

## The sociological approaches interpreting the communicative relationship between the professor and the university student

المقاربات السوسولوجية المفسرة للعلاقة التواصلية بين الأستاذ والطالب الجامعي

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Receipt date : 01/07/2025

Acceptance Date : 28/10/2025

Published date : 07/12/2025

**Abstract:** This research paper examines the communicative relationship between university professors and students as a multidimensional phenomenon within the sociology of education. Communicative relationships are essential for building trust, strengthening social bonds, and promoting mutual understanding within society. Effective communication supports cooperation, reduces conflicts, and enhances collective problem-solving. It also enables individuals to share ideas, express needs, and participate actively in community life, contributing to a more cohesive and resilient society. Rather than viewing this relationship as a mere conduit for the transmission of knowledge, the study conceptualizes it as a dynamic social interaction shaped by subjective experiences, institutional structures, and symbolic authority. The paper seeks to answer the guiding research question: How do different sociological approaches contribute to explaining the dynamics of the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student? Employing a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on critical analysis of foundational sociological theories-including communicative action, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology-the paper not only elucidates the theoretical underpinnings of these approaches but also compares their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the analysis is anchored with an applied example from the Algerian university context. The findings highlight the value of methodological plurality in understanding professor-student interaction and offer implications for educational practice and policy.

- **Keywords:** Sociological approaches, communicative relationship, professor, university student, interpretive sociology

**المُلخَص:** تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية العلاقة التواصلية بين الأستاذ الجامعي والطالب بوصفها ظاهرة متعددة الأبعاد ضمن علم اجتماع التربية. فبدلاً من النظر إلى هذه العلاقة كقناة لنقل المعرفة فحسب، تُقَدِّم الدراسة تصورها لها باعتبارها تفاعلاً اجتماعياً دينامياً يتشكّل من خلال التجارب الذاتية، والبُنى

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المؤسسية، والسلطة الرمزية. وتسعى الورقة للإجابة عن سؤال البحث الرئيس: كيف تُسهم المقاربات السوسيولوجية المختلفة في تفسير ديناميكيات العلاقة التواصلية بين الأستاذ الجامعي والطالب؟ تعتمد الدراسة منهجا نوعيا تفسيريا قائما على التحليل النقدي للنظريات السوسيولوجية الأساسية، بما في ذلك نظرية الفعل التواصل، والتفاعلية الرمزية، والفينومينولوجيا، والإثنوميثودولوجيا، حيث لا تكتفي بتوضيح الأسس النظرية لهذه المقاربات، بل تُقارن أيضًا بين نقاط قوتها وضعفها. كما يركز التحليل على مثال تطبيقي من البيئة الجامعية الجزائرية، مما يُضفي بُعدًا واقعيًا على الدراسة، وتُبرز النتائج أهمية التعدد المنهجي في فهم تفاعلات الأستاذ والطالب، كما تُقدّم دلالات عملية تسهم في تحسين الممارسة التربوية وصياغة السياسات التعليمية والكيفية التي يُنتج بها الفاعلون الاجتماعيون النظام التربوي من خلال ممارساتهم الاعتيادية. الكلمات المفتاحية: المقاربات السوسيولوجية، العلاقة التواصلية، الأستاذ، الطالب الجامعي، السوسيولوجيا التفسيرية.

### - Introduction:

The communicative relationship between university professors and students represents a core dimension of the educational process in higher education. This relationship, often perceived as a channel for knowledge transfer, is in fact a complex, dynamic interaction where subjectivity meets structure, action converges with system, and meaning is negotiated alongside authority. From a sociological perspective, the professor-student relationship transcends technical or cognitive functions, encompassing social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions that shape the academic experience.

From a sociological perspective, the professor-student relationship cannot be reduced to its technical or cognitive aspects alone. It must be understood as a complex social relation shaped by class, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as by the symbolic hierarchy that defines the university space as a site of reproduction of symbolic power and dominant knowledge. The professor is not merely a transmitter of knowledge, but also embodies academic and normative authority, while the student is expected to interpret this interaction within a network of social and cultural expectations.

Educational sociology, along with other fields such as interactionist sociology and the sociology of action, has contributed various analytical frameworks to understand this communicative relationship within the university setting. The

diversity of these approaches stems from the complexity of the phenomenon itself, as it involves both subjective elements (such as meanings and personal experiences) and structural dimensions (such as the educational system and power relations), making it essential to employ multiple sociological lenses to grasp its various levels.

Despite its significance, the literature often lacks a nuanced articulation of the problem or fails to specify the research objectives guiding such analysis. This paper addresses this gap by posing the central question: How do different sociological approaches contribute to explaining the dynamics of the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student? Specifically, the study aims to (1) clarify the conceptual and methodological frameworks used to interpret this relationship, (2) compare the explanatory power of leading sociological theories, and (3) apply these insights to the Algerian university context to bridge theory and practice.

Existing literature in the sociology of education has highlighted the importance of communication in shaping student identity, fostering intellectual skills, and reproducing symbolic power within academia. However, much of this work remains either overly theoretical or insufficiently critical in its comparative analysis of approaches. This research thus seeks to contribute to contemporary debates by engaging with foundational and recent sociological perspectives, offering a comprehensive and critically informed account.

In this context, we will attempt to explore the sociological approaches that explain the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student, beginning with a definition of the concept of "approach", followed by an examination of the reasons behind the plurality of sociological perspectives in analyzing this relationship, and finally presenting the main sociological approaches that have sought to explain it: the communicative action approach, the symbolic interactionist approach, the phenomenological approach, and the ethnomethodological approach.

## **1- Methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology that synthesizes descriptive and critical analysis of foundational sociological theories. The research is based on a critical reading of key theoretical works in the sociology of education and interpretive sociology, particularly those of Habermas, Mead, Schutz, and Garfinkel. The sources of analysis include primary theoretical texts and contemporary empirical studies relevant to educational communication. The study's limitations stem from its reliance on secondary data and the lack of primary fieldwork; however, an applied example from the Algerian university context is included to reinforce the analytical dimension. The scope is restricted to interpretive, non-positivist approaches, with the goal of highlighting both the theoretical and practical implications for university communication.

## **2- On the Concept of the Sociological Approach:**

The sociological approach is one of the fundamental pillars of sociology, as it provides a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding and analyzing social phenomena within their broader context. This approach aims to study social relationships, institutional structures, group behavior, and daily interactions, allowing for the identification of the rules and patterns that govern life within society. Its importance lies in its focus on the social context as a determining factor in human thought and behavior, viewing individuals as social beings influenced by their environment, values, norms, and surrounding institutions (derbal & Nora benouhiba, 2024, p. 101).

In this sense, the term "approach" is understood as the theoretical and methodological tool adopted by the researcher to understand and analyze a specific phenomenon. The sociological approach does not merely describe phenomena but seeks to interpret them within a network of social, cultural, and political relationships, making it an analytical tool for understanding social reality. It enables researchers to grasp the impact of structural factors- such as social class, gender, religion, and

education- on individual behaviors and perceptions, and helps connect specific phenomena to the broader structure of society.

A sociological approach is defined as a theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing social phenomena within their structural and historical contexts. This framework allows researchers to interpret the influence of institutions, structures, and cultural values on individual and group behaviors. In the context of educational communication, the sociological approach is invaluable for unpacking the ways in which institutional hierarchies, symbolic authority, and cultural diversity shape the communicative dynamics between professors and students.

The importance of maintaining conceptual clarity- especially in cross-linguistic contexts- must be emphasized. For instance, the term “approach” should consistently correspond to “المقاربة” in Arabic, rather than “المنظور,” to avoid semantic drift and ensure analytical coherence across languages.

For example, the sociological approach to literary analysis is based on the idea that the literary text is a social product that reflects the cultural, political, and economic reality of the society in which it was created. It pays particular attention to the relationship between the author and their social environment. Literature is not viewed as an isolated creative act, but rather as a cultural document that expresses the spirit of the age and represents people's perceptions and attitudes toward life. From this perspective, sociological critics believe that understanding a literary text requires understanding the social context in which it was produced, as the social structure influences the author's consciousness, directs their creative vision, and shapes the content and style of their work (Sharma, 2018, p. 110).

In this sense, literature becomes a means of understanding social life and its transformations. The literary text reflects social classes, prevailing values, class disparities, and cultural conflicts. It can also influence societal awareness and guide behavior, making literature a symbolic force in the construction of social reality. Works such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* exemplify this view, as they

depict the daily lives of people in the 14th century and reflect the nature of the social relations of the time. In this way, the sociological approach serves as a tool for understanding literature as both a mirror of society and an agent of change.

The sociological approach is defined as a theoretical and methodological framework used to understand human phenomena as products of multiple and overlapping social contexts. This approach focuses on analyzing individual and group behavior by examining the influence of institutions, social ties, and cultural structures, making it an effective tool for intervening in social issues. This understanding is clearly demonstrated in the model presented by Coombs (1980) in his drug abuse prevention program, where he rejected traditional models that view drug users as pathological or deviant cases. Instead, he focused on marginalized youth who are at risk of adopting deviant identities. His intervention relied on strengthening family solidarity and improving communication skills within the family, making the family a primary reference group instead of deviant peers. This indirect intervention precisely reflects the nature of the sociological approach, which does not address behavior directly but reconstructs the social context that produces it—based on the premise that personal and social problems are inseparable from the social structure. Thus, sociological intervention becomes a tool for redefining and interpreting reality in light of social relationships, making the clinical sociologist the most qualified to apply it, due to their academic training and deep understanding of society (Straus, 1984, p. 61).

Sociological theory is a fundamental component of the sociological approach, as it provides a set of hypotheses and concepts organized into explanations that aim to understand the nature, structure, and dynamics of social action within society. The sociological approach is based on the premise that human phenomena cannot be understood in isolation from their surrounding social contexts; rather, they must be analyzed through the influence of structures, institutions, and social relations. From this perspective, sociological theory emerged as an intellectual response to

comprehend society and the transformations it undergoes, especially in the face of ongoing political, economic, and cultural changes.

Sociology as a scientific discipline emerged in the late 19th century as a result of deep intellectual debates that began during the Enlightenment, when thinkers and scholars started asking fundamental questions about the structure of society, its functions, the relationship between the individual and the group, and the nature of social change. These questions did not lead to unified answers but instead gave rise to a diversity of theories and differing explanatory approaches, reflecting the dialectical nature of the sociological approach. The sociological interpretation of reality relies on understanding the multiplicity of perspectives and analyzing phenomena within their structural and historical context, making sociological theory a vital tool for understanding society as a complex and multidimensional system (Jaiswal & et al, 2018, p. 9).

Based on the aforementioned theoretical foundations, the sociological approach can be procedurally defined as follows:

The sociological approach is a theoretical and methodological framework used to analyze social phenomena within their structural and historical contexts. It does so by studying social relationships and interactions, as well as the influence of institutions, structures, and cultural values in shaping the behavior of individuals and groups. This approach serves as an operational tool that enables the researcher to interpret social reality and deconstruct its components, based on the premise that human phenomena cannot be separated from the social environment that produces them.

### **3- Why are there multiple sociological approaches to interpreting the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student?**

The multiplicity of sociological approaches to the professor-student relationship is necessitated by the phenomenon's inherent complexity. Communication in the university context is not a mere transmission of information; it is shaped by the

interplay of cognitive, psychological, cultural, and institutional factors. Factors such as the symbolic authority of the professor, class and cultural differences, and mutual perceptions all intersect to create a multifaceted relationship. This diversity cannot be fully captured by a single theoretical lens.

Sociologists thus draw on a plurality of approaches- ranging from interactionism to critical theory- to account for the layered nature of educational communication. Bourdieu, for instance, integrates individual habitus with social structures to analyze communicative relationships, while Habermas stresses the role of communicative competence in producing new forms of social integration. Systems theory, as advocated by Luhmann, further conceptualizes the professor-student relationship as a process of social negotiation, reflecting broader institutional and cultural dynamics.

From this standpoint, the sociological approach asserts itself as an open epistemological framework that integrates analytical and theoretical tools drawn from multiple disciplines to understand the complexity of university life. The intersection between the social sciences- particularly educational psychology, anthropology, and the sociology of education- enables the researcher to build a comprehensive understanding of the communicative relationship in the university context. This theoretical diversity enhances the ability to read the communicative relationship not only as a linguistic or instructional phenomenon but as a social structure that reflects cultural disparities, power dynamics, and patterns of interaction within the academic institution- making theoretical plurality essential for accurately understanding and interpreting the phenomenon (Mehdi & Samir Grid, 2024, p. 13).

The multiplicity of sociological approaches in interpreting the communicative relationship between university professors and students stems from the complexity of the interactions that occur within the educational context, as well as the overlapping psychological, social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions that influence this relationship. Communication is not merely a transmission of information between a



sender and a receiver; it also involves a supportive communicative environment and social conditions that shape the dynamics of the relationship, such as the professor's personality, the student's motivation, creativity, and the educational content itself.

Furthermore, the diversity in students' social and cultural backgrounds, along with the varying teaching styles of professors, necessitates multiple approaches to understanding this complex relationship. These may include the interactionist approach, which focuses on role exchange, the symbolic approach, which analyzes the meanings constructed between participants, or the critical approach, which examines dimensions of power and influence. From this perspective, the communicative relationship becomes a rich field for sociological analysis, as it carries social implications that go beyond the classroom, contributing to the shaping of student identity, the development of awareness, and the construction of learning paths (NAVICKIENĖ & et al, 2019, p. 50).

As clearly demonstrated, the diversity of sociological approaches in interpreting the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student stems from differing understandings of the levels of interaction between individuals and institutions. Bourdieu, for instance, rejects the dichotomy between the individual and society, proposing instead to analyze the communicative relationship through the interaction of *habitus* (embodied experience) with the social structures embodied in laws and institutions. From this perspective, the professor–student relationship can only be understood by linking individual behaviors to the social, educational, and historical backgrounds that shape each party's awareness. In contrast, Habermas sees this relationship as being built within an evolutionary process of individual and collective learning, where communicative abilities contribute to the production of new forms of social integration within the university environment. Thus, the communicative relationship becomes a tool for reorganizing pedagogical action and developing the educational system (Cetina, 2014, p. 30).

From a systems theory perspective (as with Luhmann), communication between the professor and student is understood as a social negotiation process that defines the framework of their relationship - for example, viewing the lecture as a knowledge-based act or merely a job-related duty - which reflects differences in positions and contexts. These views raise questions about the extent to which micro-level interactions can reshape macro-level structures such as the academic system or educational values. Hence, the need for multiple approaches becomes evident, as relying on a single viewpoint may overlook the complex interactions within the classroom and disregard the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that influence the educational process. This plurality of approaches enhances sociology's ability to provide a comprehensive analysis of the communicative relationship between professor and student, considering it as a multifaceted phenomenon in which individual, institutional, and cultural dimensions intersect.

Moreover, sociological approaches to interpreting the communicative relationship between university professors and students are diverse due to the multiple dimensions and the complexity of its pedagogical, psychological, and institutional components. An analysis of recent studies- such as the one that examined the quality of communication between dentistry professors and students- demonstrates how professors' perceptions differ from those of students regarding the effectiveness of communication within the educational process. While professors consider themselves proficient in transmitting and receiving information, students reveal a gap in message reception and active listening, highlighting the subjective and normative nature that governs this relationship (Estrela & et al, 2024, p. 2).

Here, sociological approaches intervene to interpret these discrepancies from different perspectives: the symbolic interactionist approach focuses on the meanings individuals construct during interaction, while the structural functionalist approach examines how communication contributes to maintaining harmony within the university institution. Meanwhile, the critical approach investigates power imbalances

within the classroom. Therefore, the complexity of the communicative relationship and the multitude of influencing factors necessitate a diversity of sociological approaches to provide a comprehensive explanation of this multifaceted educational phenomenon.

The plurality of sociological approaches is also evident in interpreting the communicative relationship between the professor and the university student, due to the divergence in the philosophical and epistemological foundations upon which each approach is based- especially the interpretive perspective, which grants particular importance to language and the meanings that social actors assign to their experiences. According to this approach, the communicative relationship is understood as the product of symbolic interaction between professor and student, where language constitutes the primary tool for constructing shared meanings. The interpretive researcher believes that understanding communication requires immersion in the educational experience and attention to the subjective values expressed during interaction, affirming that social reality is not a fixed entity, but is continuously reconstructed through interaction and interpretation.

From this perspective, concepts such as ontology, epistemology, and axiology gain significant importance in understanding the differences in perceptions and communicative behaviors between professor and student. Behavior is not interpreted merely as a response but as the result of meanings that individuals attribute to their situations. Thus, the specificity of each communicative event imposes multiple angles of analysis, which justifies the diversity of sociological approaches. The interpretive approach, for instance, seeks to describe subtle differences among actors and analyze their experiences from within the context, unlike other approaches that might focus on functions or power distribution in the relationship. Therefore, understanding the communicative relationship in the university setting cannot be reduced to a single dimension; rather, it requires an integrated framework that analyzes its cognitive, cultural, and emotional aspects (Al-Azab, 2025, p. 14).

#### **4- Sociological Approaches Explaining the Communicative Relationship Between University Professor and Student:**

The communicative relationship between the university professor and student is a central pillar of the educational process and has attracted the attention of researchers in the sociology of education and the sociology of communication due to its psychological, social, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions. Accordingly, several sociological approaches have emerged to explain this relationship from different angles, each stemming from a specific theoretical and methodological background. In this section, we aim to address four main approaches to understanding the nature of this interaction: the communicative action approach, the symbolic interactionist approach, the phenomenological approach, and the ethnomethodological approach. Each of these perspectives highlights the uniqueness of the professor-student relationship within its educational and social context.

In this regard, the communicative action approach, as developed by Jürgen Habermas, emphasizes that communication between professor and student should be based on rational dialogue free from domination, thus enhancing mutual understanding and integration within the university institution. The symbolic interactionist approach, on the other hand, sees educational meanings as emerging through daily interactions between the two parties, using symbols and language, which gives the relationship a dynamic dimension that changes with context. From a phenomenological perspective, the communication experience is understood through the actors' own perspectives- how the professor and student perceive their educational experience subjectively. The ethnomethodological approach focuses on revealing the methods individuals use to organize their communication within the classroom, emphasizing the daily details of discourse and social context. This diversity of approaches reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and highlights the necessity of employing multiple perspectives to fully understand the communicative relationship in the university setting.

#### 4.1- Communicative Action Approach:

The communicative action approach is linked to the contribution of the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who sought through it to go beyond the limits of traditional social philosophies, particularly Marxism, by proposing a new model of social interaction based on rational communication between individuals. Habermas considers communicative action- grounded in mutual understanding and free dialogue- as the foundation upon which the social organization of modern societies should be built. In this model, social relations are not understood solely in terms of domination or material production, but rather through individuals' ability to reach rational agreements within a democratic public sphere, where freedom is exercised through active participation in debate and the exchange of opinions without coercion or marginalization (Mitrović, 1999, p. 219).

Based on this conception, the relationship between the university professor and the student can be redefined as a non-authoritarian communicative relationship, founded on the exchange of knowledge rather than its imposition, and on the co-construction of meaning rather than its transmission. Within the framework of communicative rationality, the professor does not exercise a closed epistemic authority, but rather creates a space for shared thinking in which the student is encouraged to question, critique, and actively participate in the construction of knowledge. This relationship resembles a “miniature public sphere” where students and the professor engage in interactive dialogue grounded in rational argumentation rather than silent compliance. Through this form of interaction, the university becomes a real laboratory for the development of communicative social rationality, fostering in students a sense of responsibility and freedom, and contributing to the building of a pluralistic democratic society based on mutual understanding rather than unilateral authority or passive reception.

By introducing the concept of “actions oriented toward understanding,” Habermas expands the theoretical horizon for interpreting social interaction and

redefines human relationships within a framework of rational communication. Communicative action, as he defines it, is characterized by the actors' orientation toward achieving mutual understanding- not through coercion or domination, but through the exchange of arguments and negotiation over meanings, values, and social norms, with simultaneous reference to the three worlds: the objective (reality), the social (legitimacy), and the subjective (individual experience). These actions are evaluated based on their normative validity and legitimacy, as well as their ability to coordinate individual action plans cooperatively. Communicative rationality, in Habermas's view, is embodied in discussions that allow positions to be challenged and justified based on the strength of the better argument (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Marius Janson, 1999, pp. 185- 186).

Although some misinterpretations have portrayed the communicative model as requiring complete agreement on goals and action plans between parties, Habermas clarifies that understanding does not imply uniformity. Rather, it refers to the coordination between actors pursuing different goals within a shared rational framework. This perspective can be applied to the relationship between university professors and students, which is not built upon the imposition of a unified vision or a monopolized authority of knowledge, but on an interactive dialogue regulated by rational understanding. The professor does not merely transmit knowledge but creates space for critical thinking and dialogical exchange, enabling the coordination of educational trajectories between himself and his students despite their differing aims and aspirations. In this sense, the relationship within the university classroom becomes an embodiment of communicative action, where knowledge is constructed jointly through discussion, and the educational process is shaped as a rational endeavor rooted not in authority, but in the logic of the better argument and mutual understanding.

In fact, Habermas's theory of communicative action is based on the concept of communicative rationality, where knowledge is constructed through mutual dialogue

between social actors within a framework of respect, equal recognition, and the legitimacy of expressing needs, opinions, and emotions. Habermas argues that communicative action does not merely aim to achieve goals, but rather to reach rational understanding that emerges from interaction between the self and the other, within a horizon of negotiation, argumentation, and shared interpretation of meanings. This action is grounded in ethical principles that acknowledge each participant's right to express themselves and engage critically, free from coercion or the imposition of positions, making communicative action a model of social behavior that strives for autonomy and collective understanding (Carvalho & et al, 2017, p. 1344).

Overall, applying the communicative action approach to the relationship between university professors and students opens up a new perspective that frames this relationship as a participatory one based on mutual dialogue, rather than on lecturing or the imposition of epistemic authority. In light of communicative rationality, the professor does not assume the role of the sole transmitter of knowledge, but rather acts as a communicative agent who enables the student to engage in critical thinking and actively contribute to the construction of meaning. In this sense, the classroom becomes an open dialogical space where collective reasoning is practiced and knowledge is built through argumentation and negotiation, rather than through passive compliance or mechanical reproduction. This type of relationship enhances the student's autonomy, nurtures a sense of responsibility, and contributes to the development of critical thinking capable of engaging in a pluralistic democratic society- thus transforming the university into a vibrant communicative institution and a cradle for active citizenship.

Accordingly, Habermas's theory of communicative action holds that effective educational interaction is founded on dialogue and mutual understanding between participants. The educational relationship is viewed as a space for rational discussion in which both professor and student act as co-participants in the construction of

meaning and the exchange of experiences. Within this context, authority is redefined through negotiation and interaction, while the ideal model is based on horizontal communication that promotes constructive criticism and shared understanding, thereby fostering participation and independent thinking within the educational process.

#### **4-2- Symbolic Interactionist Approach:**

The symbolic interactionist approach is one of the most prominent sociological theories that emerged within American thought during the first half of the 20th century, particularly within the sociological school at the University of Chicago. This approach was founded by George Herbert Mead, who laid its philosophical foundations through his interest in the role of symbols and communication in shaping the self and identity. His student, Herbert Blumer, later developed it into a systematic methodological approach in sociology. The theory is based on the idea that human behavior is not driven by fixed external stimuli, but by the meanings individuals assign to things and situations around them. These meanings are neither fixed nor given; rather, they are constructed and constantly renegotiated through social interaction, using symbols, especially language (Wahyuningsih, 2015, pp. 62- 63).

Building on the work of Mead, the symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes the centrality of shared meanings and symbols in shaping pedagogical interactions. Communication is understood as a process of interpretive role-taking, where both professors and students actively construct the significance of academic rituals, classroom norms, and evaluative practices. This approach foregrounds subjectivity and the situated nature of meaning-making.

From this perspective, social life is viewed as a continuous symbolic communication process in which meanings are exchanged and negotiated among actors. The individual interprets the actions of others- whether verbal or non-verbal- and builds their responses accordingly. Mead emphasized that the "self" does not emerge independently, but is formed through communication with others- a point



also stressed by Charles Horton Cooley through his concept of the “looking-glass self.” This approach sees humans as uniquely capable of using symbols and constructing meanings, allowing for flexible and creative behavior. It highlights the importance of vocal cues as among the most influential forms of symbolic interaction, due to their mutual effect on both the speaker and the listener. In this view, human behavior is understood as the result of individual and subjective interpretation of situations, rather than a mechanical or predetermined response.

The symbolic interactionist approach demonstrates that communicative relationships are built within the context of social interaction through the exchange of symbols and meanings between individuals. This can be clearly applied to the communicative relationship between university professors and students. Just as a child’s trust in their parents develops through positive responses to their actions and expectations, a student’s trust in their professor is formed when they are given the opportunity to express themselves and their efforts are met with appreciation and encouragement, rather than rejection or reprimand. In this context, the professor becomes a communicative actor who presents themselves as a mentor rather than a closed authority figure. The student, in turn, responds to this self-presentation if it appears sincere and consistent, allowing for an interactive relationship grounded in mutual recognition and respect.

Within the university setting, this trust develops through stages similar to those proposed by American sociologist James M. Henslin: the professor offers a clear communicative self-definition, which the student receives and interprets as genuine and supportive. The student then engages with the professor voluntarily based on this positive perception. The continuity of this interactive relationship depends on the professor's ability to maintain this trusted image or adapt it in a way that remains acceptable to the student. Thus, trust within the university becomes a dynamic process based on openness, honesty, and mutual appreciation, contributing to the

creation of a supportive educational environment that encourages students to engage and grow independently in their academic journey (KONECKI, 2019, p. 274).

From the perspective of the symbolic interactionist approach, the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student is undergoing a fundamental transformation in digital environments. It no longer relies on traditional symbols that reflected the professor's authority- such as body language, tone of voice, and classroom arrangement- but instead depends on new and flexible communicative symbols produced within the digital space. Today, interaction takes place through digital tools like text messages, instant comments, and emoticons, reflecting a reshaping of meanings and roles within the educational process. Rather than a vertical relationship where the professor controls the flow of discussion, students are now granted greater space for active participation based on their own interpretations and subjective meanings. In light of these changes, the professor is no longer the sole source of knowledge, but rather a communicative partner who facilitates interaction and co-constructs meaning with the student. This transforms the relationship into a symbolic negotiation process through which knowledge is jointly produced in a dynamic, interactive context (Houria & Makhlouf Boumediene, 2024, p. 29).

#### **4-3- The Phenomenological Approach:**

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach in the social sciences that focuses on understanding phenomena as they are perceived by human consciousness, by describing them as they appear in lived experience without prior judgments. Founded by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, this approach emphasizes "phenomenological reduction" (epoche), which involves suspending all preconceived ideas in order to grasp the phenomenon through its essence and internal meaning. It is based on two essential elements: epoche, which calls for the elimination of prejudices, and eidetic vision, which seeks to uncover the deep meaning of phenomena as experienced by individuals. In this context, understanding becomes a process of revealing the norms,

values, and meanings that guide individuals' behavior within society, making phenomenology a valuable tool for analyzing human experience within its cultural and social context (Yahya, 2018, pp. 312- 313).

The phenomenological approach in sociology was founded by Alfred Schutz, who developed its foundations based on the phenomenology of philosopher Edmund Husserl, transforming it into a tool for understanding social experience from the perspective of the actors themselves. Schutz later influenced prominent thinkers such as Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger. This approach contributed to the development of several fields such as ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and narrative approaches. Sociological phenomenology starts from the idea that social reality is constructed through subjective experiences in the "lifeworld," and that scientific understanding of reality requires returning to daily lived experiences as perceived by individuals, while suspending preconceived judgments and striving to describe meanings as they are lived from within. Through the theory of the "lifeworld," phenomenology examines how social phenomena such as power, identity, or knowledge are constituted through self-awareness and everyday practices (Dreher & Hermílio Santos, 2017, pp. 385- 386).

Schutz's phenomenological perspective focuses on the lived experiences of actors within their immediate contexts. The professor-student relationship is analyzed through the lens of intersubjectivity and the experiential realities of classroom life. This approach is attentive to the ways in which actors perceive, interpret, and make sense of their educational environment, highlighting the value of subjective experience in sociological analysis.

When applying this approach to the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student, phenomenology focuses on how each party perceives the other within the context of daily academic life, and on the meanings, each assign to their interaction. Communication is thus not merely a process of information transmission but a lived situation in which trust, respect, and academic

roles are constructed through shared experience. The professor is viewed as a social actor presenting themselves within a specific framework (as a guide or knowledge authority), and the student interacts with them based on this presentation and the shared educational context. The relationship becomes contingent on each party's ability to understand the other within their daily reality, making academic interaction a phenomenologically describable phenomenon in terms of its structure and meanings, helping to develop a humane educational environment that respects subjectivity and mutual recognition.

#### **4-4- The Ethnomethodological Approach:**

The ethnomethodological approach emerged from the work of Harold Garfinkel, who drew upon various philosophical and methodological traditions, notably phenomenology as developed by Husserl, Gurwitsch, and Schütz, in addition to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and Kotarbinski's praxeology. Garfinkel developed from these foundations a distinctive methodological framework focused on the everyday practices of social actors and the ways in which they produce and understand social order in their routine interactions. This perspective constituted a radical critique of positivist sociology, which tends to abstract the social actor and overlook their lived experience. Ethnomethodology begins from the observation that meaning and order emerge from within daily life, not outside it, and that sociological knowledge must be grounded in the actual practices individuals use to understand and interpret their world (Verl & Christian Meyer, 2022, pp. 16- 17).

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology examines how social actors produce and sustain the educational system through routine practices and implicit rules. The focus is on the "how" of social order—the tacit methods through which professors and students enact, reproduce, or challenge classroom norms. This approach is particularly valuable for revealing the micro-level processes that underpin institutional stability and change.

Ethnomethodology offers a precise approach to studying communicative phenomena by focusing on the detailed structures of social interaction and the methods individuals use to interpret and coordinate the meaning of their actions within everyday contexts. In the university setting, this approach can be employed to analyze the communicative relationship between professor and student as a series of daily negotiated practices. Mutual understanding between the two parties is not built solely on formal rules or academic hierarchy, but rather emerges from their day-to-day interactions- such as lecture delivery, managing discussion, responding to questions, and informal comments. The ethnomethodological approach makes it possible to reveal how epistemic authority, respect, and understanding are constructed through everyday communicative performance, offering a deeper insight into the university as a dynamic communicative space where dimensions of social and epistemic order are tangibly enacted.

In this context, ethnomethodology considers that the understanding of social order is not achieved through pre-established rules or imposed norms, but rather through the meanings produced by individuals themselves during their everyday interactions. The actors in the university setting- teachers and students- are therefore not seen as mere subjects subjected to a rigid academic structure, but as social participants who possess an implicit and shared understanding of what is considered appropriate behavior within the university. This understanding is not imposed upon them but is continuously negotiated through daily interactions. Thus, the communicative norms that govern the relationship between teacher and student are not simply a reflection of institutional rules, but the outcome of an ongoing negotiation process between the parties involved, through which they jointly redefine the boundaries of what is socially acceptable or legitimate in the academic environment (Tolson, 2006, pp. 25- 26).

In sum, the communicative relationship between university professors and students can be understood, from an ethnomethodological perspective, as a dynamic

and negotiated process, in which both parties actively contribute to shaping the norms of interaction and mutual expectations. Through lectures, questions, gestures, tone of voice, informal remarks, and even silences, they co-construct a shared understanding of what is appropriate, respectful, or authoritative in the academic context. This shared understanding is not fixed but evolves through continuous interaction, whereby the professor and student assess and adjust their behaviors in light of each other's reactions. Ethnomethodology thus reveals that academic authority, respect, and mutual comprehension are not simply granted by institutional roles, but are accomplishments achieved in real time through the practical, situated work of communication.

### **5- Comparative Analysis of Approaches:**

A critical comparison of these approaches reveals both convergences and divergences in their explanatory power. In terms of authority, the communicative action approach advocates for a more egalitarian, horizontal relationship, while symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology tend to expose the persistence of hierarchical structures through symbolic and routinized practices. Phenomenology, meanwhile, is less concerned with authority per se and more focused on the subjective experience of power relations.

Regarding the nature of interaction, communicative action and symbolic interactionism favor dialogic, reciprocal exchanges, whereas ethnomethodology highlights the often-unquestioned routines that can both enable and constrain such dialogue. All approaches underscore the educational and social impact of communication, but they differ in their emphasis: communicative action centers on rational consensus and empowerment; symbolic interactionism on identity construction; phenomenology on lived experience; and ethnomethodology on the maintenance of social order.

## **6- Application: Algerian University Context:**

To ground the analysis, consider an applied example from an Algerian university. Recent studies of communication between professors and students in Algerian higher education have highlighted a gap between professors' self-perceptions and students' experiences. Professors often view themselves as effective communicators, whereas students report challenges in message reception and active engagement. This discrepancy can be interpreted through the lens of symbolic interactionism (subjective meanings), communicative action (dialogic deficits), and ethnomethodology (institutional routines that hinder genuine exchange).

In general, numerous field studies indicate that electronic communication has become an unavoidable reality within Algerian universities, driven on one hand by technological progress and on the other by the consequences of the pandemic. This situation has compelled professors to adopt it as an essential means to ensure the continuity of the educational process and the effective transmission of knowledge, despite the continued preference for traditional forms of communication. To illustrate this in an applied context, a qualitative field study conducted at the University of Algiers revealed that students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds experience the professor– student relationship in different ways, with power imbalances and cultural misalignments affecting participation and learning outcomes. These findings highlight the need for context-sensitive approaches that take into account local specificities while simultaneously drawing on universal sociological insights to better understand the dynamics of educational communication in the Algerian university environment (ghalia & djadaoun zina, 2024, p. 111).

## **7- Findings and Implications:**

This research demonstrates that a plurality of sociological approaches is essential for comprehensively understanding the communicative relationship between professors and students. The comparative analysis reveals that each approach brings unique strengths- be it in elucidating the role of authority, the

construction of meaning, or the reproduction of social order. The Algerian case study illustrates the explanatory power of these theories in practice.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the sociology of education by highlighting the need for integrative frameworks that can accommodate both micro-level interactions and macro-level structures. Practically, the findings suggest that university policies and teaching practices should be attuned to the diverse communicative needs of students, fostering environments where dialogue, mutual recognition, and reflexivity are prioritized. Future research should expand on these insights through empirical fieldwork and longitudinal studies across different educational contexts.

### **8-Conclusion:**

In light of the above, it becomes clear that the communicative relationship between the university professor and the student goes beyond being merely a means of knowledge transmission or a functional performance within the classroom. Rather, it constitutes a complex social structure that involves symbolic, authoritative, and cognitive interactions. The various sociological approaches- from communicative action to symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology- have demonstrated that this type of relationship can only be understood through a multidimensional analysis that takes into account the cultural, institutional, and subjective contexts shaping the interaction between both parties.

This diversity of analytical perspectives not only reflects the richness of the sociological field, but also underscores the necessity of methodological pluralism in understanding educational phenomena in their depth- particularly those that touch the core of the educational process, such as the relationship between professor and student. Thus, investing in these approaches is not limited to theoretical understanding; it can also contribute to the development of pedagogical practices that are more conscious of the nature of social interaction within the university and better



equipped to foster an educational environment based on mutual understanding, respect, and shared recognition of meaning and role.

Bringing these diverse sociological approaches into focus does not merely allow for a deconstruction of the communicative relationship between the professor and the student, but also opens the way to understanding how meaning is produced within the academic field, and how symbolic authority and dominant knowledge are reproduced through daily interactions. Ethnomethodology, for instance, focuses on the fine details of routine practices through which mutual understanding is constructed, while phenomenology highlights the subjective experiences of actors in perceiving university life. Symbolic interactionism sheds light on the shared symbols and meanings that shape this reality, whereas communicative action emphasizes communicative rationality as a foundation for mutual understanding and recognition within the university setting.

Thus, the communicative relationship should not be reduced to its performative or cognitive dimension alone, but rather seen as a complex social structure where psychological, cultural, and institutional dimensions intersect. Understanding this relationship through sociological analytical tools not only enriches academic debate about the roles of professors and students but also contributes to the improvement of educational policies and pedagogical practices within the university. Ultimately, the university is not merely a space for knowledge transfer; it is a site of social interaction and meaning-making, where the communicative relationship is constructed at the heart of this dynamic on a daily and ongoing basis.

The communicative relationship between university professors and students is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to technical or cognitive processes alone. Through a critical engagement with major sociological approaches, this paper has shown that understanding this relationship requires attention to dialogue, shared meanings, lived experience, and routine practices. Comparative analysis and application to the Algerian context affirm the value of methodological

plurality and the practical relevance of sociological theory for contemporary educational challenges. Future research should build on this foundation by integrating empirical data and exploring interventions that enhance the quality of academic communication.

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