

Instructor Argumentativeness and Socio-Communicative Style and Student Discipline: Using Physical Education Students' Class as an Illustration

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Abstract

In this study were examined associations among physical education instructors' argumentativeness and socio-communicative styles perceived by students and students' reasons for discipline. The sample consisted of 252 students (111 males, 141 females) aged 10 - 12 years old ($M = 11.4$, $SD = 0.79$) from primary schools of public primary schools who completed three types of questionnaires during physical education classes. The results supported the internal consistency of the instruments. According to the results of the study, statistically significant differences were observed in perceived instructors' argumentativeness and assertiveness between the two classes of the students. Correlational analysis indicated that perceived instructors' argumentativeness was positively related to responsiveness, intrinsic reasons, self-responsibility reasons and caring reasons for discipline. Significant negative correlations were noted for instructors' argumentativeness with assertiveness, external reasons, introjected reasons and no reasons for discipline. The results of regression analysis revealed that perceived instructors' argumentativeness could significantly predict the variables of responsiveness, assertiveness, external reasons, introjected reasons, intrinsic reasons and self-responsibility reasons for discipline.

Keywords

Argumentativeness, Socio-Communicative Style, Discipline Reasons

1. Introduction

1.1. Argumentativeness

It has been supported that the way instructors communicate in the classroom

with their students has a great effect on the learning process [1]-[16]. Argumentativeness is defined as the predisposition to defend one's position on controversial issues while simultaneously attempting to refute another person's position [17]. This form of communication behavior attacks at people's positions on an issue but not on persons. So, in the researches related to communication argumentativeness often constitutes an aggressive form of communication behavior [18]. Also, it is mentioned that for argumentativeness the locus of attack is the other's positions issue and not the other's self-concept [19]. Several studies have revealed the constructive nature of the argumentativeness trait [20] [21]. It is a preventative of physical violence that increases achievement of personal goals [19] [22] and improves relationships by encouraging better solutions to conflict [23]. As such, argumentativeness is the most socially acceptable way of managing disagreement [24] [25]. Argumentative people perceive arguments as an exciting intellectual challenge and are seen as more credible, eloquent, creative and self-assured [21] [26]. Argumentativeness is positively related to students' outcomes such as affective learning, state motivation, interpersonal attraction and satisfaction [21] [27]-[33]. [34] found that perceived instructors' argumentativeness is positively related to the perceived nine of the ten instructor communicational style attributes of impression leaving, contentious, open, dramatic, dominant, precise, relaxed, attentive and animated, whereas it is not significantly related to the friendliness which is being among the most desirable instructor communicator style attributes. Moreover, it has been supported that students who perceive their instructors to be argumentative consider their instructors more credible and evaluate them more positively for their abilities, strong character and empathy [28] [24] [35]. Additionally, [36] argued that there is a negative relationship between perceived physical education teachers' argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness and furthermore university students are attracted by the professionalism, sociability and appearance of their teacher.

1.2. Socio-Communicative Style

Another instructor communication behavior that has an impact on student's outcomes is communicative style [37] [38] [39]. Communicator style is defined as an individual's ability to initiate, adapt and respond to the communication with others [40] [41]. An instructor's communicative style can be comprised of any combination of ten communicative attributes: impression leaving, contentious, open, dramatic, dominant, precise, relaxed, friendly, attentive and animated [42]. Socio-communicative style consists of two primary dimensions: assertiveness and responsiveness [43] [44]. Assertive communicators make requests, stand up for their rights and express themselves in ways that do not compromise the rights of others [45] [46]. On the other hand, responsive communicators respond to others, which include being understanding, being a good listener, being sympathetic and exhibiting compassion [45] [46]. However, the primary distinction between assertiveness and responsiveness is that assertive

individuals insist that their rights be respected whereas responsive individuals recognize the rights and needs of another person [46]. Generally, assertive behaviours are considered to be masculine qualities, while responsive behaviours are considered to be feminine qualities [47] [48]. Moreover, assertive individuals are considered extroverted and powerful whereas responsive individuals are considered trustworthy and sociable [49] [50]. Responsive instructors are also viewed as being sensitive and understanding [51], being verbally receptive to students [52] and contributing to perceived students' learning and satisfaction [52] [53] [54].

1.3. Discipline

Discipline is considered as one of the most important factors of educational process which contributes to the quality and effectiveness of the instructional procedure. Discipline is defined as the submission to superiors or certain principles, the obedience to orders, laws and rules [55]. However, discipline is an issue which concerns educators, parents and students and it is a necessary and indispensable condition of the academic achievement as well as for the satisfaction of personal students' need for physical and psychological safety [56] [57]. According to several studies the majority of physical education teachers believe that a well-disciplined class is one of the most important indications of successful teaching [58]-[63]. In physical education classes [64] report three categories of inappropriate pupils' behaviours. Daydreaming, talking in the classroom, late arrival and participation without sportswear belong to the first degree of seriousness. Altercations, harassments, troubles, arbitrary change of the activity, violation of rules by intention and stop of participation belong to the second degree of seriousness, while material destruction, aggression and denial of teaching belong to the third degree of seriousness. [65] Studied the field of student discipline in physical education based on self-determination theory [66] and responsibility model [67] and ranked the reasons for pupils being disciplined into six categories: intrinsic reasons, external reasons, introjected reasons, responsibility reasons, caring reasons and no reasons.

1.4. The Present Study

Based on the arguments mentioned above, it can be reasonably supported that the concepts of argumentativeness, socio-communicative style and discipline reasons have been extensively explored. Nevertheless, the discipline reasons of students in physical education class have not yet been connected with socio-communicative style and argumentativeness of instructors, as they perceived by students. This study aimed at examining relations among perceived socio-communicative style and argumentativeness of instructors and reasons for students' discipline in physical education.

Specifically, the following questions are expected to be answered:

- Are there any differences noted between the classes regarding argumentativeness, socio-communicative style and discipline reasons?

- Is there a positive or negative relationship between instructors' argumentativeness as perceived by students with socio-communicative style and students' self-reports of reasons for discipline in physical education classes?
- To what extent the perceived instructors' argumentativeness could be a significant predictor of their socio-communicative style and the students' discipline reasons?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedures

The sample of the study consisted of 252 students (111 males, 141 females) aged 10 - 12 years old ($M = 11.4$, $SD = 0.79$) in Xanthi, Greece. All the participants were between the 5th grade (132 students) and 6th grade (120 students) of public primary schools and belonged to different socio-economic status. All students completed questionnaires referring to the instructors' argumentativeness and socio-communicative style and students' discipline reasons, during their physical education lessons, in May 2016. The completion of questionnaires lasted for 20 - 30 minutes approximately and flowed freely. The informants participated anonymously and voluntarily. In this way, it is supposed to obtain sincere answers. Best practice rules and research ethics were observed.

2.2. Instruments

Argumentativeness. The Greek version [36] was used to assess instructors' argumentativeness, based on the conceptualization of [34]. Preliminary examination [36] supported the psychometric properties of the instrument. In particular, confirmatory factor analysis indicated satisfactory fit indices (CFI: 0.98, SRMR: 0.05), and internal consistency of the scale ($\alpha = 0.87$). The scale consisted of ten items (e.g., "the teacher enjoys a good discussion with arguments on a controversial subject with his students", "the teacher avoids making use of arguments when he disagrees with his students"). Participants were asked to respond to the items based on a 5-point Likert-Type scale ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always.

Socio-communicative style. The socio-communicative style questionnaire [68] was used to assess perceived instructors' socio-communicative style. The scale consisted of 20 items and two factors: responsiveness (10 items, e.g. "the teacher behaves in a courteous manner during the course", "the teacher shows responsibility towards the needs of his students") and assertiveness (10 items, e.g. "the teacher acts as a leader during the course", "I think he has a strong personality"). Factor analysis has demonstrated the two-dimensional structure of the instrument and the internal consistency of the subscales has been supported (from 0.88 to 0.96). Participants were asked to respond on a 5 point Likert scale (from 1 = never to 5 = often).

Reasons for discipline. The Greek version [65], which based on the self-determination theory of [66], was used to assess students' perceptions of reasons for discipline. The scale consisted of 26 items and six factors: external reasons (4 items), introjected reasons (3 items), intrinsic reasons (8 items), no reasons (3

items), self-responsibility reasons (4 items), and caring reasons (4 items) for being disciplined. Factor analysis has demonstrated the six-dimensional structure of the instrument and the internal consistency of the subscales has been supported (from 0.58 to 0.86). Following the stem “When I am disciplined in PE class, it is because...” responses to the items were indicated on a 5-point Likert-Type scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis included the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0). The t-test for independent samples was used in order to reveal statistical significant differences between the two classes of the students. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure the correlation between the subscales of the questionnaires. Regression analysis was conducted in order to explore the extent to which the perceived instructors’ argumentativeness could be a significant predictor of their socio-communicative style the students’ discipline reasons. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05.

3. Results

Statistically significant differences were observed in instructors’ argumentativeness ($t_{1250} = 2.41, p < 0.05$) and assertiveness ($t_{1250} = -3.16, p < 0.05$) between the two classes of the students (**Table 1**). Specifically, the 5th grade of primary school proved to have the higher score on argumentativeness and the lower score on assertiveness in comparison to 6th grade. There were no statistically significant differences between classes in responsiveness ($t_{1250} = 0.19, p = 0.85$), external reasons ($t_{1250} = 0.64, p = 0.53$), introjected reasons ($t_{1250} = -1.04, p = 0.30$), intrinsic reasons ($t_{1250} = 0.84, p = 0.40$), no reasons ($t_{1250} = 0.37, p = 0.71$), self-responsibility ($t_{1250} = -0.17, p = 0.87$) and caring reasons ($t_{1250} = 0.45, p = 0.15$) for discipline.

A correlation analysis was conducted, the results of which are presented in **Table 2**. As it can be seen, there was a negative significant relationship between instructors’ argumentativeness and assertiveness ($r = -0.38$), external reasons ($r = -0.24$), introjected reasons ($r = -0.17$) and no reasons ($r = -0.23$) for discipline. Moreover, there was a positive significant relationship between instructors’ argumentativeness and responsiveness ($r = 0.46$), intrinsic reasons ($r = 0.39$), self-responsibility reasons ($r = 0.22$) and caring reasons for discipline ($r = 0.39$). At the same time, **Table 2** presents the Cronbach’s alpha, mean scores and standard deviations of the variables.

Table 1. Students’ class comparison.

Variables	Class	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Argumentativeness	5th grade	132	2.88	0.60	2.41	250	0.017
	6th grade	120	2.69	0.65			
Assertiveness	5th grade	132	2.98	0.58	-3.16	250	0.002
	6th grade	120	3.22	0.62			

Moreover, linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which instructors' socio-communicative style and students' reasons for discipline could be predicted from the ratings of instructors' argumentativeness. The results indicated that perceived instructor argumentativeness could predict significant variance in socio-communicative style ($F_{(2249)} = 45.34$, $p < 0.001$) with an R^2 of 26.7%. Perceived argumentativeness explained 14.3% of the variance in responsiveness ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 6.44$, $p < 0.05$) and 7.5% of the variance in assertiveness ($\beta = -0.27$, $t = -4.49$, $p < 0.05$). Another linear regression analysis was conducted to predict student discipline reasons based on teacher argumentativeness. The results indicated that perceived instructor argumentativeness could predict significant variance in reasons for discipline ($F_{(6245)} = 14.15$, $p < 0.001$) with an R^2 of 25.7%. Argumentativeness explained 2.1% of the variance in students' external reasons ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.23$, $p < 0.05$), 2.8% of the variance in students' intrinsic reasons ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 2.67$, $p < 0.05$), 5.2% of the variance in students' self-responsibility reasons ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 3.65$, $p < 0.001$) and 4.7% of the variance in students' caring reasons ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.46$, $p < 0.05$). The results of the regression analyses are presented in **Table 3**.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was threefold: 1) to investigate differences between classes

Table 2. Reliabilities, means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations among variables.

Factors	α	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1) Argumentativeness	0.71	2.79 (0.63)	-								
2) Responsiveness	0.82	3.41 (0.71)	0.46**	-							
3) Assertiveness	0.73	3.09 (0.61)	-0.38**	-0.33**	-						
4) External reasons	0.68	3.16 (0.72)	-0.24**	-0.23**	0.44**	-					
5) Introjected reasons	0.69	3.12 (0.79)	-0.17**	-0.01	0.30**	0.32**	-				
6) Intrinsic reasons	0.74	3.51 (0.72)	0.39**	0.49**	-0.31**	-0.15*	-0.16*	-			
7) No reasons	0.66	2.76 (0.88)	-0.23**	-0.20**	0.28**	0.31**	0.32**	-0.33**	-		
8) Self-responsibility	0.61	3.72 (0.74)	0.22**	0.02	-0.19**	-0.20**	-0.35**	-0.01	-0.08	-	
9) Caring reasons	0.79	3.26 (0.77)	0.39**	0.43**	-0.26**	-0.15*	-0.22**	0.65**	-0.32**	-0.06*	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Regression analysis results according to argumentativeness.

	B	95% CI B	SE	b	T
Responsiveness	0.37	0.23, 0.43	0.05	0.33	6.44*
Assertiveness External reasons	-0.26	-0.15, -0.38	0.06	-0.27	-4.49*
Intrinsic reasons	-0.14	-0.01, -0.22	0.05	-0.12	-2.23*
Self-responsibility Caring reasons	0.20	0.05, 0.30	0.06	0.17	2.67*
	0.22	0.09, 0.29	0.05	0.19	3.65**
	0.26	0.09, 0.33	0.06	0.21	3.46*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$.

regarding argumentativeness, socio-communicative style and discipline reasons, 2) to explore the relationship between perceived physical education instructors' argumentativeness and socio-communicative style as perceived by students and students' reasons for discipline, 3) to investigate the influence of instructor argumentativeness on their socio-communicative and student reasons for discipline and 4) to propose students' typology. According to the results of the study, statistically significant differences were observed in perceived instructors' argumentativeness and assertiveness between the two classes of the students. Correlational analysis indicated that perceived instructors' argumentativeness was positively related to responsiveness, intrinsic reasons, self-responsibility reasons and caring reasons for discipline. Significant negative correlations were noted for instructors' argumentativeness with assertiveness, external reasons, introjected reasons and no reasons for discipline. The results of regression analysis revealed that perceived instructors' argumentativeness could significantly predict the variables of responsiveness, assertiveness, external reasons, introjected reasons, intrinsic reasons and self-responsibility reasons for discipline.

Previous study's findings argued that the student-instructor interactions [69] [70] enhance students' academic and cognitive development [71] and foster student learning [72]. In this specific case, students' discipline reasons were influenced by instructors' argumentativeness and the responsiveness dimension of socio-communicative style. Instructors' argumentativeness emerged as the most important positive predictor of students' self-determined reasons for discipline. This is in accordance with [19] argument that argumentativeness outcomes are positive. Similarly, these findings support previous research indicating that argumentativeness is a generally constructive trait [20]. Not surprisingly, then, instructors' argumentativeness was closely associated with students' reasons for discipline. Additionally, regression analysis determined that the responsiveness dimension of instructor communicator style is a statistically significant correlate of students' reasons for discipline. The responsiveness dimension of communicator style refers to the degree in which an instructor's communication behaviors reflect sensitivity to students and their feelings. Earlier citations of the research were used to describe varying degrees of responsiveness including cases of helpfulness, responsiveness, sympathy, compassion, sensitivity, sincerity, gentleness, warm behavior, tenderness and friendliness [73]. Furthermore, instructors who more liberally adopt the friendly, attentive and relaxed style are rated more favorably by students [74]. Provided these, it is not surprising that the responsiveness dimension of instructor communicator style is significantly conducive to the students' discipline.

The results of this study revealed that responsive instructor communication, which is characterized by a warm, friendly, sincere, understanding, compassionate, listening and interested communication style positively influences students' disciplinary reasons. In other words, responsive instructors are more likely to be perceived as effective communicators in the classroom. However, assertive instructor communication characterized by an aggressive, competitive, do-

minant and forceful style [75] exhibited insignificant effect on students' discipline. Finally, as expected, instructor's responsiveness demonstrates a stronger positive effect on students' discipline than instructor's assertiveness. Moreover, previous studies suggested that without discipline there can be no effective teaching [57] [76]-[81] as learning takes place in a well-organized and peaceful atmosphere [82] [83]. That is why the majority of physical education teachers believe that a well-disciplined class is one of the most important indications of successful teaching [58] [60] [61] [62] [63]. It seems, in fact, that instructor's argumentativeness and responsiveness guides students to discipline. However, student's discipline due to the fact that argumentativeness and responsiveness is positively associated with students' intrinsic reasons, self-responsibility reasons and caring reasons for discipline in the classroom. Of course, the distinctions between students' discipline which leads to a positive teaching-learning classroom environment and instructor's argumentativeness and responsiveness as a form of discipline are not yet clear. It is rather apparent that argumentativeness and responsiveness are simulative in the classroom [84] leading the students to the discipline and more specifically to self-determined reasons (intrinsic, self-responsibility, caring) for behaving appropriately in class. This result supports previous findings which indicated that reasons for pupils being well-behaved in class are self-determined [85] [86]. The present study indicates the positive outcomes associated with physical education instructors' argumentativeness and it is consistent with the findings of other research [28] [29] [30] [31] [34] [36].

[87] [88] argued that an environment where argumentativeness and affirming communication coexist without verbal aggressiveness promotes positive communication and prosocial relational outcomes. The same or similar outcomes perhaps would result for the classroom environment as well. The classroom is an environment which serves as a breeding ground for aggressive behavior in the part of instructors. In the classroom argumentativeness, a constructive form of aggressive communication [89] can stimulate learning because students are exposed to both sides of an issue and are forced to articulate reasons supported by evidence for their position [90]. Argumentativeness is considered constructive because it enhances communication satisfaction and facilitates understanding [89]. Moreover, argumentativeness is fundamental in the classroom for developing critical thinking skills and maintaining fairness. [91] described argumentativeness as a trait "essential to democracy and also to personal growth". It is very important instructors to promote constructive aggressive communication while discouraging destructive aggressive communication. By increasing instructors their awareness of their own argumentative behavior in the classroom, they indisputably will influence how students choose to communicate with them. Furthermore, the 5th grade of primary school proved to have the higher score on argumentativeness and the lower score on assertiveness in comparison to 6th grade, as they have been passed in a mature stage. Thus, they are expected to be characterized by more adaptiveness to established behavioral patterns. In sum, this study not only contributes to our understanding of factors associated

with students' reasons for discipline but also corroborates the results obtained in previous studies. Moreover, because the communication is a vital function of student learning [92] [93] which related to fair play behaviors [94], future research can be conducted on the student-instructor relationship and especially on the instructors' communicative attributes (*i.e.* argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness) associated with students' reasons for discipline and Machiavellian tactics.

5. Conclusion

Students are more likely to be disciplined for intrinsic reasons, self-responsibility reasons and caring reasons when the coach is more argumentative and responsive and less assertive. Thus, it is imperative that instructors promote argumentativeness and responsiveness aiming at their students' intrinsic, responsibility and caring for others reasons for discipline allowing for the contribution of instructor behavior to physical education learning. When instructors use an argumentative and responsive communication with their students, it seems that they decrease the probability of appearance of external reasons, introjected reasons and no reasons for discipline during physical education lessons. The results of the study highlight the demand for improvement in physical education instructor in order to respond to a challenging and constantly changing field.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication.

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