

## **Relationship Between Communication Barrier and Self-Esteem Among the University Students of Gilgit-Baltistan**

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This study examines the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem with sample size ( $N = 350$ ), comprising almost equally distributed male and female university students belonging to Gilgit-Baltistan, aged 17-38 years, using purposive and snowball sampling. Demographics included in the study are age, gender, degree program, current semester, birthplace and spoken languages. Participants represented diverse linguistic, regional, and educational backgrounds. Data were collected using The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; [Rosenberg, 1965](#)) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 ([McCroskey, 1982](#)) were used as the primary measures in the present study, including a Communication Barrier Subscale. While most scales showed high reliability, the RSES had a lower alpha. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between communication barriers and self-esteem. Gender also emerged as a key factor, with female students reporting higher communication barriers and lower self-esteem. The findings highlight the psychological impact of communication challenges within the Pakistani context.

*Keywords.* Communication barrier, self-esteem, university students

Communication and self-esteem are two foundational constructs that play a critical role in shaping individual functioning, particularly within educational contexts. Communication enables the exchange of ideas, participation in social interactions, and expression of emotions and identity. It encompasses verbal, non-verbal, written, and digital forms of interaction ([Lunenburg, 2010](#)). Self-esteem, on the other hand, refers to an individual's global self-evaluation; how one values, respects, and perceives oneself ([Orth & Robins, 2014](#); [Rosenberg, 1965](#)). Both variables are interrelated in their influence on students'

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psychological well-being, academic performance, confidence, and ability to form meaningful social relationships. When students face communication barriers, particularly in multilingual or multicultural settings, they often experience anxiety, fear of rejection, and social withdrawal, all of which can lead to lower self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Therefore, understanding the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem is essential for identifying risks to student well-being, especially in underrepresented populations.

In the present study, communication barrier is treated as the independent variable whereas self-esteem as the dependent variable. These constructs are conceptually linked through a negative correlation, where increased communication barriers are associated with lower self-esteem. Research indicates that students who face persistent communication challenges often experience anxiety, frustration, and social isolation, which can undermine their sense of self-worth (Baumeister et al., 2003; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Conversely, improved communication experiences are linked to stronger emotional expression, greater social integration, and enhanced self-esteem (Young & Schartner, 2014). This conceptual relationship is grounded in both theoretical models and empirical evidence that emphasize the role of interpersonal communication in shaping self-perception and emotional well-being.

One such population is university students from Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), a geographically remote and socio-culturally distinct region in northern Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan is linguistically diverse, with Shina, Burushaski, Balti, and Khowar being widely spoken (Sufiya, 2024). However, university instruction across Pakistan predominantly uses Urdu and English, placing GB students at a linguistic disadvantage. Most of these students come from monolingual, rural backgrounds with limited access to quality education, digital resources, or bilingual instruction (Zaman et al., 2025). This language gap becomes a significant barrier when students move to urban academic environments and are expected to communicate fluently and confidently in non-native languages (Hassan, 2024). These structural inequalities often result in high levels of communication apprehension, psychological stress, and ultimately a diminished sense of self-worth and perceived self-image (Angaiz et al., 2021).

The communication barriers faced by GB students are not limited to language mismatch. They include physical barriers such as classroom environment, noise and poor infrastructure; semantic barriers such as unfamiliar academic vocabulary; psychological barriers like low confidence, fear of judgment, or anxiety; and cultural

barriers rooted in gender norms and roles, conservative values, and social unfamiliarity with co-educational environments (Berge, 2013; Kapur, 2021). In addition, organizational and technological barriers such as rigid teacher-student hierarchies, limited feedback mechanisms, and inadequate internet access further compound students' hurdles (Moore, 1993; Short et al., 1976). These multi-layered communication challenges contribute not only to poor academic engagement but also to decreased social belonging, both of which are essential for fostering healthy self-esteem (Young & Schartner, 2014).

Recent empirical evidence indicates that Gilgit-Baltistan is currently experiencing a surge in mental health concerns, particularly among its youth. Studies reveal that students with lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to report symptoms of depression, anxiety, and academic burnout (Quratulain, 2024). Zaman et al. (2025) found that language-based communication difficulties in Diamer district, one of the least developed areas in GB, significantly reduced students' classroom confidence and social inclusion. Similarly, Angaiz et al. (2021) noted that students who struggle with communication tasks report lower self-efficacy and greater emotional distress. These issues are especially prevalent among female students, who face the dual burden of language barriers and restrictive gender norms that discourage verbal assertiveness (Mehmood & Hassan, 2013). Given these complexities, there is an urgent need for context-specific psychological research to understand how communication barriers affect the development of self-esteem in this vulnerable population.

The theoretical basis of the present study lies in Symbolic Interactionism, a sociological theory pioneered by Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934). This theory posits that self-concept develops through social interaction, particularly via reflected appraisals that is how individuals perceive they are viewed by others (Schlenker, 1980; Baumgardner & Arkin, 1987). In academic settings, if students receive negative or limited feedback due to communication barriers, they are likely to internalize these experiences as indicators of personal inadequacy. The breakdown of effective interaction disrupts opportunities for social connection, identity formation, and confidence building. Complementing this, Sociometer Theory argues that self-esteem functions as a psychological barometer of social inclusion (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). When students feel unheard, misunderstood, or excluded from peer groups or academic discourse due to communication difficulties, their self-esteem naturally declines. These theories jointly suggest that communication is not only a tool

for information exchange but also a foundation for the development of identity and emotional resilience.

In addition to these psychological frameworks, the study draws upon communication theories that highlight the disruptive impact of barriers. The Shannon-Weaver Model explains how noise interferes with the accurate transmission of messages (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The Transactional Model views communication as a dynamic, two-way process where feedback and context are essential (Barnlund, 2008). Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance emphasizes that increased psychological and structural gaps in learning environments weaken communication and student engagement (Moore, 1993). The Social Presence Theory adds that reduced emotional connection in academic or digital environments lowers motivation and participation (Short et al., 1976). These models collectively help explain how the communication challenges faced by GB students contribute to social isolation and low self-confidence. Despite the theoretical and practical significance of this relationship, there is a notable lack of empirical studies examining communication barriers and self-esteem together in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Most existing literature on self-esteem in Pakistan focuses on academic achievement or general psychological factors, without accounting for the role of language, region, or cultural identity (Haider et al., 2020; Perveen et al., 2021). Similarly, while some studies acknowledge communication challenges in higher education, they seldom address their psychological consequences or the unique struggles of students from peripheral areas. This study aims to bridge this gap by empirically exploring the correlation between communication barriers and self-esteem in university students from GB, with a focus on regional, gender-based, and educational differences.

The novelty of this study lies in its cultural, theoretical, and regional specificity. It is one of the first empirical investigations to explore the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem in the unique sociolinguistic context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Unlike previous studies that have connected communication barriers to other variables including academic performance, language anxiety, adjustment stress, or interpersonal conflict (Angaiz et al., 2021; Haider et al., 2020; Perveen et al., 2021), this research specifically examines their direct relationship with self-esteem, a fundamental yet understudied psychological variable. This distinguishes the present study from prior work by targeting a core aspect of personal development that influences both mental health and academic persistence. The study also introduces a rare demographic focus on dividing it into divisions, focusing on Diamer Division and its

underlying issues. Diamer is a region recognized as one of the most underserved and educationally marginalized areas of GB. Students from Diamer often come from highly conservative backgrounds with limited exposure to formal communication training, co-educational settings, or technology-enhanced learning environments (Hassan, 2024). Moreover, this research intentionally centers on Gilgit-Baltistan because of its vulnerability in terms of current mental health, particularly among youth. There is growing evidence that students from GB face high levels of psychological distress, low self-confidence, and communication-related anxiety due to their transitional experiences in urban universities (Quratulain, 2024; Sufiya, 2024). Yet, despite these challenges, there remains a striking absence of region-specific psychological studies. This research responds to that void by offering data-driven insights that can inform culturally sensitive interventions, curriculum support, and mental health programs for students from GB. Finally, This research is the first of its kind to analyze psychological constructs like self-esteem through the lens of communication in this division, providing crucial data on a population that has been virtually absent in national psychological research. It extends the application of Symbolic Interactionism and Sociometer Theory to the Pakistani context and introduces linguistic, cultural, and gender variables into the discussion. By using validated tools such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1982; Rosenberg, 1965), the research offers a methodologically sound investigation into an underexplored issue. Beyond its academic contribution, the study holds meaningful practical implications for the betterment of Gilgit-Baltistan. Its findings can inform the design of culturally responsive language support programs, inclusive classroom strategies, and peer-led mentoring models. Counseling services may also benefit from understanding the communication roots of self-esteem issues in students from rural or multilingual backgrounds. Policymakers and education administrators could use these insights to ensure that linguistic and psychological diversity are accounted for in higher education planning and resource allocation.

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth, theory-driven, and culturally grounded examination of how communication barriers affect self-esteem among university students from Gilgit-Baltistan. By bringing together psychological theory, communication science, and sociocultural realities, it aims to fill a critical gap in the Pakistani research landscape and advocate for more equitable, inclusive educational environments for marginalized student populations.

Broader objectives of the study are to examine the impact of communication barriers on the self-esteem of university students of Gilgit-Baltistan and to investigate the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem levels in university students of Gilgit-Baltistan.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Communication barriers will have a negative relationship with self-esteem in university students of Gilgit-Baltistan.
2. Students from Diamer division will score high on communication barrier and low on self-esteem as compared to students from other divisions of Gilgit-Baltistan.
3. Female students of Gilgit-Baltistan will score less on self-esteem due to high communication barrier as compared to male students having less communication barriers.

### **Sample**

The sample consists of undergraduate students ( $N = 350$ ), with almost an equal distribution of female and male participants. Data are collected from students of Gilgit-Baltistan who are studying in various universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. To find participants, a purposive sampling strategy is employed first. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique is employed, whereby participants are asked to share the questionnaire with their peers from Gilgit-Baltistan, further facilitating data collection from the target population. The demographics included age, gender, degree program, place of birth, languages spoken, and current semester.

### **Measures**

The following measures were used to assess the study constructs.

#### ***Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale***

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by [Rosenberg \(1965\)](#), was used to assess global self-esteem. This 10-item self-report measure was rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-esteem. The RSES has demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .85 to .88 ([Rosenberg, 1965](#)).

### ***Personal Report of Communication Apprehension***

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) developed by McCroskey (1982), was used to measure communication apprehension across four contexts: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. The PRCA-24 consists of 24 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflected greater levels of communication apprehension. The scale has shown strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .90 to .95 (McCroskey, 1982). In the present study, communication barrier was conceptualized as any factor that hinders students' ability to express themselves and engage effectively in academic and social communication. Since psychological anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are core determinants of communication difficulties, the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1982) was used to operationalize this construct. The PRCA-24 assesses communication apprehension across four contexts which are group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking, which directly reflect the settings where students are most likely to experience communication barriers.

Previous research highlights that communication apprehension leads to avoidance of interaction, reduced participation, and miscommunication, making it a valid and reliable indicator of broader communication barriers experienced by students in educational settings (Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992).

### ***Demographic Information Sheet***

A demographic information sheet was used to collect personal information from participants, including age, gender, degree program, place of birth, languages spoken, and current semester.

### ***Procedure***

To conduct this study, we approached students of Gilgit-Baltistan who were studying in various universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, where data was collected physically. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was ensured. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to administering the questionnaires. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes.

They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty. After completing the questionnaires, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study. The researchers thanked them for their participation and cooperation. Throughout the research process, ethical principles were maintained to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants.

## Results

The primary objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between communication barriers and the self-esteem in the university students from Gilgit-Baltistan. To evaluate the psychometric properties of the instruments used in the study, descriptive statistics were computed. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were applied to present the findings of the research. Descriptive statistics included the calculation of mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, range, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients, and the results were displayed in tabular format. Inferential statistics involved the use of Pearson product-moment correlation to explore the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem.

Additionally, independent sample t-tests were conducted to identify significant group differences based on gender. Furthermore, ANOVA was used to examine whether communication barriers varied significantly across different divisions of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliabilities of Communication Barrier Scales, its sub Scales and Self-Esteem (N = 350)*

| Scales | k  | $\alpha$ | M     | SD    | Score Range |           | Skew. | Kurt. |
|--------|----|----------|-------|-------|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|
|        |    |          |       |       | Actual      | Potential |       |       |
| CB     | 24 | .94      | 83.24 | 17.69 | 35-120      | 24-120    | -.29  | -.13  |
| GD     | 6  | .86      | 21.86 | 4.88  | 6 - 30      | 6-30      | -.62  | -.24  |
| Meet.  | 6  | .81      | 20.98 | 5.33  | 6-30        | 6-30      | -.33  | -.46  |
| IC     | 6  | .81      | 20.91 | 4.76  | 7 - 30      | 6-30      | -.30  | -.21  |
| PS     | 6  | .81      | 19.47 | 4.90  | 8 - 30      | 6-30      | .01   | -.37  |
| SE     | 10 | .58      | 23.58 | 4.74  | 11 - 39     | 10-40     | .04   | 1.46  |

Note. CB = Communication Barrier; GD = Group Discussion; Meet = Meetings; IC = Interpersonal Conversation; PS = Public Speaking; SE = Self Esteem.

Table 1 summarizes the reliability and descriptive statistics for Communication Barriers, its subscales (group discussion, meetings, interpersonal conversation, and public speaking), and self-esteem. The communication-related scales showed good to excellent internal

consistency ( $\alpha = .81 - .94$ ), while the Self-Esteem Scale demonstrated lower reliability ( $\alpha = .58$ ), suggesting caution in interpretation. All variables fell within their expected score ranges, and most showed near-normal distribution. Communication Barriers showed slight negative skew (-0.29), and Self-Esteem exhibited moderate positive kurtosis (1.46), indicating valid data for further analysis.

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables (N = 350)*

| Variables                    | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6 |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1 Communication Barriers     | -      |        |        |        |        |   |
| 2 Group Discussion           | .86**  | -      |        |        |        |   |
| 3 Meetings                   | .92**  | .75**  | -      |        |        |   |
| 4 Interpersonal Conversation | .90**  | .73**  | .79**  | -      |        |   |
| 5 Public Speaking            | .85**  | .60**  | .72**  | .71**  | -      |   |
| 6 Self Esteem                | -.52** | -.48** | -.46** | -.47** | -.43** | - |

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among Communication Barriers, its subcomponents (group discussion, meetings, interpersonal conversation, public speaking), self-esteem, and age. Strong and statistically significant positive correlations were found among all communication barrier subscales and the overall Communication Barriers score (ranging from  $r = .73$  to  $r = .92$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that individuals who have trouble in one area of communication tend to struggle across other domains as well.

For instance, Meetings showed the highest correlation with Communication Barriers, followed closely by Interpersonal Conversation and Group Discussion, demonstrating these are closely interconnected aspects of overall communication difficulties. In contrast, Self-Esteem showed significant negative correlations with all communication barrier variables (ranging from  $r = -.43$  to  $r = -.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that higher levels of communication barriers are associated with lower self-esteem among university students. Notably, the strongest negative correlation was between overall communication barriers and self-esteem ( $r = -.52$ ), suggesting that as students experience more communication difficulties, their self-perception and confidence tend to decrease. Age was found to have nonsignificant relationship with communication barrier variables, but a very weak positive correlation with Self-Esteem ( $r = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), implying that slightly older students may have marginally higher self-esteem levels.

Table 3: *Mean Differences of Communication Barrier Scale and Self-Esteem Along Gender (N = 350)*

| Variables | Male<br>(n = 179) |       | Female<br>(n = 171) |       | t(348) | p   | 95% CI |      | Cohen's<br>d |
|-----------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|--------|-----|--------|------|--------------|
|           | M                 | SD    | M                   | SD    |        |     | LL     | UL   |              |
| CB        | 76.75             | 15.78 | 90.03               | 17.06 | 7.56   | .00 | -16.73 | 9.82 | .81          |
| SE        | 25.72             | 4.32  | 21.33               | 4.10  | 9.75   | .00 | 3.50   | 5.27 | 1.04         |

Note. CB = Communication Barrier; SE = Self-Esteem.

The results indicate significant gender-based differences in both communication barriers and self-esteem among university students in Gilgit-Baltistan. Female students reported notably higher communication barriers than male students, with a large effect size, indicating that females face more obstacles in effective communication. On the other hand, male students demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-esteem compared to female students, with another large effect size. These findings suggest a clear gender disparity, where males tend to possess greater self-confidence while females encounter greater challenges in communication.

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicate significant differences in communication barriers among students from Baltistan, Gilgit, and Diamer divisions. The mean scores show that students from the Diamer division ( $M = 94.78$ ,  $SD = 11.43$ ) experience notably higher communication barriers compared to those from Baltistan ( $M = 80.75$ ,  $SD = 18.01$ ) and Gilgit ( $M = 79.58$ ,  $SD = 17.67$ ). The ANOVA yielded a statistically significant F-value of 22.59 with an effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) of .12, indicating a medium effect. Regarding self-esteem, significant differences were also found across the three divisions. Students from Diamer reported considerably lower self-esteem ( $M = 19.13$ ,  $SD = 4.53$ ) compared to students from Baltistan ( $M = 24.71$ ,  $SD = 3.53$ ) and Gilgit ( $M = 24.82$ ,  $SD = 4.49$ ). The F-value of 53.48 was highly significant, with an effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) of .24, reflecting a large effect.

## Discussion

The present study was based on symbolic interactionism and supported by Sociometer Theory, the Transactional Model of Communication, and Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance. It examined the relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem among university students of Gilgit-Baltistan, with a focus on gender, degree level, and regional differences. The results showed a significant negative relationship between communication barriers and self-esteem, supporting the first hypothesis that students who

experience more communication barriers tend to have lower self-esteem. Students who reported greater communication apprehension in group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking also reported lower levels of self-esteem. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that communication difficulties reduce feelings of social acceptance, confidence, and emotional validation, which are important for developing a positive self-concept. Communication is not only important for academic success but also for identity formation and social inclusion. When students struggle to communicate in unfamiliar languages, they may feel isolated, less competent, and excluded from academic environments. These findings support Sociometer Theory, which proposes that self-esteem reflects an individual's perception of social acceptance and belonging.

Beyond its contribution to understanding students in Gilgit-Baltistan, this study adds to the broader literature on communication barriers and self-esteem among linguistically marginalized populations ([Bashir & Batool, 2021](#); [Khan & Abbas, 2022](#)). The findings are relevant to multilingual educational settings across South Asia and other developing regions where students from minority language backgrounds must adapt to dominant academic languages. The study also expands the application of Symbolic Interactionism and Sociometer Theory in non-Western contexts, contributing to a more culturally diverse understanding of communication and social psychology ([Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)). Furthermore, the combination of communication apprehension and self-esteem measures in a regional sample provides a useful framework for future researchers interested in examining psycholinguistic inequalities in other underrepresented populations ([Hassan et al., 2024](#)).

The findings also revealed important gender differences. Female students reported higher communication barriers and lower self-esteem than male students. These results support the third hypothesis, which proposed that female students would experience greater communication barriers and lower self-esteem compared to male students. Cultural and societal norms in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan may help explain these differences ([Coates, 2015](#)). Females are often encouraged to be less outspoken, particularly in formal and mixed-gender settings, which may increase communication anxiety and limit participation in social and academic activities. Such experiences can negatively affect confidence and self-worth ([Mruk, 2006](#)). Many female students are also among the first women in their families to pursue higher education and may face social restrictions, limited support, and additional family responsibilities, which can further

influence their personal development. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have shown how gender-related expectations and social comparisons contribute to lower self-esteem among women ([Mehmood & Hassan, 2013](#); [Zafar et al., 2020](#)).

It is important to note that the third hypothesis focused on comparing communication barriers and self-esteem between male and female students. While female students reported both higher communication barriers and lower self-esteem, the present study does not establish a direct causal relationship between these variables. Since the data were collected at one point in time and analyzed using group comparisons, it cannot be concluded that communication barriers directly caused lower self-esteem among females. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the context of gender socialization, cultural expectations, and institutional challenges rather than as evidence of a causal process. Future studies should use mediation analysis to examine whether communication barriers explain the relationship between gender and self-esteem.

One of the most important findings of this study was the regional variation among students. Students from Diamer division reported the highest communication barriers and the lowest self-esteem compared to students from Gilgit and Baltistan divisions. These findings support the second hypothesis, which predicted that students from Diamer would experience greater communication barriers and lower self-esteem than students from other divisions. The results may reflect differences in educational opportunities, language exposure, and social conditions ([Baig & Amin, 2024](#); [Liu & Wang, 2018](#); [Zulfiqar & Rasheed, 2022](#)). Diamer is generally considered less developed in terms of educational resources and is characterized by more conservative social norms ([Quratulain et al., 2024](#)). Students from this region often encounter difficulties when entering academic environments where Urdu and English are the dominant languages. They may also experience cultural adjustment challenges, feelings of isolation, and stress when adapting to new academic and social expectations ([Young & Schartner, 2014](#)). Previous research has similarly highlighted linguistic insecurity, cultural transitions, and limited educational exposure as challenges faced by students from Diamer ([Hassan et al., 2024](#); [Sufiya et al., 2024](#)).

In the present study, birthplace was used as an indicator of regional background because information about participants' primary and secondary schooling locations was not available. However, birthplace alone does not necessarily mean that participants completed their early education in the same region. Some students may have attended schools outside Gilgit-Baltistan, which limits the certainty of

conclusions drawn from regional comparisons. Future studies should include information about participants' schooling history to better understand how educational environments influence communication barriers and self-esteem (Saleem & Mahmood, 2019; Liu & Wang, 2018).

The findings are consistent with symbolic interactionism, which suggests that self-concept develops through social interactions and the feedback individuals receive from others. Students who regularly face communication difficulties may receive less positive feedback and fewer opportunities for participation, leading to feelings of inadequacy (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Mruk, 2006). The Transactional Model of Communication also helps explain how differences in language and culture can reduce understanding between individuals and create communication challenges (Lunenburg, 2010). Similarly, Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance is especially relevant in modern educational settings, where language difficulties can increase psychological distance between students and instructors, reducing confidence and negatively affecting self-esteem (Berge, 2013).

The relatively low reliability of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in this study requires careful interpretation. Although the scale has been widely validated across many cultures, previous research has shown that reliability can vary across different populations and translated versions. One possible reason is the presence of both positively and negatively worded items, which may create confusion among respondents who are less familiar with such response formats. Cultural factors, including differences in self-expression and response styles among students from conservative and collectivist backgrounds, may also have influenced the consistency of responses (Harter, 1999; Mruk, 2006). Despite these limitations, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale remains one of the most widely used and validated measures of global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; Orth & Robins, 2014). Future research should consider adapting or developing culturally appropriate self-esteem measures for students in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for universities and policymakers to address communication and psychological challenges faced by students. Providing language support services, cultural orientation programs, mentoring opportunities, and psychological counseling can help reduce communication barriers and improve self-esteem, particularly among female students and those from disadvantaged regions such as Diamer.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The study relied on self-report measures, which may be affected by response biases such as social desirability and inaccurate self-perceptions. Therefore, participants' responses may not fully reflect their actual experiences. In addition, the cross-sectional research design limited the ability to establish causal relationships between communication barriers and self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale demonstrated relatively low internal consistency in the present sample, suggesting that self-esteem may not have been measured with complete reliability. Cultural differences in interpreting scale items may have influenced participants' responses. Another limitation concerns the measurement of regional background. Birthplace was used as an indicator of participants' regional identity; however, information regarding where participants completed their primary and secondary education was not collected. As a result, conclusions regarding regional differences should be interpreted cautiously. Furthermore, socio-economic status was not included in the study despite its potential influence on both communication barriers and self-esteem. Finally, the sample was limited to university students from selected institutions, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to all young adults in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Future research should include students from a wider range of universities and geographical regions to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers are encouraged to employ mixed method approaches by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of students' communication experiences and self-esteem development. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how communication barriers and self-esteem influence one another over time and to explore possible causal relationships. Future studies should also investigate whether communication barriers mediate the relationship between gender and self-esteem using mediation and structural equation modeling techniques. Researchers should consider collecting detailed educational background information, including the location of participants' primary and secondary schooling, to better understand regional differences. Additional variables such as socio-economic status, academic stress, social support, digital literacy, language proficiency, and institutional climate should also be examined as potential predictors of communication barriers and self-esteem. Given the higher communication barriers and lower self-esteem observed among female students and students from Diamer division, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of communication skills training, language support programs, mentoring

initiatives, and psychological counseling services designed for these vulnerable groups. Finally, culturally appropriate self-esteem measures with stronger reliability should be developed or adapted for use among students in Gilgit-Baltistan.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study highlight the critical need for universities, especially those serving students from Gilgit-Baltistan, to address communication barriers as they significantly impact students' self-esteem. Language support programs, such as remedial Urdu and English classes and public speaking workshops, should be implemented to assist students struggling with academic communication. Faculty should also adopt inclusive teaching strategies that accommodate linguistic and cultural diversity, ensuring a supportive classroom environment. The study further reveals that female students and those from the Diamer division face greater communication challenges and lower self-esteem. This points to the need for gender-sensitive initiatives, such as leadership training and safe communication spaces for women, and region-specific support programs, including orientation sessions and academic mentoring for students from underdeveloped areas. Moreover, the study supports theoretical frameworks like Symbolic Interactionism and Sociometer Theory, emphasizing that improving students' communication skills can enhance their social inclusion and self-worth. At the policy level, educational institutions and government bodies should invest in equitable access, digital resources, and culturally responsive education policies to reduce disparities and promote student well-being across diverse backgrounds.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that communication barriers significantly and negatively affect the self-esteem of university students from Gilgit-Baltistan. These students face unique challenges rooted in linguistic diversity, cultural conservatism, limited educational resources, and psychological apprehensions. With languages such as Shina, Balti, and Burushaski commonly spoken, and Urdu or English often being second or third languages, students from Gilgit-Baltistan frequently struggle to adapt to the communication demands of higher education environments. These difficulties lead to feelings of inadequacy, lower confidence, and reduced academic participation, ultimately lowering self-esteem. Moreover, cultural transitions, such as adapting to co-educational institutions or more open social norms can intensify communication anxiety. The findings highlight an urgent

need for universities to adopt inclusive and culturally responsive strategies, including language support, mentorship, and psychological services. By acknowledging the specific barriers faced by university students from Gilgit-Baltistan, educators and policymakers can create more equitable learning environments that enhance both academic success and emotional well-being.

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