

Navigating Communication Barriers: Teaching Assistants' Miscommunication Experiences in U.S. Undergraduate Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) play a critical role in undergraduate education in U.S. classrooms. GTAs, or Teaching Assistants (TAs), are often responsible for teaching introductory courses, leading laboratory sessions, grading assignments, and facilitating discussions during their jobs and study. Considering the number of undergraduate students in U.S. classrooms, GTAs are increasingly involved in instructional roles. This study examines the experiences of GTAs regarding miscommunication with undergraduate students in their role as an instructor. Through in-depth interviews with TAs from three U.S. universities, this study identifies key communication challenges, including unclear instructions, linguistic barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and instructional ambiguity. The findings provide a comprehensive insight into the communication challenges GTAs face, highlighting the necessity for improved communication strategies in the classroom. Additionally, this study will contribute to the enhancement of TA training programs so that TAs effectively identify, address, and resolve miscommunication with students in various circumstances.

Keywords: Miscommunication, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Instructional ambiguity, Virtual miscommunication, Undergraduate.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States has witnessed a steady increase in student enrollment over the years, considering the undergraduate educational level. According to the college enrollment statistics, approximately 19.6 million students are pursuing higher education, with 16.6 million enrolled in undergraduate programs (Hanson, 2022). U.S. universities employ Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from both domestic and international students to support undergraduate instruction and conduct introductory courses. GTAs are critical in facilitating classroom discussions, grading assignments, conducting laboratory sessions, and providing instructional support. However, they often face challenges due to their relative inexperience as instructors despite their enthusiasm and commitment to their jobs (Arshavskaya, 2015). With over 125,100 GTAs currently employed across the United States (Whittington, 2020), their role in shaping undergraduate education is increasingly significant. However, one of the primary difficulties they encounter is miscommunication with students, which can impede the learning process and create ambiguity in academic interactions (Arshavskaya, 2015). Graduate Teaching Assistants, also called Teaching Assistants (TAs), typically begin teaching with minimal prior experience and learn instructional strategies while performing their duties. Effective communication is essential in ensuring students understand course expectations, assignments, and instructional content when the instructor conducts the classes and labs or interacts outside the classroom. However, due to inexperience, linguistic barriers, or differences in instructional styles, TAs may struggle with conveying their messages clearly, leading to misunderstandings.

Existing research has primarily focused on the experiences of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in U.S. classrooms, highlighting linguistic and cultural challenges as key sources of communication issues (Barshefsky, 2015; Chiang, 2009). However, little attention has been given to the communication challenges faced by both domestic and international GTAs. Moreover, the current body of research does not sufficiently explore how TAs navigate and resolve these communication difficulties over time (Barshefsky, 2015; Chiang, 2009; Barshefsky, 2015). This study addresses this gap by examining GTAs' experiences with miscommunication in undergraduate classrooms, including office hours and virtual interactions with the students. Specifically, it examines how GTAs recognize, navigate, and adapt to communication challenges through a trial-and-error learning process. Gaining insight into these experiences is essential, as TAs are pivotal in shaping undergraduate students' academic development and engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the study focuses on the miscommunication of TAs in the undergraduate classroom, it is essential to explore the context of miscommunication. Miscommunication can be labeled as a misunderstanding, any problem in speech production and reception (Dascal, 1999), inconsistency between communicative effects and intentions, or communication breakdown (Clyne, 1994). Gass and Varonis (1991) consider both misunderstanding and incomplete understanding. Gass and Varonis's definition is very relevant to defining miscommunication in this study. When GTAs interact with undergraduate students, if they cannot deliver the message correctly or students fail to understand the instructors' message, that could lead to ambiguity in the meaning of the conversation. Ambiguity in the messages leads to the student's incomplete understanding, misunderstanding, or problematic understanding. In this circumstance, it is important to explore how to deal with these issues of misunderstanding, as TAs are shaping the academic experiences of undergraduate students. The study covered the miscommunication TAs face inside and outside the classroom when they perform their responsibilities. GTAs responsibilities are to teach basic introductory undergraduate courses, facilitate a discussion section or tutorial, lab classes, grading assignments, exams, or projects, and hold weekly office hours (Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants | Electrical and Computer Engineering, n.d.).

Clarifying messages and expectations and establishing regular communication to avoid pitfalls are important. Due to a lack of experience or being a novice teacher, they encounter problems or challenges in ensuring effective communication. Scholars have conducted many studies to explore the experiences of TAs (Barshefsky, 2015), the challenges and communication problems (Chiang, 2009) they face, and the experiences of misunderstanding while interacting with their students. However, most previous studies focused on ITAs' miscommunication experiences and challenges. Because of the lack of studies to explore the experiences of TAs, it is difficult to conclude whether ITAs and TAs face the same kind of common challenges and problems in the classroom (Chiang, 2009; Alberts, 2008 & Barshefsky, 2015). However, there is a similarity between the ITAs and TAs in that they learn the trial-and-error process when they instruct courses at the undergraduate level. Some of the previous studies could be helpful to understand the challenges instructors face inside and outside the classroom. Chiang (2009) conducted a study focused on the linguistic and cultural sources of communication problems. It is based on several office-hour interactions between international teaching assistants and American college students. Chiang's studies (2009) show that problematic understanding can be managed through the communicative procedures of correction and prevention. So, it is understandable that linguistic and cultural-related miscommunication could be reduced through correction and building mutual understanding when it is required. Lin & Yi (1997) explored miscommunication concerning classroom management issues, and they identified that due to a lack of information about the U.S. grading and testing system, ITAs face problems that lead them to feel anxiety and frustration.

In a study, Barshefsky (2015) focused on ITAs' experiences in U.S. classrooms and their implications for practice. In the classroom, TAs face various unexpected activities that sometimes lead to miscommunication between TAs and students. According to the study, ITAs claimed that many U.S. undergraduate students do not review the course syllabus before the class meetings, are not prepared for assigned class activities, do not

clean their desks and equipment after a laboratory session, do not pay attention during the class, and do not take notes from the board (Barshefsky, 2015). In addition, the study also showed that the ITAs face many other challenges, including linguistic, instructional, and cultural challenges. The study portrayed some of the challenges instructors face in the classroom, which could also be some of the communication challenges for all the TAs. For example, domestic TAs may also face linguistic and cultural challenges, but the context and nature of the challenges could be different. Before starting the job, their universities offer instructors training to handle classroom management issues, cultural challenges, and communication problems they face to perform their responsibilities. Alberts (2008) worked on the Challenges and opportunities of foreign-born instructors in the classroom. It shows that many students, parents, and legislators are concerned about their impact on students' educational achievement. Students might achieve maximum outcomes if they correctly understand the content or messages covered because of cultural differences and language issues. The instructors should be able to accurately display and teach the information in a way they would understand. To deal with problematic understanding, Alberts (2008) came up with some recommendations, and there are encouraging students to raise their hands if they do not understand, make sure that they speak slowly, prepare extensive notes that the students can read on the blackboard or screen, assign 'language police' students who are responsible for correcting TAs with words that are unknown to the instructors. Though Albert's recommendations were focused on international teaching assistants, these recommendations could be applied to all instructors. The recommendations to improve classroom interactions might reduce miscommunication between undergraduate students and TAs. This is because most of the recommendations are related to effective communication strategies. Overall, after examining the studies mentioned above, it is evident that most of the research has explored the challenges and methods to address them, identifying communication issues, challenges, and opportunities for international teaching assistants. There is a knowledge gap regarding miscommunication between TAs and undergraduates, as this area receives little attention from scholars. With the increasing involvement of undergraduate students, the contributions from many domestic and international instructors are growing over time. TAs generally shape the educational experiences of undergraduate students, learning through trial and error during their journey. However, little is known about their experiences, what they attempt, and how they play out when faced with challenges and communication problems. So, the study aims to focus on TAs' experiences in general, their perception of miscommunication, the types of miscommunications they face, uses of language by the students, virtual miscommunications, and how they resolve miscommunication. To better understand these issues, the following research questions have been developed:

RQ1: What kind of communication-related difficulties do TAs experience in the classroom?

RQ2: What types of miscommunications do TAs encounter with undergraduate students?

RQ3: How do TAs resolve miscommunication or attempt to prevent future communication breakdowns?

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) serves as a relevant theoretical framework for understanding miscommunication in this study, as it examines how individuals adjust their communication styles to facilitate understanding in social interactions (Giles, 1973). Considering the ideas of this theory, speakers modify their language, tone, and nonverbal cues based on their conversational partners to reduce social distance and enhance comprehension. However, miscommunication can occur when these adjustments fail due to linguistic barriers, cultural differences, or mismatched expectations. In the context of this study, GTAs, as novice instructors, may struggle to adapt their communication styles effectively to meet undergraduate students' needs, leading to unclear instructions, misunderstandings, and instructional ambiguity. CAT provides a lens to analyze how GTAs recognize and manage communication breakdowns, whether through convergence (aligning their speech patterns with students) or divergence (maintaining distinct instructional styles). By applying CAT, this study explores how GTAs consciously or unconsciously

adjust their communication and how these adaptations influence their ability to resolve or exacerbate miscommunication in academic settings.

Additionally, the situated learning theory (SLT) provides a relevant theoretical framework for this study, emphasizing learning as a social process that occurs through participation in authentic, real-world contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The learning experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) can be examined through the lens of this theory, which posits that learning is inherently social and occurs through active participation within a given community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theory also emphasizes that knowledge acquisition is context-dependent, shaped by authentic, informal, and often unintentional interactions within a specific environment (Situated Learning – NIU, n.d.). Developed in the early 1990s by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, SLT suggests that individuals learn not in isolation but through engagement with their surroundings, drawing on prior knowledge and adapting to situational demands. Within this framework, learning is viewed as a process of enculturation, where individuals progressively acquire a particular community's discourse, values, and practices (Ashikaga, 2015). Stein (1998) further underscores that situated learning extends beyond formal instruction, as knowledge is grounded in everyday actions and primarily transfers to analogous situations. Moreover, learning accumulates declarative and procedural knowledge and involves problem-solving, critical thinking, and social interaction within real-world contexts. This theoretical framework is particularly applicable to the present study, as it provides a lens through which to examine how GTAs navigate miscommunication challenges in undergraduate classrooms, office hours, and virtual interactions. As novice instructors, GTAs engage in a trial-and-error learning process, continuously refining their communication strategies in response to classroom dynamics. Their teaching experiences serve as situated learning contexts where they develop professional competencies through practical engagement, reflection, and adaptation. Additionally, Ashikaga (2015) argues that novice teachers experience multiple dimensions of professional development through situated learning, reinforcing the relevance of this framework in understanding how GTAs manage and learn from communication difficulties. By applying SLT to the study of GTAs' experiences with miscommunication, this research aims to elucidate how these instructors identify, address, and learn from communication breakdowns in their teaching roles. Understanding their learning processes within these contexts offers valuable insights into pedagogical development and the broader socialization of GTAs within academic environments.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) regarding miscommunication with undergraduate students. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring the meanings individuals assign to their experiences within their contexts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach is considered subjective because it relies on interpreting contextual data, which provides valuable insights into participants' perspectives (Thomson, 2011), which is very important for this study. In-depth interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this study. This technique was chosen as it allows for an open and flexible exploration of participants' perspectives, with the researcher approaching the interviews with an open mind and a willingness to learn from the data (Court, 2018). The interviews focused on understanding the specific challenges and insights that GTAs experience when communicating with undergraduate students.

Participants

In this study, eight Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from three universities in the United States were interviewed. Four of the participants were male, and four were female. The participants were selected through purposive sampling for this study, which is convenient when specific criteria need to be met for inclusion. The criteria for inclusion were that the participants must have taught at least one semester as a GTA for a COM 101 course and must have undergone the university's basic instructional training. In this study, confidentiality and participant identity protection were prioritized. So, considering the participants'

privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and the names were Helena, Sara, John, Mary, Michel, Mark, Emily, and Jordan. This step was essential in safeguarding the participants' anonymity.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately 40 minutes each. The interviews were guided by a set of questions informed by the literature on qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This semi-structured approach allowed flexibility to explore themes as they emerged during the conversation while ensuring that the core topics were covered. In this study, all the interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis (Schroeder & Modaff, 2018). The transcription process involved careful attention to accurately capture the participants' words and expressions, which was integral to understanding their experiences and insights.

Data Analysis

In this study stage, thematic analysis has been used to analyze interview data. The analysis followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to immerse in the data and identify recurring patterns so that the study correctly finds the themes. The transcripts were divided into topics, then coded and sorted into themes and subthemes. This process allowed the researcher to organize and interpret the data in a way that highlighted the key issues related to miscommunication between GTAs and undergraduate students. Informed consent has been ensured before conducting the interviews. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood how their data would be used and the steps taken to protect their confidentiality. Participants were assured that their personal information and responses would remain anonymous, and pseudonyms were used to report results.

FINDINGS

After analyzing the primary data, this section identifies three significant themes: challenges in the classroom, experiences of miscommunication, and strategies to address miscommunication.

Difficulties in the Classroom

Teaching Assistants face various kinds of difficulties in the classroom. One of the significant difficulties in the classroom is dealing with "placeholder" students. One of the TAs stated, "There are students who come in and go to class, but they do not like processing the information much; they are just like a placeholder." If the students do not pay attention in class, it leads them not to understand classroom instructions and lecture content properly. Peer talking in the classroom is another major challenge that TAs encounter. It is problematic for the TAs to deliver the lecture properly. In Mark's words:

You are teaching, and some other students are talking to each other, which can distract me as an instructor sometimes. Sometimes, people walk into class, come and sit there, and it is as though they don't pay attention to what you are saying.

Apart from the above-mentioned issues, some students show flippant attitudes regarding assignments and speeches, sometimes embarrassing the instructors. One of the TAs acknowledged that one of her colleagues once faced a difficult situation where one of the students asked the instructor to use disrespectful language to allow the student to speak even after the deadline was over. The language said, "You should be able to know, let me do my speech whatever, or I should be able to turn this whenever I like." So, this kind of language is quite disrespectful to the instructor as the student tries forcing them to allow the speech. In addition, TAs also have to deal with some students who have been absent from the class for a long time and suddenly show up and request to be allowed to submit all the missed assignments and be given the opportunity to deliver the

speeches. Then, the student disappears again. So, it is very challenging for the TAs to contact the students as they are out of contact.

Miscommunication Experiences

From the analysis of the interviews, it was revealed that miscommunication is a persistent challenge in interactions between teaching assistants (TAs) and undergraduate students. Encountering communication difficulties is common for the TAs, which ranged from minor misunderstandings to more significant obstacles that impacted classroom engagement and learning outcomes. Miscommunications arise from various factors, including differences in expectations, language barriers, and the mode of communication used. From the analysis of the experiences of TAs, four primary categories of miscommunication have emerged:

Instructional Ambiguity

Course instructors may sometimes struggle to communicate instructional content effectively in the classroom. Lack of clarity or lack of understanding frequently arises both inside and outside the classroom when students have difficulty understanding lecture instructions, group activity guidelines, assignment requirements, or speech expectations.

This kind of confusion between TAs and students can result from unclear explanations by the TA or a lack of attentiveness from students, often leading to misunderstandings that require additional clarification. As a result, students may feel uncertain about assignment requirements or classroom activities. For instance, Emily, one of the TAs, explained:

"Most of the questions I receive from students are clarification messages about assignments or speeches—what I might be looking for in particular, or specific requirements they want to ensure they are fulfilling."

Additionally, international undergraduate students may face additional challenges in understanding classroom instructions, particularly regarding group activities. Sara shared an example of how one of her students struggled with group placement:

"One day, I assigned one of my students (of Asian descent) to a particular group, but she couldn't find another member of that group."

Such incidents highlight how instructional ambiguity can lead to confusion and hinder students from meeting expectations in assignments, speeches, and classroom discussions. Apart from the issue arising due to a lack of detailed instructions, cultural or linguistic differences may further complicate comprehension at other times.

Linguistic Barriers

Linguistic challenges contribute significantly to miscommunication between TAs and students. Some undergraduate students use informal language, speak too quickly, misuse words during speeches, or incorporate slang and unfamiliar expressions in conversations. These factors can make it difficult for TAs to grasp students' intended messages fully. John, an international TA, described his experience:

"I may not fully understand when they speak very fast... I usually understand them unless, of course, they use typical American terms. If it's plain English, then I am able to comprehend it."

Notably, this issue is not one-sided. An American TA pointed out that TAs themselves may sometimes speak too quickly, making it harder for students—especially international students—to follow along. The language barrier is particularly challenging for non-native English-speaking students. Sara recalled one such instance:

"I have a student whose first language is not English. She is an extremely dedicated student—she tries hard. But the language barrier is a big issue. I think I spent about 15 minutes after class one day trying to explain how groups work."

These examples illustrate how linguistic differences, ranging from speech pace to unfamiliar vocabulary, can create obstacles to clear communication in the classroom, even when TAs have conversations outside of the class as well.

Cultural Issues

Cultural barriers pose challenges for TAs when delivering lectures and providing examples, as students may struggle to understand references outside their own cultural context, and it happens for both domestic and international TAs. Miscommunication occurs when students fail to grasp the intended message due to unfamiliarity with cultural norms or expressions. One such issue involves language use in the classroom, particularly swearing. Michel shared his experience:

"I have a student who swears occasionally, though it usually doesn't happen frequently."

Although the instructor did not find the swearing offensive, they noted that students could express themselves more effectively by choosing alternative words that convey honesty in a more appropriate manner. This highlights how cultural expectations around language differ and how students might not always be aware of more professional or respectful communication styles in an academic setting. Cultural barriers are not limited to international TAs; all TAs, regardless of their background, encounter cultural differences in the classroom. One TA mentioned that students sometimes use slang or unfamiliar expressions that can be difficult to understand, especially due to generational gaps. The study finds another common cultural challenge that happens when students refer to campus-specific issues or aspects of campus culture. TAs, particularly those who are new to the institution or from different cultural backgrounds, may struggle to fully understand the context of these references. Similarly, international students may experience difficulties adjusting to classroom norms in the U.S. education system. For instance, one TA pointed out that in some Asian classrooms, instructors do not move too much in the class while conducting the lecture, whereas in the U.S., professors often move around the classroom. This contrast in teaching styles can contribute to initial misunderstandings and adjustments for students and TAs when teaching assistants from different cultural backgrounds.

Virtual Miscommunication

Email communication is a frequent source of miscommunication between students and TAs. Many TAs reported receiving a high volume of emails from students, some of which were unclear or lacked necessary details. Michael described a recurring issue:

"The biggest miscommunication that I might get through email is when might ask for like extensions on an assignment or anything like that when they have not submitted an assignment where the deadline has already passed... they are not very specific; it's a lot of generalized as to why they might not have been able to submit the assignment on the time. So, that level of ambiguity...doesn't allow me to generate a response sometimes. So, sometimes I ask for clarification, like why things are going on."

Beyond vague requests, TAs also encounter difficulties with spelling and punctuation errors in student emails, which can make understanding the intended message more challenging. Poorly structured or unclear emails lead TAs to ask for further clarification, leading to delays in communication with the students. Even sometimes, they exchange emails for urgent clarification. Technological barriers also contribute to virtual miscommunication, particularly in hybrid or High-Flex learning environments. Sara reflected on her first experience teaching in High-Flex mode, emphasizing the challenges of mediated communication:

"My first teaching experience was very different because it was mostly online. There were a lot of communication barriers—students didn't always have reliable internet access. When I first started working with undergraduate students, communication was difficult and challenging, largely due to our situation during the pandemic."

The shift to virtual learning created additional obstacles for both students and instructors, as connectivity issues and the lack of face-to-face interactions made communication less effective. These challenges highlight the importance of clear, structured, and detailed communication in virtual settings to minimize misunderstandings.

Solutions to overcome miscommunication

TAs follow many strategies to solve their communication problems with undergraduate students. Sometimes, these strategies might vary from one instructor to another. One major solution Sara mentioned is to clarify, repeat, and show information in multiple ways to reduce ambiguity. In John's opinion:

To avoid (miscommunication), I think clarity is really important. Repetition of instructions shows information in multiple different ways just because everyone's learning style is so different. So, as I said, to have a hands-on activity, maybe a video or maybe a discussion question, and just presenting that information. Letting students know that I keep my PowerPoints for them for notes and things like that, I think, helps reduce those miscommunications.

Besides, this strategy uses concrete and specific language, which also plays an important role. Specifically, when communication happens online, there is a possibility for an incomplete understanding. So, using concrete and specific language helps reduce ambiguity and communication breakdown. In addition to this, Sara also shared that building emotional rapport with the students is very effective as it helps students stay connected with the instructor. They also feel free to communicate with TAs when needed. Sara stated that:

I think...we can reduce miscommunication even emotionally. It's not just about the information; it's about the emotion they feel if they feel like their instructors are supporting them. That's going to reduce that miscommunication and make them more willing to listen and reach out and clarify.

Another TA, Michael, focuses on speaking directly to reduce miscommunication if he is able to identify any, tries to lower the level of ambiguity as much as possible, and tries to be explicit about the message. Ambiguity is a major reason leading to miscommunication between the TAs and students. That is why Michael always tries to be more explicit about the text and message when it is all about instructions, exchanging messages, or email communication. Michael stated that:

I guess lowering the level of ambiguity or lowering the level of uncertainty. When you're communicating with other people, I guess the biggest thing is just to be concise and simple. And don't leave things open to interpretation. Speak directly about what you mean, and what you're hoping the outcome to be, and there will be less miscommunication.

So, besides reducing the level of ambiguity it is also important to not leave the message that led to open interpretation. The open interpretation may compromise the meaning of the messages. Another TA, Helena, strives to communicate clearly and clarify the messages to minimize miscommunication. Because of a slightly different pronunciation as an international student, she realized that sometimes many students face difficulty understanding some words, such as 'water', the way he pronounced them. In his country, they follow British English pronunciation, which is sometimes slightly different from American pronunciation. To overcome this challenge, one of the strategies she follows is to repeat the messages if needed and speak in a slower way in order to make sure everyone understands the messages that have been delivered. As an international TA, she encounters many linguistic and cultural barriers because she lacks knowledge about the U.S. culture and environment. So, the internet is a greater saver for him. Whenever she hears any unfamiliar

words and terms, he asks the students to explain the meaning of the term, or most of the time, she takes help from the internet to overcome linguistic barriers and cultural barriers. She stated that:

I quickly look up the word on the Internet or in the dictionary and then find its meaning so that I can understand it.

Overall, miscommunication is considered part of our conversation, and it happens all the time between the instructor and undergraduate students. So, reducing the level of miscommunication with the students is a good way to make learning more effective and ensure proper learning environments inside and outside of the classroom. TAs experience various challenges in the classroom and encounter miscommunication as well when they engage with the students in conversation. So, avoiding and reducing the following are some of the strategies to encounter these situations. Some of the mentionable strategies are to clarify, repeat, and show information in multiple ways to reduce ambiguity, be explicit and speak directly, lower the level of ambiguity as much as possible, communicate clearly and clarify the messages, use concrete and specific language, ask them directly about the issues, taking help of the internet to explore unfamiliar terms or words from the students and building emotional response and rapport building with the students to build up good relationship and understanding with the students.

DISCUSSIONS

The study's findings help us understand overall instructional communication in the classroom and how TAs, in general, deal and negotiate with problems. The study portrayed how miscommunication happens in the classroom, leading us to understand the general instructional communication at the school in the context of the U.S.A. In the background section, we identified that previous teaching mainly focuses on ITAs. Chiang (2019) discussed linguistic and cultural issues, and Arshavskaya (2015) discussed instructional problems. It was assumed that ITAs might not share the same perceptions or topics regarding the classroom as American TAs. However, the study's findings identified some commonalities that all TAs face in school. The study found a bigger picture of instructional communication in areas such as ambiguity, linguistic barriers, cultural issues, etc. There are some similarities in nature and types of challenges and problems both domestic and international TAs face. For example, cultural barriers are one of the significant issues that all TAs, in general, face in the classroom. However, context and nature could be different for domestic and international TAs. International TAs encounter cultural barriers to international instructors because they do not have enough knowledge about the U.S.A. culture. In contrast, domestic TAs may encounter cultural barriers because of students from diverse cultures or lack knowledge about campus culture. However, TAs, regardless of domestic or international, acknowledge that it is a common barrier for all. Cultural barriers are common because America is considered one of the world's most multicultural countries, accommodating people from diverse cultures. The study led us to think about defining some areas like cultural barriers, linguistic issues, and instructional ambiguity.

Age is another factor that creates miscommunication among instructors and students. We understand that there is a small age gap between TAs and undergraduate students. Most of the TAs belong to millennials and Generation Z. In contrast, most of the regular undergraduate students are below Generation Z. So, they tend to be closer to age than undergraduate students, but that does not mean that there is no communication problem between them. Understandably, a smaller age gap allows individuals to become more familiar with updated culture, contemporary slang, and popular terms. However, being younger can also lead to some communication issues. The present study found that some students exhibit a flippant attitude towards assignments and presentations because they are nearly the same age, sometimes creating embarrassing situations for the instructors. So, it is evident that undergraduate students are sometimes not treated the way TAs expect from students. This study helps us think more about that and challenges our assumptions. The study is significant for another issue; Lin and Yi (1997) stated that the lack of information about the U.S. classroom creates communication problems. The study argued that domestic TAs have enough information and knowledge about the U.S. classroom, but they still face issues and challenges in the school. So, lack of

information about U.S. classrooms could be one of the contributing factors, but many other factors lead to miscommunication in the classroom. So, the study is significant for identifying why and how miscommunication happens in the school and how TAs, in general, negotiate with the issues to shape the educational experience of undergraduate students. The study highlights that the way TAs negotiate and learn through a trial-and-error process helps us to come up with some recommendations, for example, clarify, repeat, and show information in multiple ways to reduce ambiguity, lowering the level of ambiguity as much as possible, using concrete and specific language, emotional response, and rapport building with the students, etc. could help all TAs to deal with the communication problems as a guideline to become a better instructor. In addition, the overall experiences of TAs covered in the study will help prospective TAs have a good understanding of dealing with their students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges of miscommunication that graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) encounter in their classrooms. The findings illustrate the importance of understanding the broader context of instructional communication, shedding light on instructional ambiguity, logistical barriers, and cultural differences. The experiences shared by TAs show how they learn from their mistakes, improving their teaching skills through a trial-and-error process. The recommendations provided by the participants offer practical guidance for reducing communication issues between instructors and students. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the critical role of effective communication in creating a positive and productive learning environment, and it suggests that addressing miscommunication through strategies like more precise instructions, more straightforward language, and stronger emotional connections can lead to better teaching outcomes.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations should be considered. The sample size was relatively small, consisting of only eight participants, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across GTAs. Additionally, the study focused solely on three universities in the United States, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or countries. The reliance on self-reported data from GTAs may also introduce bias, as participants may have been influenced by social desirability or recall bias limitations. Future research with a more extensive and more diverse sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the communication challenges GTAs face.

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