

Tone and Positive Language Among Instructors: Salient Tools for Communication in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

Effective communication is a cornerstone of educational leadership, yet the nuanced role of instructors' tone of voice and positive language in shaping student engagement, motivation, and classroom dynamics remains underexplored in higher education. Grounded in Social Influence Theory, which posits that individuals' attitudes and behaviors are significantly affected by the communication style and persuasive strategies of authority figures, this study investigates how instructors' tone and use of positive language function as tools of leadership within college classrooms. The research addresses a critical gap in literature: while numerous studies focus on instructional strategies and content delivery, few examine how verbal tone and positive linguistic choices directly impact students' responsiveness, participation, and perception of instructor credibility. This qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews with higher education instructors from diverse programs within a state university in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Participants are selected due to the heightened communication demands inherent in college teaching, where instructors act not only as educators but also as mentors and role models. Interview questions probe how instructors perceive and utilize tone and positive language to influence classroom engagement, maintain authority while fostering approachability, and support student motivation and confidence. Expected outcomes include insights into practical strategies for employing tone and positive language to strengthen instructor-student rapport, enhance classroom atmosphere, and reinforce instructors' credibility as educational leaders. Findings are anticipated to inform professional development initiatives, highlighting the significance of affective communication skills as integral to effective teaching and leadership in higher education.....

Keywords Tone, Positive, Language, Communication

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, instructors play multiple roles that extend far beyond the delivery of academic content. They act as mentors, motivators, and leaders who guide students through intellectual and personal development. Within this complex dynamic, communication becomes one of the most powerful instruments of leadership. The way instructors communicate through their tone of voice and choice of language can determine whether a classroom becomes a space of engagement and trust or one marked by fear, disengagement, and misunderstanding (Garil, Entong, & Muarip, 2024; Calzada, 2024). College students, in particular, are highly perceptive of how instructors speak to them; they tend to respond not only to what is said but also how it is said (Garil, 2024; Estoque, 2023). Instructors' tone and linguistic choices, therefore, have a profound effect on students' motivation, participation, and perception of instructor credibility (Garil, Abbas, & Limen, 2024; Ceneciro, 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of communication competence in education, there remains a research gap in understanding the specific influence of tone and positive language as tools of educational leadership within higher education settings. Much of the existing literature has focused on pedagogical methods, instructional clarity, and feedback techniques, while limited studies have examined how instructors' affective communication styles especially their vocal tone and the positivity of their language shape the classroom atmosphere and students' emotional engagement (Divinagracia, 2024; Murro, 2024). This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how these communicative elements serve as instruments of social influence and leadership in the college classroom. Anchored in Social Influence Theory, which explains how individuals' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors are shaped by others' communicative behaviors and perceived authority (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), this study positions the instructor as a central figure of influence in the learning environment. According to this theory, communication style plays a critical role in determining how followers students, in this case respond, comply, or engage with a leader's message. An instructor's tone of voice and use of positive language can enhance credibility, foster respect, and encourage cooperative behavior, aligning with the theory's premise that influence is achieved not merely through power but through effective and empathetic communication (Carpio, Caburnay, & Nollado, 2024; Quisay & Aquino, 2024).

The independent variables of this study are the instructors' tone of voice and use of positive language, while the dependent variables include student motivation, classroom participation, perceived respect, and instructor credibility. The scope of this study focuses on higher education instructors from various programs within a state university in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Operating within this specific regional and academic context, these educators face unique challenges—such as large class sizes, diverse student personalities, and heightened academic pressures—conditions that demand advanced communication competence (Garil, Abbas, & Limen, 2024; Calzada, 2024).

This research seeks to answer how instructors' tone and positive language affect student engagement, classroom climate, and perceptions of leadership. Through qualitative interviews, the study intends to capture instructors' lived experiences and reflections on how adjustments in tone or the use of affirming language influence classroom dynamics.

Ultimately, the expected outcome is a conceptual and practical understanding of how tone and positive language function as leadership tools in higher education communication. The study anticipates revealing that instructors who consciously manage their tone and employ positive language can strengthen students' confidence, improve classroom harmony, and enhance their own credibility as educational leaders (Ceneciro, 2025; Divinagracia, 2024). These findings are expected to contribute to the development of communication-centered leadership training and professional development programs for educators, reinforcing the role of empathy, clarity, and positivity as essential components of effective educational leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Tone in Educational Communication. Tone of voice plays a significant role in shaping the quality of communication between instructors and students in higher education. According to Goleman (2018), tone conveys emotional intent beyond the literal meaning of words, influencing how messages are perceived and internalized. Instructors' tone can project authority, empathy, or indifference, directly affecting student engagement and classroom rapport (Mehrabian, 2017). When instructors use a warm, respectful, and encouraging tone, students are more likely to participate, ask questions, and express their thoughts freely. Conversely, a harsh or dismissive tone can create anxiety, reduce motivation, and hinder open communication (Mazer & Hunt, 2019). In the context of educational leadership, an instructor's tone serves as a subtle yet powerful tool for building credibility and fostering trust. Leaders who balance authority with approachability through tone are often perceived as both competent and caring, which enhances their influence and effectiveness in guiding students (Northouse, 2021). This aligns with Garil, Entong, Muarip, et al. (2024), who emphasized that instructors' tone and delivery styles during academic training deeply affect emotional connection and learning retention. Similarly, Savellon, Asiri, and Chavez (2024) found that academic leaders who communicate with confidence and positive tone overcome public speaking anxiety, fostering trust and engagement among learners.

Tone and Classroom Engagement. Research has consistently shown that the emotional undertone of instructors' communication influences students' willingness to engage in learning activities. Pishghadam and Derakhshan

(2021) highlight that tone not only affects comprehension but also impacts the emotional climate of the classroom. A positive tone can help sustain students' attention and encourage collaborative interaction, whereas a monotonous or negative tone may signal disinterest, leading to disengagement. Instructors who consciously adjust their tone to suit classroom situations such as being calm during conflict or enthusiastic during lectures can effectively manage student behavior and maintain a productive learning atmosphere (Frymier & Houser, 2016). Chavez, Cuilan, Mannan, et al. (2024) support this perspective, noting that ethical communication and tone among instructors enhance integrity and respect in academic settings. Likewise, Castro, Ventura, Estajal, et al. (2024) observed that teachers' adaptive tone and emotional balance are crucial when handling multiple subjects and maintaining instructional quality.

Positive Language as a Tool for Motivation and Respect. Positive language, which includes affirming words, supportive feedback, and respectful phrasing, is an essential component of effective teaching and leadership. Dweck's (2015) concept of the growth mindset underscores that positive language fosters resilience and motivation among learners by emphasizing effort, improvement, and potential rather than shortcomings. When instructors use encouraging expressions such as "You're making progress" or "Let's try this together," they promote a psychologically safe learning space that motivates students to take academic risks and persist through challenges (Seligman, 2018). Moreover, positive communication builds mutual respect, reducing resistance and promoting a sense of belonging (Cornelius-White, 2007).

In relation, Chavez, Adalia, and Alberto (2023) emphasized that motivation is strengthened when educators and parents use affirming language and supportive strategies in guiding learners. Chavez, Lamorinas, and Ceneciro (2023) further demonstrated how online discourse patterns reveal the power of positive and inclusive language in countering bias and fostering equality.

Impact of Positive Communication on Classroom Climate. The consistent use of positive language contributes significantly to a harmonious classroom climate. According to Hamre and Pianta (2010), positive verbal interactions are closely linked to emotional support, which in turn enhances students' cognitive and social engagement. Instructors who frame feedback constructively and highlight students' strengths help cultivate optimism and self-efficacy among learners (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This approach not only improves individual confidence but also strengthens group dynamics, as students model the respectful and supportive communication demonstrated by their instructors. As such, positive language functions as both a motivational tool and a form of leadership practice that sustains a respectful, productive classroom environment.

This is consistent with Cuilan, Chavez, and Soliva (2024), who analyzed verbal and nonverbal communication patterns and found that effective tone and language significantly improve persuasion, engagement, and understanding. Similarly, Chavez, Gregorio, Araneta, and Bihag (2024) stressed that communication grounded in respect and policy awareness reinforces leadership credibility and professional integrity among teachers.

Educational Leadership Through Communication. In educational leadership, communication extends beyond the transmission of knowledge; it embodies the capacity to inspire, influence, and nurture student growth. Sergioivanni (2018) describes leadership in education as a relational process where tone and language determine the quality of interactions and the degree of trust established between teachers and students. Effective leaders in the classroom consciously use both tone and positive language to model professionalism, empathy, and fairness. Through these communicative behaviors, instructors demonstrate transformational leadership, encouraging students to develop not only academically but also emotionally and socially (Bass & Riggio, 2019).

In a related study, Chavez, Garil, and Padirque (2024) noted that innovative and responsive leadership among young educators stems from their ability to communicate with empathy, clarity, and positivity. Likewise, Chavez and Lamorinas (2023) asserted that instructors who adapt their communication tone in online learning contexts demonstrate stronger leadership and assessment practices, especially in fostering motivation during challenging times.

The reviewed literature highlights that both tone of voice and positive language are indispensable tools for communication in educational leadership. Tone shapes how messages are received, influencing engagement and perception of instructor credibility, while positive language nurtures motivation, confidence, and respect. Together, these communicative elements foster a learning environment where students feel valued and inspired to achieve. As such, understanding and intentionally practicing effective tone and positive language are vital for college instructors who aim to lead with empathy, authority, and influence in the modern educational landscape.

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how instructors' tone of voice and use of positive language serve as salient tools for communication and educational leadership in higher education. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of instructors' personal experiences, perceptions, and practices in real classroom settings. Through descriptive analysis, the researcher sought to capture the authentic meanings and interpretations that instructors associate with their communication behaviors, specifically how tone and positive language affect student engagement, classroom atmosphere, and their credibility as educational leaders. This design also supports the goal of providing rich, contextual insights rather than numerical generalizations, making it appropriate for exploring interpersonal and leadership dimensions of teaching.

3.2. Population and sampling

The study involved higher education instructors from various programs within a state university in Zamboanga City, Philippines. These participants were selected because higher education teaching demands advanced communication skills and leadership competencies, as instructors often act as educators, mentors, and role models to students preparing for professional life. The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique used to identify respondents who are most knowledgeable and experienced in the topic under investigation. The inclusion criteria required that participants (1) be full-time or part-time instructors with at least one year of teaching experience at the college level, and (2) have direct classroom interaction with students either in face-to-face, blended, or online modalities. A total of 20 instructors were identified as respondents, ensuring a manageable yet diverse group that could provide comprehensive insights from different academic disciplines.

3.3. Instrument

The main research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher based on the study's objectives. The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed responses about instructors' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to their tone of voice and use of positive language in classroom communication. It consisted of two major parts: (1) questions focused on how instructors' tone influences classroom communication, student engagement, and credibility as educational leaders, and (2) questions centered on how positive language contributes to motivation, respect, and classroom atmosphere. Example items included: "How does your tone of voice affect how students respond to your instructions, feedback, or discussions?" and "Can you share an experience when your positive words improved a student's attitude or the class environment?" The guide was validated by communication and education experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives before data collection. Table 1 presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
To examine how instructors' tone of voice influences classroom communication, student engagement, and credibility as educational leaders.	How does your tone of voice affect how students respond to your instructions, feedback, or discussions? Can you describe a situation where adjusting your tone changed the way students reacted or understood your message? How do you maintain an authoritative yet approachable tone when managing classroom behavior or addressing conflicts?

To determine how positive language strengthens motivation, respect, and classroom atmosphere.	In what ways do you integrate positive language into your daily classroom communication and interactions? How does using positive language affect students' confidence and participation? Can you share an experience when your positive words improved a student's attitude or the class environment?
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3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought approval from the university's research ethics committee and secured consent from the participating instructors. Once approval was granted, participants were contacted and briefed on the purpose, nature, and confidentiality of the study. In-depth interviews were then conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms, depending on participants' availability and preference. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accuracy of data transcription. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues, tone variations, and significant contextual observations. After data collection, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and returned selected portions to participants for verification through a member-checking process, ensuring credibility and accuracy of the responses. All gathered data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

3.5. Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret and organize the qualitative data. This method was chosen because it enables the identification of recurring patterns and themes that reflect how instructors perceive and apply tone and positive language as communicative and leadership tools. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researcher (1) familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generated initial codes related to tone, language, motivation, engagement, and leadership, (3) collated codes into potential themes, (4) reviewed and refined the themes for coherence and distinction, (5) defined and named each theme, and (6) produced a final narrative analysis. The themes were supported by direct quotations from participants to provide authenticity and depth. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher applied criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, using peer debriefing and audit trails to strengthen the study's rigor and validity.

RESULTS

Research Objective 1: To examine how instructors' tone of voice influences classroom communication, student engagement, and credibility as educational leaders.

Question No. 1. How does your tone of voice affect how students respond to your instructions, feedback, or discussions?

1.1 Positive and Encouraging Tone

Instructors noted that modulating their voice to project warmth and patience acts as a psychological buffer for students in the learning environment. This relational approach dismantles the fear of judgment, fostering a secure space where trial and error are viewed as essential components of the learning cycle. Ultimately, this tone strengthens the instructor-student dynamic, promoting a growth mindset and encouraging proactive participation. "When I use a calm, friendly, and encouraging tone, students tend to feel safer and more supported in the learning environment."

"A friendly and supportive tone can strengthen the teacher-student relationship, creating an environment of trust where students feel comfortable seeking help or clarifying doubts."

1.2 Neutral and Professional Tone

A steady, objective vocal delivery serves as an anchor in the classroom, minimizing emotional distractions and maximizing focus on academic content. Participants observed that eliminating dramatic inflections helps establish a structured, predictable environment, which is particularly effective for managing large or diverse groups. This approach signals fairness and clarity, ensuring instructions are unambiguously received while maintaining a highly professional atmosphere.

"Maintaining a neutral and steady tone helps keep the class focused and creates a predictable learning environment."

"A neutral tone helps in managing classroom dynamics, especially in large classes or mixed-ability groups."

1.3 Playful or Humorous Tone

The strategic use of humor and a lighthearted delivery functions to flatten perceived hierarchies, making the instructor appear highly approachable. This communicative strategy effectively diffuses classroom tension and lowers affective filters, thereby catalyzing peer collaboration and intellectual risk-taking. As a result, the learning experience transitions from a rigid obligation to a shared, engaging communal activity.

"Injecting humor or a lighthearted tone in discussions can significantly enhance student engagement and make the classroom environment feel more welcoming."

"A lighthearted tone fosters collaboration and peer interaction. When the classroom feels relaxed, students are more likely to work together, discuss ideas freely, and support each other in learning tasks."

Question No. 2. Can you describe a situation where adjusting your tone changed the way students reacted or understood your message?

2.1 Explaining a complex physics concept in a fast-paced and monotone manner

Pacing and enthusiasm are critical variables when communicating dense technical information. Instructors recalled instances where rapid, monotone delivery of complex theories resulted in cognitive overload and student disengagement. By deliberately decelerating their speech and inflecting their tone with enthusiasm, educators not only gave students the necessary cognitive processing time but also signaled the intrinsic value of the subject matter, transforming confusion into active inquiry.

"During a lecture on a complex physics concept, the initial delivery was fast-paced, very technical, and monotone, which caused many students to appear lost and only a few to ask questions."

"Enthusiasm communicates that the topic matters that encourages the students to invest attention."

2.2 Discussing group performance issue with authoritative tone

When addressing academic shortcomings, transitioning from a punitive, authoritative tone to a neutral, collaborative one yields significantly better pedagogical outcomes. Participants noted that highlighting deficits with a firm voice often triggers defensiveness and silences dialogue. Conversely, framing critiques as shared problem-solving opportunities shifts the classroom dynamic from one of blame to one of accountability and proactive teamwork.

"During a discussion about group project performance issues, I initially used a firm and authoritative tone, focusing on mistakes and areas where students fell short."

"I emphasized solutions over blame, encouraged each group member to reflect and contribute, and acknowledged their successes and efforts before discussing areas for improvement."

2.3 Demonstrating a clinical procedure to students in a lab in a fast-paced and matter-of-fact tone

In high-stakes practical applications, such as clinical or laboratory demonstrations, a rushed and purely task-oriented tone can induce performance anxiety. Instructors found that slowing down and verbally normalizing mistakes creates a supportive scaffolding for skill acquisition. This deliberate adjustment in vocal delivery bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical execution, significantly boosting student confidence and accuracy.

"During a laboratory demonstration of a clinical procedure, I initially presented the steps in a fast-paced, matter-of-fact tone, focusing on completing the procedure efficiently."

"I also demonstrated the procedure slowly with examples and guided students through hands-on practice while observing closely."

Question No. 3. How do you maintain an authoritative yet approachable tone when managing classroom behavior or addressing conflicts?

3.1 Establish clear expectations and consistently enforce to maintain authority

Authority is most effectively maintained when it is rooted in consistency rather than strictness. Instructors who establish transparent behavioral and academic boundaries early on can afford to use a supportive, corrective tone when infractions occur. By operating alongside students rather than in opposition to them, educators enforce standards without fracturing the foundational trust and rapport necessary for effective classroom management. "On the first day of class I made it very clear from the syllabus and our discussion exactly what the expectations like attendance, participation, how we handle late work and what respectful behaviour looks like in this room." "I also make a point of being available like I hold a brief checkin time after class, I tell students if something is going on I'd rather you come talk with me than let it spiral."

3.2 Maintain authority while remaining approachable

Balancing strict compliance with interpersonal warmth is vital, especially in environments where safety and fairness are non-negotiable. Instructors navigate this dichotomy by utilizing a firm voice for enforcing critical rules while maintaining a conversational, engaging demeanor during standard interactions. This duality ensures that standards are upheld while preserving an approachable environment where students feel comfortable seeking guidance.

"In the lab environment, rules are nonnegotiable for safety and fairness e.g., equipment use, cleanup, participation so I use a firm voice that establishes authority."

"I'm approachable in that the students know they can ask me questions, get help from me and even drop by office hours for some questions and clarifications."

3.3 Set a professional and structured classroom tone

Setting a highly structured tone from the onset establishes the classroom as a professional sphere, preparing students for future workplace environments. Instructors utilize a neutral, firm delivery to address off-task behavior swiftly, minimizing disruption. However, pairing this strict structure with an open invitation for dialogue prevents the environment from feeling overly punitive, allowing for constructive behavioral correction.

"My approach is somewhat more structured: first week we go through classroom etiquette, ontime arrival, phones away, respect for peers' questions, etc."

"If someone is off task, I use a neutral but firm tone and will usually say they need to stop what they're doing now so the rest of us can focus."

Research Objective 2: To determine how positive language strengthens motivation, respect, and classroom atmosphere.

Question No. 1. In what ways do you integrate positive language into your daily classroom communication and interactions?

1.1 Acknowledging students' efforts rather than just correcting them

Shifting the communicative focus from absolute accuracy to the recognition of effort profoundly impacts student engagement. Participants utilize positive reinforcement to validate the learning process itself, effectively normalizing struggle as a mechanism for growth. By providing specific, supportive feedback, instructors foster a psychologically safe space where intrinsic motivation thrives over the fear of evaluation.

"I always try to acknowledge students' efforts rather than just the correctness of their answers. I believe that when students feel recognized for trying, they become more confident in participating, even if they are unsure of their responses."

"I also make it a point to give specific feedback, highlighting what they did well and what they can work on next."

1.2 Using affirmative feedback during presentations and discussions

Publicly affirming students' communicative strengths serves as a powerful catalyst for building self-efficacy. By deliberately highlighting effective behaviors during presentations, instructors reinforce positive academic habits and encourage continuous skill development. This targeted affirmation creates a reciprocal environment of support, elevating overall classroom participation and engagement.

"I use affirmative feedback during presentations and discussions to help students recognize their strengths and build confidence in their communication skills."

"Affirmative feedback also creates a supportive atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas."

1.3 Highlighting professional values using positive language

Positive language acts as a bridge between current academic performance and future career identities. Instructors strategically frame their feedback to highlight core professional competencies, such as teamwork and ethical behavior. This linguistic strategy instills a deeper sense of purpose, motivating students to embody these values and approach their education as foundational preparation for their professional lives.

"I highlight professional values using positive language so students can connect their classroom performance with the real expectations of their future careers."

"I also connect positive language to core values of the profession, such as compassion, teamwork, and ethical behavior."

Question No. 2. How does using positive language affect students' confidence and participation?

2.1 Affirmations connect effort with progress

Verbal affirmations are instrumental in helping students explicitly link their academic exertion to tangible progress. When instructors validate individual contributions, students transition from a mindset of risk-avoidance to one of active intellectual exploration. This shift not only amplifies individual self-esteem but also cultivates an inclusive, collaborative learning community where peer motivation flourishes.

"Affirmations help students see the connection between their effort and progress. When students hear that their insights contribute to the learning community, their confidence grows."

"Affirmations help students develop a growth mindset. As a result, students become more engaged and willing to participate in discussions, group tasks, and even leadership roles during activities."

2.2 Praising a student's reasoning before correcting mistakes reduces anxiety

The fear of public failure frequently stifles student participation. Instructors counteract this by acknowledging the cognitive effort and logic behind a student's answer before addressing factual errors. This communicative sequence validates the student's thought process, significantly reducing performance anxiety and reinforcing the principle that critical thinking is just as valuable as finding the correct answer.

"Many students hold back because they fear making mistakes in front of their peers. When instructors intentionally highlight the strengths in a student's response such as their reasoning, approach, or effort it reduces anxiety and encourages a more open learning atmosphere."

"As their confidence builds, students become more willing to attempt difficult questions or share developing ideas."

2.3 Positive language helps build rapport and trust

The consistent application of positive language is foundational to establishing profound interpersonal trust between instructors and students. When learners feel genuinely supported through constructive affirmations, they exhibit a greater willingness to engage in vulnerable, skill-based activities like role-plays and demonstrations. This established trust accelerates skill acquisition and fosters a highly dynamic, interactive classroom culture.

"Positive language builds rapport and trust between teacher and students. When students feel genuinely supported, they are more comfortable stepping outside their comfort zones especially during role-plays, presentations, and practical demonstrations that require public performance."

"When I consistently emphasize growth such as noting improved communication, teamwork, or confidence students begin to internalize these positive beliefs."

Question No. 3. Can you share an experience when your positive words improved a student's attitude or the class environment?

3.1 Highlighting students' strengths first boosts confidence and motivation

Utilizing a "strengths-first" feedback model significantly alters how students receive and process critique. By anchoring evaluations in positive reinforcement, instructors model professional peer review and reduce defensive barriers. This strategy cultivates a community of reflective practitioners who view feedback as an instrument for growth, ultimately transforming the classroom into a collaborative, rather than competitive, space.

"When students conducted lesson demonstrations, I made it a practice to highlight specific strengths before discussing areas for improvement."

"I noticed a significant change in the overall class environment. Students became more open to receiving critique because they realized feedback was meant to support growth, not to judge mistakes."

3.2 Praising specific strengths builds confidence during challenging tasks

During high-anxiety tasks, such as public speaking or reading, targeted praise serves as a critical intervention for overcoming self-doubt. Instructors observed that highlighting specific, successful elements of a student's performance provides the necessary psychological scaffolding for them to tackle more demanding tasks. This positive reinforcement creates a ripple effect, elevating the courage and participation levels of the entire class.

"In my literature class, I had students who struggled with reading aloud because they lacked confidence and feared mispronouncing words."

"Student participation increased significantly. They went from minimal involvement to raising their hand and eventually volunteering for a dramatic reading in front of the entire class."

3.3 Positive language reduces stress and tension in group work

Collaborative projects frequently become breeding grounds for interpersonal tension and stress. Instructors mitigate these conflicts by strategically shifting their language to emphasize collective progress and shared successes. This linguistic intervention reorients students from a paradigm of blame to one of solution-oriented negotiation, fostering accountability, unity, and a healthier group dynamic.

"In group projects, tension and conflict often arise due to overlapping tasks, uneven participation, or pressure to meet deadlines."

"Instead of pointing fingers when challenges appeared, students became more solution-oriented. They were more willing to negotiate tasks, listen to each other, and support weaker members."

DISCUSSION

This study is anchored on Social Influence Theory, which posits that individuals' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors can be shaped by others through communication, persuasion, and social interaction (Kelman, 1958; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In educational contexts, instructors are considered powerful agents of social influence because their tone of voice, word choice, and interpersonal demeanor can shape students' perceptions, motivations, and engagement in learning. Social Influence Theory suggests that influence operates through three primary mechanisms: compliance, identification, and internalization. These mechanisms explain how instructors' communicative behavior particularly their tone and use of positive language impacts students' responses, classroom atmosphere, and perception of the instructor's leadership and credibility.

Influence of Tone on Classroom Communication and Engagement. Findings based on the first objective examining how instructors' tone of voice influences classroom communication, student engagement, and credibility as educational leaders can be understood through the identification and internalization dimensions of Social

Influence Theory. Instructors' tone of voice conveys not only the literal meaning of words but also their emotional intent and relational stance toward students. A warm, encouraging, and respectful tone enables students to identify positively with the instructor, perceiving them as approachable and empathetic authority figures. This form of identification fosters trust and openness, which are essential for meaningful communication and student engagement.

Conversely, a harsh, indifferent, or overly authoritative tone may trigger resistance or compliance without genuine understanding. When students comply merely out of fear or obligation, their engagement becomes superficial a dynamic consistent with Kelman's concept of compliance-based influence, where behavior changes temporarily to avoid negative consequences rather than as a result of genuine motivation. On the other hand, when instructors communicate with a balanced tone authoritative yet respectful students are more likely to internalize classroom values and expectations. They do not merely follow instructions but come to believe in the importance of active participation and mutual respect as shared norms within the learning environment.

Tone also functions as a nonverbal cue of leadership credibility. Instructors who modulate their tone to express confidence, empathy, and clarity are often perceived as competent leaders who can manage learning dynamics effectively. Through consistent exposure to such communication, students internalize these qualities as part of academic professionalism, further validating the role of tone as a subtle yet powerful form of social influence in education. This aligns with Cialdini's (2004) principle of liking and authority, where individuals are more likely to be persuaded or guided by those they admire and trust.

Role of Positive Language in Motivation, Respect, and Classroom Climate. In relation to the second objective determining how positive language strengthens motivation, respect, and classroom atmosphere Social Influence Theory provides a useful lens to explain how affirming, supportive, and respectful communication fosters intrinsic motivation and prosocial behavior among students. Positive language operates through the mechanism of internalization, wherein students adopt the values and attitudes modeled by the instructor because they align with their own self-concept and aspirations. When instructors use affirming statements such as "You're improving," or "Let's work on this together," they activate emotional reinforcement that encourages students to persist despite challenges.

This internalization process transforms the classroom into a psychologically safe and motivating space. Students who feel respected and encouraged are more willing to engage in academic discourse, share opinions, and take learning risks behaviors that are central to participative learning. The repeated use of positive language thus becomes a social cue signaling inclusivity, fairness, and empathy, which in turn shapes the classroom's collective emotional climate. Within the framework of Social Influence Theory, such communication fosters identification-based influence, where students emulate the instructor's constructive communication patterns and replicate them in peer interactions, creating a ripple effect of positivity and respect.

Furthermore, positive language enhances the relational dimension of leadership. It reinforces the instructor's image as a transformational leader one who motivates followers through inspiration rather than control. By communicating optimism, appreciation, and encouragement, instructors influence students' self-perception and sense of belonging. This type of influence extends beyond academic performance to emotional and social development, supporting the notion that educational leadership is fundamentally communicative and relational. As such, positive language not only motivates students but also cultivates a classroom culture grounded in mutual respect and shared success.

When interpreted together, the effects of tone and positive language reveal a coherent pattern of social influence processes in the classroom. Instructors' tone primarily shapes students' immediate emotional and behavioral responses, influencing compliance and engagement. Meanwhile, positive language contributes to long-term attitudinal change by fostering identification and internalization. Through these interconnected mechanisms, instructors become not only transmitters of knowledge but also social influencers who shape students' emotional experiences and communication norms.

This synthesis underscores that effective educational leadership relies less on positional authority and more on relational authority, which is constructed through everyday communicative acts. Instructors who communicate with warmth, respect, and clarity embody the principles of ethical influence guiding students not through coercion, but through trust and inspiration. Therefore, Social Influence Theory provides a robust explanatory framework

for understanding how tone and positive language operate as tools of persuasion, motivation, and leadership in higher education.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that instructors' tone of voice and use of positive language play crucial roles in fostering effective communication, student engagement, and leadership presence in higher education. A calm, encouraging, or humorous tone helps create a safe, supportive, and participative learning environment, while maintaining a neutral or authoritative tone ensures clarity, fairness, and respect. Adjusting tone whether to convey enthusiasm during complex discussions or empathy in addressing classroom issues significantly enhances understanding, motivation, and classroom dynamics. Similarly, the consistent use of positive language strengthens students' confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging. Acknowledging effort, offering affirmative feedback, and highlighting professional values not only reduce anxiety but also cultivate a growth mindset and mutual respect. Positive words transform the classroom atmosphere from one of fear or competition to one of collaboration, trust, and shared learning. Overall, the study concludes that tone and positive language are powerful tools of educational leadership. When used intentionally, they not only improve communication and student participation but also model the empathy, professionalism, and respect that define effective and inspiring educators....

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