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w Pile**

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Effective Communication and Improved Educational Results for Students in Economic Specializations

Introduction

Communication is very important for future economic specialists and for the future employees of different organizations. Economic activity takes account of large volumes of data and it is therefore very important to have a functioning system of communication between all departments in an organization as well as within each department. Managers of organizations and business owners are looking for employees with excellent communication skills that can effectively contribute to the workplace culture and have a greater impact on customers. Communication skills are important when collaborating on projects, providing service to customers, sharing ideas in training sessions and participating in other diverse business situations [Neil Kokemuller, 2017; Audra Bianca, 2017]. In this framework, communication, leadership and entrepreneurial skills cannot be separated from each other if the intention is to develop the full potential of an individual who is successful in his academic and professional life [Manshoor Hussain Abbasi, Attiya Siddiqi, Rahat ul Ain Azim, 2011]. So, communication can be considered to be the correlation between leadership and entrepreneurial skills which influences every individual's personal and organizational effectiveness [Brun, 2010; Summers, 2010]. That is why many studies show a direct relation between effective communication and organizational performance [Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010]. It is also why good communication skills are very important for young economists trying to enter the labour market, and also for when they are developing their career. One study conducted in this area indicated that recruiters rated communication skills as the most important characteristic for an ideal candidate for a job [Yate, 2009].

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The simplest way to define communication is the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. The elements in the communication process determine the quality of communication. A problem in any one of these elements can reduce the effectiveness of communication [Keyton, 2011].

In considering the importance of communication skills for future, university-trained economists generally, this study analyses the importance of communication from the point of view of the students specializing in economics. Within universities in general, communication is undertaken in three ways. The first is vertical communication, mainly from the students upwards to the university management, in the form of: verbal requests, petitions, actions initiated by the students. Communication between professors and students is usually undertaken verbally (e.g. through teaching, oral evaluations within seminars, discussions and debates) and in writing (coursework, bibliography, tests and exams). The second way of communicating is through horizontal communication, which is a way of communicating on the same level. Horizontal communication is basically a way of shaping opinions, identifying common needs and interests, and presenting these to upper management. In this context either students or professors will try to identify a common denominator in order to present a view that is characteristic of the general will. Horizontal communication prepares the basis for vertical communication. From the didactical point of view, this is the best type of communication for courses and seminars that require the exchange of ideas, team work, and drawing conclusions between professors and students in topics that require debate etc. The third way of communicating is mixed communication, which is the ideal form of communication within universities. This concept is based on both horizontal and vertical communication and facilitates the diagonal exchange of ideas, meaning that students' messages can be received by upper management in a far easier way thanks to the openness of dialogue; message transmission is no longer solely verbal, but takes place through specially created systems in agreement with the students, professors and upper management [Magdalena Iordache-Platis, Ioana Josan, 2009].

It is from this general framework that the learning environment for preparing the future economists must be considered. Taking account of these aspects, our research tried to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of communication for students specializing in economics and to correlate the communication skills developed by the students with their theoretical background. The research team analysed communication at three levels: (1) communication between students during their official schedule over the academic year; (2) communication between students and professors; and (3) informal communication between students in informal meetings outside their official schedule. The analysis of the effectiveness of communication in the learning process was conducted through a modern teaching technique, i.e. the training firm.

Methodology

Purpose of the research: The research aims to determine the opinion of students specializing in economics at the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, Romania. It relates to the effectiveness of communication in didactical activities using a modern technique of learning, i.e. the training firm. The research team analyse students' communication and the importance of communication skills for future economists at three levels: (1) communication between students during their formal studies and in special workshops, during which they can develop their training firm activities; (2) communication between students and professors related to theoretical aspects that will be put into practice in the activity of the training company; and (3) communication between students related to their experience in the training firm in informal meetings that are separate from their official schedule.

Method used: The research team used two instruments for gathering the data. The first was a questionnaire that included questions structured on three levels of analysis of the communication process: (1) communication between students during their official schedule; (2) communication between students and professors; and (3) communication between students in informal meetings, and the observation methods of the professors supervising the activities of student teams developing the training firms as required by the economics specialization of the „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, Romania.

Hypotheses: The following hypotheses were framed for the research: (1) development of the communication skills, leadership and entrepreneurial competences by the students using modern teaching techniques; (2) development of student teams; (3) improved results for the students for the disciplines that use this method; (4) opportunities for students to offer their experience to new members of the teams; (5) a practical exercise in observing by doing; (6) experience by the students of the communication development stages in a new team which is forming and evolving.

Sample selection: The analysis considered students specializing in economics at the Faculty of Economic Sciences from the „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, Romania, where the modern technique of teaching, i.e. a training firm, is used as a method of study. Questionnaires were completed by 99 students who were involved the training activities, according to their level of education. The study analysed the answers and observations of the most active and involved students. However, this has to be considered as a flaw in the research conducted because it does not include feedback from students who were less involved in these activities and in the teams that were meant to be created and developed using this teaching method.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are:

- ❑ 51.5% of respondents were male and 48.5% of respondents were female;

- ❑ 62.2% of respondents lived in urban areas and 37.4% lived in rural areas;
- ❑ income: 8.1% of respondents had less than 1000 lei, 20.2% had from 1001 – 2000 lei, 33.3% had from 2001 – 3000 lei and 31.3% had more than 3001 lei.

Training firm – modern teaching method

The use of the training firm represents an interactive teaching method which aims to develop an entrepreneurial spirit in students through the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge by providing the framework to put the theoretical concepts learned by the students during their economic training into practice. This method is being developed to offer students the opportunity to develop their business skills by simulating processes and activities that take place in real companies and also to observe how one firm relates to other companies and institutions. The training firm facilitates learning and development of economic knowledge in a real firm, shaping skills and competences that can be applied in all economic domains and in all departments of a firm.

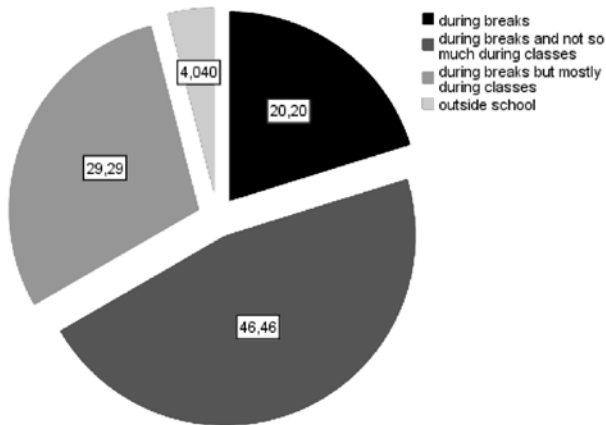
The advantage of using a training firm as a teaching method is mainly in developing the entrepreneurial spirit of the students through: (1) familiarization of the students with the activities of a real firm; (2) simulating economic processes specific to the real business environment; (3) perfecting business language; (4) real and concrete information and knowledge referring to the functioning of market economy mechanisms; (5) the importance of specific and specialized training in career development; (6) encouraging the competitive spirit, quality and responsibility of students; (7) the development of competences, skills and abilities of future entrepreneurs: i.e. creativity, competitive spirit, critical thinking, analytical thinking, searching for solutions, decision making, assumption of responsibility, team work, initiative, adaptability, perseverance, time management and results evaluation, flexibility and others.

Research results

As mentioned above, in order to achieve the research objectives, for the first part of the research, 99 questionnaires were issued and the data obtained were analysed using the (SPSS) programme. After analysing the data, the following research results were obtained:

- ❑ Results referring to the main times when students mostly communicate

Figure 1. Times when students most often communicate with each other

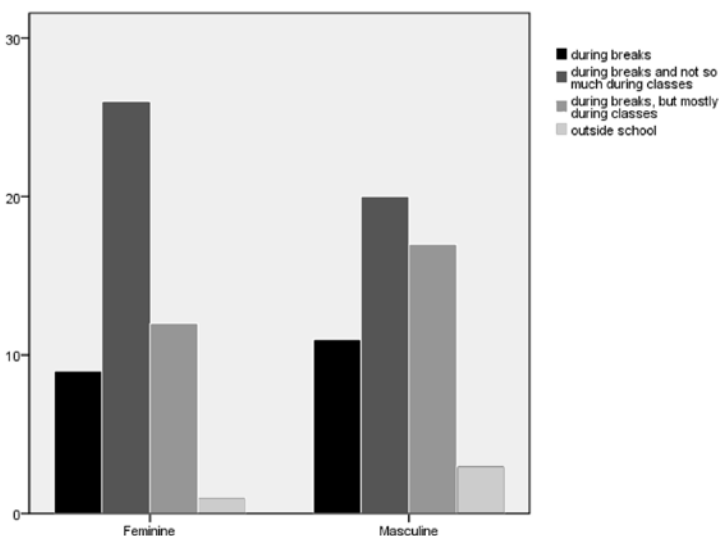


Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

The results (Figure 1) show that: the majority of students (46.46%) most often communicate with their colleagues during breaks and less so during classes; 29.29% of students communicate with each other during breaks, but most often during classes; 20.20% of students communicate with each other only during breaks and only 4.04% of students communicate with their colleagues outside school.

- Results referring to the main times when students mostly communicate, by gender

Figure 2. Times when students most often communicate with each other by gender



Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

Table 1. Times when students most often communicate with each other by gender* cross-tabulation

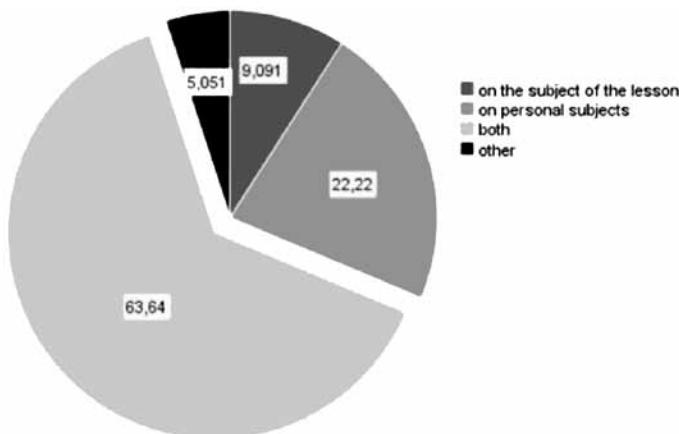
			Times when students most often communicate with each other				Total
			0	1	2	3	
Gender	F	Number	9	26	12	1	48
		% within 25. Gender	18.8%	54.2%	25.0%	2.1%	100.0%
	M	Number	11	20	17	3	51
		% within 25. Gender	21.6%	39.2%	33.3%	5.9%	100.0%
Total	Number	20	46	29	4	99	
	% within 25. Gender	20.2%	46.5%	29.3%	4.0%	100.0%	

Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

As can be observed from Figure 2 and Table 1, when asked when they most often communicate with their colleagues, students of different genders seemed to have similar opinions. In order to verify this, the Independent Sample T Test was applied and it showed that there are no major differences among students of different genders in considering times when they most often communicate with each other. However, Table 1 shows that females communicate more during breaks and less during classes (54.2%) compared with males (39.2%). Males seem to prefer to communicate during classes and after classes.

- ❑ The third result considers the reasons for students’ communication during their official schedule

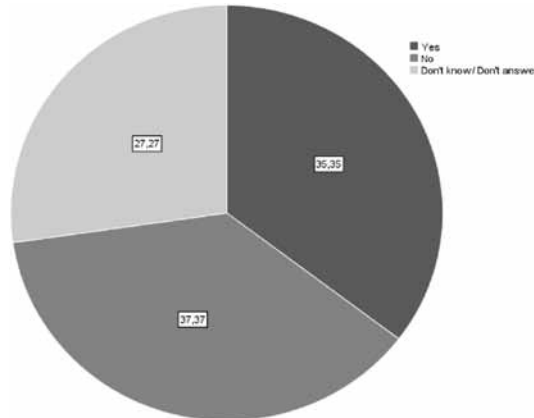
Figure 3. Students’ reasons for communication during their official schedule



Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

As can be seen in Figure 3, more than half of the students (63.64%) mention that their communication during their official schedule relates both to the subject of the lessons and to personal subjects, 22.22% argue their communication is on personal issues and only 9.09% argue that their communication relates to the subject of the lesson.

Figure 4. Satisfaction with teaching methods used during classes

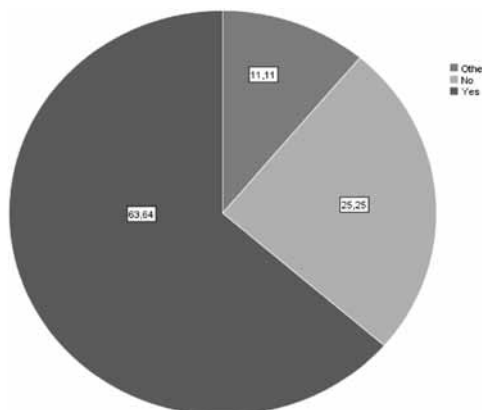


Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

As can be seen in Figure 4, students' opinions regarding the teaching methods are split in three: 35.35% are satisfied by the teaching method, 37.37% are not and 27.27% cannot decide or do not want to answer this question.

When asked about the reasons of their dissatisfaction, most of them argue that the teachers are not doing enough practical work with them, or that they have to learn too much theory and the teaching method is boring.

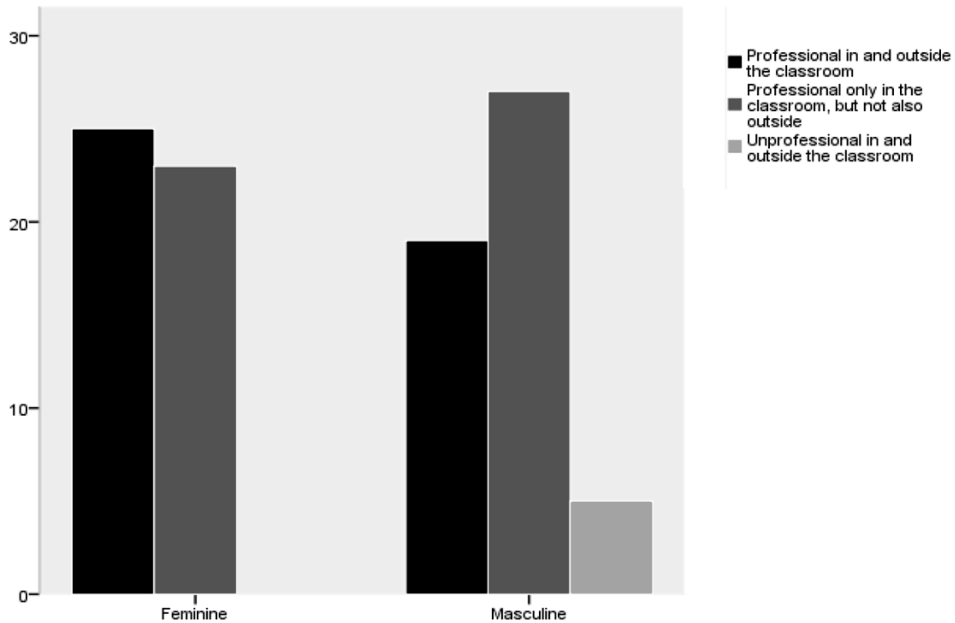
Figure 5. Attending extracurricular activities



Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

As can be observed in Figure 5, the majority of the students (63.64%) mention that they attend extracurricular activities, 25.25% mention they do no and 11.11% give answers such as: „I don't have time to do that”, „I did not know about that”, „I'm not interested in that”. Unfortunately, most of these answers regard the absence of time.

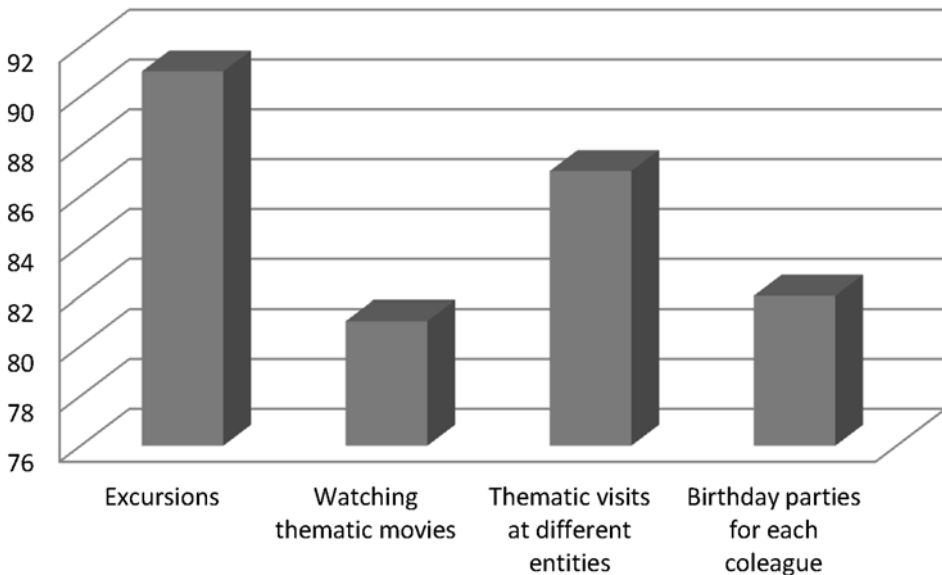
Figure 6. Student-teacher relationship



Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

When asked about the type of the relationship that should exist between students and teachers, half of the respondents (50.51%) argued that they would like this relationship to be professional i.e. only during classes and not outside them; 44.44% suggest that this relationship should be professional both during classes and also outside them, while only 5.05% would like to have an unprofessional relationship with their teachers both during classes and outside them.

As can be seen from the graph above, when it comes to the extracurricular activities preferred by the students for social communication, most of the students mentioned excursions (91), more than half (87) mentioned visits at various institutions, 82 mentioned birthday parties and 81 mentioned watching films. Some students mentioned other kinds of activities, such as going out for a coffee or long walks in nature.

Graphic 1. Extracurricular activities preferred for socio-emotional communication

Source: Own calculations based on data from SPSS.

Conclusions and Discussions

Extracurricular (ECA) or Extra Academic Activities (EAA) are those activities performed by students that are outside the regular school or university curriculum. Extracurricular activities are offered to all students. Generally, voluntary activities are not always extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular activities are generally social, philanthropic and voluntary activities (as opposed to mandatory). They often involve others of the same age. Such activities are often part of study programmes, yet student-led initiatives, such as independent newspapers, are also very common.

Involvement in after-school clubs and extracurricular activities is beneficial in a variety of ways. For example, school clubs can offer a place to form relationships. Extracurricular activities increase positive self-development, regardless of where the activities take place (at school or away from school). Involvement in activities, whether it be sports, clubs, or school-based programmes, have a positive impact on the participant's life.

Exposure to diverse groups can help adolescents to become socially intelligent and responsible adults.

Implementing the training firm as a modern teaching method will represent, at university level, a combination for professional training between theoretical and practical preparation. The expected result of using this method

is for the university to offer students and graduates to the labour market with communication skills, leadership and entrepreneurial competences. This method offers the right conditions for: (1) a higher uptake of by the labour market students and graduates; (2) a shorter adaptation period in the work place for graduates; (3) increased adaptability in changing work places; (4) increased knowledge of the specific processes of a firm; and (5) flexibility etc.

This method could bring improvements in understanding how to communicate effectively in groups. Generally, managers of organizations and business owners look for people who clearly express their ideas using words, non-verbal expressions and gestures. This is the best way to examine how employees communicate efficiently to maximize results and to increase individual productivity.

Implementing the concept of the training firm will increase students' interest in school because it makes use of many popular solutions: computers, social media, practical work, interactive work, team work and trips. It gives them the opportunity to participate in different kinds of competitions, they do not have exams, they are appreciated, they can win prizes and the benefits can continue.

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Skuteczna komunikacja i lepsze wyniki edukacyjne dla studentów specjalizacji ekonomicznych

Streszczenie

W procesie edukacyjnym, skuteczna komunikacja jest bardzo ważna, ale trudna do zmierzenia. Zespół badawczy próbował przeanalizować proces komunikacji wśród młodych grup studentów, z naciskiem na kwestie związane z komunikacją pomiędzy studentami oraz komunikacją pomiędzy studentami i profesorami. Analiza ta była połączona z wdrożeniem specjalnej metody edukacyjnej dla specjalizacji ekonomicznych, tzn. symulacji działalności ekonomicznej w firmie. Skuteczna komunikacja w procesie edukacyjnym zależy w dużej mierze od profesora oraz zastosowanej metody, ale waga komunikacji na poziomie grupy oraz zachęcanie do interakcji pomiędzy studentami związanej z ich przyszłą aktywnością musi być również wzięta pod uwagę.

Słowa kluczowe: skuteczna komunikacja, wyniki uczenia się, praktyczne umiejętności młodych ekonomistów

Effective Communication and Improved Educational Results for Students in Economic Specializations

Abstract

In the educational process, effective communication is very important and but difficult to measure. The research team tried to analyse the communication process at the level of young groups of students, highlighting issues related to communication between students and communication between students and professors. This analysis was combined with the implementation of a special educational method for economic specializations, i.e. simulation of the economic activity in a company. Effective communication in the

educational process depends heavily on the professor and on the method used, but the importance of communication at the group level and of encouragement for interaction between students related to their future activity also need to be considered.

Key words: effective communication, learning results, practical skills for young economists

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