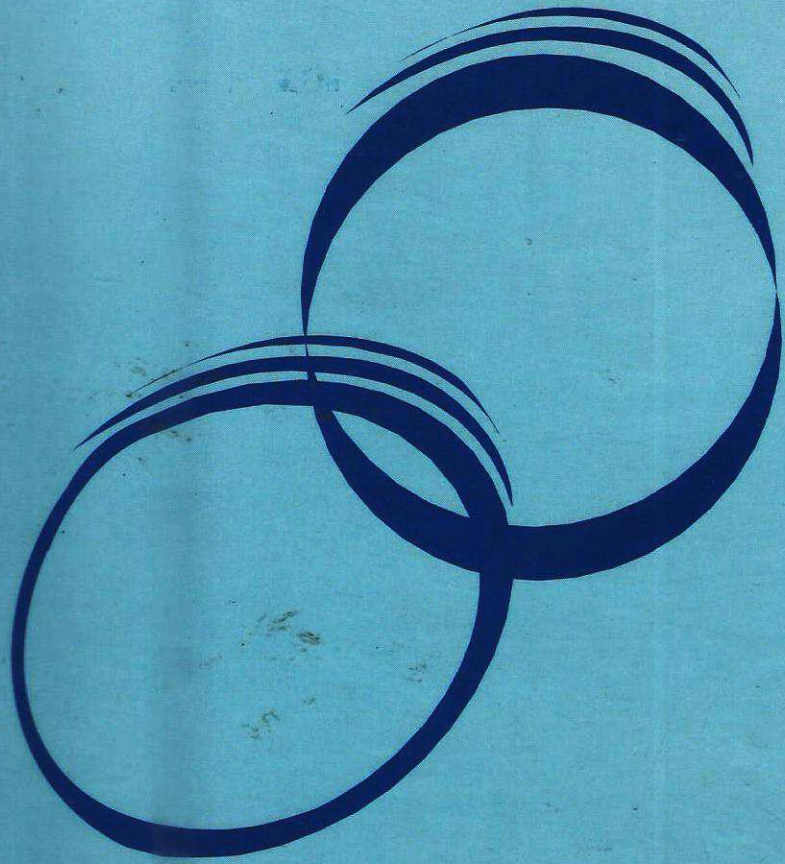# *Fundamentals of*
Human Communication

Edited by
Des Wilson

2 | Communication Arts: Some Basic Facts
Desmond Wilson & Ita Ekanem

Objectives

After going through this chapter, the reader should be able to:
- describe the concept of Communication Arts;
- show an understanding of the basic issues and facts about communication studies;
- share the curricular concerns of the discipline bearing in mind its multi-disciplinary nature; and
- see the relationship between pedagogical issues and the practice of communication.

Introduction

There has been some controversy over time on the proper nomenclature for the communication discipline. This has been as a result of the diversities in curricular concerns expressed by the academic fathers of the programmes in the various institutions. Some scholars have insisted that the reasonable thing to do is to share the positions of the academic front-runners right or wrong. In Nigeria today, a couple of names has been widely used from Communication Arts to Mass Communication, Communication Studies, Communication and Language Arts, Linguistics and Communication Studies and a motley of combinations now fashionable in faculties where some older programmes are facing rapid decline in students enrolment. Sometimes, these nomenclatural differences have created some psychological divide and identity problems for some, leading further to unacceptable professional prejudice against products from certain institutions. While this is a natural consequence from a cultural notion of "my mama's-soup is sweeter-than-yours", this discriminatory situation does not often point to curricular deficiencies nor incompetence on the part of the graduate from such a programme.

That is why there is an urgent need for a review of the current NUC curriculum based on theory and practice in Nigeria and worldwide.

Yet another issue is that in which there is clearly a semantic confusion of the terms 'communication' and 'communications'. Some call their departments Mass Communications thus giving the wrong notion that it might perhaps be dealing with technical equipment. These are issues which we have addressed in this chapter bearing in mind that after sixteen years, the NUC minimum standards document for its 'Mass Communication' programme needs to be revisited in all its ramifications.

What Communication Arts is

Communication Arts is a term which looks at communication in a broader context. It is a discipline which embraces the core areas of mass communication (Radio/TV, Newspaper/Magazines, Public Relations/Advertising) and other fields of the humanities such as Theatre, Traditional Communication, Photography, Music, Applied Aesthetics, etc.

Mass Communication which is the nomenclature used in many universities in Nigeria, is rather restrictive and does not adequately address the growing interest in the arts and aesthetics of communication. There is need as Unoh (1980) has pointed out for our communication curricula to chart a broad direction in order to equip those we train with the knowledge and skills to develop communication in all fronts. In his reference to the University of Ibadan's communication programme, Unoh stated that:

> It is our view at Ibadan, that the diversity, broadness and ramifications of the field for communication are best appreciated when various aspects of the discipline are accommodated within the same curriculum, with room for concentration or specialisation in any aspect, after the general exposure and training.

This thinking led to the term Communication Arts in order to capture the broad nature and scope of the discipline in the University of Uyo. Akpan (1987), one of the founding fathers of the Communication

Arts programme in Uyo, says "it embraces all the arts of communicating in both personal and non personal situations. It has a wide scope of interest, and is not limited to the study of Print and Electronic Journalism, Public Relations, and Advertising".

Communication Arts is more embracing than Mass Communication. Mass Communication could be viewed as a sub-discipline under Communication Arts, which is concerned with imparting knowledge in the arts of communicating effectively via the mass media – Radio, Television, Newspaper and Magazine. Communication Arts uses various media to accomplish its purpose. The medium may be Television, Radio, Film, Poetry, Dance, Drama, Music, Sculpture or Photography. It searches for significant events in human lives, locates their unique qualities, selects and emphasises their most important elements and gives them a treatment which enables the audience to appreciate its significance (Akpan, 1987).

Communication has been taught under different names. The most popular names are Mass Communication and Communication Arts. In Universities where communication is taught under the name Mass Communication, the essential direction is to see communication as process while those who adopt the name Communication Arts place more emphasis on its arts – performing arts. Akpan (1990:1) says:

> If studied as arts, communication, then as a discipline, is concerned with the development of fine skills in expressing ideas, attitudes and feelings through a specific medium.

As a distinct discipline, it draws knowledge from other fields of study such as Psychology, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology/Anthropology, Linguistics, Religion etc. The essential interests of the communication artist are:

(a) *Selection:* The communication artist must select events (visions) that are illuminating and significant.
(b) *Emphasis:* The communication artist must emphasise the important elements and clarify them .
(c) *Magnification:* The communication artist should dwell on the elements which enhance the beauty of the meaning he intends to share.

Communication, Communications

(a)   Communication

Man is a communication animal. His life depends on it. Without communication, man would live a purposeless life. In fact, he would be a lifeless being unable to relate with himself and things in his environment. This is why there is the popular saying that "man cannot not communicate".

Communication is the basis in which man establishes a relationship with himself and things in his environment. It is the current which runs through all human history. We use it to reduce uncertainty in a vast and challenging world. Communication is the engine that powers every human activity. Through it, we exchange symbols, establish relationships, banish fear and "blast off the barriers to oneness and understanding" (Wilson, 1997).

Akpan (1987) affirms the centralness of communication in human affairs saying: "Without communication we cease to exist as social creatures because communication is a social affair".

Despite its centralness in human life, a single acceptable definition of communication has not emerged. Just as human life is fluid the definitions of communication have reflected the varied backgrounds of those who define it. Let us look at a few of them.

* Communication is any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another (R. Chappell & W.L. Read, 1984).
* Communication is the process by which one person (or a group) shares and imparts information to another (or group) and clearly understands one another (Rita Udall & Sheila Udall, 1979:5).
* Communication is not just the giving of information, it is the giving of understandable information and receiving understandable messages by another party so that it can be understood and acted upon (E.C. Eyre, 1983).
* The communication process involves all acts of transmitting messages to channels which link people, to the languages and symbolic codes which are used to transmit messages, the means by which messages are received and stored, and the rules, customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and events (Frank O. Ugboajah, 1985).

- Communication is the process involving the passing of messages through the use of symbols which all parties in the communication encounter understand. It involves the exchange of ideas, opinions, attitudes and beliefs between people (Sybil James, Isaac Ode & Oludayo Soola, 1990).
- Communication is establishing a commonness with oneself or with others. It is the sharing of meaning with oneself or with others (Emmanuel D. Akpan, 1987).
- Communication is an exchange of meaning. Each participant comes into the communication situation with his or her own experience which he or she hopes to exchange with the other participant(s) (Des Wilson, 1997).
- Communication is a continuous, irreversible transactive process involving communicators who occupy different but overlapping environments and are simultaneously senders and receivers of messages, many of which are distorted by physical and psychological noise (R.B. Alder & N. Towne, 1990).

Scholars have classified these definitions into three; namely, linear, interactive and transactive.

Linear View

The linear view defines communication essentially as a transmission of messages from a sender to a receiver. It is a one-way process typified for example, by a command. Adler and Towne (1990) see it as an injection of messages of some sort into a receiver. They present the model as follows:
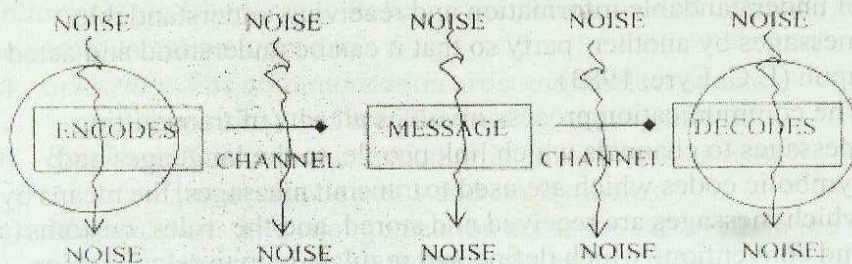
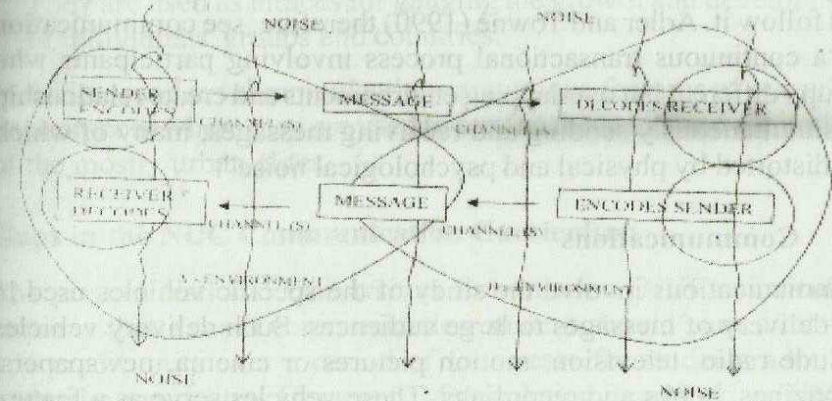*Source: Adler and Towne, 1990:11*

Interactive View

The interactive view brings in the element of feedback. Communication looks less like giving a command or an injection or merely passing on information to someone else. The participants in the communication encounter share something in common which enable them to match their individual mental images. What both share in common may be their educational background, age, occupation, group membership or lifestyle/habits. This commonness tends to erase their differences.

However, both participants have their individual communication environment which refers not only to their physical location but to their personal histories which they bring into the communication encounter.

These unique environments can create misunderstanding if they do not overlap. Each participant constructs and receives messages according to his/her communication environment. The environment may consist of the participant's state of mind, knowledge/experiential level on the topic of discussion, educational attainment and wealth of experience.

However, the interactive view still sees communication as a purposive endeavour where each participant performs a fixed task at any identifiable time.

Source: Adler and Towne 1990:13
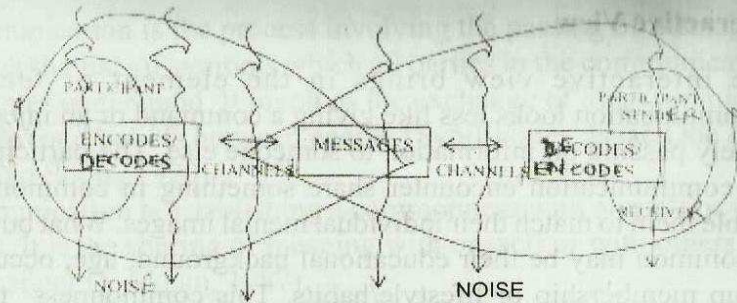
Transactional View

The transactional view sees the communication process as one where communicators usually send and receive messages simultaneously so that the images of the sender and receiver cannot be separated. Communication at this level is an ongoing highly recursive and dynamic process. There is no specific (or separate) role for the sender and the receiver.

Adler and Towne (1990) say that at a given moment we are capable of receiving, decoding and responding to another's behaviour, while at the same time, the other person is receiving and responding to ours. In this view, both our verbal and non-verbal skills are constantly being exchanged.

The transactional view shows how difficult it is to isolate a single discrete "act" of communication from the events that precede and follow it. Adler and Towne (1990) therefore, see communication as 'a continuous transactional process involving participants who occupy different but overlapping environments and create relationship by simultaneously sending and receiving messages, many of which are distorted by physical and psychological noise".

(b) Communications

Communications involve the study of the specific vehicles used in the delivery of messages to large audiences. Such delivery vehicles include radio, television, motion pictures or cinema, newspapers, magazines, books and recordings. These vehicles serve as a feature of modern societies. They are usually studied under a restrictive term "mass communication".

Modern communications are endogenous to Africa and employ high and complex technologies which are acquired and installed at a huge cost.

Characteristics of Modern Communications

Modern communications, Dominick (1999) says, are organised under elaborate organisational set up. Hence we have such holding companies as Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC), Daar Communications, Minaj Systems International, Time-Warner Company etc. They display the following characteristics:

- They facilitate the delivery of public messages to very large and widely dispersed audiences. Audiences which are different in demographic and psychographic characteristics and are dispersed geographically.

- They are marked by very high and expensive technologies which facilitate rapid transmission of messages. Today, modern communication through the use of computers and satellite technologies target a global audience.

- They have overcome the barriers of distance, illiteracy, race, regional loyalty etc., and tend to link people together globally.

- They are used as indices for gauging the growth and development of individuals, groups and countries.

In Africa, modern communications are unique features of our urban environment where they are used to service the needs and aspirations of the mostly urban elites.

Gaps in the NUC Communication Curriculum

The present National Universities Commission (NUC) curriculum requires that a mass communication student should earn a total of 156 credit units over a period of four years for students admitted under the competitive University Matriculation Examination (UME). These units are made up of 18 compulsory credit units to be taken over the period of study and spread out as follows: 10 in the first, 6 in the second, 2 in the third and 6 in the final year.

However, while the current NUC curriculum addresses some basic training requirements for the practice of Journalism, Public Relations, Advertising and Broadcasting it largely ignores a lot of the artistic, aesthetic, psychological, linguistic, environmental, gender, conflict, human rights, speech and other issues some of which have been taken up by some communication departments.

This curriculum should provide for a more broadly based programme embracing teaching, research and consultancy services in Applied Communication, Broadcasting, Business and Organisational Communication, Literary Communication, Oramedia/Traditional Communication, Photojournalism, Print, Public Relations, Advertising, Music, Theatre and other performing arts, etc. The courses designed for the first year of the 4- year programme should be largely introductory foundation courses that cover the broad spectrum of Communication Arts as a humanistic discipline. By the same token the courses for the last three years of the programme should be designed to deepen and strengthen as well as facilitate academic construction in the various areas of specialisation.

In its philosophical conceptualisation, the Communication Arts programme which is a broad field of study is intended to provide the student with the widest spectrum of knowledge possible within the specified study period of four years. As a result, the programme offers to expose students to the many arts which are used in the exchange of messages, ideas, attitudes or feelings such as the arts of journalism, film, television, theatre, popular music, book publishing, photography/photojournalism, graphic and fine arts, radio, traditional communication (oramedia), advertising, public relations, and business/organisational communication as well as their synergistic and aesthetic dimensions.

This training should include a 6 – 12 month internship or practical training involving attachment to media houses and institutions engaged in various aspects of media production.

This wide ranging content enables the students to acquire knowledge and skills which could be very valuable in educational institutions, in the media of mass communication (i.e newspaper, magazine, paperbacks, publishing, radio, television, film), rural information extension services, business and organisational communication and other related administrative and information management settings.

This broad content comprising a total of over ninety – eight course titles gives it an advantage over other direct mass communication programmes. On graduation, students who wish to specialise can now choose from the various areas or aspects available. Because of limited academic and financial resources, graduate students are equally limited to Mass Communication at that level and that is why graduate programmes at PGD, MA and Ph.D should be limited to Mass Communication too.

The arts basis of communication is even attested to by the fact that most conventional Nigerian institutions house it in their Faculty of Arts with the exception of the University of Lagos, ESUT and RSUT. What is required at the moment is however, for Nigerian scholars to eschew the fixation with labels and to expand horizons and open up our curricula to embrace neglected areas. What is expected is for us to agree on certain minimum standards and then we can build on our various unique features. There is no need for curricula synchronisation of the type which can obliterate our individual identities. Each university should have its unique selling point rather than for us to work towards a single collective consciousness.

Existing Gaps and Possibilities

Clearly, the present curriculum exhibits serious gaps which we believe can be addressed through the injection of new specialised courses as electives or as special areas in some departments. There is an urgent need to expand the present curriculum to address its loud silence on the teaching of other international languages, especially the French Language which can reinforce international broadcasting, foreign correspondence courses etc. Other courses that could be considered include:

- Reporting the Oil Industry
- Development Communication
- Speech Communication/Rhetoric
- Human Rights Reporting/Child Rights
- Gender Communication
- Issues in Communication and Terrorism
- Peace and War Communication

- Environmental Communication
- Health Communication
- French for Journalists
- Religious Communication
- Conflict Management/Reporting
- Oramedia/Interpersonal Communication
- Human Communication
- Media and Social Issues
- Cross Cultural Communication
- Political Communication
- Financial/Business Communication
- Communication Aesthetics
- Communication and Labour Relations
- Entertainment Reporting
- Publishing
- Public Affairs Reporting

Other courses can be addressed under existing specialised reporting courses. However, we must admit that the existing curriculum is a minimum standards document which is capable of being expanded to accommodate courses such as human rights and peace teaching, freedom of information, civic and social responsibility, constitutional rights, cultural aesthetics and gender issues.

As we cannot produce a curriculum that can be without gaps, it is necessary to arrive at some consensus as to what should now be included and what can be left out, that is, for each institution to teach according to its ability and resources rather than embrace an octopus which does no one any good.

Role of the NUC, Teachers and Industry in Shaping Communication Discipline

(a)   Role of National Universities Commission

The National Universities Commission among other objectives is saddled by law with ensuring standards through improving the curricula of the universities. One of the measures it has adopted to ensure standard and improvement of quality of teaching in our universities is through periodic performance reviews and accreditation exercise.

The problem facing communication education in our Universities goes beyond performance reviews and accreditation. Students have taken large interest in the study of communication. The pressure for more intakes is not matched by available facilities and personnel. Many departments lack functional facilities and are losing quality staff to other lucrative sectors such as banks, insurance and oil companies. Many others choose to go abroad where staff welfare and conditions of service are better.

The National Universities Commission should direct sufficient attention to these areas of deficiency. The NUC should put a plan in place where existing departments are equipped with functional studios, computers, satellite television channels and transmitters. It can liaise with individual universities and execute such a plan from money appropriated by Federal Government and donations from the private sector.

The NUC should allow universities chart unique curricula directions for themselves and not impose a common curriculum for all departments of communication in Nigerian universities. This imposition of a common curriculum and structure appears to have forced some departments into answering a common name and being in a certain faculty. For example, it should not be the business of the NUC to impose a particular faculty/school of communication, department or determine what name it should answer. There should be flexibility which should allow departments to reflect the varied directions and emphasis in which training is given.

Role of Teachers

Communication is a dynamic field and teachers need to constantly update their knowledge and skills through seminars, conferences and workshops. Without such periodic updates, our communication educators may be left behind by the new trends in scholarship and practice.

Our teachers should be encouraged to conduct research in order to furnish the industry with research findings to solve unique communication problems. There are countless papers and research

results which are unutilised either because the teachers are too poor to fund their publication or are not given encouragement to do so.

Moreover, the poor treatment and remuneration of teachers is not encouraging. These are areas the NUC and private organisations can assist. There should be a fund specifically set aside for book development.

Role of Industry

The industry has a greater role to play in the improvement of the training environment. It can do this by endowing chairs, donating books and equipment, sponsoring seminars/workshops and giving periodic financial assistance to universities to update their communication education facilities.

By doing this, the industry ensures that it receives quality manpower from our training institutions. Our communication institutions should be equipped to teach the skills and impart knowledge with the latest communication technologies. The industry should contribute its quota to prevent the severe brain drain affecting communication studies in the country.

(b)   New Possibilities in the NUC – Curriculum: A Recommendation

The Columbia University Journalism programme has in recent times raised issues with the existing curriculum in its institution.

In an article in the *Columbia Journalism Review,* Brent Cunningham asked the daunting question 'What should journalism schools teach?' (*http://22.cjr.org/issues/2002/6/school-cunnigham.asp*). Cunningham, a managing editor of the journal, and faculty member was raising this question in an institution a *New York Times* article referred to in 1983 as 'the nation's best-known journalism school'.

Recently, a Ph.D student of the Department of Communication Arts in a memo to his Head of Department raised a similar question, when he wrote of the need to 'upgrade'the Ph.D programme.

Writing from two ends of the Atlantic, they both raised issues of curricular inadequacies albeit in the respective institutions' graduate programmes even though Cunningham wrote more about the

undergraduate programme. Nevertheless, the issue here is how we can extend NUC's curriculum to accommodate current concerns in our society and the world at large. While teaching the 'craft' of communication may well be a necessary concern of the curriculum, it is equally important that new social problems and issues, which confront us each day like 'breaking news' are made part of the relevant content through courses like: Mass Media and Social Issues, Issues in Terrorism and the Media, Media and Conflict Management, Media and Coverage of Poverty, Political Communication, Financial Communication, French for Journalists etc.

In addition, interface between the industry and the classroom should be more formalised so as to enable a greater intersectoral exchange and understanding of the needs of each sector. Thus there should be some quality markers and regulatory guidelines for both sectors.

Furthermore, the current training curriculum at the university level which provides for a more informal link with the industry should be formalised and students should be made to undergo industrial training in ITF –approved institutions for a minimum of six months during the four – year training period. This review should be accommodated and approved by the NUC because its failure to do so has impacted negatively on the quality of graduates from the university in the area of their technical/professional efficiency.

The current NUC document merely provides for minimum standard for its programmes. There is thus a lot of room for individual faculties to accommodate some aspects of the neglected areas. This possibility is encouraging, but its major drawback is the apparent lack of funding which in a private sector-driven economy should not really be a problem. This can work if the NUC also deregulates its control of university education in Nigeria.

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