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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND SELF-EFFICACY

Valerica Anghelache (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galati, Teacher Training Department, Gării Street, No. 63-65, Galati, Romania,
valerica.anghelache@ugal.ro

Abstract

Today, communication is the central topic of debates, regardless of the competence of individuals. Moreover, it is well known that human existence cannot be imagined in the absence of communication. Starting from this premise, interpersonal communication is an essential topic in the research of anthropologists, psychologists or sociologists. From the educational perspective, the communication is definitely an essential dimension of the school, probably the only one responsible for the climate and organizational culture, implicitly responsible for the quality of relationships between individuals, for the cohesion of the group. The interpersonal communication is influenced by the cognitive, emotional or contextual variables that may be stimulating or inhibitors factors of communication. Based on these considerations, the objective of our paper is to show the levels of students' general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skill. Subjects with a positive perception of personal self-efficacy tend to get higher scores in interpersonal communication. From a psycho-pedagogical perspective, these results draw attention to the need for individual development in terms of social component, but also in terms of emotivity, activity satisfaction, or well-being.

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1. Introduction

Communication accompanies any human activity, being a liaison of interpersonal relations whose quality affects individuals and organizations alike. It is well-known that successful organizations pay great attention to the way their employees relate and communicate to one another, promoting an organizational culture in which each person may freely express themselves, and also activities meant to ensure cohesion and a positive work climate. From an organizational point of view, most studies identify a strong connection between the quality of communication and performance, work involvement and motivation, as well as institutional and interpersonal trust (Wright, 2004, Porumbescu et al., 2013). From a psycho-sociological point of view, communication is defined as “the ensemble of processes by which exchanges of information and significance are pursued by people who are in a given social situation” (Abric, 2002, p.14).

2. Problem Statement

Attempting to go beyond the cybernetic pattern of understanding the communication process, psychologists assert that personal communication skills are influenced by more categories of variables: psychological, cognitive (the cognitive system, self-representations, representations of the others or of the context), social (social role and status, prejudice), psycho-semantic (the balance and order of words), and contextual (social and cultural context) (Abric, 2002). One could state that the act of communication is pluri-determined. An interesting thesis has been advanced by Seo and Kwon (2016), who claim that academic resiliency is significantly determined by the interpersonal communication skills and by the communication patterns acquired at home. In the case of the families that develop a conformist communication pattern, parents exert their authority so that children follow their parents’ opinions, thus avoiding any disagreement or debate. This aspect becomes obvious in the interaction with others, and correlates with a decrease in the ability of self-expression.

A part of the general psychic structure, communication may also be related to human development, as Frydrychowicz (2005) states. The author also stresses the fact that the efficacy of interpersonal relations depends on the ability to communicate, to establish and maintain the contact with others. Emotional attitude and energy represent dimensions of interpersonal communication, having a regulating role for the behavior of individuals engaged in communication. Self-efficacy is a cognitive variable with significance in supporting interpersonal communication. Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as the ensemble of one’s beliefs with regard to one’s ability to reach certain performance levels. One’s perception of self-efficacy influences one’s experience, behavior, motivation, and way of thinking. People who manifest high self-efficacy are intrinsically motivated, reckon with failure more easily, control various situations, and are bold enough to approach various situations and tasks, which they perceive as challenges, and not as threats. At the other end, people with low self-efficacy levels avoid confrontation, have limited aspirations, display disengaging and hesitating behavior and self-distrust, being prone to failure, stress and breakdowns.

Self-efficacy can also be assessed at a group level. Thus, from the academic point of view, the efficacy of a group of students is in close connection to their teacher’s self-efficacy, that is to say, to the teacher’s perception of their own competences (Canrinus et al., 2012). Along the same lines, Agbaria (2013) asserts that students’ self-efficacy level is an explanation for their academic motivation.

3. Research Questions

Interpersonal communication and self-efficacy are widely tackled in the literature, most researchers being concerned with explaining the factors determining the two variables, as well as with their implications in explaining certain behaviors, attitudes, processes or choices, which begs the question as to whether there is a relation of interdependence between the interpersonal communication skills and the self-efficacy level? Do the two variables bear the imprint of certain personality traits?

4. Purpose of the Study

Starting from research findings from the literature, and also from data resulted from an observational survey carried out personally, in a longer period of time, the present research aims to identify a possible answer to the questions above. Thus, the main objectives of this investigation are:

- a) To show the levels of students' general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skills;
- b) To identify the possible interdependence between interpersonal communication skills, self-efficacy and certain personality traits.

In reaching these objectives, the following working hypotheses have been employed:

1. Students' self-efficacy and communication skills significantly vary according to their age.

Personality traits influence the interpersonal communication skills according to general self-efficacy levels.

5. Research Methods

The present research has been carried out on a sample of 160 participants, students of "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galati, Romania, of whom 96 (60%) are also active teachers. The participants' average age is of 33 years old. 40 participants (25%) also have management responsibilities in their respective schools. It is only by chance that all subjects are female. In what the procedure is concerned, the following aspects have been envisaged: general self-efficacy, age, interpersonal communication skills, and typological dimensions of personality. In order to verify the research hypotheses, standard research instruments have been employed, the findings being subsequently statistically analyzed (IBM SPSS 20).

General self-efficacy. This variable was measured by the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). This instrument includes 10 items, responses being made on a 4-point scale, from 1= not at all true to 4 = perfectly true. The General Self-Efficacy Scale is one-dimensional, correlating with emotion, optimism, and work satisfaction. The Alpha-Cronbach coefficient is of .76. High perception of self-efficacy is associated with ability to set objectives, involvement, resistance to hindrance and ability to recover from failures.

Interpersonal communication skills. In order to measure this variable, we have employed the Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory (ICSI), developed by Bienvenu (1971). This instrument measures general trends in interpersonal communication, revealing a certain communication pattern. The questionnaire is structured along four components: clarity in expressing oneself, listening skills, giving and receiving feedback and capitalizing on emotional interaction.

Typological dimensions of personality. This variable was measured by using the TT (typological trends) questionnaire, developed by Constantin (2004). The 40 items of this questionnaire are structured

along four main dimensions: generous, involved, vindictive and helpless, but also consider two secondary factors: selfishness/ altruism and internal/ external locus of control. The responses are made on 7-point scale, from 1= never agrees, to 7 = always agrees. Alpha-Cronbach coefficients are as follows: the *generous* factor: $\alpha = .81$; the *involved* factor: $\alpha = .81$; the *claiming* factor: $\alpha = .80$; the *helpless* factor: $\alpha = .82$; the *selfishness/altruism* factor $\alpha = .81$; and the *internal/ external locus of control* factor: $\alpha = .76$.

6. Findings

Data primary analysis has revealed the following general aspects:

a) In what the general self-efficacy variable is concerned, the findings highlight a moderate and a high level. No subject recorded a low level of this ability. The mean of the general self-efficacy variable is of $M=30.0$, $SD=4.1$;

b) The means of interpersonal communication skills indicate both a low and a high level: *clarity of messages* ($M=21.0$, $SD=3.5$); *listening ability* ($M=18.0$, $SD=3.1$); *giving feedback* ($M=16.1$, $SD=4.2$); *capitalizing on emotional interactions* ($M=19.0$, $SD=5.0$)

c) The means of the six typological dimensions of personality, according to the feminine standard, reflect high intensity in the manifestation of the following factors: *generosity* ($M=5.7$, $SD=.59$), *involvement* ($M=6.0$, $SD=.51$); *claiming* ($M=5.86$, $SD=.70$), *selfishness* ($M=6.0$, $SD=.54$), *internal locus of control* ($M=5.65$, $SD=.72$), and low intensity of the *helplessness* factor ($M=3.2$, $SD=.80$).

The findings obtained during the process of verifying each of the two hypotheses are presented below.

H1: Students' self-efficacy and communication skills vary according to their age.

In order to verify this hypothesis, we calculated the t-test for independent samples. The results in what concerns the relation between the *level of general self-efficacy* and *age* are: $t(158) = 4.46$, $p < 0.05$, which means that there are significant differences between the means recorded. Thus, subjects older than 33 averagely score higher in self-efficacy ($M_2=31.74$) than subjects under 33 years of age ($M_1=28.98$). Calculation of the effect size underlines that $r = 0.07$, which, according to Cohen criteria, indicates that age has little influence on general self-efficacy, as perceived by subjects. In what the relation between *communication skills* and *age* is concerned, the results of the t-test are as follows:

▪ Clarity of message and age: $t(158) = 2.48$, $p < 0.05$. We infer that there are statistically significant differences here: subjects older than 33 years of age generally score higher in sending messages ($M_2=21.70$) than subjects under 33 ($M_1=20.33$). The calculation of the effect size indicates $r = 9.41$, which, in reference to Cohen criteria, illustrates an extremely strong effect of the age on the abilities of sending messages clearly.

▪ Listening skills and age: $t(158) = 1.01$, $p > 0.05$. These results indicate that age does not trigger statistically significant differences when it comes to the subjects' listening skills.

▪ Giving feedback and age: $t(158) = 1.03$, $p > 0.05$. As in the previous case, the results do not point out statistically significant differences in what concerns the relation between the subjects' age and their giving feedback skills.

▪ Capitalizing on emotional interactions and age: $t(158) = 2.82$, $p < 0.05$. The results in the t-test indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the two variables. Thus, subjects older

than 33 generally score higher in their skills of capitalizing on emotional interactions ($M_2 = 20.08$) than subjects under 33 of age ($M_1 = 17.88$). In what the effect size is concerned, the calculations indicates a value $r = 1.41$, i.e. a very strong effect of the age over the skills of capitalizing on emotional interactions in the interpersonal communication process.

These results indicate that the hypothesis partly verifies, as age generates significant differences at the levels of general self-efficacy, clarity of sent messages and abilities of capitalizing on emotional interactions.

H2. Personality traits influence the interpersonal communication skills according to the general self-efficacy level.

In order to verify this hypothesis, we have calculated simple ANCOVA. Data statistical analysis highlights the following aspects:

a) *Generous – interpersonal communication skills*. Findings:

- There is a statistically significant effect of *generosity* variable on the *sending messages* skills [F (20,138) = 2.97, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F (1,138) = 0.08, $p > 0.001$]. Therefore, the subjects characterized by generosity have better abilities of sending messages, at a different self-efficacy level. Nevertheless, in what the effect size is concerned, the analysis indicates a low effect of the personality trait on this skill in the case of the subjects in this research ($r = 0.14$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of *generosity* variable on the skills of *giving and receiving feedback* [F (20,138) = 8.18, $p < 0.001$], as well as a statistically significant effect of GSE co-variable [F (1,138) = 30.11, $p < 0.001$]. To put it differently, the generous are more effective in giving feedback at similar self-efficacy values. Generosity has, nevertheless, little effect on feedback quality ($r = 0.23$);

- The influence of generosity on the *listening* skills [F (20,138) = 1.77, $p > 0.001$] and on the ability of *capitalizing on emotional interactions* [F (20,138) = 2.07, $p > 0.001$] is statistically insignificant.

b) *Involved - interpersonal communication skills*. Findings:

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *involved* variable on the *sending messages* skills [F (17,141) = 3.40, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F (1,141) = 0.086, $p > 0.001$]. The inference here is that the skills of sending messages and their clarity are influenced by the communicator's involvement level, at different self-efficacy levels. Nevertheless, the effect size is low ($r = 0.15$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *involved* variable on the *listening* skills [F (17,141) = 4.76, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F (1,141) = 6.46, $p > 0.001$]. In other words, at different self-efficacy levels, the involved people have listening skills in the interpersonal communication process, although the effect size is low in this case ($r = 0.17$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *involved* variable on the *giving feedback* skills [F (17,141) = 7.96, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F (1,141) = 2.71, $p > 0.001$]. The effect size is nevertheless low, measurements showing that $r = 0.23$. At different self-efficacy levels, the quality of the giving/receiving feedback process is influenced by the involvement trait.

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *involved* variable on the skills of *capitalizing on emotional interactions* [F (17,141) = 4.49, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F (1,141) = 7.90, $p > 0.001$]. To put it otherwise, at different self-efficacy levels, the skill of

capitalizing on emotional interactions is influenced by the involvement trait. Nevertheless, the effect size is low in this particular case ($r = 0.17$).

c) Claiming - interpersonal communication skills. Data analysis highlights that:

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *claiming* variable on the skills of *giving feedback* in interpersonal communication [$F(19.139) = 4.25, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.139) = 5.34, p > 0.001$]. Therefore, at different self-efficacy levels, the subjects with analytical spirit and prompt reactions record better abilities of giving feedback, although the effect is low ($r = 0.17$).

- The influence of the claiming personality trait on clarity of message [$F(19.139) = 1.61, p > 0.001$], on listening skills [$F(19.139) = 1.80, p > 0.001$] and on the skills of capitalizing on emotional interactions [$F(19.139) = 2.13, p > 0.001$] is statistically insignificant.

d) Helpless - interpersonal communication skills. Findings:

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *helpless* variable on the *sending messages* skills [$F(23.135) = 4.39, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.135) = 1.09, p > 0.001$]. One can assert that, at different self-efficacy levels, the subjects that are sensitive to other people's problems record better results in sending messages, although the effect size of this influence is low for the present investigation ($r = 0.17$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *helpless* variable on the *giving feedback* skills [$F(23.135) = 7.37, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.135) = 0.39, p > 0.001$]. The inference is that, at different self-efficacy levels, sensitivity to other people's problems influence the feedback quality. The size effect is low ($r = 0.23$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *helpless* variable on the skill of *capitalizing on emotional interactions* [$F(23.135) = 8.58, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.135) = 6.87, p > 0.001$]. At different self-efficacy levels, the subjects characterized by sensitivity have skills in capitalizing on emotional interactions during the communication process. The size effect is low ($r = 0.24$).

e) Altruism/selfishness - interpersonal communication skills. Findings:

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *altruism/selfishness* variable on the *sending messages* skills [$F(19.139) = 5.79, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.139) = 1.72, p > 0.001$]. Therefore, at different self-efficacy levels, the subjects characterized by altruism have the ability of sending clear messages during the act of interpersonal communication. The size effect in this case is, however, low ($r = 0.20$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *altruism/selfishness* variable on the skill of *giving and receiving feedback* [$F(19.139) = 9.04, p < 0.001$], as well as a statistically significant effect of the GSE co-variable [$F(1.139) = 48.75, p < 0.001$]. At similar self-efficacy levels, altruism/selfishness influence feedback. The size effect in this case is, however, low ($r = 0.25$);

- There is a statistically significant effect of the *altruism/selfishness* variable on the skill of *capitalizing on emotional interactions* [$F(19.139) = 5.38, p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [$F(1.139) = 25.54, p > 0.001$]. Although the size effect is low in this case ($r = 0.19$), we infer that, at various self-efficacy levels, altruism/selfishness influence the skills of capitalizing on emotional interactions;

▪ The influence of the *altruism/selfishness* personality trait on the listening skills [F (19.139) = 2.35, $p > 0.001$] is statistically insignificant.

f) Internal locus of control – interpersonal communication skills. Findings:

▪ There is a statistically significant effect of the *internal locus of control* variable on the *sending messages* skills [F (23.135) = 8.05, $p < 0.001$], as well as a statistically significant effect of the GSE co-variable [F(1.135) = 27.26, $p < 0.001$]. The effect size in this case is nevertheless low ($r = 0.24$);

▪ There is a statistically significant effect of the *internal locus of control* variable on the *listening* skills [F (23.135) = 5.12, $p < 0.001$], but the effect of GSE co-variable is statistically insignificant [F(1.135) = 7.32, $p < 0.001$]. In this case, one can speak of a very strong effect ($r = 1.91$);

▪ There is a statistically significant effect of the *internal locus of control* variable on the skill of *giving feedback* [F (23.135) = 6.55, $p < 0.001$], as well as a statistically significant effect of the GSE co-variable [F (1.135) = 22.48, $p < 0.001$]. The effect size in this case is still low ($r = 0.21$);

▪ There is a statistically significant effect of the *internal locus of control* variable on the skill of *capitalizing on emotional interactions* [F (23.135) = 5.85, $p < 0.001$], as well as a statistically significant effect of the GSE co-variable [F (1.135) = 37.13, $p < 0.001$]. The effect size in this case is low ($r = 0.20$).

The linear relation between general self-efficacy (GSE), interpersonal communication skills, and personality traits has been verified with the help of r Pearson correlation. Data statistical analysis indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between GSE and giving feedback [r (158) = .24, $p < 0.01$], capitalizing on emotional interactions [r (158) = .33, $p < 0.01$], as well as a statistically significant positive correlation between GSE and the following typological trends: generosity [r (158) = .25, $p < 0.01$], involvement [r (158) = .35, $p < 0.01$], claiming [r (158) = .21, $p < 0.01$], altruism/selfishness [r (158) = .41, $p < 0.01$]. There has also been recorded a statistically significant negative correlation between GSE and helplessness [r (158) = -.33, $p < 0.01$]. Data statistical analysis indicates that the second hypothesis is valid.

7. Conclusion

This research has aimed at measuring the levels of students' general self-efficacy and interpersonal communication skills, as well as the possible relation between certain personality traits, communication skills and self-efficacy. The statistical analysis of the data collected by applying the three investigation tools has revealed the existence of certain correlations and also that of some statistically significant differences. Despite some influences of a relatively low effect, the results indicate a relation of interdependence between the variables in this study. Thus, it has been observed that the level of personal self-efficacy varies according to age, subjects older than 33 years of age scoring higher than the younger subjects. Therefore, people above 33 are more involved, manage challenging and stressful situations and failure better, have better abilities of setting their objectives. Age also influences the interpersonal communication skills, subjects above 33 scoring higher in clarity of the messages they send and in capitalizing on emotional interactions. This aspect translates in the greater attention they pay to the contents and tone of the message, and also to their interlocutors' feelings. Consequently, we infer that self-efficacy also has a determining role: self-confident people who are able to resist when confronted with destabilizing situations have better skills of clear expressing their messages, while also having consideration to other people's feelings. These findings concur with Bandura's (1994), Wright's (2004) and Porumbescu's (2013) theories.

When it comes to personality traits, the results indicate a certain influence on interpersonal communication skills. Thus, the subjects characterized by generosity have a high self-efficacy level and record good sending messages and giving feedback skills. They are altruistic and have an internal locus control. The subjects characterized by involvement have good sending messages, listening, giving feedback, and capitalizing on emotional interactions skills. They are altruistic, but manifest an external locus control (which is to say that they feel like their success is owing to chance). The claiming subjects, with analytical spirit and qualities of fine observers of reality, bold enough to take firm stands to their superiors, also record abilities in giving and receiving feedback. They are rather selfish and display a high self-efficacy level. The subjects characterized by helplessness, sensitive to other people's problems, but lacking self-confidence, energy and determination, display low self-efficacy levels, but manifest skills of sending messages, giving feedback and capitalizing on emotional interactions. They are rather selfish and have an internal locus control. These findings concur with Frydrychowicz's (2005) and Abrie's (2002) studies.

From a psycho-pedagogical and didactic point of view, the findings of the present research may constitute a hallmark in the undertaking of improving the efficiency of the relation to students, of adapting the teaching demarche, with a view to increasing the general self-efficacy levels, so that students be able to cope with the challenges of solving the academic tasks they are given. The teacher's attitude, message or feedback type should be placed in relation to context, and also to the students' communication skills and prevalent personality traits. This requires that the teacher be very observant and possess adaptive skills.

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