



COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

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Summary

This research study was designed to create a psychological intervention program with a formative character aimed at stimulating and developing the communication skills necessary for the teaching profession. Following the implementation of the psychological intervention program, we organized the control experiment in order to evaluate the efficiency of the training program. The communication style refers to the set of manifestations characteristic of a person in the act of communication, being an indicator of the way a person structures his or her world of social relations, as well as an indicator of how information processing and transformation of this information into behavioral facts in social, evaluative, and practical judgments. In our research we relied on the classification of communication styles according to St. Marcus. There are four styles of communication that we investigated in teachers: assertive, non-assertive, aggressive, and manipulative. The research results showed that the communication techniques and assertiveness training included in the intervention program stimulated the practice of an assertive communication style, as well as a decrease in the non-assertive communication style.

Keywords: *communication, assertive, non-assertive, aggressive, teachers*

1. INTRODUCTION

The assertiveness of the human personality, in any associative context, is explicitly based on the development of symbolic interferences integrated in communication processes. Beyond the postulate of the communicative character exclusively to human interactions, the circulation of messages in any way is a defining note of contemporary society.

The term communication comes from the Latin *comunis / communicatio* which means "to share", "to be in a relationship" or "to establish a community with someone". Iacob (2004) defines human communication as a relationship based on sharing a meaning. An extensive definition of communication belongs to the sociologist Mircea Agabrian (2008), who considers communication: "a process

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by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, and behaviors." Extensive and effective communication requires basic skills in sending the message, listening, asking questions, and giving feedback. Communication skills are important for a teacher who provides education to students (McCarthy and Carter, 2001 apud Khan, Khan, Syed Zia-UI-Islam, Khan, 2017). In the literature there are various studies that study the communication of teachers, the ability to convey clear messages, to listen, and to provide feedback (Shaunessy, 2009; Cooper, 1979; Brusckhe, 1991). Didactic communication, carried out in an educational context, is defined in the general sense as a form of instrumental communication, directly involved in supporting a systematic learning process (Ciobanu, 2007 apud Goia 2011). Didactic communication is the one that mediates the realization of the educational phenomenon as a whole, this taking place only as a special form necessary in the transmission of specific learning content. Given that one of the basic objectives of the education system is to prepare the child for real life, communication at the didactic level should be conceived as a permanent interaction between teacher and student (Bloju, Stan, 2013).

1.1. Communication styles

The communication style refers to the set of manifestations characteristic of a person in the communicative act, being an indicator of the way a person structures his or her world of social relations, as well as an indicator of how information processing and transformation of this information into behavioral facts in social, evaluative, practical, and other judgments. There are a multitude of classifications of communication styles. Each style has some specific characteristics that deserve to be developed (Pânișoară, Sandu, Pânișoară, Druță, 2015). In one study, Jackson reveals that participants considered that "different learning activities were effective in developing oral communication skills during their university studies" (Jackson, 2014).

In our research we relied on the classification of communication styles according to Solomon Marcus (1987). There are four styles of communication that we have investigated in teachers.

An individual who uses the *aggressive style* has a tendency to express their own opinions and feelings, without taking into account how the other person will feel. This style is based on the desire to dominate and control the communication process through intimidation, insult, and coercion of the interlocutor.

The manipulative style represents the individual's preference for a backstage role, in which he or she waits for the right moment to come to light and to stand out. There is a tendency to look for hidden intentions behind any statements of others. The person who has adopted this style of communication avoids confrontations and open exposure of opinions, which can change to those of the interlocutor.

The *non-assertive style* is characterized by the avoidance of conflict situations and the reserved expression of one's own beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. People with this style of communication most often have a passive, detached position, rarely manifesting their own initiative.

The *assertive style* refers to that option of the individual in communication that helps him to directly express his thoughts, feelings and beliefs without hurting others (Rizeanu, 2013). Yogaranee (2016) states that assertiveness is a personality trait that describes how people behave when they want to express something without being aggressive.

The more commonly used opinion regarding the communication styles in the literature emphasizes the idea that the teacher's communication style, either in relation to students or their parents and colleagues, remains constant, characterizing the teacher's personality. At the same time, according to more recent research from Stavropoulou and Stamatis (2017), teachers can adopt more or less all styles of communication occasionally depending on the communication needed at a given time or in a certain situation. Suharni, Atmowardoyo and Salija (2018) reached the same conclusions, stating that the aggressive style was used when the teacher intended to forbid or remind students of something, the assertive style in situations when it motivated students, and the passive style when the student asked for help.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVES

The research aimed at realizing a program of psychological intervention with formative character oriented towards the stimulation and development of the communicative abilities necessary for the teaching profession. The general objective of the training experiment was the development of efficient communication with teachers in order to provide continuous training in their professional activity. The specific objectives of this experiment proposed for the intervention program were: stimulating, developing, training and practicing communication skills through various techniques and exercises; developing assertive communication; and training the ability to use communicative competence in working with the student, which requires knowledge and application of effective communication styles. The objective of the control experiment is to evaluate the effectiveness of the psychological intervention program.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

We propose to study the following hypotheses in this paper: We believe that through a complex program consisting of a system of communication techniques and assertiveness training we will develop communication skills in teachers.

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

The training experiment included 22 teachers aged between 25 and 65, 11 in the control group (CG) and 11 in the experimental group (EG). The selection criterion, to ensure the homogeneity of EG and CG, was the level of assertiveness, aggression and non-assertiveness in the communication of the subjects and the expressed desire to enter the psychological training program

3.2. INSTRUMENTS

The questionnaire "Analysis of communication styles" (S.C), developed by S. Marcus, aimed at identifying communication styles in teachers. The test is relevant for the 4 fundamental styles of communication: non-assertive style, aggressive style, manipulative style, and assertive style. One point is awarded to the "true" answers. The points are summed up on communication styles. The style in which the maximum number of points was obtained indicates the dominant attitude in communication, the relatively stable and predictable characteristics of communicative behavior.

3.3. PROCEDURE

Following the training of the research participants, the evaluation questionnaire of the studied constructor was applied repeatedly (non-assertive style, aggressive style, manipulative style, and assertive style). The preparation of the participants for the questionnaire application consisted in explaining that it is necessary to select a "true" or "false" option for each item of the scales. The way to complete the scales was pencil and paper. The completion of the scales was done without a time limit. The questionnaire was applied individually to the subjects from the experimental group and the control group in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the psychological intervention program. To determine the comparisons of the experimental group and the control group, we used the nonparametric statistical test to compare two independent U Mann Whitney samples and the Wilcoxon statistical test.

3.4. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The experimental design chosen for the present research was that of a formative and control study. The questionnaire "Analysis of communication styles" (S.C), developed by S. Marcus, was applied to 66 teachers before the implementation of the psychological intervention program in order to identify the communication styles of teachers. The complete data obtained in this stage did not form the subject of this

paper, but were the basis for the elaboration of the formative program. Psychological interventions were carried out regularly with the teachers in the experimental group once a week, 12 sessions over a period of 12 weeks.

The psychological intervention program consisted of several basic stages:

1. *The stage of interpersonal knowledge and creating an atmosphere of trust within the group* (2 sessions) - the stage involves knowing the purpose and objectives of the program, identifying expectations, interpersonal knowledge and creating a secure atmosphere, and setting rules.
2. *The actual intervention stage* (8 sessions) - aimed at achieving the proposed objectives and was based on the application of techniques for developing effective communication (active listening, expressive skills, the art of asking, non-verbal language, etc.), and assertiveness training.
3. *Consolidation and evaluation stage* (2 session) - is an important part of the psychological intervention program, in which the consolidation of skills takes place, their transfer to practice, evaluation of the feedback of the subjects after participating in this program, and appreciation of group activity.

Following the implementation of the intervention program, the questionnaire "Analysis of communication styles" was repeatedly applied to evaluate the studied constructor (non-assertive style, aggressive style, manipulative style, and assertive style). The final data from the control experiment (post-intervention) were reported to the data of the ascertaining experiment (pre-intervention), being a reference in demonstrating the differential relevance obtained, following in parallel the evolution of the control group, compared to the experimental group.

4. RESULTS

The control experiment aimed to determine the progress made in developing teachers' communication skills, comparing and interpreting the results of the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG). To determine the homogeneity of the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG), we compared the results obtained by teachers at the test stage. The results obtained from EG and CG are shown in Figure 1 where the data in the test phase can be viewed.

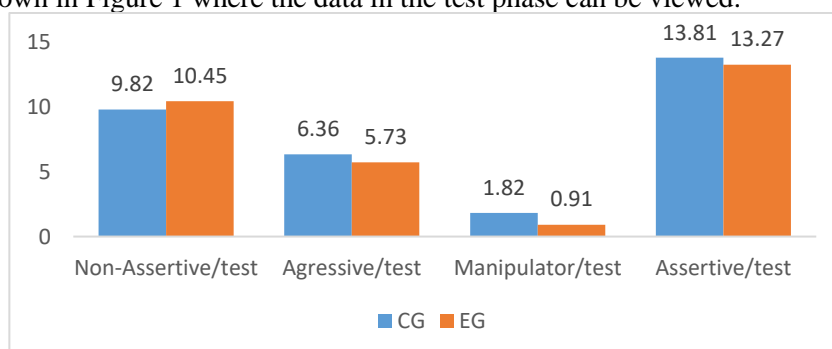


Figure 1. Results of EG and CG / test communication styles

According to the results presented in figure 1, we can see that the experimental and control groups are homogeneous. This is statistically confirmed. For the variable *Non-assertive communication style* ($U=44.00$; $p=0.264$); for the *Aggressive communication style variable* ($U=38.50$; $p=0.124$); and for the *Assertive communication style* ($U=57.50$; $p = 0.832$). However, the data described confirm that the experimental and control groups are homogeneous in three variables: Non-Assertive communication style, Aggressive communication style, and Assertive communication style.

Table 1. U Mann Whitney test of EG / CG-test communication style

	Non-Assertiv/test	Agressiv/test	Manipulator/test	Assertiv/test
Mann-Whitney U	44.000	38.500	31.000	57.500
p	0.264	0.124	0.024	0.832

Statistical data processing allowed only non-assertive, aggressive, and assertive styles to be taken into account. The Manipulator style cannot be taken into account due to the statistically significant differences obtained by subjects from EG and CG ($U = 31$; $p = 0.024$). These results allow us to conclude that for the manipulative communication style, homogeneity was not ensured and will continue to be excluded from our research.

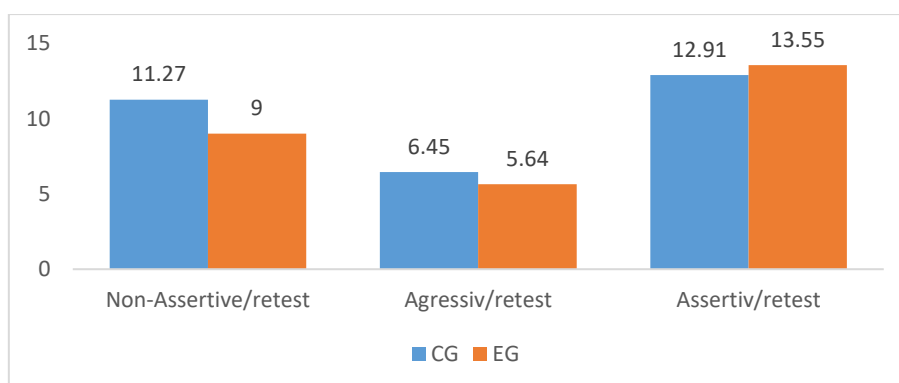


Figure 2. Results on EG and CG / retest communication styles

The results presented in Figure 2 illustrate statistically significant differences between CG and EG in the retest. Statistically significant differences were confirmed in the Non-Assertive, Aggressive, and Assertive communication style.

Table 2. Test U Mann Whitney communication style EG / CG-retest

	Non-Assertiv/retest	Agresiv/retest	Assertiv/retest
Mann-Whitney U	4.500	35.500	34.500
p	0.001	0.041	0.046

Through the U Mann Whitney test, the statistically significant difference was confirmed for the *Non-Assertive communication style* variable ($U = 4.50$; $p = 0.001$), for the *Aggressive communication style* variable ($U = 35.50$; $p = 0.041$), and for the *Assertive communication style* variable ($U=34.50$; $p=0.046$). Following the application of the training program, we determined that the incidence of the *Aggressive style of communication* with teachers is lower. Considering that the aggressive communication style involves the direct expression of their opinions, feelings, and needs in a way that can harm the dignity and rights of the interlocutors, and for teachers the target audience are students, we can see that they have become more tactical in communication oriented towards interlocutors. Teachers in the experimental group use criticism and threats less often, do not interrupt the interlocutor frequently, and take into account the opinions of others. The Assertive style registered a statistically significant increase. The *Non-assertive style* decreased compared to the pre-intervention data, so there is a positive dynamic in approaching teachers' communication styles.

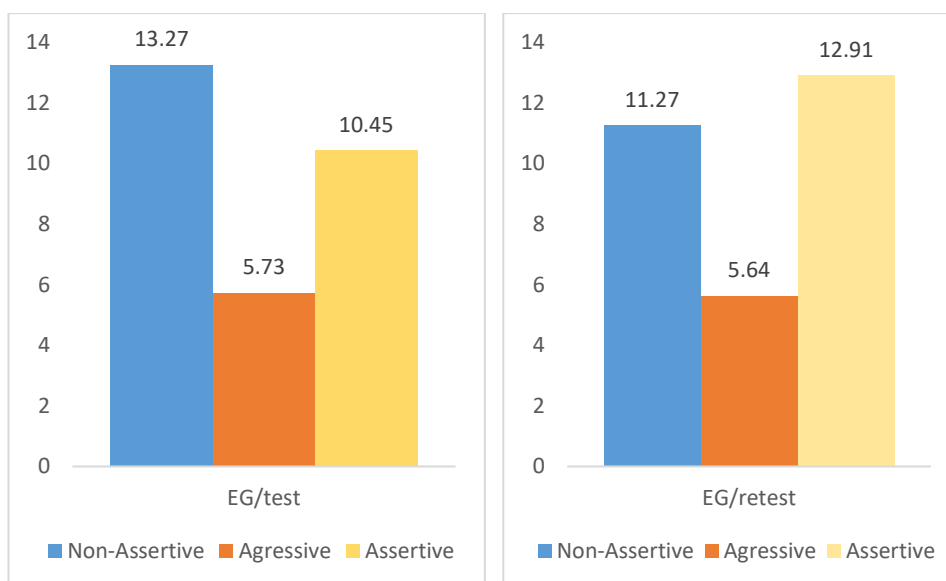


Figure 3. Results on communication styles to EG test and EG retest teachers

Comparing the results of the experimental group in the initial phase (test) and final (retest), we found an increase in values in the Assertive style (EG / test - M = 10.45; EG / retest - M = 11.27) and a decrease in values in the Non-Assertive style (EG / test - M = 13.27; EG / retest - M = 12.91). The analysis of the results by means of the Wilcoxon nonparametric test on communication styles in EG teachers in the test and retest stage showed statistically significant differences in these two communication styles: Assertive style $Z = -1.653$, $p = 0.048$ and Non-assertive style $Z = -0.954$, $p = 0.040$ (see table 3).

Table 3. Wilcoxon test for the variables investigated

EG/CG		Assertiv/retest - Assertiv/test	Agressiv/retest - Agressiv/test	Non-assertiv/retest - Non-Assertiv/test
CG	Z	-1.379	-0.142	-1.190
	p	0.168	0.887	0.234
EG	Z	-1.653	-0.209	-0.954 ^a
	p	0.048	0.834	0.040

The detailed analysis of the data included in figure 3 and table 3 indicates a slight decrease of the Aggressive style in the experimental group (EG), without registering significant differences. The result obtained by us indicates that long-term intervention is needed to model and reduce the aggressive style of communication.

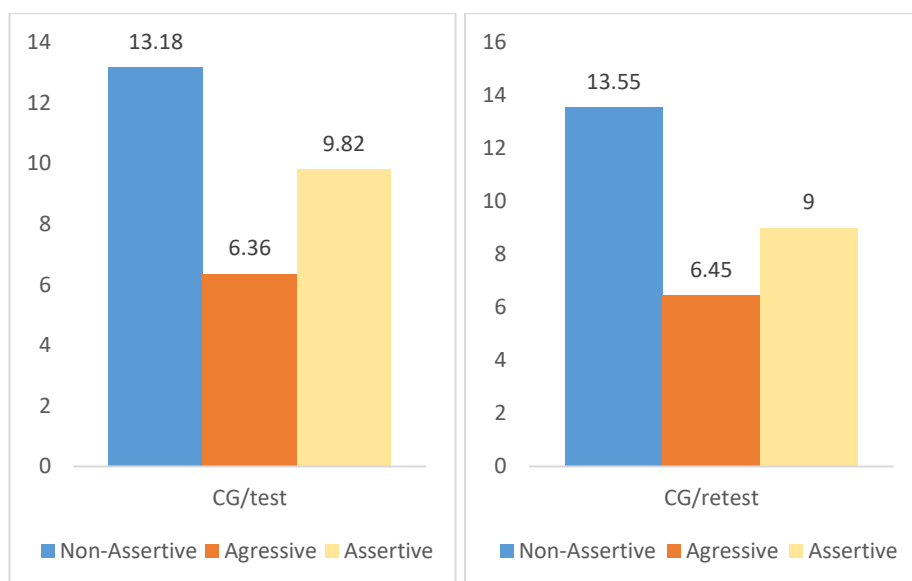


Figure 4. The results regarding the communication styles of the teachers from CG test and CG retest

The test-retest analysis, performed using the Wilcoxon nonparametric test to compare the distribution of ranks for paired samples, indicates that in the case of the control group (CG) no significant differences were obtained between the initial and final values for Assertive, Aggressive, and Non-Assertive communication styles. Teachers included in the control group, not being involved in the psychological intervention program, did not register changes in communication styles, thus experimental results were validated by the control group (CG) and by statistical data processing.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Among the teachers in the experimental group, there were significant increases in the assertive style. Thus, through the training experiment we managed to ensure through 12 sessions a significant change in the style of assertive communication. We also managed to reduce the non-assertive communication style, the teachers showing more involvement in the act of communication with students and colleagues. Working with irrational cognitions related to the fear of not being judged by others, including in assertiveness training, helped teachers in the experimental group to become more open to others, expressing their own opinions. Teachers who have followed the training program have highlighted a better level of acquisition in terms of effective communication as opposed to those teachers who did not participate.

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