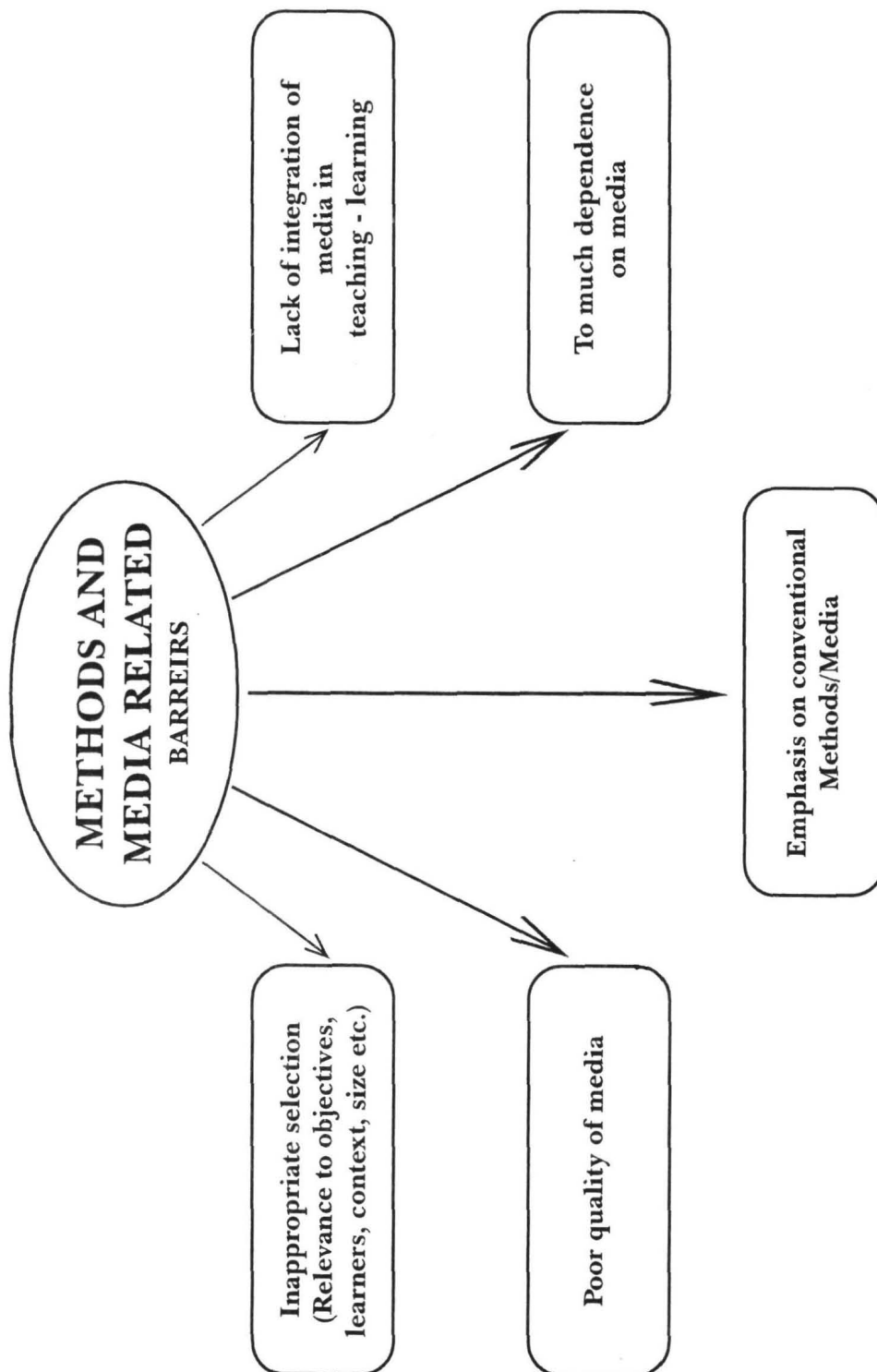


FIG. 4 : BARRIERS RELATED TO METHODS AND MEDIA

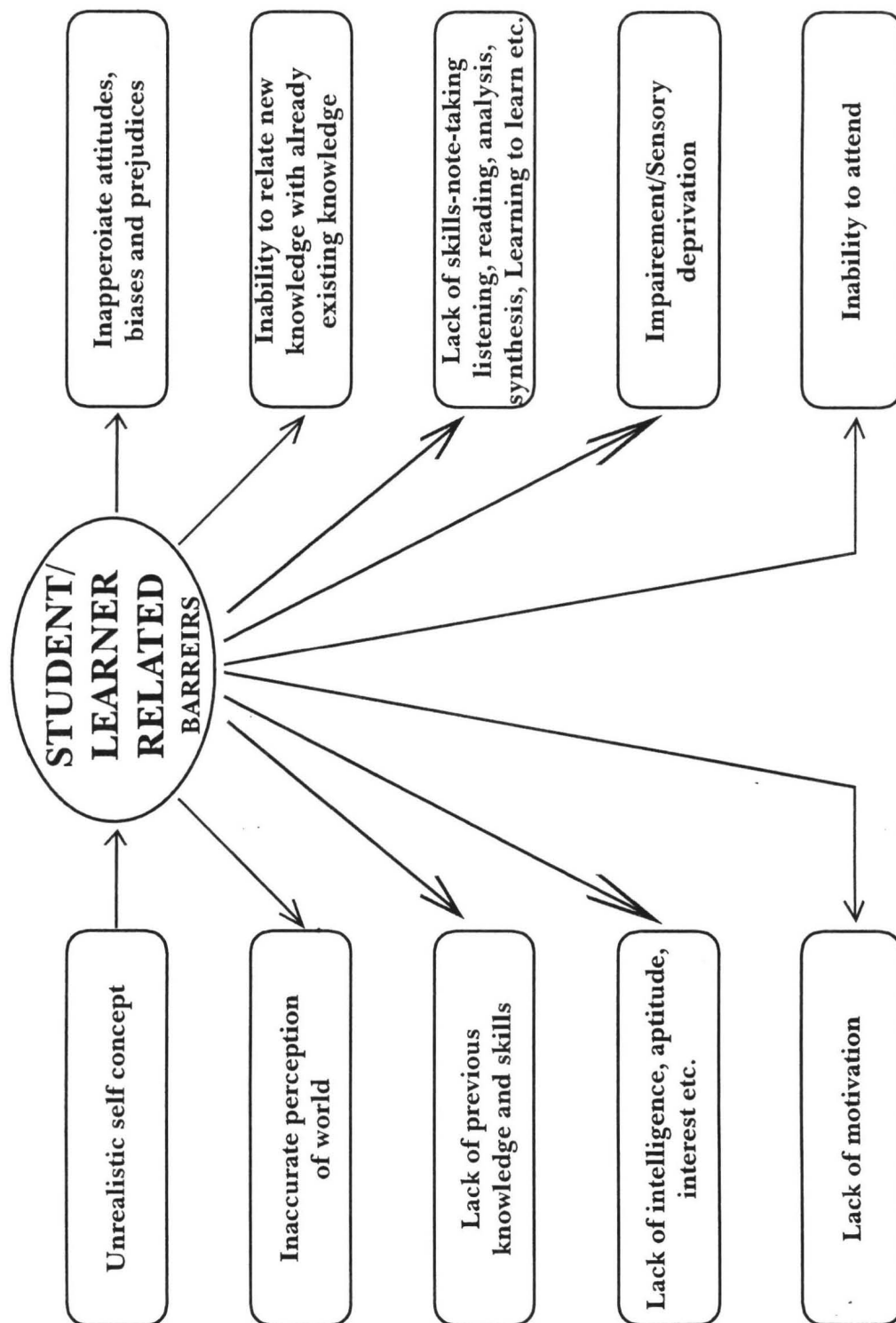


FIG.5 : BARRIERS RELATED TO STUDENTS

concept affects participation in or withdrawal from certain academic tasks in educational institutions, Students who do not feel they will succeed, who may be self conscious and want to avoid embarrassing failure experience will not venture into pursuits that raise such doubts. Communication is adversely affected by unrealistic self-concept.

- **Inaccurate Perception of World:** if the learners view world to be not worth living, they will become pessimistic and lack needed zeal and enthusiasm to participate in classroom communication or will always show negative attitudes.
- **Lack of Previous Knowledge and Skills :** Lack of previous knowledge and skills required to learn new knowledge and skills creates problems in classroom communication, - Learners fail to acquire new knowledge and skills and relate it meaningfully to what they already know as well as fail to actively participate in classroom.
- **Lack of Intelligence, Aptitude, Interest etc. :** A minimum level of intelligence, aptitude and interest is essential to be successful in a particular discipline or subject if not possessed by the learner(s) makes the classroom communication ineffective.
- **Lack of Motivation :** Lack of Motivation to learn new information/knowledge and skills, adversely effect communication process.
- **Inability to Attend :** If learners do not pay necessary attention to the task in classroom, the communication fails.
- **Impairment/Sensory Deprivation :** Impairment or any sensory deprivation in the learner restricts his participation in classroom communication.
- **Lack of Notes Taking, Listening, Reading, Analysis, Synthesis, Learning to Learn Skills :** Lack of these basic skills makes communication process in classroom difficult for both teacher and students.
- **Inability to Relate New Knowledge with Already Existing Knowledge:** Meaningful learning does not take place if a student fails to relate new knowledge with already existing in his mind. Communication thus, does not yield the desired learning outcomes and students are not able to retain new learning for a long period of time.
- **Inappropriate Attitudes, Biases and Prejudices :** If a learner possesses unfavourable attitude towards teacher, subject, classfellows/peers, institutions or life, or is biased or prejudiced will have problems in communication, relating with people and accepting others viewpoint.

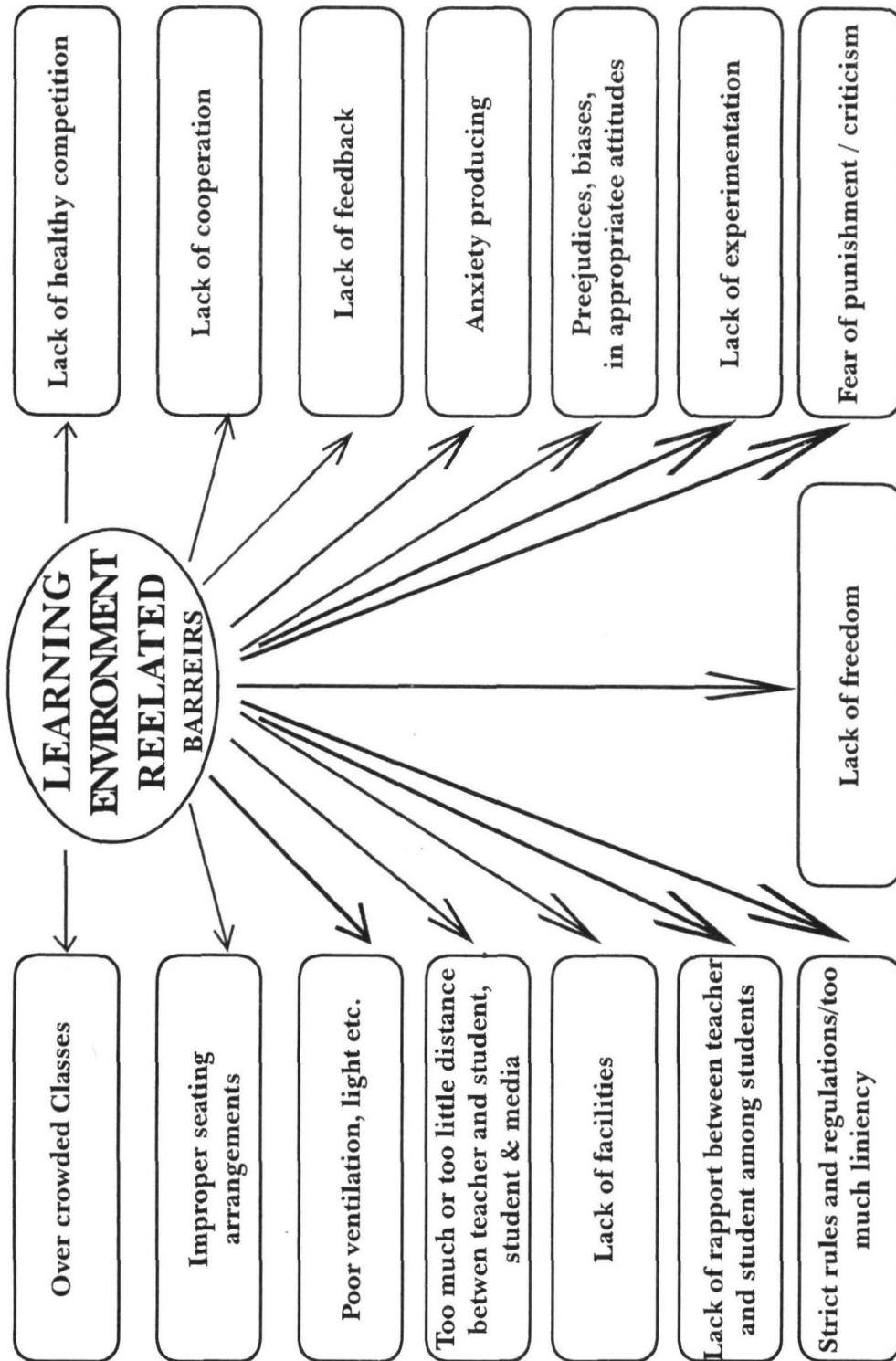


FIG.6 : BARRIERS RELATED TO LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

2.5 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT RELATED BARRIERS :

Learning environment related barriers to communication (Fig.6) are:

- **Over Crowded Classes :** Overcrowded classes makes it difficult for the teacher to pay attention to all the learners and cater to their individual needs and thus affects communication
- **Improper Seating Arrangements:** It leads to discomfort to the learners, problems in maintaining eye contact with teacher or peers or problems of access to teacher or learner and thus restrict free flow of ideas among learners or between teacher and learner.
- **Too Little or Too Much Distance between Teacher and Student, Student and Media etc. :** Too little or too much distance creates communication difficulties. If distance between teacher and student is too much, students have difficulty in relating to the teacher and openly participating in classroom communication. On the other hand, if distance is too little, student feels threatened that his personal space is being encroached upon and he restrains himself from interaction.
- **Lack of Facilities:** Lack of facilities such as proper chalkboard electricity points, media etc. in classroom act as barriers in communication.
- **Lack of Rapport Between Teacher and Student and Among Students:** It makes classroom environment closed in which students restrain themselves from participation, clarifying their doubts or expressing their own viewpoints.
- **Strict Rules and Regulations or Too Much Leniency :** Both are unfavourable for effective communication. Strict rules and regulations create fear and students will not freely open up, while too much leniency creates discipline problems.
- **Lack of Freedom** Learning environment that restrict individual's freedom to participate or express his view point or experiment is not conducive for effective classroom communication.
- **Fear of Punishment/Criticism :** Learning environment characterised by fear of punishment and criticism discourages students to be frank and open and participate freely in classroom communication process.
- **Lack of Experimentation :** Lack of opportunities to experiment, innovate or create again hinders the process of communication.
- **Anxiety Producing :** Learning environment that causes anxiety among learners hinders the process of effective communication. Students are restricted in their communication. Sometimes they may withdraw themselves or may not participate in classroom

communication.

- **Lack of -Feedback :** If the element of feedback is missing in the learning environment, it hinders the process of communication. Imagine a situation in which feedback regarding student's performance or students feedback regarding instructional effectiveness is missing. The communication will either be ineffective or breakdown at one point.
- **Lack of Co-operation :** Teacher-student cooperation and cooperation among students if lacking, will lead to breakdown of the communication.
- **Lack of Healthy Competition :** Lack of healthy competition among students may lead to complete breakdown of communication among students or groups.

CONCLUSIONS :

From the above, it is clear that a multiplicity of barriers can exist in the classroom communication, which can either make it ineffective or decrease its effectiveness. There is also an interplay of these barriers. The barriers stated above need to be eliminated from teaching-learning situation in order to increase the effectiveness of communication. Teacher's self awareness need to be increased and

courses in the area of subject-matter, learners', psychology, understanding of learning process, instructional design, instructional methods and media, teaching skills, interpersonal relations and communication skills should be organised for them. In case of students, increasing self-awareness, training in communication skills-both verbal and non-verbal, developing group-discussion skills and providing individual guidance to students, if needed, will help in improving classroom communication.

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