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## The Concept of Dialogue: its Importance and Obstacles

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### *Abstract*

*The concept of dialogue, both linguistically and terminologically, is markedly different from intertwined concepts such as debate, argumentation, and negotiation. Dialogue is considered one of the methods used in any human discourse. In this research, we shed light on its clarification and discussion. Subsequently, we delve into the concept of interactive communication in dialogue, emphasizing that dialogue is based on the foundation of understanding, which involves agreement between individuals to achieve specific goals they aim for. Furthermore, we discuss the importance of dialogue, both internally and externally, and highlight the obstacles that should be avoided in dialogue.*

**Keywords:** Dialogue, Interactive Communication, Importance of Dialogue, Dialogue Obstacles

### **Introduction**

#### **Language and Terminology**

##### **Firstly, the Concept of Dialogue**

Linguistically, the word “dialogue” in the Arabic language carries several meanings, rooted in the term “hiwar” (dialogue), which denotes returning to something and from something, and it also refers to debate and discussion. “tahawur” (dialogue) signifies interaction. It is said, “I heard their dialogue and conversation.” “tahawur” (dialogue) means interaction. One might say, “He pondered, and his word did not return to me as dialogue,” meaning that dialogue involves the retraction of speech and responding through addressing. Dialogue is mentioned in the Quran in three contexts: when God said, “And his companion, while he was conversing with him, said, ‘Have you disbelieved in He who created you from dust and then from a sperm-drop and then proportioned you [as] a man?’” (Surah Al-Kahf: Verse 34.), and when His saying goes, “And you complain to Allah, and Allah is Hearing and Seeing” (Surah Al-Kahf: Verse 37.). It seems that in these three instances, dialogue is the act of revisiting and exchanging words between two parties, involving giving and receiving. (Jethwani & Ramchandani, 2022)

In the English language, “dialogue” means discussion, conversation, and debate (Surah Al-Mujadalah: Verse 51.). In response, “istihara” (dialogue) means to interrogate. “muhawara” (dialogue) involves reviewing logic in communication. It is said, “They are in dialogue,” meaning they are reconsidering their words (Mangono, 2008, p. 27).

In the French language, “Dialogue” is derived from the Greek word “Dialogos,” which is a compound of “Dia,” meaning between, and “Logos,” meaning word or speech. Its effects are mutual, whether collective or individual (Ibn Manzur, 2003, pp. 217-218).

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For linguists, dialogue has many meanings, all of which are based on a single context: “interacting conversation dialogue.” (Suleiba, 1982, p. 501) Dialogue entails debate, revisiting pronunciation and speech in communication, and exchanging ideas, necessitating the presence of two individuals, a speaker and a listener, who engage in a discussion, with the speaker sometimes being the sender of the message and at other times the recipient of it. (Joo et al., 2023)

In terms of terminology, several researchers have explored the definition of dialogue, and their definitions closely align. It is defined as a "conversation between two individuals or groups, focusing on a specific topic, each with their own perspective. Its aim is to seek truth or a maximum degree of alignment of viewpoints, free from hostility or bias, using a rational and knowledgeable approach, with both parties willing to accept the truth, even if it emerges from the other party" (Yaqub Al-Din, 2008, p. 219). Additionally, it can be described as "one of the forms of communication among individuals, characterized by the exchange of arguments, opinions, and meanings. In other words, it is the lived experience through words. Dialogue is the only form of communication, an interactive act rather than just a temporary response" (Ajak, 1998, p. 90; Derince, 2022)

Dialogue, therefore, serves as the foundation for a specific discourse, where the conversation between the speaker and the interlocutor is built upon a shared foundation that acts as a fabric of exchangeable thoughts. In this environment, the sender and receiver meld together to become a single entity coexisting in the same world. Consequently, dialogic communication is a web of data and ideas, continually generating new data and ideas. Both interlocutors are producers of thoughts and consumers of each other's ideas (Abboud, 2008, p. 71).

Some philosophers and legal scholars have expanded the concept of dialogue to a broader and more comprehensive level, replacing the format of verbal dialogue between two participants with religious, cultural, civic, and political dialogue between two or more populations. This is done to create an atmosphere of closeness, understanding, love, and respect. Ethical dialogue between nations, based on conditions, is considered "an effective tool for crystallizing ideas and theories instead of isolation," which can be detrimental to parties lacking the culture and logic of dialogue, knowledge, and understanding (Al-Sheikhly, 1993, p. 6).

Opinions have varied regarding the concept of dialogue and its mechanisms. Some argue that dialogue, in its various forms, is a conversation between two parties to find common ground. This common ground may consist of shared values such as justice, equality, love, and respect. Others believe that dialogue aims to achieve material and moral interests for both parties through persuasion. "Humans, as Plato says, have the ability to persuade by presenting various alternative means, and civilization is the preservation of the social order through persuasion" (Abboud, 2008, p. 74 & Adel, 2011, p. 51). The desired dialogue is primarily based on the common name of the great human values that enrich all cultures and religions. These human values constitute the fertile material that ensures the growth and prosperity of dialogue. Dialogue is "the general and global popular force that the interacting peoples participate in creating and benefiting from" (Waqidi, 1990, p. 171).

Every contemplative thought is essentially dialogic in nature because it begins with an inner dialogue with oneself, and then this dialogue extends outward to engage with others. (Fadl Allah, 1987, p. 57). Human activity represents an interactive endeavour aimed at asserting one's existence by expressing emotions and feelings in the presence of others. Therefore, “every human activity is nothing but a dialogue” (Saidi, 2015, p. 17; Okafor et al., 2023)

In the realm of rhetorical discourse analysis, the term “dialogue” may be used to indicate, in contrast to monologue, any exchange of speech, most often between two individuals. However, many prefer to use it to refer to more formal forms of conversation where there is a mutual intention to achieve a specific outcome.

Thus, when discussing dialogue in theatre, philosophy, and other contexts, it tends to acquire ethical value: “Dialogue seeks to move away from the field of power and interests... The pleasure of dialogue does not come from consensus but from the enrichments that never cease” (Abdullah, 2020, p. 1240). As for the term “dialogism” (Dialogis me), it is used in rhetoric to signify the method involving the incorporation of an imaginary dialogue within the spoken discourse. In discourse analysis, it is used following Bakhtin to refer to the interactive dimension of language, whether spoken or written (Matghuno, 2020, p. 17). The speaker is never isolated; their discourse becomes the space where the opinions of the direct interlocutors meet in conversation or discussion about any event from ordinary life, worldviews, tendencies, theories, etc. Bakhtin’s dialogism is primarily used to emphasize the multifaceted nature of linguistic interaction (ibid).

In literary dictionaries, “dialogue” means a conversation or interaction among participants in a conversation, pursuing the exchange of opinions and ideas, and it is used in poetry, short stories, and novels (Fathi, 1986, p. 148).

From the above, it becomes clear that dialogue is the exchange of ideas and knowledge between two or more individuals within the context of a specific subject or issue, with the aim of reaching an agreement or a resolution related to the subject of the dialogue, or the formulation of an ethical agreement in order for the dialogue to be fruitful. Ultimately, it aims to generate new knowledge. Dialogue becomes the mechanism or fundamental principle that propels thinking beyond its limits and makes it more open, and thus, thinking and dialogue converge in debate, argument, and discussion, which are the foundation of any dialogue.

### **Firstly, Interrelated Concepts with Dialogue**

Several terms are closely associated with the concept of dialogue, and some may even be considered synonyms, which should be clarified to highlight the uniqueness of dialogue. Among the most prominent of these concepts are argumentation, discussion, debate, and negotiation. These concepts can be explained as follows:

#### **Debate and Dialogue**

The concept of debate is often confused with dialogue to the extent that they are sometimes used interchangeably. However, they are distinct concepts. Dialogue is a “form of collaboration between two or more parties towards a common goal,” whereas debate is a form of expressing opposition. In a debate, there are two opposing sides, each attempting to prove the other wrong. Each side seeks to find faults, weaknesses, and errors in the opponent's ideas and arguments, creating a closed mindset that always sees itself as correct (Abboud, 2008, pp. 81-82).

Nevertheless, debate can sometimes serve as “a method for dialogue that can, at times, lead to the truth through reasoning. The debater knows how to organize their knowledge and integrate it into a coherent system, and they particularly know how to find a logical basis for their opinions” (Fadl Allah, 1994, p. 9).

Despite debate, whether in its commendable or condemnable form, being a form of conflict, albeit an intellectual one, it either ends with embarrassing one of the parties and proving their error, leading them to abandon their opinions, or it traps the opponent and humiliates them. Debate, argumentation, and controversy all tend to lean towards confrontation, even if it means stubbornly adhering to one’s own opinion (Fathi, 1995, p. 10).

What is known about dialogue is that it is based on a general ethical foundation between the parties or a common set of rules governing it, which the interlocutors must adhere to. Its ultimate aim is to reach a satisfactory outcome for both parties (Jaber, 2019, p. 478).

In summary, dialogue and debate share the aspect of reviewing spoken communication between two parties, but they diverge in their style of review and their intentions.

### **Discussion and Dialogue**

It has become common among people, both the general public and intellectuals, to use the term “discussion” to mean dialogue, which is a misapplication. Linguistically, “discussion” means examining an account, that is, investigating it. Typically, an account involves two parties. However, the examination is usually biased in favour of one of them. Discussing one party with the other implies scrutinizing and grasping everything the other party possesses. Therefore, the politeness of ideas is often hindered because people try to prove the correctness of their ideas (ibid).

In “discussion,” individuals also hold fixed positions and compete to prove their viewpoints and persuade others to change. At the very least, “discussion” leads to some form of agreement or compromise, without producing any creative or innovative outcome. In contrast, the primary goal of dialogue is to reveal inconsistencies in our thinking, and thus, it can lead to the discovery or reconstruction of a genuine and creative collective consciousness (Basloum, 2005, p. 16).

However, some link discussion and dialogue. Gadamer, for instance, sees discussion as a process in which two individuals attempt to understand each other. Openness to the other is the fundamental characteristic of conversation. Each of them takes the viewpoint of the other seriously until they understand what the other is saying. In the context of discussion, information becomes something that is not fixed or something that needs to be discovered. It is an extended process that emerges in interaction, where the parties to this interaction hold preconceived judgments that Gadamer (2022, p. 1) referred to as the horizon of intellectual understanding. This horizon includes a number of perspectives that take precedence over others (Al-Tobi, 1984, p. 21). In this context, Habermas introduces the concept of the fusion of horizons, meaning that the agreement between the discussants is not imposed but depends on common beliefs and understanding that comes from the past and is tested in the present and carried into the future (Adel, 2013, p. 52).

### **Negotiation and Debates**

Another interrelated concept in dialogue is negotiation or bargaining. It differs from dialogue in that negotiation aims to achieve one’s own benefit or interest using all available means, including rhetorical, rational, and diplomatic arguments. In other words, it encompasses all oral and expressive techniques. Negotiation concludes with a form of balancing conditions or settling disputes over the interests being negotiated, in a way acceptable to all parties (ibid).

As for debates, they do not allow parties to engage in mutual work to explain and clarify the topic of discussion. The debater or antagonist does not see the other party or the recipient as a partner in the quest for truth (Jaber, 2019, p. 478). Instead, they view them as an opponent, adversary, or enemy in error, posing a threat to the other party. The goal becomes the victory of one of the parties. Dialogue, on the other hand, is a form of cooperative and collaborative inquiry into the truth and the revelation of the foundation and ground upon which all the surrounding elements are based.

### **The Concept of Interactive Communication in Dialogue**

Interactive communication constitutes the essence of dialogue, and it is its fundamental component, as no effective dialogue is devoid of interactive communication between different parties. The term "interactive communication" essentially comprises two concepts: the concept of "interaction," which

means action and reaction. In the context of dialogue, it implies participation in action and reaction concerning specific content. The term "communication" corresponds to the foreign term "continuities," which signifies continuity and includes another concept close to it, which is the concept of "communication" (Abdul Rahman, 2014, p. 33).

Communication "is the exchange of speech between a speaker who produces a spoken message directed towards another speaker. It seeks listening, direct or implied response, depending on the spoken message." (Nazif, 2010, p. 24) Definitions of communication implicitly reflect the importance of content and relationship in establishing interaction.

Communication plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's identity and awareness of themselves and the world around them. Through communication, an individual gains awareness of themselves in the context of their perception of others' relationships and experiences (Muhayel, 2005, p. 15). They benefit from the behaviors of individuals they interact with. As such, communication becomes a foundational condition for all social life. Communication is facilitated through the shared language of acceptance, creating symbols or relationships that represent the interactive relationship between the self and the other (Nazif, 2010, p. 22).

Despite the differences in individual languages, which are a trading facet of linguistic diversity in communication, this variation constitutes the truth behind the need for dialogue. In fact, the difference in individual languages paves the way for dialogue, and this linguistic diversity is what leads to differences of opinion, making it one of the reasons for the intensification and evolution of dialogue (Nour Al-Din, 1994, p. 164).

Language represents the primary barrier to any dialogue, where "language" here means culture and not just symbols or linguistic rules. Language can either bind or push towards a specific way of life, a set of practices and traditions, or a system of standards related to justice and ethics, or a specific concept of ethics, religion, politics, and economics. If we strip language of its cultural context, it becomes a lifeless body or an empty frame (Nour Al-Din, 1994, p. 165). We can conclude that the concept of dialogue intersects with the concept of communication in a common intellectual and cognitive framework. Both involve building bridges to reach the other.

### **Secondly: The Importance of Dialogue and Its Dimensions**

Dialogue is considered the ideal means for acquaintance and shedding light on the obscure points in human relationships. Considering dialogue as one of the most prevalent and practiced forms of human discourse, it strengthens options for communication and acquaintance between nations and peoples. It is considered the ideal cultural method for humans to learn about their fellow beings and address the misunderstandings that have arisen between civilizations for centuries. Dialogue is a peaceful way to solve social problems through discussion and mutual expression (Nazif, 2010, pp. 46-47). In the words of Hannah Arendt, an American philosopher (1906-1975): "We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves when we speak about it, and when we speak, we learn how to be human beings" (Abboud, 2008, p. 90). It is worth noting that Hannah Arendt's prestigious position in the field of political science is primarily attributed to her book: "The Origins of Totalitarianism.", which was discussed by: Abdullah (2020, p. 148).

Dialogue is one of the necessities that life cannot be imagined without. The essence of speech is dialogue. In fact, the first words spoken by the first human being were fundamentally dialogical. It's essential to note that dialogue is built on differences, meaning that differences give birth to dialogue, where each party seeks to convince the other of their point of view. While the manifestations of differences have multiplied in the present, encompassing political, religious, cultural, and social aspects,

among others, dialogue remains the most successful means of resolving theoretical and practical differences. This is because it begins with mutual recognition. Through the principles of dialogue, compliance with the principle of the right to difference is achieved (El- Bahi, 2013, p. 21).

Therefore, dialogue is inherently intertwined with every form of speech and forms the basis for differences. This underscores the importance of dialogue, with the following being its most significant aspects:

### **A. The Mechanistic Importance**

Dialogue is the foundation of civilization and the transition of the natural human being into a political or civil individual. It grants rights and imposes duties, giving you the right to belief and the right to criticize differing opinions and beliefs. It also imposes duties; thus, whoever holds a belief or makes a claim must first listen to the evidence presented by the claimant before engaging in objections. Dialogue is, therefore, the field of exercising the persuasive power of humanity. (Abdul Rahman, 2018, p. 28).

Dialogue passes through multiple paths and various methods and procedures. It does not follow a single level but oscillates between affirmation and denial, belief and disbelief, suspicion and certainty, submission, and firm conviction. These procedures encompass the entire discourse or a portion of it. Understanding the discourse directed towards others is not merely about extracting the meaning of the words but is built upon the dialectical interaction between the addressing self and the addressed self, which involves considering the interpretation of the addressee. (Najm & Onizan, 2023, p. 239)

### **B. The Internal Importance**

Dialogues exist in the presence of human collectivity in the individual appearance of each person. The fundamental truth is that a human is not solitary but a collective entity, both “self” and “other” simultaneously (Abdul Rahman, 2018, p. 28). The dialogical process is in harmony with the essence of humans as collectives, not as individuals. Although dialogue encompasses different fields, it fundamentally depends on the encounter of two open-minded individuals. Interculturalism is the process of a collective group acquiring cultural practices belonging to the traditions of another group (Barry, 2011). Thus, dialogue becomes the primary expression of any ideal human stance or lived human experience, even in the case of internal dialogue with oneself. Dialogue with oneself is a cognitive and reflective inner dialogue within human nature. It is a step toward understanding others, a genuine desire for self-improvement, expanding one’s cognitive horizons, benefiting from the knowledge and achievements of others. Knowledge is relative, enriched through dialogue, interaction, and communication, and this drives further knowledge. (El- Bahi, 2013, p. 41)

### **C. The External Importance**

Dialogue with the other here refers to dialogue with those who differ in religion, nationality, culture, and identity, regardless of their opinions and beliefs. However, some people argue that dialogue should be limited to homogeneous groups or closely related topics (Jaber, 2019, p. 500). They claim that Muslims should only engage with Muslims, and Christians with Christians, citing the avoidance of unproductive disputes and the pursuit of benefits as reasons. Dialogue participants do not always share the same knowledge and beliefs. The nature of the differences among them plays a central role in determining the style of dialogue that can be adopted to address their divergent perspectives, sometimes even contradictory. If the goal of dialogue is to find a way to resolve existing differences between clans, sects, or civilizations, it becomes a means of organizing, regulating, and legalizing these differences by bringing together differing, and at times conflicting, viewpoints. This is done to confront the challenges of the era and devise appropriate solutions for them. (El- Bahi, 2013, p. 10)



### Thirdly: Obstacles to be Avoided in Dialogue

The process of dialogue involves obstacles that participants must avoid to ensure the success of the dialogue. These obstacles include:

1. **Conceptualization:** This involves altering the opposing viewpoint for criticism, so the statement is not taken as is. Some may intend to change the context, the real context surrounding the edges of the dialogue (Barko, 2010, p. 29). This leads to a transformation from the five forms of dialogue, which are:
2. **Persuasive Dialogue:** Characterized by its competitive nature, where each party attempts to convince the opposing party to accept their ideas using logical and rational arguments. This is evident in critical discussions that rely on the Socratic method of successive questioning.
3. **Investigative Dialogue:** It relies on questioning the premises of valid and established issues used for persuasion, dealing with neutral results or information.
4. **Negotiation Dialogue:** The goal is not persuasion or the verification of information but rather reaching an agreement among all negotiating parties. It primarily aims to achieve personal benefit or interest according to an agreed-upon method. Negotiation is defined as a “dynamic expressive position, involving two or more parties discussing an issue, during which ideas and viewpoints are presented, exchanged, aligned, and reconciled, using all persuasive techniques to preserve mutual interests (Salama, 2012).
5. **Informational Dialogue:** Its purpose is to obtain news and information, primarily informational and communicative. This dialogue goes through three stages: information gathering, information analysis to reach conclusions, and finally presenting and discussing the results widely among interested parties and researchers.
6. **Educational Dialogue:** Pertains to the field of education and teaching. Its main goal is to organize and regulate relationships within educational and instructional institutions.

To the fifth form, which is the argumentative or controversial dialogue. This occurs when the four types of dialogues deviate from the original subject, meaning extracting the statement from its context and placing it in another context. It also involves using interpretation and reinterpretation to form meanings, which can lead to misunderstanding. In this style, collaborative relationships do not develop. However, one advantage of argumentative dialogue is that conflict and quarrels become alternatives, replacing physical confrontation. It serves as an outlet for all negative and pent-up emotions to establish clear and sincere long-term relationships.

The methodology, main objectives, and initial situation for shaping dialogue can be briefly summarized in the following table: (Adel, 2012, pp. 86-87)

<b>Dialogue</b>	<b>The initial position</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Objective</b>
persuasion dialogue or critical thinking	disagreement	The internal and external directory	convince the other
Investigative dialogue	Lack or lack of evidence	Evidence-based knowledge	Set up the directory
Negotiated dialogue	Divergence of interests	Success and negotiation	private benefit
Information dialog	Lack of news and information	Accountability	Get real news
Controversial dialogue	Arousing emotions and feelings	Attack and personal confrontation	Disagreement and clash
Educational dialogue	Ignorance	Education and upbringing	Dissipating knowledge

1. **2. Compliments:** The dialogue parties may engage in compliments that hinder genuine dialogue.

2. **Monolithic Thinking and Excommunication:** It is the imposition of one's opinion through force and violence, labeling anyone who opposes as an enemy. The descriptions of such opposition vary from one field to another. In the religious realm, they may be described as deviant, atheistic, or heretical. In the social context, they are accused of being deviant and aberrant, while in politics, they are labeled as opportunistic and self-serving. (El- Bahi, 2013, p. 24)
3. **Cultural Relativism:** Dialogue can open the door to cultural relativism, which contradicts the universality and objectivity of truth within each culture. (Barko, 2010, p. 29)
4. **Disconnection between Thought and Subject:** This is what makes the discourse expressed a discourse of inclusion rather than content. (Abdullah, 2020, p. 4171)
5. **False Dialogue:** It relies more on formal appearance than substance or essence. It involves accepting the words of others without discussion, showing agreement and approval (Barko, 2013, p. 29). It can be said that the absence of the condition of sincerity, without truth and trust, any dialogue will lose its purpose. (Adel, 2011, p. 33)

## Conclusion

The results of this section can be summarized as follows:

1. Definitions of dialogue vary, but they converge in the sense that they all involve reviewing and discussing speech between two parties.
2. The importance of dialogue is diverse and varies depending on the levels of dialogue. The most important levels of dialogue include individual, where dialogue goes beyond the individual context, and bilateral, which involves dialogue between two parties regardless of their characteristics and nature, and collective, where dialogue involves more than two parties, even if they are connected by a single topic or more.
3. Regarding the obstacles to dialogue, the reasons vary with the different forms of dialogue. The most important reasons include distorting the idea, magazine dialogue, monolithic thinking and excommunication, cultural relativism, the disconnection between thought and its subject, and false dialogue. Without the conditions of clarity and trust, any dialogue will lose its purpose because each dialogue has its own boundaries determined by understanding its parties and their objectives for this discussion, aiming to reach genuine opinions.

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