



2. Barriers to Effective Communication

BVPT-104: English & Communication

Chapter 2: Barriers to Effective Communication

Topic: Identifying and Overcoming Communication Barriers

□ **Introduction**

Communication is essential in all aspects of life—especially in **healthcare**, where misunderstandings can impact diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. While effective communication builds trust and improves patient outcomes, **barriers** can prevent the message from being understood clearly.

In this chapter, we will explore:

- What are communication barriers?
- Types and real-life examples
- Strategies to overcome each barrier in healthcare and physiotherapy

□ What is a Communication Barrier?

A **communication barrier** is anything that prevents the correct transmission, reception, or interpretation of a message between a sender and receiver.

"A barrier is anything that interferes with the **flow or understanding** of communication."

In physiotherapy, poor communication can result in:

- Patients not following instructions
- Delayed progress or recovery
- Misunderstandings and lack of trust

□ Types of Communication Barriers

Let's break them down with **examples and how they affect physiotherapy**:

□ A. Physical Barriers

These are **external environmental factors**.

Example	Impact in Clinical Practice
Noise in the treatment area	Patient can't hear instructions clearly
Poor lighting	Therapist can't see patient's expression/posture
Distance	Voice loses clarity in a large space

□ B. Psychological Barriers

Barriers caused by **emotions, thoughts, or mental health**.

Example	Impact in Clinical Practice
Anxiety	Patient hesitates to ask questions
Anger or frustration	Misunderstanding or resistance to therapy
Depression	Disinterest, low motivation, poor response

□ C. Physiological Barriers

Barriers related to **health or body function**.

Example	Impact in Clinical Practice
Hearing loss	Patient misses or misunderstands instructions
Visual impairment	Can't read educational material
Speech difficulties	Patient can't express discomfort or concerns

□ D. Language Barriers

When the **spoken or written language** is hard to understand.

Example	Impact in Clinical Practice
Using medical jargon	"Perform passive range of motion" vs. "Move your arm gently"
Different dialect or accent	Patient misunderstands the instructions
Patient doesn't speak therapist's language	Complete communication breakdown

□ E. Cultural and Social Barriers

Different **cultural beliefs or social norms** may affect communication.

Example	Impact in Clinical Practice
Gender-based interaction norms	Some female patients may avoid open discussions
Touch sensitivity	Some cultures avoid physical contact
Misunderstood gestures	A nod or smile may mean different things

□ How to Identify Communication Barriers

Observe for:

- Repeated clarification requests
- Patient seems confused or silent
- Wrong action despite instructions
- Mismatch in facial expression and words
- No feedback from patient

□ Strategies to Overcome Communication Barriers

Here's how a physiotherapist or health worker can manage each barrier:

Barrier Type	Solution / Strategy
Physical	Ensure quiet, well-lit space; reduce distractions
Psychological	Build rapport, be empathetic, give patient time to open up
Physiological	Use visual aids or tactile cues; speak slowly and clearly
Language	Use simple, everyday words ; demonstrate; use a translator if needed
Cultural	Be respectful; avoid assumptions; learn about patient's background

□ Self-Check Questions

1. What is a physiological communication barrier?
2. Give two examples of how language can become a barrier.
3. How can physical barriers be reduced during a therapy session?
4. What is one cultural factor that may affect patient communication?
5. Why is psychological state important in patient-therapist interaction?

1. A health-related condition like hearing loss or speech impairment.
2. Use of jargon; patient and therapist don't speak the same language.
3. Use a quiet, well-lit space and keep close proximity during instructions.
4. Gender norms or taboos around discussing health conditions.
5. Emotions like anxiety or depression can affect a patient's participation.

□ Key Take-Home Messages

- Barriers can **block understanding** even when communication seems clear.
- Being aware of different **types of barriers** is the first step to overcoming them.
- **Adapt your language, tone, and approach** to suit the patient's needs.
- Good communication ensures **better compliance, recovery, and trust** in physiotherapy practice.