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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION STYLE AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING

**Abstract.** The quality of teaching and learning heavily depend on the quality of communication taking place in the classroom. Improving communication is essential for approaching excellence in teaching and one of the discernable paths on the way to the goal is through the study of teachers' communication style as one of its key variables. The present paper is aimed at discerning approaches to the study of communication style, analyzing their theoretical propositions and empirical contribution, as well as their relevance for effective teaching research. Effective communication is a core concern in developing teaching competence, hence the study of one of its key variables is seen as a priority. The research methods applied presuppose the analysis of the communication style construct, comparison of various research traditions of the problem and synthesis of research findings with implications for effective teaching. Analysis of literature revealed several schools of thought: 1. grounded in the behaviourist traditions; 2. oriented towards behaviourist and personality theories, including social dimensions; 3. relying on personality theories; 4. grounded on theories of activity and interaction. Communication style influences such dimensions of the teaching-learning process as learning gains, affect for the teacher, instructional content and the course, learning environment, participation of students, their motivation, trust in the teacher, credibility, positive relations between teacher and learners just to mention a few.

**Key words:** communication style; effective teaching; teacher's communication behaviour; socio-communicative style.

**Introduction.** One of the three whales on whom teaching competence rests is communication competence backed up by pedagogy and subject matter competence. Improving communication is essential for approaching excellence in teaching and one of the discernable paths on the way to the goal is through the study of teachers' communication style (CS) as one of its key variables (Norton, 1977, pp. 525-541).

Numerous attempts have been made at scrutinizing the CS concept and its implications for effective teaching. Thus, at the dawn of the XXth c. a closely related notion of pedagogic communication technique was first used in the works of A.Makarenko (Makarenko, 1935); the resurgence of interest followed in the 1970ies with the introduction of communicator style concept in the study of R.Norton (Norton, 1977); the style of professional-pedagogic communication was closely analysed by Kan-Kalik I. (Kan-Kalik, 1987), the personal style concept was developed by D.Merrill and R.Reid (Merrill & Reid 1981), the construct of socio-communicative style was offered by J.McCroskey and V.Richmond (McCroskey & Richmond, 1998); relationship between communication style and effective teaching and learning was studied by J.Andersen (Andersen, 1981), R.Norton (Norton, 1977), P.Kearney and J.McCroskey (Kearney & McCroskey (1980), M.Wanzer, J.McCroskey (Wanzer and McCroskey, 1998), M.Martin, J.Chesebro, T.Mottet (Martin, Mottet & Chesebro, 1997), A.Makarova (Makarova, 1993), V.Zasluzhenyuk and V.Semychenko (Zasluzhenyuk & Semychenko, 2001) and many others.

Yet little evidence of systematic undertakings at synthesizing and drawing upon relevant research or implementing it in programmes providing special guidance for pre- and in-service teachers in our country is available.

**Methodology of the research.** In this article an attempt will be made at critically assessing and analyzing approaches to the study of the communication style of teachers. Accordingly, the tasks of the present study consist in 1. discerning traditions and lines of research into communication style, thus describing their main contribution; 2. evaluating their empirical support and

outlining their relevance for effective teaching research. The research methods applied presuppose the analysis of the CS construct, comparison of various research traditions of the problem and synthesis of research findings with implications for effective teaching.

**Results and Discussion.** Pervasive manifestation of an individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviour is often described as a style of communication. Rich theoretical provisions of the construct were offered by R.Norton (Norton, 1978) who contended that communicator style is "the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood (Norton, 1978, p.99). The communicator style is understood by him as a stable behavioural pattern of an individual.

The construct was operationalised on the basis of nine independent criteria: dominant, open, dramatic, relaxed, contentious, animated, friendly, attentive and impression-leaving. Communicator style is described in terms of the following features: it is observable, multifaceted, multicollinear, and variable, but sufficiently patterned (Norton, 1983, p.47). Communicator style is observable via non-verbal behaviour including gestures, posture, body movement, facial expression, eye contact etc.

Communicator style can be rarely registered in its pure form. Every individual accommodates a variety of features in their patterns of communication behaviours demonstrating the combination of features forming their unique constellations of communication style. In this respect, communicator style is multifaceted.

Style variables are described as multicollinear or dependant on each other, which means that style-making features often overlap and do not exclude each other. Thus, a person with a dominant, relaxed style sends a message of being confident, while a non-dominant, non-relaxed style of communication is associated with the feeling of insecurity. The style-making features may form a peculiar blend aimed at relaying certain messages between the interlocutors.

Communicator style varies depending on the context of communication. Although individuals may have their preferred style of communication or at least a dominant

one, under certain circumstances they can deviate from it (Norton, 1983, pp.47-53).

Finally, R.Norton (1983) came up with the conceptualization of the Communicator Image construct, which he used to describe an individual's perceived image in the role of a communicator i.e. the extent to which a person regards himself/herself as an effective communicator.

A distinct tradition in the study of communication style comes from the works of social psychologists and communication researchers (Bolton & Bolton, 1984; McCroskey & Richmond, 1996; McCroskey & Richmond 1998; Merrill and Reid, 1981), who classify patterns of communicative behaviour on the basis of social dimensions. As a result, a socio-communicative style (SCS) construct merging the existing research on social style and interpersonal communication was advanced by J.McCroskey and V.Richmond (McCroskey & Richmond, 1998). The followers of this line of research view communication behaviour as a product of an individual's personality and, therefore, at least partly genetically predetermined. The theory rests on the premise that personality traits affect communication behaviour and individual socio-communicative style. By observing display of one's patterns of communicative behaviour, which are rather stable, one can better understand the speaker's personality.

SCS descriptors usually include three dimensions across social behaviour, namely assertiveness, responsiveness and versatility. Assertiveness and responsiveness constitute the core elements, with versatility presenting the extent to which a person can adapt to the context of communication (Richmond & Martin, 1998, pp.133-138).

Essential to the understanding of the construct under discussion is the delineation between the socio-communicative style and socio-communicative orientation. Socio-communicative orientation describes individual's perception of his/her communicative behaviour, constituting an element of self-concept, whereas socio-communicative style is the way others perceive the individual's communicative behaviour and form an image on the basis of recurring behavioural patterns. The two images do not necessarily overlap (Richmond & Martin, 1998, p.134).

Assertive communicative behaviour reveals itself in a proactive stance, powerfulness or even aggression. Assertiveness is highly correlated with the dominant communicator style. Responsive communication behaviour includes interpersonal sensitivity, regard for others' needs, feelings or opinion. It is highly correlated with the attentive and friendly communicator styles (Waldherr & Muck, 2011, p.18). Versatility manifests itself in the capability to adapt one's communication style on the basis of situational demands. Versatility is key for effective communication in that individuals need to be able to differentiate between contexts of communication and make necessary amendments in the communication style accordingly.

D.Merrill and R.Reid (Merril & Reid, 1981) propose their classification of communication styles grounded on the levels of assertiveness and responsiveness: 1. expressive (characterized by high levels of assertiveness and responsiveness); 2. driver (characterized by high levels of assertiveness and low level of responsiveness); 3. amiable (low in assertiveness and high in responsiveness); 4. analytical (exhibits low levels of both assertiveness and responsiveness);

A similar classification was offered by Richmond and Martin (1998), who categorize styles into competent, aggressive, submissive and non-competent. High levels

of assertiveness and responsiveness add to competence in SCS and socio-communicative orientation. High levels of assertiveness combined with low responsiveness leads to aggressiveness. Communicative behaviour in which low level of assertiveness is combined with prominent responsiveness is described as submissive. When both assertiveness and responsiveness levels are low, an individual is classified as non-competent (Richmond et al, 1998, p.139).

Competent communicators with high levels of assertiveness and responsiveness more readily engage in social interactions, maintaining a higher social profile than their less assertive or responsive counterparts.

An insightful framework describing communication styles on the basis of personality theories is suggested by A.Waldherr and P.Muck (Waldherr & Muck, 2011), who contend that behaviour-based tradition in interpreting communication styles and personality-driven paradigm of communication style study often overlap and offer a perspective overarching both schools of thought (Waldherr et al, 2011, pp. 7-11).

The grounding of their framework is the Five-Factor Theory of Personality (McCrae & Costa, 1996) in light of which communication styles are viewed as "characteristic adaptations". The authors further explain that communication styles are "characteristic and relatively stable behavioural patterns, but influenced by personality, which in turn is dependant on individual biological basis" (Waldherr et al, 2011, p.8). Thus, personality traits are aligned with the communication style chosen by an individual. At the same time, the development of an individual communication style depends not only on the biological basis, but is also strongly influenced by social context, including cultural and social norms, education, unique experience etc. For instance, one's social roles and profession, in particular, make individuals shift to a more assertive behavioural pattern. In cultures where emotional display is unwelcome, expressive extroverted individuals are likely to behave in a more reserved manner as opposed to cultural contexts where openness and expressiveness are accepted as a norm.

The development of an individual communication style is thus believed to be influenced bilaterally: by the biological basis, as well as the social context. This holds special relevance for instructional communication and effective teaching researchers. In light of the propositions of the given framework, communication style although genetically dependant can be trained and partially adapted. Nevertheless, the question concerning the extent to which biologically based personality traits can be modified and influenced by instruction remains open.

#### *Teacher Communication Style*

Much of the research into the communication style construct is concerned with pedagogical context. Teacher communication style is described as "the collective perceptions of a teacher's relational image in the classroom (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980, p.533) or "as individual typological peculiarities of socio-psychological interaction between the teacher and the learner" (Kan-Kalyk, 1987, p.97).

Communication style is seen to be critical for effective teaching. Specifically, research pioneered by R.Norton (Norton, 1977) into the concept of communicator style and its relevance for effective teaching yielded prolific empirical data in its support (Andersen et al, 1981; Norton, 1978; Kearney & McCroskey, 1980).

J.Andersen, R.Norton and J.Nusbaum (Andersen et al, 1981) established that perceptions of teacher effectiveness and perceptions of student learning (across

cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions) were positively correlated with open and active style attributes.

Moreover, CS of teachers was found to be conducive to students' learning gains. Summing up the results of a number of studies, T.Wubbles, H.Créton and H.Hooymayers (Wubbles et al, 1992) posit that students' perceptions of teacher's communication style are strongly related to academic outcomes and student satisfaction with the instructional process and the instructor. Friendly, understanding and authoritative communication behaviour of teachers is positively related to student outcomes, whereas uncertain, dissatisfied and admonishing behaviours are negatively related.

Effective teachers, according to the relevant sources, are highly assertive, responsive, and versatile. In the study of M.Wanzer and J.McCroskey (Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998) assertiveness, responsiveness, students' affect for the instructor and the course material were negatively associated with teacher misbehaviour (Wanzer et al, 1998, p.48). Excellence in teaching is seen as an ultimate goal of assertive teachers. Assertiveness was found to increase students' affect toward both the teacher and the course material. Responsiveness was also strongly associated with students' liking for both the teacher and the instructional content.

Similarly, assertive teachers, perceived by students as decisive, deliberate, challenging, and dynamic, also enjoyed greater affect and commitment toward course content in the study of P.Kearney and K.McCroskey (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980, p.547). Versatility as the third major component of CS was also positively correlated with teaching effectiveness. Teachers perceived by their students as flexible, accommodating and encouraging student work were also reported to enjoy greater affect and behavioural commitment on students' part (p.549). Finally, responsiveness, like the previous two dimensions of socio-communicative style, also invoked greater affect and behavioural commitment.

Responsive and assertive teachers are more effective in establishing positive and trusting classroom atmosphere. Students display higher levels of trust toward teachers perceived by them as responsive and assertive, including students who tend to be reserved (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996, p.99).

Student participation in the classroom is also strongly linked to teacher's style of communication. To illustrate the point, the study of S.Myers and K.Rocca (Myers & Rocca, 2007) shows that student participation was associated with three profiles of teacher's communicator style: (1) the "human" instructor (made up of such features as openness, attention, friendliness and composure); (2) the "actor" instructor (including features of the dramatic, impression-leaving, and animated styles); (3) the "authority" instructor (combining attributes of the dominant, contentious and precise styles);

A link between socio-communicative style and learner motivation was established in the study of M.Martin, J.Chesebro and T.Mottet (Martin et al, 1997), who maintain that competent socio-communicative style of teachers resulted in greater perceived learner motivation (Martin et al, 1997, p. 437).

The attributes of effective teaching with reference to teacher communicator style were singled out by R.Norton (Norton, 1977), who related teacher effectiveness research to the communication frame of reference making a strong point of communicator style construct. In his empirical study, the researcher identifies the following communicator style variables critical to perceived teaching effectiveness: good communicator image, attentive, impression-leaving, relaxed, not dominant, precise. It is suggested in the study that

teaching effectiveness is strongly related to teacher's communicator style and improving communication behaviours is essential for approaching excellence in teaching (Norton, 1977, pp.525-541).

Effective teaching is also associated with dramatic communicator style (Norton & Nussbaum, 1980), entailing such elements as story-telling, humour, jovial attitude, and positive learning environment. More competent teachers are also considered to be more precise, attentive and less contentious than less competent teachers as suggested by the study of D.Bednar and M.Brandenburg (Bednar & Brandenburg, 1984).

A distinct school of thought places communication style within the paradigms of the theories of activity and interaction. In this respect, communication style is conceptualized as a stable form of ways and means of interaction between individuals (Zimnyaa, 2006, p.168). The author accentuates common grounding between CS and pedagogic activity (Zimnyaa, 1997). CS in teaching is believed to reflect (a) communication capabilities of the teacher; (b) relationship between the teacher and learners; (c) teacher's creative individuality; (d) features of the learner group (Kan-Kalik, 1987, p.97).

The research on teacher communication behaviour is rich in classifications of CS based on various underlying principles and elements of the teaching-learning process. Thus, a widely cited classification of V.Kan-Kalik (1987) presumes communicative context and individual characteristics of the protagonists of instructional communication. 1. *CS based on active involvement in joint creative activity of the teacher and learners*, viewed by the author as the most productive style; 2. *CS based on friendliness* – stimulates positive interaction between teacher and learners; 3. *distant CS*; 4. *communication-intimidation*; 5. *communication-flirtation* (Kan-Kalik, 1987, pp.62-101).

Classification offered by A.Markova (1993) is based on teacher's orientation on the process or result of his/her work, dynamic style features (stability, flexibility etc.), productivity (learning outcomes, interest toward the subject-matter etc): *emotional-improvisational style* – CS shares the attributes of dramatic, animated and impression-leaving communicator styles; *emotional-methodological style* – the teacher establishes positive relationship with the learners, treats all learners equally, stimulates interest toward the instructional content and class discussion; *reflective-improvisational style* – the teacher gives clear lessons, clearly explains new material. The teacher's communicative behaviour is best described by such attributes as attentiveness, precision and reservedness; *reflective-methodological style* – characterised by such features as attentiveness, argumentativeness and contentiousness. The teacher gives boring lessons, fails to stimulate learners' interest toward the subject-matter, and focuses mainly on weaker learners. The learning environment is often unfavourable (Markova, 1993, pp. 180-187).

The latter studies are examples of research, which is vastly theory informed with interspersions of empirical proof in support of the proposed theoretical framework rather than variable oriented with isolated interpretations of data. Owing to this tradition, insightful elegant theory on instructional communication research with special implications for teacher education research has emerged (V.Kan-Kalik, I.Zyazyun, A.Markova, L.Mitina, Ya.Kolominskii, M.Talan, N.Volkova, S.Maxymenko, A.Leontiev, M.Filonenko, V.Semychenko, T.Yatsenko etc).

**Conclusions.** Synthesizing the results of the study, several lines of research into communication style are noticeable:

- the first research line is grounded on the behaviourist traditions, treating it as a recurrence of patterns of behaviour (Norton R.);
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> school of thought centers around patterns of communication behaviour as preconditioned by social dimensions and individual's personality (socio-communicative style);
- the 3<sup>rd</sup> approach is largely dependent on personality theories. Accordingly, communication style is viewed as characteristic adaptations of personality (Waldherr A., Muck P.);
- the 4<sup>th</sup> line of research places communication style within the paradigms of theories of activity and interaction (Zimnyaa I., Lomov B., Leontiev A.),

conceptualizing it as a stable form of ways and means of interaction between individuals.

Overall, the summative findings accentuate relevance of communication style for teaching effectiveness, including such dimensions as learning gains (Anderson et al, 1981; Wubbles et al, 1992), affect for the teacher, instructional content and the course, positive learning environment (Wanzer and McCroskey, 1998), students' active participation in the instructional process (Myers and Rocca, 2007), learner motivation (Martin et al, 1997), trust in the teacher, credibility, positive relations between teacher and learners (Wooten and McCroskey, 1996) to mention a few.

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#### СООТНОШЕНИЕ МЕЖДУ СТИЛЕМ ОБЩЕНИЯ И ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬЮ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ

**Аннотация.** Ключевой предпосылкой эффективности преподавания является коммуникативная компетентность. Целью статьи является изучение проблемы стиля общения, как одной из составляющих педагогического общения, выделение основных подходов к изучению стиля общения, анализ основных теоретических положений, эмпирических достижений и импликаций в контексте эффективности преподавания, предусматривающей применение ряда теоретических методов исследования, таких как анализ, сравнение, синтез и обобщение. Выделены следующие подходы к изучению стиля общения: 1. направление, опирающееся на традициях бихевиоризма; 2. исследования, объединяющие традиции бихевиоризма и психологии личности в социологической призме; 3. направление, основанное на теории личности; 4. деятельностный подход и теория взаимодействия. По данным исследований, стиль общения влияет на следующие составляющие учебно-воспитательного процесса: учебную успеваемость, отношение учащихся к учителю, учебному материалу, дисциплине, учебную активность, атмосферу учебной среды, мотивацию учащихся и т.д.

**Ключевые слова:** эффективность преподавания; педагогическое общение; социо-коммуникативный стиль; стиль общения.

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#### СПІВВІДНОШЕННЯ МІЖ СТИЛЕМ СПІЛКУВАННЯ ТА ЕФЕКТИВНІСТЮ ВИКЛАДАННЯ

**Анотація.** Ключовою передумовою ефективності викладання є комунікативна компетентність. Метою статті є висвітлення проблема стилю спілкування, як однієї зі складових педагогічного спілкування, виділення основних підходів до вивчення стилю спілкування, аналіз основних теоретичних положень, емпіричних здобутків та імплікацій в контексті ефективності викладання, що передбачає застосування ряду теоретичних методів дослідження, таких як аналіз, порівняння, синтез та узагальнення. В ході дослідження було виділено наступні підходи до вивчення стилю спілкування: 1. напрямок, орієнтований на традиції бихевиоризму; 2. дослідження, що поєднують теорії бихевиоризму та особистості в соціологічній призмі; 3. напрямок, що ґрунтується на теорії особистості; 4. діяльнісний підхід та теорія взаємодії. За даними досліджень, стиль спілкування впливає на наступні складові навчально-виховного процесу: навчальну успішність, ставлення учнів до вчителя, навчального матеріалу та дисципліни в цілому, навчальну активність, атмосферу навчального середовища, мотивацію учнів тощо.

**Ключові слова:** ефективність викладання; педагогічне спілкування; соціо-комунікативний стиль; стиль спілкування.