

A STUDY OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS AS
PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS IN
AGRICULTURAL AND EXTENSION EDUCATION *

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Good communication is particularly important in the education of students preparing for careers in agriculture and extension-related fields. Success in such fields is closely related to the ability to communicate with clients, therefore, it is extremely important that the education given to young people pursuing such careers should be a model of good communication.

The Problem

The problem was to determine which of certain selected variables might cause problems of communication in the classes taught in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Mississippi State University.

The Procedure

A comprehensive search of the literature concerning research in communication problems revealed that breakdown in the communication process within the classroom was related to (1) the personal problems of the students, (2) the classroom environment, and (3) the instructors and the methods and techniques used in teaching. From this information an instrument comprised of 45 variables was developed and administered to the students enrolled in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. There were 138 questionnaires returned, representing 100 percent of the students attending classes during the period in which data were collected.

Computations used in this study consisted of determining means, frequencies, percentages, rankings within groups, rankings within categories, and an overall ranking. Students were requested

* Based on research reported in the author's Master of Science thesis entitled "A Study of Classroom Communication Problems as Perceived by Students in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Mississippi State University," Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, Mississippi State University, 1977.

to respond to questions concerning age, sex, ancestry, citizenship, length of residence in the United States, and class standing. Student evaluations of problems as they related to individual courses and classrooms were also analyzed.

The Findings

Analyses of the data revealed that uncomfortable seating was the most important problem affecting the communication process in the classroom. Lack of visual aids was rated second, and lack of handouts, third. These were followed closely by lectures not interesting, visuals not helpful, main points of the lesson not summarized, lessons not well prepared, and the instructor not caring whether the student learned.

Table 1 summarizes the data for the entire population on all of the communication problems studied.

Uncomfortable Seating. Uncomfortable seating was particularly important to respondents enrolled in one class, who rated it as a very frequent problem, with a mean of 4.04 on a 5.00 scale. Students in another class ranked it second. Students of northern European ancestry and those of senior class standing also rated uncomfortable seating high in terms of being a problem in communication. Uncomfortable seating was reported to be a frequent problem by 68 percent of the groups under consideration. Only the respondents who were of African descent rated it as almost never a problem.

Table 2 shows the means and rankings assigned by the various groups to the problem of uncomfortable seating.

Lack of Visual Aids. Lack of visual aids was rated by the respondents as the second most important communication problem in the classroom, with a mean of 2.83. Students enrolled in one class, however, reported it to be a very frequent problem, with a mean of 4.00, followed closely by the mean of 3.36 given by students taking another class, and a mean of 3.32 by students taking still another class. Students of junior class standing and persons of northern European ancestry also found this to be a frequent problem, with students of middle-eastern ancestry finding it least important.

Table 3 summarizes the groups rankings of lack of visual aids as a communication problem.

Lack of Handouts. Lack of handouts was rated as the third most important problem by the total population, with a mean of 2.78, or more than occasionally a problem. However, respondents enrolled in one class rated it a very frequent problem, with a

Table 1

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES OF POPULATION TO
COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Item	Mean * (N = 138)	Rank Within Group	Overall Rank
<u>Group I Problems: Student Problems</u>			
Health	1.44	3	24
Sleep	1.89	1	13
Finances	1.32	7	27
Grades	1.67	2	21
Homesickness	1.25	5	30
Lonesomeness	1.34	4	26
Unhappy love life	1.29	6	29
<u>Group II Problems: Classroom Problems</u>			
Too warm	1.80	4	18
Too cold	1.87	2	16
Distractions inside	1.80	5	19
Distractions outside	1.83	3	17
Too bright	1.31	8	28
Too dark	1.22	9	31
Uncomfortable seats	3.30	1	1
Can't see face	1.45	7	23
Can't see chalkboard	1.40	6	20
<u>Group III Problems: Instructor/Instruction Problems</u>			
Not loud enough	1.91	11	12
Not distinct	1.92	10	11
Talks too fast	1.98	12	13
Talks too slow	1.67	14	21
Vocabulary	1.88	13	15
Mannerisms	1.43	15	24
Mode of dress of instructor	1.22	16	31
Lack of visuals	2.83	1	2
Visuals no help	2.73	4	5
No participation	2.29	8	9
Uninteresting lectures	2.74	3	4
Lack of handouts	2.78	2	3
Instructor not prepared	2.48	6	7
Class not summarized	2.54	5	6
Didn't care	2.43	7	8
Tests not clear	2.28	9	10

* Mean based on 1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, 4 = very frequently, and 5 = always. 27

Table 2

UNCOMFORTABLE SEATING AS A COMMUNICATION PROBLEM

Group	Mean*
Age: 19 or under	3.00
20 to 24	3.31
25 and over	3.32
Sex: Female	3.46
Male	3.25
Ancestry: Northern European	3.83
Southern European	3.29
Middle Eastern	2.33
American Indian	3.00
African	1.33
Asian	2.25
More than one	3.21
Unknown	3.03
Citizenship: United States	3.41
Other	2.00
Class standing: Freshman/sophomore	2.67
Junior	3.02
Senior	3.83
Graduate/non-classified	3.02

* Mean based on 1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, 4 = very frequently, and 5 = always.

mean of 4.00. Lack of handouts was also given a high ranking by students who were uncertain of their ancestry and those of freshman/sophomore class standing. This item was least important to students who indicated that they were of middle-eastern or African ancestry.

Table 4 summarizes the data concerning lack of handouts.

Summary

Based on data collected and analyzed in the course of this study, the following conclusions may be drawn: