

Teacher Candidates' (Pedagogical Formation Students') Communication Skills

Süleyman Göksoy

Faculty of Education, Educational Sciences, University of Düzce, Educational Administration and Supervision, Düzce, Turkey

Email: goksoys@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify pedagogical formation students' (teacher candidates') communication skills based on their perceptions. The study sought answers to the following research question: What are the perceptions of pedagogical formation students (teacher candidates) related to their communication skills? Assessment of pedagogical formation students' (teacher candidates') perceptions regarding their communication skills was undertaken through qualitative research methods. Qualitative data collected with the help of semi-structured interview form were analyzed in terms of content. The study was conducted with the participation of 48 teacher candidates attending pedagogical formation classes at Düzce University during 2013-2014 academic year. According to the data obtained at the end of the study, teacher candidates are aware of the necessity and importance of communication. They are aware that the prerequisite for being contented, successful and social individuals and professionals is healthy and good communication with others. Teacher candidates know the importance and necessity of body language in effective communication and generally prefer to use it. They are also aware of the need for written and oral communication when required. Psychological situations such as anxiety, stress, lack of self-efficacy, timidity, fear and excitement are regarded as barriers that inhibit communication. These barriers are followed by being misunderstood, lack of feedback and language, culture, prior information and prejudices related to inappropriate context/environment and persons involved in communication. Teacher candidates express that they can develop communication skills by participating in social activities. They also state that they can develop communication skills by reading books/articles/research findings, participating in courses/seminars/conferences, meeting new and different people and taking training-expert support.

Keywords

Component, Teacher Candidate (Pedagogical Formation Student), Communication Skill

1. Introduction

Schlechty (2005) argues that teaching is leadership and that teachers should regard their profession as leading and inventing instead of regarding it as acting, announcing and doing clinical work. Studies on the quality of education emphasize that teachers have the leading role for school productivity and student achievement (Militello, Rallis, & Goldring, 2013) and that quality of education is dependent on teacher quality to a great extent (Acat, 2006).

Therefore, researchers have examined teacher characteristics for many years and listed the qualities of successful teachers. Leading qualities are found to be being resourceful and intelligent, having emotional strength, vitality (or willingness) and thoughtfulness (or friendly behaviors). Studies on teacher behaviors have presented that teacher behaviors create differences on student achievement based on specific teaching principles and methods (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2013).

According to Slavin (2013), there is no formula for being a good teacher or a spell that entails being the teacher of the year in seven steps. Teaching includes making tens of decisions each hour, planning and preparations. However, the main characteristic of perfect teachers is deliberativeness/purposefulness. Deliberativeness is doing everything for a reason and a purpose. Balcı (2013) emphasizes that the success in effective school and school development research depends on teacher control and states that teachers should have knowledge in various areas to accomplish this.

Effective and efficient communication should be established between the teacher and the student in the learning-teaching process. Therefore, effective teachers are also regarded as effective communicators. Teaching-learning atmosphere generated by teaching shows how important it is in the communication process (Nartgün, 2014). Attaining individuals' thoughts and feelings is only possible through systematic and deliberative communication (Zel, 1995). In this context, the prerequisite for teachers to affect others around them is being good communicators.

Communication is the process of sharing knowledge, ideas and attitudes between two or more people to create common understanding (Lewis, 1975) and the process to transfer all types of concepts and symbols to change human behavior (Bursahioğlu, 1994). Hence, communication is the transfer and comprehension of meaning. An idea that is not received or comprehended by others is not beneficial regardless of how great or marvelous it is. Full communication, if it exists, occurs when it ensures the formation of the same picture in the minds of the receiver and the sender when a thought or idea is transferred (Robbins & Judge, 2012). Therefore, communication is complex, requires mastery, it is encountered everywhere and every time and it is important. It is included in all aspects of school life as well (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Communication, life blood of every school, is a process that links the individual, group and the organization (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2013). Process of communication is ongoing and includes eight stages: ideating, coding, transmitting, receiving, decoding, acting, using (the information) and giving feedback. There are several barriers that interfere with effective communication process and they include different frequency environments, filtering, semantics and differences in status. In order to overcome barriers that inhibit effective communication, techniques such as empathy understanding, feedback and listening can be used (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2013).

Communicative competence is composed of a set of skills and resources of the individual who communicates. Personal resources include both the technical knowledge about the rules and norms of communication and communication capacity that includes skills such as coding and decoding (Jablin & Sias, 2001). Hence, individuals can create their own communication resources by developing the skills of receiving transmitted knowledge, transmitting, listening and providing feedback (Hoy & Miskel, 2012).

Problem of Research

This study is to identify pedagogical formation students' (teacher candidates') communication skills based on their perceptions. The study sought answers to the following research question: What are the perceptions of pedagogical formation students (teacher candidates) related to their communication skills? It is aimed to determine the perception of workload of primary and secondary school teachers in accordance with teachers' opinion.

2. Methodology of Research

Data for the study undertaken with phenomenological design—a qualitative research design—were collected with the help of interview forms. Phenomenological design focuses on topics that are known but need to be in-

investigated in detail and in depth. It deals with analyzing the structures and relationships used in daily life and unearthing hidden meanings in verbal and written texts in order to understand social world of individuals (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect in-depth data from students.

2.1. Validity and Reliability

Qualitative data collected via semi-structured interview form were descriptively analyzed. It was ensured that the data base was examined by an expert to provide reliability and analysis results and data were compared. In order to increase validity (plausibility) of the study, a conceptual framework was generated about the concept after reviewing the related literature and regulations during the development phase of the interview form. Following the interviews, statements were transcribed and individuals were asked to read and check the texts to receive confirmation. It was ensured that the data collected during interviews reflected the actual situation. In order to increase reliability (consistency) of the data, all findings were directly provided without commentaries.

2.2. Sample

The study was conducted with the participation of 48 teacher candidates attending pedagogical formation classes related to teaching profession at Düzce University during 2013-2014 academic year. All participants in the sample answered the semi-structured interview form. Sample was selected based on willingness and volunteering and interviews were held one-on-one with the participants.

2.3. Implementation Process

This study continued for 3 weeks for 3 hours per week during educational sciences courses. Communication techniques, communication styles and communication barriers were studied each week both theoretically and in practice.

2.4. Data Collection Tool

Data for the study were obtained via semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. Semi-structured interview forms are preferred by researchers due to their flexibility, standards, the opportunities they offer to collect in-depth information about a specific topic, the ease to reach more participants and the ease they provide in data collection and analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). During the development of the form, five open-ended questions were prepared following literature review and views of two experts in the field of educational sciences were obtained and pilot implementation was undertaken with the participation of three school principals and a teacher to receive participant confirmation. Sub items of the question asked to teacher candidates are as follows:

- 1) As a teacher candidate, why do you need to communicate?
- 2) As a teacher candidate, with whom you need to communicate?
- 3) As a teacher candidate, which communication tools do you use?
- 4) As a teacher candidate, what are the barriers that interfere with your communication?
- 5) As a teacher candidate, how can you develop your communication skills?

2.5. Data Analysis

Inductive analysis—a type of content analysis—was used in analyzing the data obtained in the framework of the study. Through coding the data, inductive analysis is used to reveal the concepts underlying the data and the relationships between these concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994'den cited in: Yüksel, 2011; Yıldırım & Şimşek 2005). Participating teacher candidates were coded as S1, S2... Data coding was followed by obtaining the themes, arranging the themes and codes, defining and interpreting the findings. Themes were identified based on the related literature and the regulations.

3. Results of Research

This section thematically presents the findings obtained through data collection methods regarding teacher can-

didates' perceptions about their communication skills.

1) Teacher candidates' reasons for communication

Table 1 presents teacher candidates' (pedagogical formation students') reasons for communication.

Table 1. Teacher candidates' reasons for communication.

Theme	Definition	Codes (Sub Themes)	n
Necessity	To express information, feelings and thoughts	To better understand other individuals (to ensure uniformity in meaning)	20
		To socialize	18
		Not to be alone	13
		To be happy	10
		To get along with others	6
		To share	5
		To express oneself	5
		To learn new things/to be informed —to give information	8 6
		To interact	5

Table 1 displays teacher candidates' awareness of the necessity and importance of communication. Teacher candidates are aware that the prerequisite for being contented, successful and social individuals and professionals is healthy and good communication with themselves and with the others. This finding may be interpreted that teacher candidates are preparing for their profession with more awareness.

Some views regarding teacher candidates' reasons for communication are provided below:

“To meet my needs in daily life, to share what I know (S40)”, “To meet my needs and desires in order to continue my life (S41)”, “To transmit the topic I want to explain, to solve any problems I face, to get along with the others and to transmit my feelings and thoughts (S3)”, “To be able to live in harmony with the others, to get along with them, that's why it is crucial for me (S32)”, “To understand individuals better and to be better understood by them (S10)”, “I meet my needs through communication and interaction (S12)”, “To socialize, to sustain and continue my existence (S17)”, “I communicate to learn new things, to meet my needs, to adapt to social life, to get information and to transmit information (S22)”, “I need communication to transmit my feelings and thoughts and to meet my needs (S30)”.

2) With whom should teacher candidates communicate?

Table 2 presents the views about with whom teacher candidates think they need to communicate.

Table 2. With whom should teacher candidates communicate?

Theme	Definition	Codes (Sub Themes)	n
All living and non-living beings	Beings that can express information, feelings and thoughts	Family	20
		Friends	18
		Colleagues	13
		Positive/model individuals	10
		Students	6
		Administrators	5
		Parents	5
		Nature	8
Everyone	6		

Teacher candidates expressed that they were open to communication and family was the first in their list of communication. Communication with the family had the priority for teacher candidates for human health and happiness as well as continuity of the society. Family was followed by friends, colleagues and students respec-

tively. The fact that etcher candidates are aware of the value and importance of family may be regarded as good news for the societal future of the country.

Some teacher candidate views regarding with whom they should communicate are as follows:

“Individuals around me; my family, teachers, friends (S31)”, “My family, friends, neighbors, teachers (S32)”, “Human beings, animals, plants, the nature (S22), I am in communication with everything around me, whether living or non living (S34)”, “With all living things (S35)”, “...with everyone (S36)”, “With students, parents, colleagues, administration, my friends, other people in my environment (S37)”, “Friends, teachers students... (S38)”, “My family, close people in my social environment, administrators, friends (S39)”.

3) Communication tools that are used

Table 3 presents teacher candidates' views regarding the communication styles/types they used.

Table 3. Communication tools used by teacher candidates.

Theme	Definition	Codes (Sub Themes)	n
Communication Channels	Methods to express knowledge, emotions and thoughts	Body language-face to face	20
		Verbal	18
		Written	13

Teacher candidates were aware of the need and importance of using body language for effective communication and generally preferred to use it. However, they were also aware that verbal and written communication channels needed to be used when the circumstances required it.

Some teacher candidate views regarding the communication styles/types of teacher candidates are as follows:

“I express myself better in verbal communication (S20)”, “Verbal statements and eye contact is more effective while talking (S22)”, “Verbal expressions and eye contact is more effective (S21)”, “Face to face communication and body language is more effective (S22)”, “I mostly use face to face communication. I transmit my feelings and thoughts better this way (S23)”, “Body language, written and verbal (S24)”, “First of all body language and then verbal communication (S25)”.

4) Communication barriers

Table 4 presents the communication barriers identified by teacher candidates.

Table 4. Barriers that interfere with teacher candidates' communication.

Theme	Definition	Codes (Sub Themes)	n
Communication Barriers	Elements that affect the quality of communication negatively	Psychological causes (anxiety, stress, lack of self competence, shyness, fear, excitement)	20
		Being misunderstood	18
		Inability to receive feedback	13
		Inappropriate conditions/environment	10
		Receiver's characteristics (language, culture, prior knowledge, biases etc.)	6

Teacher candidates regarded the psychological reasons such as anxiety, stress, lack of self competence, shyness, fear and excitement as the leading communication barriers. They were followed by being misunderstood, in ability to receive feedback, inappropriate conditions/environment and reasons related to the receiver such as language, culture, prior knowledge and biases. Having a healthy psychology was considered to be the prerequisite for communication by teacher candidates. This may be related to the association between effective teaching and having a healthy psychological condition.

Some views regarding communication barriers experienced by teacher candidates are as follows:

“Lack of readiness on the part of the receiver, lack of appropriate conditions in the environment (S11)”, “Annoying stimulants from the environment (such as sounds, noise) interfere with my communication

(S12)”, “lack of clarity and openness in the receiver or the resource, lack of reception through the right channels, lack of prior knowledge on the part of the receiver (S13)”, “Environment, physical conditions or the behaviors of the receiver... (S14)”, “Inability to express myself clearly, psychological conditions, shyness, distractibility (S15)”, “negative attitudes and behaviors of others, biases, shyness (S16)”, “Factors related especially to environment, my psychological situation (S17)”, “factors such as biases, sensitivity, shyness (S18)”, “lack of attention from the receiver, lack of listening on the part of the listener, lack of empathy on the part of the listener, lack of eye contact, lack of appropriate conditions (S19)”.

5) Methods to Develop Communication Skills

Teacher candidates’ views regarding the development of communication skills are provided in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Methods to develop communication skills.

Theme	Definition	Codes (Sub Themes)	n
Methods to develop communication skills	Elements that can increase communication skills	Social activities	20
		Reading books/articles/research	18
		Attending courses/seminars/conferences	13
		Meeting new/different people	10
		Training/expert support	6

Teacher candidates stated that they developed their communication skills by attending social activities and they suggested using this method to develop communication skills. They also mentioned reading books/articles/study results, attending courses/seminars/conferences, meeting new and different people and taking expert support and receiving training to develop communication skills.

Teacher candidates prioritized social activities which are real life practices in communication skills development followed by reading, attending seminars and meeting new people. They preferred training and expert support as the last option when their communication skills did not develop after these.

Some candidate teacher views regarding methods to develop communication skills are as follows:

“I develop my communication skills by reading and by attending social activities (S1)”, “Attending courses for diction reading, participating in social activities (S2)”, “Communicating with different people, reading, participating in social activities, taking formal and informal training (S3)”, “Social and cultural environments (S4)”, “By keeping continuous dialogue with the others by taking expert support (S6)”, “By getting involved in environments where there are many people ... (S7)”, “By reading books, articles, attending conferences or taking support from experts in the field (S8)”, “By examining the related articles and studies, and most importantly by trying (S9)”, “I develop my communication skills by communicating with more and different people (S10)”, “By reading books, chatting with friends, spending time with my family (S11)”, “By spending more time with people and by getting to know new people since we are social existences (S12)”.

4. Discussion-Conclusions—Recommendations and Suggestions

Pedagogical formation students (teacher candidates) attending faculties of education are aware of the necessity and importance of communication. They are aware that the prerequisite for being contented, successful and social individuals and professionals is healthy and good communication with themselves and with the others. This finding may be interpreted that teacher candidates are preparing for their profession with more awareness.

Teacher candidates are open to communication and family is the prioritized choice for communication purposes. For teacher candidates, families are leading sources for human health and happiness as well as the continuation of society. Family is followed by friends, colleagues and students. It may be pleasing for the societal future that teacher candidates are aware of the value and importance of family and emphasize it. Teacher candidates know the importance and necessity of body language in effective communication and generally prefer to use it. They are also aware of the need for written and oral communication when required.

Psychological situations such as anxiety, stress, lack of self-efficacy, timidity, fear and excitement are regarded as barriers that inhibit communication. These barriers are followed by being misunderstood, lack of feed-

back and language, culture, prior information and prejudices related to inappropriate context/environment and persons involved in communication. Having a healthy psychology was considered to be the prerequisite for communication by teacher candidates. This may be related to the association between effective teaching and having a healthy psychological condition.

Teacher candidates express that they can develop communication skills by participating in social activities. They also state that they can develop communication skills by reading books/articles/research findings, participating in courses/seminars/conferences, meeting new and different people and taking training-expert support. Teacher candidates prioritized social activities which are real life practices in communication skills development followed by reading, attending seminars and meeting new people. They preferred training and expert support as the last option when their communication skills did not develop after these.

Based on the data, following suggestions are provided:

- Teacher candidates should be provided with training that will help them handle psychological factors that interfere with their communication such as anxiety, stress, lack of self competence, shyness, fear and excitement.
- Teacher candidates should be provided with more training on effective communication techniques and practice opportunities should be offered.
- Social activities that will help teacher candidates to develop their communication skills should be provided.

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