Revisiting Interpersonal Communication Competence, Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction, and Student Motives for Communicating with Fellow Students in an HBCU and a PWI Cultural Context

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Abstract
Extant literature has yet to compare interpersonal communication satisfaction, communicative competence, and student motives (pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation) for students communicating with fellow students in the HBCU and PWI context. The sample comprised 270 (138 HBCU students, 132 PWI students) participants. Hypothesis one was tested using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and hypothesis two was tested using Pearson correlation. Both hypotheses were partially supported by the data.
This study draws particular relevance to our understanding of interpersonal communication competence as a means to explore interpersonal communication satisfaction and student motives in an HBCU and a PWI university. For this study, interpersonal communication competence (ICC) and interpersonal communication effectiveness (ICE) are treated in like manner to study the relationship between interpersonal communication satisfaction and students’ motives for engaging in interpersonal relationships with one another in their respective universities, specifically in an HBCU and PWI context. Students’ interpersonal communication competence and their motives are discerned as important constructs for fulfilling communication satisfaction. Although student motives have been linked to student learning and student-instructor relationships, this study extends the literature on student motives (pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation) as critical constructs to frame interpersonal communication competence and interpersonal communication satisfaction.

Interpersonal Communication Competence (Effectiveness)

Interpersonal communication competence also known as interpersonal communication effectiveness is a skill that many students desire to develop. Interpersonal communication competence “involves achieving one’s goals in a manner that, ideally, maintains or enhances the relationship in which it occurs” (Adler & Towne, 2003, p. 30). When individuals seek to be satisfied in a communication interaction with others, cultural differences must be considered in building knowledge structures for deriving satisfaction in a communication context and the ability to enhance communication competence skills. Cultural differences and cultural preferences of others suggest that there “is no single model of competence” (Adler & Towne, p. 30). Competence in an interpersonal communication context takes the situation and the relationship into consideration. Interpersonal competent communicators are able to choose a wide range of behaviors to widen their repertoire; have the ability to select from a wide range of appropriate behaviors; are skilled at performing communicative behavioral practices; can easily understand the other person’s point of view, among others (Adler & Towne, 2003).

In examining extant literature on interpersonal communication competence, “. . . assertiveness and responsiveness are core style elements of competent communicators, and are highly predictive of communication competence” (Mottet & Beebe, 2006; McCroskey & Richmond, 1996, as cited in Dilbeck and McCroskey, 2009, p. 258). Beyond this, “Competent communicators are flexible, able to adapt their communication to meet the demands of different situations” (Knutson & Posirisuk, 2006, p. 4). When individuals are skilled at meeting demands of a variety of situations, they are, in essence, as Adler and Towne write, are skilled at performing communicative behavioral practices without little effort.

Lily Arasaratnam (2009) writes that our behavioral practices in a communication interaction can determine our communication competence. It depends on the goals and expectations as to what we want to achieve in an interaction with another communicator. Arasaratnam goes on to inform us that “a competent communicator is effective in one’s ability to achieve one’s goals, and appropriate in one’s ability to exhibit [behavior] that is accepted as well as expected in a given situation. Needless to say, expected and accepted [behavior] depends on [a] cultural/relational context, and, therefore, these factors have to be taken into consideration when extending this definition of communication competence to interpersonal contexts” (p. 2). Interpersonal communication competence is defined “as an individual’s ability to relate with people from different cultural backgrounds so as to maximize the chance of mutually beneficial outcomes” (Simkhovych, 2009, p. 384). Additional understanding of ICC introduces a perspective on sojourners and their relational experiences that may be external to their
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experiences. Emphasis is placed on learning more about student-student relationships among diverse populations in various university settings. For example, the communication teaching faculty, in particular, see a correlation between ICC/ICE performances and interpersonal communication relationships between students when they are required to work in teams. However, Simkhovych (2009), supporting Hammer et al.’s (2003) research writes that “Inter[personal communication] competence is the ability to communicate effectively in [a] cross-cultural situation and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 384). Hammer and his colleagues support Adler and Towne’s research on what interpersonal communication competence is.

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction

Students can derive much social and cultural capital from communication satisfaction with other interactants. Social capital “refers to the benefits of knowing people who can be of help to [others], . . . that is, making ‘connections’ . . . [and] is often referred to as "networking" (Zweigenhaft, 1993, p. 211). Cultural capital “consists of various forms of knowledge, dispositions, and skills” (Zweigenhaft, p. 211). For example, students who come from upscale communities, where community members have college degrees and send their children to college, tend to possess certain knowledge, dispositions, and skills they can share with other students in an interpersonal communication context. However, there are other ways students can accumulate social and cultural capital. For example, Sebastian, Namsu, and Kee (2009) found positive relationships between intensity of Facebook use and students' life satisfaction [as well as interpersonal communication satisfaction with other community members], social trust, civic engagement, and political participation. Extant research indicates that the development of communication satisfaction includes, but is not limited to “feelings” and “expectations” as factors relevant to student communication satisfaction in classroom settings. Graham (2004) contributes to this line of thinking and suggests that [students’ self-esteem] may positively correlate with interpersonal communication satisfaction and classroom learning. For example, in learning contexts, “Instructors who help other students feel good about themselves…contribute to the communication satisfaction of their students” (Graham, 2004, p. 217). Interpersonal communication satisfaction also provides a way for determining positive independent and interdependent self-construal, the way students feel about themselves in classroom settings. Said differently, interpersonal communication satisfaction can boost students self-concept and self-esteem.

Anderson, Martin, and Riddle (2001) write that [interpersonal communication] satisfaction is a felt experience from communication interactions [with others]” (p. 242), though interactants may share different perspectives and communication styles. Chen (2002) assesses that communication satisfaction is met during communicative interactions when an individual acknowledges feelings of satisfaction. Chen also argues that communication satisfaction “reflect[s] participants’ emotional reaction toward their interaction in terms of the degree it had met or failed to meet expectations” (p. 140; see also Hecht, 1978). Goodboy (2009) notes that [interpersonal] communication satisfaction is driven by fulfillment of expectations. “[Interpersonal] communication satisfaction is . . . a response to the accomplishment of communication goals and expectations. [Interpersonal] communication satisfaction results when positive expectations are fulfilled and is largely contextual” (Goodboy, Martin, & Balkan, 2009, p. 373; see also Hecht, 1978). Duran and Zakahi (1987) further inform us that communication satisfaction influences individuals’ communication competence with reference to their communication performance in and outside the classroom.
Communication satisfaction influences strong positive interpersonal interaction which in turns motivates individuals’ desire to engage in interpersonal relationships. Chen (2002) explains that communication satisfaction of individuals within interpersonal communication relationships increases as individuals get to know each other. As such, Chen (2002) further notes that communication satisfaction in interpersonal relationships is reported to be higher in intra-group encounters than in intergroup encounters. Therefore, from a positive lineal relationship, communication satisfaction increases as cultural familiarity increases among students.

Interpersonal Communication Motives

Researchers have studied students’ motives for communicating with their instructors and their perceptions of motivation, learning, and satisfaction (Weiss & Houser, 2007), but communication scholars have yet to study students’ motives for communicating with each other for understanding interpersonal communication competence/effectiveness. “Euro American students attending PWIs and African American students enrolled in HBCUs apply different sets of formal and informal rules to interact successfully with…” (as cited in Gendrin & Rucker, 2007, p. 43) [their fellow classmates]. Research also reveals that “HBCUs provide an institutional culture where African American students can assert, express, endorse Afrocentric attitudes, link[ed] to their legacy [that helps them] believe in themselves and their academic ability to adopt a strong sense of belonging, communication, and ethnic identification and have a sense of well being” (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007, p. 43). Moreover, culture plays a major role in the way students effectively communicate and interact with one another in a classroom setting or a setting external to the classroom, especially when students work on external groups. Those of us who teach in university classrooms have received complaints from students who perceive their fellow classmates do not communicate with them effectively or none at all on group projects, a reason that some students prefer to work independently. However, many students welcome the opportunity to work with their classmates because it helps them improve their communication competence through knowledge and the skills and helps them acquire more social and cultural capital. “Communication competence is achieved when a person is motivated to use knowledge and skill to communicate effectively in an appropriate manner” (Westmyer, DiCioccio, & Rubin, 1998, p.30). Consequently, motivation surfaces as the objective one establishes for experiencing satisfying interaction with others. It is an interpersonal function. Rubin et al.’s (1988) found six motives for the reason people communicate with others: pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation. Pleasure is for fun. Many professors and instructors have observed in their classrooms that a number of students derive much pleasure when doing projects with fellow classmates, which allows students to interact with other students. Pleasure also has a lot to do with entertainment. In an academic setting, especially when students need to develop a minimal relationship at best with one another persons to accomplish group tasks, pleasure can be used as an ice breaker to start the communication interaction (Westmyer et al., 1998). Affection means caring and “affectionate communicative interactions with others often initiate and accelerate relational development. Escape is the filling of time to avoid other behaviors, and “represents the need to withdraw or avoid activities through communication” (Westmyer et al., 1998). We have found in the classroom that some students prefer to escape group assignments because they feel more comfortable working independently. Relaxation is an ‘unwinding’ concept, and “describes the need to rest and unwind through communication” (Westmyer et al., 1998, p. 29). Inclusion is [the] sharing of feelings and avoiding loneliness” (Anderson & Martin, 1995, p. 249). “Behaviorally, inclusion is the need to conduct satisfactory
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interactions and associations with others. Emotionally, it is the need to establish or maintain a mutual interest in and acknowledgement of others” (Westmyer et al., 1998, p. 27).

These five motives clarify reasons individuals communicate with others make decisions about whether their communication satisfaction needs have been met not only in a competent way, but also in their cultural interactions with those who share a different culture from their own. Pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation are very important interpersonal communication motives for students who want communication satisfaction and want to improve their interpersonal communication competence and effectiveness. The most important message of this study is for students to simply learn a set of interpersonal communication concepts to describe communication satisfaction and communication competence/effectiveness, apply them to one’s self before applying them to others. Pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation are skills that emerge from this process and useful skills for human interconnectedness. Hence, the following hypotheses are posed:

\( H_1 \): There will be significant differences between African American and Euro-American students’ interpersonal communication satisfaction and interpersonal communication motives for communicating with other students with reference to school type.

\( H_2 \): There will be no significant difference between African American and Euro-American students’ communicative competence and interpersonal communicative motives for communicating with other students with reference to school type.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred seventy students, 270 (138 from the HBCU and 132 from the PWI) in the Midwest participated in this study and agreed to complete a survey instrument. Ages ranged from 17 to 23 \((m = 19.15, sd = 1.553)\) for the HBCU students. Ages ranged from 18 to 38 \((m = 20.46, sd = 3.555)\) for the PWI students. Participation in this study was voluntary, even though students received extra credit.

Procedure

During the last two weeks of the 2008 Summer Session B at the PWI and the end of the first week during Spring Semester 2008 at the HBCU, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire asking their perceptions about communication satisfaction, communication competence/effectiveness, and student motives for communicating. The authors asked their fellow colleagues’ permission to survey students in several different classes at both the HBCU and PWI universities. One of the authors taught at the HBCU and the other currently author teaches at the PWI.

Measures

Communicative Competence Scale (CC): Communication competence was measured using Wiemann (1977) 36-item scale that asked such questions as “S generally knows what type of behavior is appropriate in any given situation” ; “S is not afraid to speak with people in authority”; “S listens to what people say to him/her.” (S) is the subject with whom the other person is communicating. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The reliability estimate for the communicative competence scale was \( \alpha = .82 \).

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory Scale (ICS): Communication satisfaction was measured using Hecht’s (1978) 16-item measure of interpersonal communication satisfaction such as “The other person let me know that I was communicating effectively,” and “I was very satisfied with the conversation.” Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale.
ranging from 1 = disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The reliability estimate for the interpersonal communication satisfaction scale was: α = .86. 

**Interpersonal Communication Motives Scale (ICM):** R. Rubin, Perse, and Barbato (1988) developed the 28-item ICM scale that asks individuals, why they communicate with one another. Each item was rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale (from 5 = exactly like me to 1 = not at all like me). The grand means, standard deviations, and reliability estimates for the five motives were: 

- **Pleasure** (m = 3.71, sd = 0.83, α = .92), 
- **Affection** (m = 4.02, sd = 0.72, α = .84), 
- **Inclusion** (m = 3.17, sd = 1.07, α = .90), 
- **Escape** (m = 3.01, sd = 0.99, α = .78), and 
- **Relaxation** (m = 3.40, sd = 0.98, α = .92).

Data Analysis

Hypothesis one was tested using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and hypothesis two was tested using Pearson correlation.

**RESULTS**

MANOVA—Race/ethnicity and ICS and ICM

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there will be significant differences in African American and Euro-American students’ communication satisfaction and motives for communicating with fellow students in their respective universities. The hypothesis was partially supported. Race/ethnicity and interpersonal communication satisfaction represent the explanatory variables, and pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation represent the response variables. A one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine the effect student ethnicity and communication satisfaction had on student motives (pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation). A significant main effect was found (Lambda = (5, 249) = .054, p = .000; partial η²p = .361).

Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that student race/ethnicity and interpersonal communication satisfaction influenced participants’ interpersonal communication motives with the exception of affection and inclusion: pleasure (F(16, 253) = 7.122, p = .000); affection (F(16, 253) = 3.872, p = .260); inclusion (F(16, 253) = 1.211, p = .260), escape (F(16, 253) = 2.317, p = .003); and relaxation (F(16, 253) = 8.140, p = .000). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>HBCU</th>
<th>PWI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication Motives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure***</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape**</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation**</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: HBCU = historically Black colleges and universities; PWI = predominantly White universities.  
*p < .01,  **p < .001
Hypothesis 2 predicted no significant difference in African American and Euro-American students’ communicative competence and interpersonal communication motives for communicating with other students in their respective universities. The hypothesis was partially supported. A Pearson correlation was calculated to determine the relationship between African American and Euro-American students’ Interpersonal communication competence and student motives (pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation).

As indicated in Table 2, there was a positive but negligible relationship between ICC and pleasure (\( r = .047, p > .05 \)) for the HBCU sample, and a negative negligible relationship between ICC and pleasure (\( r = -.058, p > .05 \)) for the PWI sample. There was a positive and negligible relationship between ICC and affection (\( r = .113, p > .05 \)) for the HBCU sample, but a positive and significant correlation (\( r = .171, p < .05 \)) between ICC and affection for the PWI sample, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. There was a positive but negligible relationship between ICC and inclusion (\( r = .026, p > .05 \)) for the HBCU sample, but a positive and significant relationship between ICC and inclusion (\( r = .242, p < .01 \)) for the PWI sample, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. There was a positive, but negligible relationship between ICC and escape (\( r = .063, p > .05 \)) for the HBCU sample, but a positive and significant relationship between ICC and escape (\( r = .188, p < .05 \)) for the PWI sample, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Finally, there were negative and slight correlations between ICC and relaxation (\( r = -.064, p > .05 \)) for the HBCU sample, as well as a negative and slight correlation (\( r = -.059, p > .05 \)) between ICC and relaxation for the PWI sample.

Table 2
Correlations between Interpersonal Communication Competence and Motives based on School type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Pleasure</th>
<th>Affection</th>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Escape</th>
<th>Relaxation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>-.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>.171*</td>
<td>.242**</td>
<td>.188*</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: HBCU = historically Black colleges and universities; PWI = predominantly White universities.
* \( p < .01 \), ** \( p < .001 \)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore the “notion that PWIs and HBCUs have different cultural norms and expectations for successful classroom communication” (Gendrin & Rucker, 2007, p. 54) between students. However, in PWIs cultural norms are “reflected in the dominant cultural majority student population and privilege communication preferences” (Gendrin & Rucker, p. 54) for students of the dominant cultural group. The “hegemonic nature of [a university] culture appears . . . to be unified and unchallenged. But hegemonic ideology and practice do not subsume the entirety of school culture. In other words, [universities] are sites characterized by an unequal interchange between competing class cultures. Thus, it is crucial for [faculty] to analyze and illuminate not simply the lived experiences of a particular class culture,
but the relationship amount the secondary cultures and their articulation with the dominant school culture and each other” (Giroux, 1981, p. 28).

Hypothesis one predicted that there will be significant differences in African American and Euro-American students’ communication satisfaction and motives for communicating with other students in their respective universities. Hypothesis one was partially supported. Hypothesis two predicted that there will be no significant difference in African American and Euro-American students’ communicative competence and interpersonal communication motives for communicating with other students in their respective universities. Hypothesis two was partially supported also.

First, students’ motives (pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation) for communicating with fellow students in and out of the classroom were stronger for African American than for Euro-American students. Since the correlations indicated no significant differences for the HBCU sample, these results inform us that HBCUs are known for their small-scale classroom settings and nurturing environments. African Americans attending HBCUs may feel empowered in their interpersonal interactions and relationships with their fellow students. For this reason, they may feel empowered to communicate freely with their own unique voices without feeling marginalized and de-centered from mainstream discussions in the classroom, as some African Americans have perceived in the PWIs they attended. “Many students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are looking for attention, personalized faculty-student relationships, and opportunities to interact with their peers in small-scale settings [that is found in an HBCU setting], . . . According to research on college student success, [African Americans] excel in this type of environment, performing better in the classroom, and increasing their likelihood of attending graduate and professional school” (Gasman, 2008, diverseeducation.wordpress.com). With reference to African Americans attending HBCUs, they appear to excel in their communicative competence and ultimately derive interpersonal communication satisfaction from their peers.

Second, PWIs are perceived to admit cultural outsiders with relatively little thought of helping them adjust to a culture that is different from their own (Saddlemire, 1996). PWIs have been perceived as hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming, especially through their peer culture. But given the cultural norms of PWIs, it is assumed that Euro-American students can easily adapt to this environment because it is one to which they have been socialized. However, this study does not suggest that all Euro-American students seek pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation with their peer group to derive communication satisfaction. It does suggest that Euro-American students have a need to escape from the pressures of academic demands, given the nature of the institutional culture of PWIs.

With reference to student motives to communicate and their desire for satisfying interactions with their peers, classroom relationships should be developed with the goal of overcoming alienating divisions that reproduce the relations of domination and powerlessness between racial groups. In other words, social power for communicative competence and communication satisfaction must be democratized and humanized in diverse classroom settings.

Future research should examine and extend the literature on African American and Euro-American students’ perceptions of their interpersonal communication competence, interpersonal communication satisfaction, and interpersonal communicative motives by investigating the perceptions of African American students in PWIs and Euro American students in HBCUs. Future research should also examine other ethnic groups’ perceptions of these variables as well. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.
References


