

AGRICULTURE TEACHERS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND TEACHING COMPETENCY IN ONNA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' communication skills are essential for success in the classroom. It is related to how the teacher speaks, listens, writes, and behaves while teaching. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent of influence of communication skills on Agriculture teachers' teaching competency in public secondary schools in the ONNA Local Government Area. One research question was postulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all secondary school teachers teaching Agricultural subjects in public secondary schools in the study area. The sample was purposively drawn to include all the 42 Agriculture teachers in public secondary schools in the area. A reliable and validated researcher-designed instrument was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used for data analysis. The highest mean of 3.94, indicating the highest influence was obtained in item no 6. "Speaking clearly helps me to gain the attention of students in class", seconded by item no.1 "Listening gives me extra insight needed to answer questions to solve learners' problem", with the mean at 3.87, and thirdly, item no 11. "Using different behaviours as body language facilitates my communication with students" had a mean of 3.79. Teachers should adopt proper communication skills in classrooms to boost their competency in teaching and for the students to gain meaningful learning experiences.

KEYWORDS: Communication Skills, Learning, Teaching and Competency

Introduction

Communication is a dynamic process which needs coordination of the mind and courage to face others to convey a message in an effective way. It is only successful when one delivers the message in a clear and understandable way. Effective communication needs to convey and accept messages in all kinds of situations. Good communication is considered a strong tool for effectiveness in the teaching profession. Communication is defined as the transfer of information to

produce a greater understanding. It can be done vocally (through verbal exchanges), through written media (books, websites, and magazines), visually (using graphs, charts, and maps), or non-verbally (body language, gestures, pitch of voice, and tone). All of these means of communication are essential soft skills that are vital for a successful career.

Communication skills involve listening and speaking as well as reading, writing, and the use of body language. For effective teaching, a teacher needs to be highly skilled in all these areas. Teachers with good communication skills always make things easier and more understandable. Effective communication skills are really important for transmitting educational information and interacting with students in the class. Teachers have to teach the students to have different thinking approaches. To teach in accordance with the ability and capability of students, the teacher needs to adopt communication skills that motivate the students toward learning (Sng, 2012).

Teachers communicate more instructions orally. Good communication skills of teachers are essential for success in teaching students, and those with poor communication skills may undermine the learning process and promote academic failure. For a student to understand what is right or wrong, he or she would totally depend on the communication skills of the teacher in class (Srivastava, 2002). Good communication minimizes the potential for unkind feelings during the process of teaching, and the learners must be attentive to the teacher during teaching for a better understanding.

Teachers who possess all communication skills to a reasonable extent can be termed competent teachers. Teachers' competency appears to be a significant contributor to school effectiveness. As suggested by Ornstein (1991), effective teachers are those with high knowledge and competency in communication skills. Wilson, Shulman, and Richet (1987) noted that teachers' profound knowledge of curriculum context and pedagogy enhances students' performance. Medley (1982), states that the teacher's competency in behavioral skills, communication skills, and knowledge is related to school performance.

The communication skills of the teacher are related to how the teacher speaks, listens, writes and behaves while teaching. These are valid considerations in teaching. A teacher may acquire so much knowledge and skills in a subject but lack the ability to communicate the knowledge to the learners. Communication skills are additional skills needed by the teacher to enhance the learning process. Each teacher has a different level of skills, abilities, and competencies due to their different levels of teaching experience and different educational backgrounds. Based on these differences, they will display different sets of motivation, commitment, and engagement. Burgogue (1993) employed a functional perspective to define competency as how the goals of organizations are best achieved by improving members' performance. Different organizations require different types of competencies to achieve their goals globally. In the education sector, the competency of the teacher is a strong determinant in goal attainment.

Statement of the Problem

Considering the government's huge investment in public education, its output in terms of the quality of students' performance has been observed to be unequal with government expenditure. Consequent upon the observed deterioration in academic achievement, attitude, and values of secondary school students, one wonders if the high declining rates and poor quality of the students are not a reflection of the instructional quality in the school, which is essentially a function of teachers' communication skills. In other words, the ineffectiveness of teachers in classroom interaction with students could be responsible for the observed decline in the performance of students and the widely acclaimed falling standards of education. The researcher was motivated to conduct an indigenous investigation in her locality to discover the influence communication skills have on teachers' teaching competency.

The Purpose of the Study

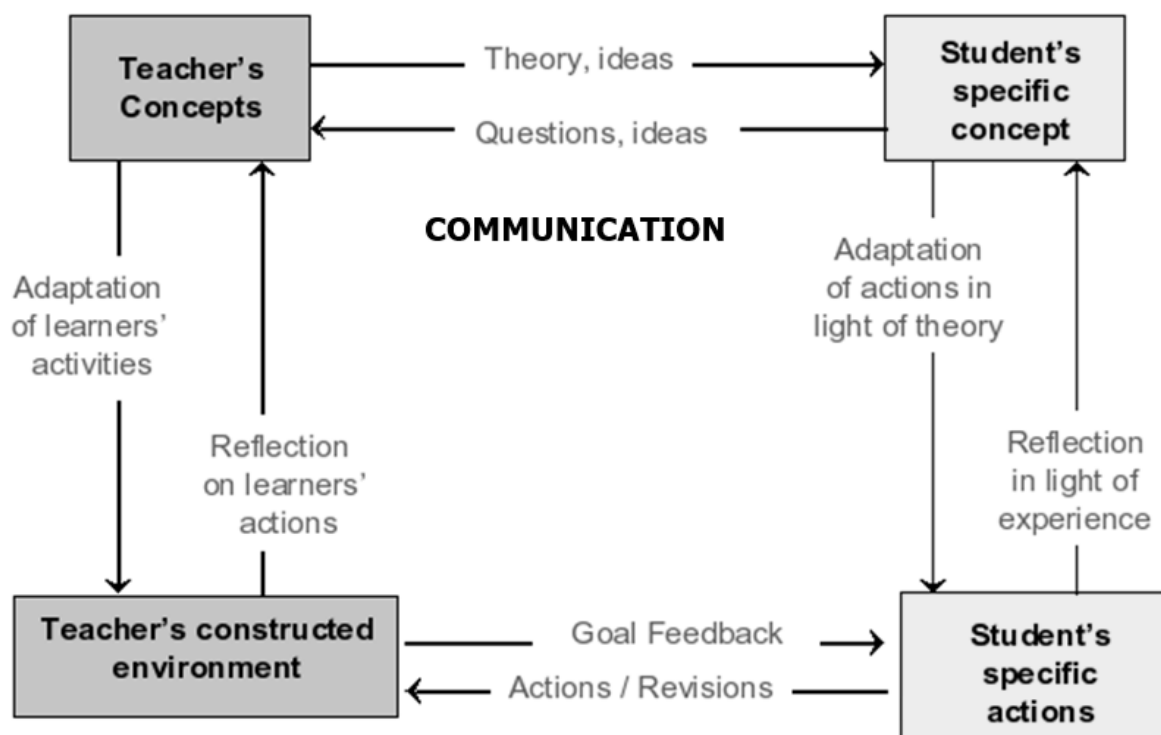
The purpose of the study was to investigate if Agriculture teachers' communication skills significantly have an influence on their teaching competency in public secondary schools in ONNA Local Government Area. This study is significant because the result will enable the public, the government, teachers and students to understand the relevance of the communication skills of teachers in teaching. One research question was postulated to guide the study which is "To what extent does communication skill influence teaching competency of Agriculture teachers in public secondary schools in ONNA Local Government Area." The study determined the perception of male and female teachers on the influence of teachers' communication skills on teaching competency.

Theoretical Framework

Adapted from Muller 2006

A conversational framework, propounded by Muller in 2006, is a method of capturing the essentially interactive, communication, and goal-oriented actions, as well as the feedback required to complete the learning process. The learning process operates on the two levels of discussion: theory and experienced practice, linked by the process of adaptation and reflection. The framework illustrated here describes the process of operating at the level of a concept or skills, such as a topic within a particular stage of the curriculum. Muller explained that at the center of teaching and learning is communication, which enhances the process of conveying the teacher's concept to the student and receiving feedback goals from students. The role of communication in teaching and learning is indisputable and, indeed, a vital one for teaching success.

Conversational Framework of Learning



The policy on education for teacher education includes the purpose of teacher education, institutions of training professional teachers and their entry qualifications, the curriculum of teacher colleges, and professionalism in teaching. Effective teaching, which is a function of good communication skills, should be accompanied by the effort of the learners to achieve positive results. Teachers' competencies need to be high in order to achieve meaningful teaching-learning at the secondary school level. A distinction needs to be made between junior secondary school (JSS) and senior secondary school (SSS) curricular. Teachers' competencies for each level and the appropriate subject would vary as well. Competency needs to be examined in the context of the preparation of teachers that would implement these programmes. Their competencies must therefore relate to academic and professional growth, classroom interaction, and evaluation. Quinn, et al. (1996) indicated that competencies were associated with knowledge and skills for effectively implementing certain assignments or projects. To be effective in a particular competency, one must be able to accomplish the results of a job with specific qualifications and personal attributes.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching competencies are the skills and knowledge that enable a teacher to teach successfully and to maximize students' learning. Teachers must have expertise in a wide range of competencies in an especially complex environment where hundreds of critical decisions are required each day (Jackson 1990). A professional teacher is expected to possess certain competencies, both professional and personal. Professional competencies are both academic and pedagogical. Academic competencies are the teachers' knowledge of their subject, while lesson or instructional delivery is pedagogical.

Teaching competency has different dimensions, such as mastery of subject matter, enhancement of motivation of students, planning, presentation, evaluation skills, communication skills, and classroom management skills. Teachers who possess all these skills to a reasonable extent are said to be competent teachers. Teachers' competency appears to be a significant contributor to school effectiveness. As suggested by c, effective teachers are those with high competency in knowledge and communication skills. Wilson, Shulman, and Richet (1987) noted that teachers' profound knowledge of curriculum context and pedagogy enhances students' performance.

Medley (1982) remarked that teachers' competencies, such as behavioral skills, communication skills, and knowledge, relate to school performance. Knowing the curriculum content is not enough to motivate students to learn if they do not have effective communication skills to deliver the lesson. The teacher's communication skills are expressed in his/her ability to speak articulately and accurately, listen to the students and the learning environment to respond correctly, read or write clearly when relevant, and exhibit appropriate teaching behaviour or attitudes. The use of body language and behavioral expressions may have an added advantage in enhancing communication during teaching. Within the context of this study, teaching competency proportionally relates to communication skills.

Communication involves the encoding and decoding of messages by sender and receiver. It is the process through which concepts, ideas, and messages are transmitted from one point to another and feedback is received. Walberg (1999) remarked that communication should perform three functions, namely, increase understanding, enhance the spirit of solidarity, and improve the capacity of men and women towards achieving the goal of communication. In line with this, communication therefore goes beyond making information available to people but also builds understanding between and among participants who must follow a process.

According to Tyler (2008), the entire communication process involves a sender who transmits a message and a receiver who usually reacts. At times, there are interferences between transmission and reception, and all of these take place within an environment. Tyler explored the phases of communication as follows:

- He explained that the first stage in the process of communication by the sender is to communicate fast. Sometimes one is unconscious, for instance when pricked by pain. It could be as a result of careful thinking or some external stimulus.
- The second stage is encoding. That is, after a message has been conceived, it can only have meaning to the receiver if it is formulated or put in the language that is understandable to him. Encoding simply means putting a message or ideas in a manner that is understandable by the other party. In encoding, the appropriateness of the language used will, in no small way, ensure the success of the message being sent.

- The third stage is the selection of the communication medium. After the message has been properly encoded, the sender is left with the responsibility of selecting the most appropriate medium of communication.
- The fourth stage is the decoding of the message. Decoding means translating a message into an understandable language or form when a message is received. The process of assimilation of the entire components is what encoding is all about. Several factors could contribute to a receiver's inability to understand a message effectively. These include such factors as difficulty in the language used by the sender, differences in educational background, culture, religion, and political outlook of the sender and the receiver, which tend to bridge understanding.
- The fifth stage is interpreting the message. After encoding the message, that is, understanding it, the sender will have to read between the lines to get the hidden meaning. A number of factors could lead to the misinterpretation of a message, and care must be taken by both the sender and the receiver not to have the message misinterpreted.
- The sixth stage is providing feedback. This is the most important stage in the entire communication process. This is because it determines whether the message has been effective or not and whether the desired event has taken place. Feedback, which is the response of the receiver to the message, could be positive or negative. It is positive when there is evidence that the message has been understood and negative when it has not. Communication skill is the ability to convey and share information with others in an efficient way. It is a very vital skill and is used widely in all sectors of the work force and particularly in education.

Hence, good communication leads to high confidence, and hence, if a teacher performs well in his/her communication, he/she will be confident in the teaching process. Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and Stanford Research Centre found out that 85% of professional success comes when one possesses communication skills, and only 15% of career success comes from technical knowledge and skills (hard skills). Therefore, the way teachers (educators) communicate and interact with students during the teaching learning process plays a crucial role in determining how competent a teacher is in teaching as well as determining the academic performance of learners as a whole. Good teaching does not occur in a vacuum. Every competent teacher needs to possess a strong set of values, skills, and knowledge. These values guide the application of relevant skills and knowledge on a day-to-day basis.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Acher & Hugh (2011) described descriptive study as that, which uses surveys to express real-life situation. The area of the study was ONNA Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The territorial unit and geographical area called Oniong Nnung Andem, addressed as ONNA people consists of twenty (29) villages and with a population of Four Hundred and Ninety-five Thousand (495,000) dwellers. The main ethnic group of the Local

Government Area are the Ibibio people. Currently there are six (6) public secondary Schools in the area and all offer Agricultural Subjects including Agricultural science and Animal Husbandry.

The population of the study consisted of all secondary school teachers teaching in public secondary schools in the study area. Agriculture Teachers including Agricultural science, Fishery and animal husbandry subjects' teachers, were purposively drawn from all the public secondary schools in the study area to constitute the sample of the study which comprised 42 subjects.

The study made use of researcher-designed instrument called 'Teachers' Communication Skill and Teaching Competency'' questionnaire with 12 items and a 4-point rating scale. The instrument was divided into two parts section A and section B. Section A was designed to get some demographic information about the respondents and Section B was designed to elicit information about the perception of the respondents on the influence of communication skills on teaching competency. The ratings were; High Influence (HI), Moderate Influence (MI), Low Influence (LI) and Influence (NI).

The instrument was validated by experts to confirm that the instrument measures what it purports to measure. Test-retest reliability method was used and data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The reliability index of 0.83 was obtained which indicated high correlation value showing that the instrument was reliable. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation statistics while the research hypothesis was analyzed using independent t-test statistics.

Research Question: To what extent does communication skills influence Agriculture teachers' teaching competency in public secondary schools in ONNA Local Government Area.

Table 1: Mean Responses of Male and Female Teachers on the Influence of Communication Skills on teaching Competence

S/N	ITEM	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1.	Listening gives me extra insight needed to answer questions to solve learners' problem.	3.87	.36	HI
2.	Listening helps me to know the level of understanding of my students in class.	2.88	.88	MI
3.	Listening helps me to gain proper management control of my students in class.	3.67	.50	HI
4.	Writing on board foster my ability to explain my ideas to students.	3.76	.54	HI
5.	Writing out notes helps me to recall concepts and ideas while teaching.	2.18	.78	NI
6.	Speaking clearly helps me to gain attention of students in class.	3.94	.28	HI
7.	Speaking helps me to inspire my students to participate in my class.	3.74	.60	HI
8.	Speaking to my students creates a good rapport between my students and I	3.32	.63	HI
9.	Speaking to explain points of my students help them to adequately respond to my teaching.	3.71	.69	HI
10.	Using different behaviors as body language facilitates my communication with students	3.79	.42	HI
11.	Using body language reduces stress of excessive speaking in teaching	3.45	.61	HI
12.	Body language sometimes speaks louder than words in of caution.	3.62	.74	HI

Field work, 2021

2.50 Benchmark

Key: *High Influence (HI) Moderate Influence (MI) Low Influence (LI) and No Influence (NI).*

Table 1 shows that 11 out of the 12 items of influence had mean above 2.50 which was the cut-off point, indicating that the items had significant influence on Agriculture Teachers' teaching competency. Standard deviation of less than 0 indicates that the responses clustered around the mean. This shows that the responses did not deviate far from the mean in a significant manner. More specifically, the highest mean of 3.94 indicating the highest influence was obtained in item no 6. "Speaking clearly helps me to gain attention of students in class", seconded by item no.1 "Listening gives me extra insight needed to answer questions to solve learners' problem", with the mean at 3.87 and thirdly was item no 11. "Using different behaviors as body language facilitates my communication with students" had a mean of 3.79 followed by item no 7. "Speaking helps me to inspire my students to participate in my class with the mean at 3.74". Item no 2. "Listening helps me to know the level of understanding of my students in class" with a mean of 2.88, moderately influenced the teachers' teaching competency among other influences, while Item no 5 "Writing out notes helps me to recall concepts and ideas while teaching". had no influence with the mean at 2.18, less than the benchmark.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are in consonance with Knight, (2012), a researcher and communications specialist, who said educators are increasingly recognizing the importance of listening as well as talking. ONNA Agriculture teachers in their responses ascertained the gains of the use of listening skills as a part of communication skills in teaching. This means that listening is crucial to building a good classroom culture. Good listening skills are needed to develop empathy and understanding with the students and to assess whether students understand what they are being taught.

The influence of speaking on ONNA Agriculture Teachers' teaching competency was found to be high. This result agrees with Marzano & Marzano, & Pickering, (2003) who found out that building and sharing of meaning occurs during speaking in the process of communication, through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols or behaviours, writing skills as means of communication in class include all the knowledge and abilities related to expressing ideas through written word and the abilities of teachers to clearly communicate ideas through writing. From the finding, writing on the board foster Teachers' ability to explain ideas to students. It is evidence that writing skills are important because they allow students to get point across without being physically present.

However, a significant number of ONNA Agriculture teachers' response on writing notes in class while teaching confessed that, writing notes does not help them to recall concepts and ideas while teaching.

Communication is an important life skill that help us throughout lifetime. The best about it is that, communication is not only limited to any work sector but pitches its significances in all aspects of life; personal, professional and even business life. It is important that a competent teacher have good communication skills in teaching as this helps the students have effective and meaningful learning experience.

Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate a significant influence of teachers' communication skills in teaching and learning in school. Effective communication is important, and if communication is not effective, students' learning processes will be jeopardized. The students may not really understand what they have been taught, despite getting good test and examination grades. An important part of a teacher's job is to ensure that there is a free flow of communication to boost the learning process. Good communication minimizes the potential for unkind feelings during the teaching process and is considered a strong tool for effective teaching and learning. It is a basic need for the academic success of students and professional achievement in life. Teachers with poor communication skills may cause students' failure and undermine the academic performance of the school and thus the educational system. Communication skills are a skill that can be learned and improved upon overtime.

Recommendations

Based on this research findings, the following recommendation have been put forward to ensure teachers competency in teaching:

1. Teacher should adopt proper speaking skills as means of communication such as, speaking coordinatively, articulatively and loud enough to catch the students' attention during teaching.
2. Active listening is a necessary tool for commnication, teachers should involve all their sense organ when teaching.
3. Teachers should not only listen to students but to themselves and the learning environment in order to achieve better outcome of the teaching.
4. Teachers should behave actively during teaching to enhance effective teaching and learning.
5. Seminars and conferences should be organized for teachers, for them to be well equipped with the skills of communication.
6. Teachers should be encouraged to read variety of books which will help them to be up-dated on communication skills.

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