

## College Instructors' Expectations of Their Own Image

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**Abstract:** The article is dedicated to the issue of developing communicative abilities in specialists and the study of the real practice of students' perception of their instructors. The authors assume that the rationale behind the professional communication of a modern instructor is that he/she is capable of engaging in competent discussions with both a specific opponent and a whole audience, irrespective of its size. Besides, the article stresses the significance of the instructor's ability to model his/her motives and the student's personality attributes and his/her ability to perceive the student's emotional state with a view to ensuring effective communication.

**Key words:** Social perception • Psychology of communication • Interpersonal relations • Communicativeness

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### INTRODUCTION

Instructors and disciples (students, graduate students, Ph.D students, retrainees) are the primary subjects of the educational space of higher learning institutions. The activity of the teaching and the taught takes place within the process of communication and interaction.

As we know, communication, which is at the heart of interaction between people, accompanies them throughout life. In particular, professional activity in any field by its psychological nature can be seen as not only a content area but a communication process. However, communication skills and abilities, which to a large extent govern people's behavior, are brought out differently in different people. It's no secret there are "incommunicative" individuals out there. Quite often difficulties with communication are due to the fact that the person does not fully command the knowledge and skills he/she needs. As a result, instead of mutual understanding there arises misunderstanding between communication partners.

Needless to say, that will hardly facilitate attaining a high level of professionalism and developing a positive

attitude towards people, oneself and one's own activity, which is the basis for the realization of one's creative potential and actualization of one's unique individual-psychological traits.

**Theoretical Aspects of the Issue:** In Russophone psychology literature, communication is a very broad concept. It comprises three interrelated components. The first one is called communicating. Communicating is exchanging information. The second component is interaction. Interaction implies mutual or reciprocal actions or influence. The third component is social perception. Social perception is individuals' mutual perception of each other [1, 2, 3]. It should be noted that in foreign psychology, these communication components are considered as independent phenomena [4, 5]. In real practice and professional activity, in particular, all the three communication components are brought out simultaneously. That said, each communication component has its own characteristics and its own results. This is due to the fact that each component has its own peculiar psychological mechanisms.

The quality of rapport between the instructor and the student is one of the major factors related to the

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effectiveness of the learning process [6, 7]. In analyzing the effectiveness of interaction between the subjects of the educational process, foreign researchers explored such aspects of communication as influence (domination versus subordination) and association (cooperation versus opposition) [8, 9]; the emotional aspects of the communication process, the motivators and demotivators of the interaction process. Research findings reveal that there are differences between instructors' self-perception and student's perception of their instructors [10, 11].

While considering pedagogical communication as a goal-oriented process of establishing and maintaining contact between the instructor and the student, one has to note the dual nature of the orientation, i.e. changes in the attributes of the interaction between the communicators and changes in the latter themselves [12]. According to V.S. Merlin's integral individuality concept, the attributes of one's personality traits always reflect one's attitude towards a certain side of reality and are brought out most vividly in the course of professional activity [13]. Consequently, the attributes of the instructor's personality, who is considered by us as a subject of the educational process, are brought out in the course of his/her pedagogical activity in the form of his/her attitude towards students and the latter's attitude towards the instructor in the course of pedagogical and academic activity – in other words, in communication.

Our observations reveal that some instructors begin to analyze their relations with students and colleagues, the administration and public institutions relatively late and with difficulty. We believe that this is one of the reasons behind their having trouble communicating in the course of their scientific and pedagogical work.

**Methods of the Study:** In order to determine the character of relationship and the degree of interaction between instructors and students in the course of the educational and bringing-up process, the study surveyed 300 instructors working in 10 colleges of different streams (technical, economics, pedagogical, military, etc.) within the city of Almaty. Out of them, 110 are male instructors and 190 are females. There were 900 students, who represented various departments and were in their 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> years at the same colleges the surveyed instructors worked at.

**Instructors' Perception Study Results:** Guided by the hypothesis that instructors can take the students' attitude towards themselves adequately, we invited the instructors to respond to some questions that interested us the most.

As the findings revealed, all in all, from the viewpoint of instructors, students perceived them quite positively. In that regard, more than half of the respondents (67.2% of the female and 51% of the male instructors) were convinced that they were perceived by their students as kind and interested in the students' success. Approximately a third of the female instructors (29.3 %) and about half of the male instructors (42.7%) stated that their students perceived them as demanding, strict, but just. It's quite notable that there was no single respondent whose answer was negative – no one said that his/her students perceived the instructor as “not caring about” or “not liking” them. And just 1.5% of the respondents from the female sample thought that they were perceived as “overly liberal” and 2% as “inclined to set the distance between themselves and the students”. As for the male instructors, 6.3% responded that they were perceived as “overly liberal, not demanding”.

On the whole, the picture of instructors' expectations of their image in the minds of students is quite favorable.

Guided by the hypothesis that the atmosphere at a specific department, which is inclusive of various forms of scientific communication, is crucial to building a positive attitude towards work, we invited the respondents to respond to the question: Does the atmosphere at your department facilitate augmenting creative activity? Sorted by priority, the college instructors' department atmosphere assessments were as follows: a) “Yes, it does” (54%); b) “It does in a way” (28%); c) “No, it doesn't” (6%); d) “I'm having trouble responding to this question” (9%); e) “No answer” (3%). Thus, according to the results, more than half of the respondents believed that the state of affairs at the department does overall facilitate instructors' creative activity. The findings reveal a much lower number of the respondents who had other responses. In this regard, for instance, 3% experienced some tension at the department, but stated there had been no conflict as yet, while just 2% noted they were perceived by their students as not caring about them.

The findings revealed that the instructors had a really positive opinion concerning the atmosphere across all the departments. However, given the statistically tangible percentage of those who picked the “It does (facilitate it) in a way” option (almost a third of the respondents), as well as those who had trouble responding and those who had a negative opinion, we can well assume that the instructors surveyed were in need of the department's immediate assistance with regard to research work and creating opportunities for scientific communication. Apparently, it makes sense to allocate more attention to

the scientific aspect of instructors' activity as well, especially those who have no experience of scientific work.

The analysis of the study's data brings up three major considerations:

- College instructors rate the social-psychological climate at their departments quite positively;
- The fact that there are positive ratings attests to that specific social-psychological group's special corporate culture;
- All in all, the study reveals quite a high level of being satisfied with the state of interpersonal relations between instructors and heads of departments, which is yet another attestation of the social-psychological climate being positive.

**Students' Perception Study Results:** The study revealed that 100% of the freshmen found the attitude of about half (44.6 %) of their instructors towards them to be kind.

33.7% of the sophomores (a third of the respondents) noted that only a minority of their instructors treated them kindly and were interested in their success.

29.1% of the third-year student respondents stated that their instructors treated them kindly.

With the fourth-year student respondents, the number of kind instructors reached a half (47.5%). Thus, the student's age and his/her experience going to college have an impact upon the rating of instructors' kindness: it goes down from 44.6% to 29.1% and goes up to 47.5%. The ratings by the fourth-year student respondents is the most optimistic. The third-year students were the most critical.

It would be interesting to juxtapose the responses of students, instructors and heads of departments on this issue (Table 1).

Based on the findings of our empirical study we can draw two conclusions: 1) the opinions of the instructors and heads of departments were pretty similar with regard to many positions. The only exception was the opinion concerning the instructors' liberal treatment of the students; 2) the picture of the way the professors and instructors see the students' perception of them on certain positions was much more positive than the students' real perception of them.

It's notable that no instructor picked a negative response, i.e. "not caring about", "not liking the students" and only 1% picked the "sets the distance between him-/herself and the students" option. As for the heads of departments, just 1% admitted that there were such instructors.

Table 1: Juxtaposition of the responses of students, instructors and heads of departments on students' perception of their instructors (% of the respondents)

	Students	Instructors	Heads of departments
Kind	38,7	59	51
Demanding but just	47,5	36	38
Overly liberal	4,5	3,9	9
Indifferent, apathetic	2,5	0	1
Sets the distance	6,7	1	1
I don't know, I haven't taught yet		0,1	0

Furthermore, the students were more critical on these positions: 2.5% said that their instructors' attitude towards them was apathetic and 6.7% - that their instructors preferred to set the distance between themselves and the students.

Another important factor in the study of instructors' attitude towards students is determining the level of interpersonal relations between the teaching and the taught and detecting the presence or absence of psychological contact between them. For this reason, the student respondents were invited to voice their opinion on what style of communication and relationship between the instructor and students they found to be the most acceptable and preferable. The findings revealed that most students demonstrated quite a balanced approach to picking the most acceptable option in terms of instructors' behavior in communicating with students ("strict, demanding, but quite democratic", 37%). A tangibly smaller group (29%) preferred the extremely liberal variant of the teacher-student relationship ("very down-to-earth, on an equal footing with the students"). The rest of the respondents went for such variant of in-class communication as "free-flowing, no restrictions on emotions" (27%). Just 5% of the respondents thought of the "extremely conservative" variant of their instructors' behavior in communicating with them as acceptable and preferable ("strict, official, without displaying emotion").

Consequently, while the students had a pronouncedly negative opinion with regard to the "extremely conservative" instructor behavior variant, there was no such definiteness about the rest three positions (the variation in the frequencies of the values of the attributes is minimal). Note that the largest group of students is oriented towards the most productive, cooperation-wise, style of pedagogical interaction ("strict but democratic"). However, one can worry about the fact that 3% left the question unanswered.

Another important factor in the study of instructors' attitude towards students is determining the level of interpersonal relations between the teaching and the taught and detecting the presence or absence of psychological contact between them.

The study revealed that the students had contact with their instructors out of class using the question "Do you communicate with your instructors out of class?". In this regard, various variants of out-of-class communication were offered to pick from. The responses to the question were as follows: 18% of the students admitted they conversed about the content of their courses with most of their instructors, 55% - with just some of their instructors. Judging by the responses, 11% of the respondents considered the subject of their out-of-class communication to be professional issues discussed with most of their instructors, 51% - with some of their instructors. The respondents were least of all inclined to discuss their personal problems with their instructors out-of-class, namely: 69% of the respondents noted they didn't share any issues related to their personal life with their instructors. At the same time, 30% (in totality) of students admitted they discussed personal issues with their instructors.

Based on the study's data we can say that young college students do, on the whole, have psychological contact with their instructors, but it mostly deals academic and professional issues. Thus, students want their instructor to be a pedagogue (a knowledge translator), in the first place and, to a lesser degree, a psychologist, mentor, or an older friend.

**Inferences:** Summing up, we find it rightful to draw the following conclusions:

Overall, the study has revealed quite a high level of being satisfied with the state of interpersonal relations between the teaching and the taught. This attests to the positive attitude of students in all years towards the college instructor team. This is evidenced by there being a significant number of so-called "favorite" teachers (not less than 10).

The study has detected the presence of business communication and psychological contact between college instructors and students. In this regard, students opt for a demanding and strict but moderately democratic style of communicating as the most acceptable in their relationship with their instructors.

The process of pedagogical activity based on instructor-student interaction tolerates no standards or templates, although the scale of the pedagogue's creative

objectives can, of course, vary - from applying new teaching methods to resolving diverse private issues arising in specific situations in the course of work.

One cannot achieve through using the theoretical (using books and words) learning system an effective and reasonable transition from the social role of a student to the social role of a subject of joint activity. The most efficient way is goal-oriented modeling as part communicative training, both for instructors and students. The goal of such training is the practical teaching of communicative skills and capabilities.

Overall, Kazakhstan is currently in need of both professional and psychological preparation of competent human resources. It's about developing systemic thinking, an ability to come up with the most effective solution in any, even extreme, situations, with minimum psychological and physical damage and loss of time.

Therefore, it makes sense to consider communication as a significant subsystem, which, first of all, is closely related to and complements other subsystems (professional self-determination and social and professional identification of subjects in college). All the three subsystems are among the crucial components of the system of professional-personality preparation of future specialists.

Second of all, these mutually related and mutually complementary subsystems (components) make up an integral poly-system psychological phenomenon, i.e. the professional-personality preparation of competitive specialists capable of actualizing Kazakhstan's ascendancy to becoming one of the world's 30 most developed countries.

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