

Persuasive Communication at the Academic Level and How to Make it More Effective

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Abstract: *The paper is the result of an empirical research conducted by the authors and is based on their experience in teaching at the academic level and also on the experiences of other professors from Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. This paper aims to develop a qualitative research on how teacher's communication style is influencing students' satisfaction, and to find out how it affects the relations with students, how e-learning by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can improve teacher – student communication, interactions, relations or student participation in and outside the class. The main research method was a questionnaire. Most of the questions reflect Hecht's conceptualization of communication satisfaction, and also other authors contributions on the subject like Alan K. Goodboy, Matthew M. Martin and San Bolkan. The questionnaire was used also to find answers to how new modern informatics techniques can improve teacher-student communication, relations, interaction and participation in and outside the class. The sample included the students from the second year from public administration specialisation and a small number of teachers. During the research process we found out more about how well did we managed to communicate with our students from the second year and what we can do in order to improve our communication process based on their preferences. In the end, the paper presents some practical solutions for improving both persuasive communication between teachers and students and the interactions between them using IT&C instruments for a more effective participation in and outside the class.*

Keywords: *persuasive communication; teaching process; effective participation.*

JEL: *A 20; A23; I 23.*

Introduction

Communication has been an ongoing concern for people since old times. In ancient Greece, for example, those who master the art of communication stated more easily in society and could gain special privileges in this way. In its first sense, the art of persuasive communication was called rhetoric - "the science and art of persuading" (Prutianu, 1998).

Communication is a pervasive aspect of any human activity, personal or professional, putting his mark on the success achieved in these actions. Moreover,

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it is part of the infrastructure of any organization, it is the base of understanding, cooperation and action. In essence, the ability of an organization to perform depends on the content and nature of the communication, that makes information to spread, to obtain desired behaviours and to achieve objectives, but it can also distort the messages, mess things up, to cause frustration, tension or conflicts.

1. Review of literature: approaches of communication and their relevance for teacher - student communication in a higher education system

Over time there have been concerns on the definition of communication, both overall and in respect of certain sides of this phenomenon. So, we remember the contributions of Oliver (1997), Nemteanu (1997), Bovee and Thill (2000), Spence (1994), Eisenberg and Goodall (2004), O'Rourke (2004), Kalla (2005) who were concerned of the general definition of the communication phenomenon, stressing the two sides of the process studied as interdependence or its transactional character. Căndea and Căndea (1996), Prutianu (1998), Daft (2000), Covey (2000) and Adler and Rodman (2006) dealt closely with interpersonal communication and Simon (1997), Drenthe et. al (1998), Myres and Myers (1982), Witherspoon (1997), Burduş and Căprărescu (1999), Buckley and others (1998), Burduş, Căprărescu, Androniceanu and Miles (2000), Cheney (2007), De Ridder (2003) with organizational communication.

The levels of communication is another important issue, with contributions from Prutianu (1998), Vasile (2000), Căndea and Căndea (1996), Burduş and Căprărescu (1999), O'Rourke (2004), which identifies several distinct levels communication - intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass.

Human communication can be conducted at different levels - intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass (Prutianu, 1998, O'Rourke, 2004), the message construction process is increasing in complexity with the passage from one level to another.

Intrapersonal communication is advising the individual with himself, hearing the "inner voice", through which the individual knows and judges himself, he asks and answers himself, he thinks, analyze and reflects, assess the decisions or repeats messages intended to others. This is the root of all forms of communication, influencing the results of any such episode.

Interpersonal communication is the dialogue with the other (Prutianu, 1998). This type of communication helps us to know the others and ourselves, by their image of us. Through interpersonal communication are established, maintained and sometimes destroyed human relations. Interpersonal communication is a process in which two or more parties interact to achieve an exchange of messages (Vasile, 2000). It supposes the existence of feedback (response) and alternating roles of transmitter and receiver, persons occupying equal positions in terms of their importance in the communication process.

The group communication is providing exchanges within the team, the organization, in small human communities. People spend most of their existence within different groups related to their social or professional life, each person contributing with their own expectation values hoping to satisfy certain personal needs. Achieving the groups objectives (individual or collective) depends heavily on communication, of the ability of members to send, receive, interpret information. Therefore, performance and quality groups depend of the communication quality at their level; it became one of the most important factors determining the performance that can reach a group, because without good communication, organization and coordination of activities, the results are practically impossible to achieve (Machin, 1980).

Mass communication enables broadcasting written, spoken, visual or audio messages to an audience more or less large and heterogeneous; the generic formulation is "media communication" (Prutianu, 1998).

Another key point in this discussion is found in significant impact of the perception on communication. Every human being has his own perception of the world, has its own "mental map" of the world (Covey, 2000b), in relation to which he choice his behaviours, and most conflicts and communication difficulties are caused by too large differences between these mental maps. People think that operate with reality, but in fact they are dealing only with mental representations of its own way of perceiving reality, that can be misleading (Cummings, 2008). Perception tends to govern communication with others and the relationship between the individual and the world that surrounds him, it filters the surrounding reality, distorts and shapes it to match the feeling, thinking and behaviour (Prutianu, 1998).

Communication process definition proposed by Bowditch and Buono (1985, p.81 quoted by Kreitner and Kinicki, 1989) translating "exchange of information between sender and receiver, and interference (perception) of meanings between individuals involved" indicates that this process may be described by a series of clear steps and a series of elements that are closely interdependent. Managers who understand these actions may consider, first, their means of communication and, secondly, can design communication programs that align with the needs, objectives and characteristics of work groups or run organizations.

There are many who consider communication as easy just because they communicate effortlessly and without a full awareness of the process, but communication is often complex, and "opportunities" for sending or receiving incorrect messages are numerous, and therefore the concerns have emerged on the definition of appropriate models for the complexity of the situation. (Androniceanu, Abaluță, 2008).

Concerned professionals have advanced many such models of communication. Among the first are those of Shannon and Weaver, American researchers who appreciated this process as being linear, between a transmitter and receiver, through a channel with a code, in the presence of a certain "noise",

Gerbner's model that emphasizes the perception, specifically Lasswell's mass communication, or contribution by Newcomb, who first brought the issue of communication in a social relationship, the communication process within the school, moving to semiotic school that emphasizes the meaning and methods of production to school in Palo Alto, which considers communication as a social phenomenon and try to build the integrated logic link between relational and organizational aspects (Tran and Stanciugelu, 2003). School is based in Palo Alto phrase "everything is communication", communication is the new term which expresses man's relationship with the world, providing rules of understanding of all things and issues.

Transmission through communication channels can make some problems (Greenberg, 2002), since there are many ways that information can circulate, such as telephone lines, radio or TV signals, fiber optics, and even waves that transmit vibrations of the human voice. Thanks to modern technology, people can exchange messages through a variety of channels suitable both visual and oral information. However, regardless of channel chosen for transmission, the goal of communicator must be the same: understanding of the intended message by the receiver.

Communication channel capacity is influenced by the ability to transmit multiple signals simultaneously, to facilitate rapid feedback and both ways and establish a personal communication. Face-to-face discussion is the greatest capacity for interaction that allows direct reception of multiple signals and immediate feedback (Androniceanu, 2009).

It is important that teachers and students to understand that each communication channel has advantages and disadvantages and all can be effective and efficient in the right circumstances. Selection of these channels must be made according to message type, arising out the key to success in choosing the appropriate channel for the right message.

2. Research methodology

2.1 Research objective

The main research objective of this research paper is to adapt and apply an instrument for measuring student communication satisfaction in classes and also to emphasize the benefits of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for improving teacher-student communication in and outside the class. In order to do that we developed a **questionnaire structured in three parts**: the first part contains questions for identifying the structure of participants to this research study; the second part contains questions for measuring student communication satisfaction with an instructor throughout the semester; and the third part contains questions on how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) means influence student learning activities, teacher – student interaction and relationships. We also had a number of **informal interviews** with our teacher colleagues and also

with our students from second year, before distributing the questionnaire, and after distributing it in order to check the answers.

2.2 Hypothesis' research

1. Teacher's communication style influences students' satisfaction;
2. Teacher's communication style affects / influences the relations with students;
3. Communication styles, techniques and technology can shape student-teacher interactions, student participation and class management style;
4. Use of ICT means can significantly improve teacher-student communication in and outside the classroom.

2.3 Identifying the community studied

Corporate statistics comprises a total of 286 students, second year from Public Administration Specialisation, Faculty of Management, Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. The total number of students in this specialization for this year is given by secretarial service of the faculty.

2.3.1 The sampling

In this research were involved students from 6 groups having seminars with me ("Analysis and organisational behaviour") in the academic year 2009/2010, second semester. Students are second year, from Public Administration Specialisation, Faculty of Management, Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Also, in carrying out our research, we had a number of informal interviews with teacher colleagues and students.

Sampling was random, meaning that the questionnaires were distributed only to those students who participated in the examination of "Public Management", dated May 31, 2010. Of the total questionnaires distributed were chosen only those completed by students that were part of the six groups that worked with me at the seminar of "Analysis and organizational behaviour."

We chose to distribute the questionnaire at the end of an examination for all the second year students, and not during the seminar, in order to eliminate possible discussions between them and the interpretations, which could lead to influencing responses by students. This would have happened if we had distributed a questionnaire at different times and on different days, according to the seminars schedule.

In the end, the number of present students from the 6 groups that completed the questionnaire is 122.

2.3.2 Establishment survey questionnaire

The questionnaire includes identification questions to see if the subject answers questions that bias or reference population.

The questionnaire includes, after the introductory part that shows the purpose of the study, a total of 21 questions divided into three categories:

➤ The first category includes questions to identify subjects (1-5), which enable students based on: specialization, year of study, sex, age, environment of origin. The questionnaire includes identification questions to see if the subject answers questions that bias or reference population;

➤ The second category includes the set of questions (6-9), and focused on issues such as measuring communication satisfaction with an instructor, and degree of participation and communication during the seminars depending on certain factors;

➤ The third category includes the set of questions (10 to 21), and focused on issues such as informatics and communication technologies means used by students in the learning process, in communication with teachers, with other students, or to interact in class, etc.

Participants completed a survey at the end of the semester that assessed their general communication satisfaction with a particular instructor. Participants were asked to reference general communication with their instructor in their smallest class during the current semester. These instructions were provided because large lecture formats may impede the amount of actual communication between a teacher and student while smaller classes tend to encourage more student communication. Participants reported on classes in which they were most likely to converse with a teacher. The ICSI is 19 items and measures the communication satisfaction an individual perceives when referring to an actual conversation. The developed measure 21-item version was used in this study (the second part of the questionnaire). It utilizes a 5-point Likert response format ranging from (-2) disagree strongly to (+2) agree strongly.

2.4 Findings

From the first five questions addressed in order to identify the subjects resulted that all 122 students (26 men, 96 women) are second year in Public Administration Specialization. Age ranges from 18 to 29 years (104 students are 18-21 years old; 15 students are 22-25 years old and 3 students are 26-29 years old). Regarding the origin environment 83 students are from urban environment and 39 from rural environment.

To question number 6 “In order to assess your general communication satisfaction and the appropriateness of conversations with a particular teacher, please indicate whether you disagree strongly, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or agree strongly with each of the following statements.” **the results using Likert Scale** (the codes -2 = disagree strongly to 2 = agree strongly) **and the results**

using *Semantic Differential Scale* (the codes 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly) are presented in *Figure no. 1 and Table no.1, as follows*:

Table 1. Items on the Likert Scale

Items	Likert Scale	Semantic Differential Scale
My communication with my teacher feels satisfying	0,92	3,92
I feel pleased after talking to my teacher	1,00	4,01
I usually feel positive about my conversations with my teacher	1,03	4,03
My teacher makes an effort to satisfy questions I have	0,94	3,94
I get a sense of well being when I communicate with my teacher	1,04	4,04
I feel comfortable talking with my teacher	0,96	3,98
I dislike talking with my teacher	-1,68	1,31
I am not satisfied after talking to my teacher	-1,03	1,96
My conversations with my teacher are valuable	1,07	4,07
When I talk to my teacher, I feel like it's a waste of time	-1,86	1,13
Talking with my teacher leaves me feeling like I accomplished something	1,07	4,09
My teacher fulfills my expectations when I talk to him/her	1,13	4,13
My teacher makes an effort to answer questions I have	1,12	4,12
My conversations with my teacher are worthwhile	1,15	4,15
I wish my teacher was better at communicating with me	-0,68	2,06
I wish my conversations with my teacher were more productive	-0,91	2,08
My teacher makes an effort to satisfy the concerns I have	1,04	4,04
My teacher tends to dominate our conversations and not allow me to get my point across	-0,53	2,54
I can effectively communicate with my teacher	1,19	4,19
My teacher genuinely listens to me when I talk	0,99	3,99
My teacher can relate to me when I talk to him/her	1,01	4,01

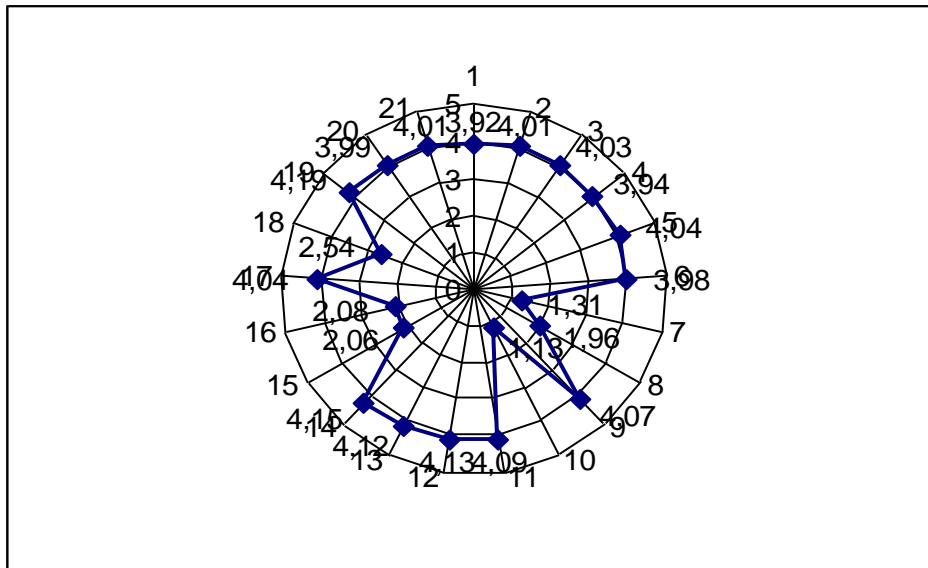


Figure 1. Graphic results using Semantic Differential Scale for assessment of general communication satisfaction with a particular teacher

The overall level of student satisfaction in communication is measured by a simple arithmetic average of the 21 scores calculated in Annex no. 2 and presented in Table 1.

$$G = \frac{0,92+1,00+1,03+0,94+1,04+0,96+(-1,68)+(-1,03)+1,07+(-1,86)+1,07+1,13+1,12+1,15+(-0,68)+(-0,91)+1,04+(-0,53)+1,19+0,99+1,01}{21} = 0,86$$

The mathematical calculations for question number 6, using Likert Scale and Semantic Differential Scale are presented in Annex no. 2.

The answers to question number 7 „Take into account that your participation and communication in Analysis and organisational behaviour class vary depending on a number of factors, such as: number of students, seating arrangement, size of room, your interest in the subject, amount of participation required, time of day, and how you are feeling.” Are presented in Figure 2.

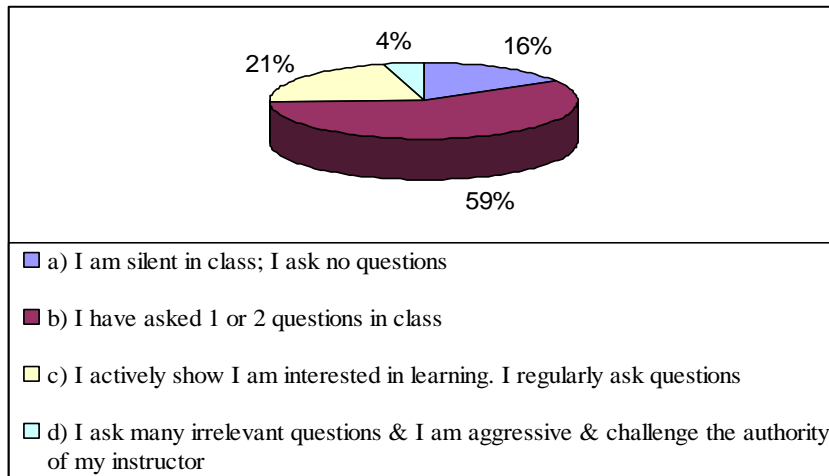


Figure 2. Students' questions situation in *Analysis and organisational behaviour* class during second semester, academic year 2009/2010

Regarding question number 8 „Take into account that your participation and communication in *Analysis and organisational behaviour* class vary depending on a number of factors, such as: number of students, seating arrangement, size of room, your interest in the subject, amount of participation required, time of day, and how you are feeling.” 17 students chosen first answer „a) I have no contact with my instructor”; 93 students said that „I can talk to my instructor to set up an appointment or ask a specific question before/after class”; 12 students chosen the third variant „c) I have met with my instructor in her office for specific question” and no student chosen „d)” variant („I stop by to see my instructor every day and have been a “bugging” my instructor”). (Figure 3)

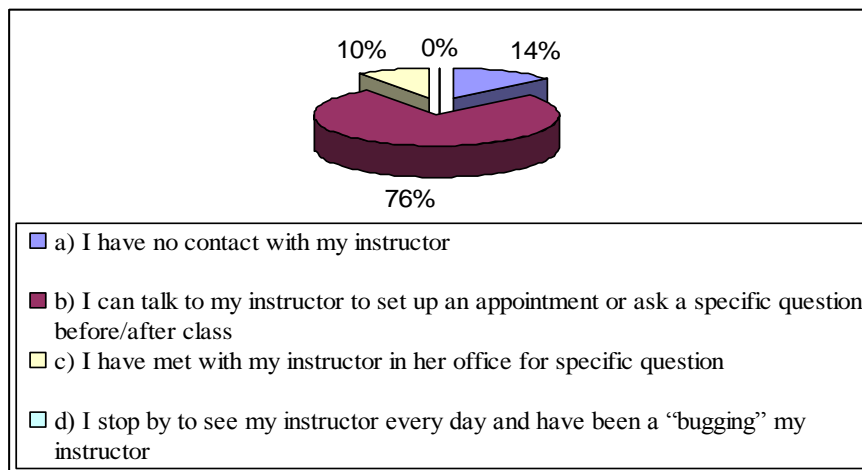


Figure 3. Students' interaction and relation with the instructor

In question 9 “Why do you think communication between teachers and students is important?” most students (68 in number) responded that it „helps them to clarify the class requirements along with the expectations of the teachers”; followed by „builds confidence in communication skills of students and creates a positive learning atmosphere” – 49 students; „increases satisfaction of learning by the student” – 4 students and „can help develop relationships between individual students and instructors which may lead to letters of recommendation for future education or employment” – 1 student. (Figure 4)

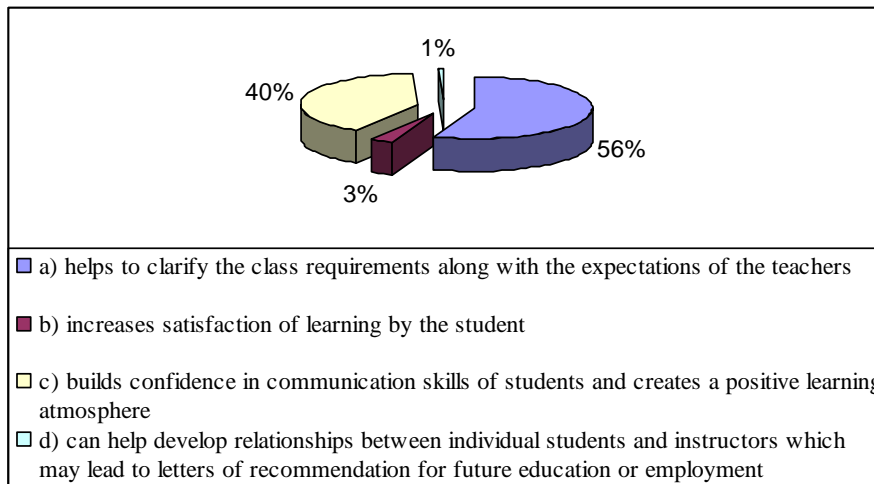


Figure 4. The importance of teacher-student communication

With regard to question number 10 „Please indicate in the table below what kinds of digital technologies you use in your studies overall rather than any specific course you may be taking. Generally students uses laptops or desktop computer for gathering information, also they use, digital audio CDs or DVDs, memory sticks, internet infrastructure, etc.” *students had to use the codes 1 = a little, 2 = moderately, and 3 = a lot or leave blank any squares that do not applied.* Results are presented in table no.2, and are interpreted with Semantic Differential Scale.

Using Excel we centralized data (students responses to question 10), from which resulted the following information: students prefer to use **a lot** “internet infrastructure”; to use **moderate** “laptops / desktop computers” and **a little** “digital audio technologies”.

In order to centralized and interpret the results to the next eleven questions we used codes as follows disagree strongly - 1, disagree - 2, neither agree nor disagree - 3, agree – 4 , agree strongly – 5 or not applicable – 0, and then I applied the Semantic Differential Scale.

Table 2. Perspectives of the communication process

Perspectives of the communication process	Laptops/ desktop computer	Digital audio technologies	CDs / DVDs/ Memory sticks	Internet infrastructure	Semantic Differential Scale
Communicating with colleagues	24*2	9*1		89*3	2,65
Communicating with family/ friends	47*2		4*1	71*3	2,54
Communicating with tutors/ teachers	31*2		9*1	82*3	2,59
Doing a learning task collaboratively	34*2	9*1		79*3	2,57
Doing a learning task individually	21*2		3*1	98*3	2,77
Gathering information	3*2		5*1	112*3	2,84
Listening to course material	21*1	74*3		27*2	2,60
Managing information	89*3		28*2	5*1	2,68
Oral presentation	97*3	18*2	7*1		2,73
Planning a group learning task	33*2		2*1	87*3	2,69
Planning a individual learning task	118*3			4*2	2,96
Reading course material	81*3		14*1	27*2	2,54
Revising for an exam	93*3		14*1	15*2	2,64
Self assessment exercises	115*3			7*2	2,94
Viewing course material	3*2		2*1	117*3	2,94
Writing an assignment	73*3		10*1	39*2	2,51

Table 3. Main results

Current no.	Item	Results Semantic Differential Scale
11.	e-Learning is an important element of my courses	3,91
12.	Without e-learning I would be unable to study	4,72
13.	e-Learning is one of a number of important components of my courses	3,70
14.	e-Learning makes my courses more enjoyable	4,13
15.	My university is not very smart in the way it uses e-learning	2,44
16.	With e-learning I interact more with other students and/ or teachers	4,00
17.	I find using computers difficult	2,09
18.	I find using technological devices difficult	2,08
19.	Getting access to an Internet connected computer is a problem for me	2,36
20.	e-Learning makes studying easier for me	3,91
21.	It would be good if there was much more e-learning in my courses	3,85

2.5 Data analysis and interpretation

From the 286 students of the specialization of Public Administration, second year, who responded to the questionnaire questions, only the answers to 42.65% of them were taken into account in interpreting the results.

Interpretation of answers to the questions of identification of the sample allows highlighting the following conclusions:

- ✓ Female students were particularly dominant in the sample (78.68%) (96);
- ✓ Most students surveyed are 18-21 years old (85.24%) (104);
- ✓ Most respondents are from urban areas (68.03%) (83);
- ✓ All students interviewed are second year to Public Administration specialization, Faculty of Management, AES Bucharest.

In the second part of the questionnaire the answers received from my students allowed me to measure their communication satisfaction with me, during the second semester in „Analysis and organizational behaviour” classes.

According to literature (James A. Black & Dean J. Champion, 1976) Likert scale provide an ordinal measurement level and presents both advantages and disadvantages, as follows:

- Likert Scales are easily to construct and to interpret;
- Likert scaling is flexible, meaning that the researcher is able to include more or fewer items;
- Although summative scales measuring level is ordinal, by convention, the data obtained using Likert scales are treated mathematically as a statistic such as interval-level measurement;
- As any summative scales, Likert scales score itself does not say much, because the number varies depending on items and the weights given, therefore it must convert them into standard scores;
- It is said that all items are in a relationship identical measured size, which discusses measurement validation;
- People who get the same score do not necessarily have the same feature, or size at the same level.

To question number 6 where they were asked to assess their general communication satisfaction and the appropriateness of conversation during the second semester in „Analysis and organizational behaviour” classes, responses were more than pleasant for us, because in both scales we used, resulting values indicated a high satisfaction for their general communication with us as an instructors / teachers.

In order to study the first two research hypotheses, we designed and used four questions, including question number 6 which contains 21 items. The 21 items included in this question refer to the student satisfaction in communicating with the teacher, the teacher's communication style with the student and how this influences the relationship with the student. Each student awarded a score from -2 = „strongly disagree” to 2 = „agree strongly” to each item, depending on the degree of

satisfaction. Later these points were summed, obtaining an average for each item separately. The obtained average we reported to these ranges of values:

- From -2 to -1: very low degree of satisfaction (very dissatisfied), aggressive or passive - aggressive communication style, very bad relationship with students;
- From -1 to 0: a low degree of satisfaction (dissatisfied), passive communication style, bad relationship;
- From 0 to -1: high degree of satisfaction (satisfied), assertive communication style combined with the aggressive tactics of control, good relationship with students;
- From 1 to 2: very high degree of satisfaction (very satisfied), assertive communication style, good relationship with students.

The results can be seen in table no. 1. They were able to follow more easily the relation between the obtained score and the communication satisfaction degree with the teacher, teacher's communication style, or the relationship between teacher and student.

To the first item „My communication with my teacher feels satisfying”, most of the students (91) responded that they „agree” and 11 of them said that they „strongly agree”, which means that *most of them feel good while they are communicating with me*. To the second item „I feel pleased after talking to my teacher” 85 students said they „agree” and 19 of them said that they „strongly agree”. To the third item „I usually feel positive about my conversations with my teacher” 18 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 82 students – „agree” and 22 students „agree strongly”. To the fourth item „My teacher makes an effort to satisfy questions I have” 5 students said they „disagree”, 11 students - „neither agree nor disagree”, 92 students – „agree” and 14 students „agree strongly”. *So, in this case, for 5 students it is clear that I didn't made everything possible to answer appropriate to their questions*. To the fifth item „I get a sense of well being when I communicate with my teacher” 12 students answered „neither agree nor disagree”, 93 students – „agree” and 17 students „agree strongly”. To the sixth item „I feel comfortable talking with my teacher” 3 students said they „disagree”, 14 students - „neither agree nor disagree”, 89 students – „agree” and 16 students „agree strongly”. *For the students who choose “disagree” it seems that either they have a passive communication style or I used with them an aggressive style that inhibited them*. To the seventh item „I dislike talking with my teacher” 86 students said that they “disagree strongly”, 33 students – “disagree” and 3 students - „neither agree nor disagree”. To the eighth item „I am not satisfied after talking to my teacher” 20 students said that they “disagree strongly”, 86 students – “disagree” and 16 students - „neither agree nor disagree”. *Although the average to the last two items is negative (-1,68; -1,03) this score denies the negation, which in reality means that students in generally like talking to me and they are satisfied when we communicate*. To the ninth item „My conversations with my teacher are valuable” 3 students said they „disagree”, 1 student - „neither agree nor disagree”, 102 students – „agree” and 16 students „agree strongly”. *In this case we can*

observe that not all the students think that their conversation with me is valuable. From informal interviews and discussions with my students I found out that not all of them are highly interested in what they study within these discipline. This is one of the main reasons for which they think that they can not learn something useful for their future career. Fortunately the number of these students is small, as we can see, most of the students 83,62% think that their conversations with me are valuable. To the tenth item „When I talk to my teacher, I feel like it’s a waste of time” 108 students said that they “disagree strongly”, 11 students – “disagree” and 3 students - „neither agree nor disagree”. To the item no. eleven „Talking with my teacher leaves me feeling like I accomplished something” 1 student said he „disagree”, 5 students - „neither agree nor disagree”, 102 students – „agree” and 15 students „agree strongly”. To the item no. twelve „ My teacher fulfills my expectations when I talk to him/her” 4 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 98 students – „agree” and 20 students „agree strongly”. To the item no. thirteen “My teacher makes an effort to answer questions I have” 2 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 103 students – „agree” and 17 students „agree strongly”. From the answers to this item we can see that 84,42% students consider that I do my best to answer all of their questions as good as possible. To the item no. fourteen “My conversations with my teacher are worthwhile” 7 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 89 students – „agree” and 26 students „agree strongly”. To the item no. fifteen “I wish my teacher was better at communicating with me” 3 students said that they “disagree strongly”, 89 students – “disagree” and 20 students - „neither agree nor disagree”. To the item no. sixteen “I wish my conversations with my teacher were more productive” 112 students said– “disagree” and 10 students - „neither agree nor disagree”. To the item no. seventeen “My teacher makes an effort to satisfy the concerns I have” 3 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 111 students – „agree” and 8 students „agree strongly”. To the item no. eighteen “My teacher tends to dominate our conversations and not allow me to get my point across” 12 students said that they “disagree strongly”, 73 students – “disagree”, 5 students - „neither agree nor disagree” and 32 students “agree”. Because to these item 26,22% students said that I tend to dominate the teacher – student conversation, it resulted that although in general I have an assertive communication style with my students, from time to time I also use an aggressive communication style, especially when it comes to control tactics, or, as some students said, use of intimidations. To the item no. nineteen “I can effectively communicate with my teacher” 8 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 82 students – „agree” and 32 students „agree strongly”. To the twentieth item “My teacher genuinely listens to me when I talk” 3 students said that they “disagree”, 9 students - „neither agree nor disagree”, 96 students “agree” and 14 students „agree strongly”. To the item no. twenty one “My teacher can relate to me when I talk to him/her” 11 students said „neither agree nor disagree”, 98 students – „agree” and 13 students „agree strongly”.

The overall level of student satisfaction in communication was measured with an arithmetic average of the 21 scores calculated in Annex 2 and presented in

Table no.1. The average score is 0,86, which means that students are in generally satisfied with the teacher-student communication, that I practice an assertive communication style combined with the aggressive tactics of control and that I have good relationship with them.

To **question 7** most of the students (71 in number) answered that “they have asked 1 or 2 questions in class”, followed by 26 students who actively showed interest in class and asked questions. As we can see in figure 2 - 21% of the students (20 in number) are silent during the class and only 5 students said that they ask irrelevant questions in order to challenge the teacher. The results were not so surprising, because most of the students showed to be interested in the subjects we debated during seminars and also because there was an active participation requirement during classes. This active participation during seminars is evaluated and valued with 10% from the final mark. So most of the students made everything possible to ask and answer questions.

With regard to **question number 8** students had to choose from four variants. The graphic distribution of the answers can be seen in figure 3. Most of the students (93) have chosen the second variant “I can talk to my instructor to set up an appointment or ask a specific question before/ after class”. This resulted because my students used to come at the beginning or at the end of my class in order to ask me questions about the themes they have chosen for their seminar papers, or if what they had worked until that moment is good, or to clarify some theoretical and practical aspects related to the discipline (this because some students were more shy then others, and didn't felt comfortable to ask any explanations during classes).

In question 9 “Why do you think communication between teachers and students is important” 56% of students responded that it „helps them to clarify the class requirements along with the expectations of the teachers”, followed by 40% who said it „builds confidence in communication skills of students and creates a positive learning atmosphere”. These answers reveal once more that teacher – student communication is essential. If teachers and students practice an assertive communication style, then the results of the both parts involved in the learning process will be very good. Also when most students chosen these two variants it makes me think that they are satisfied with my communication style and we have a good communication in and outside the class, and also a positive relationship.

From the data analysis and interpretation above, as also from the centralization of scores in table 1, it results that the first two research hypothesis are confirmed and also a part from the third hypothesis (communication style can shape student-teacher interactions, student participation and class management style) confirmed.

In the third part of the questionnaire the answers received from my students allowed me to identify what ICT means my students use to communicate with teachers, tutors, colleagues, family and friends, during what kind of tasks; and also how e-Learning and ICT means helps them to communicate better with their teachers or colleagues and to learn better and interact more.

In order to study a part of the third research hypothesis and the last research hypothesis, we designed and used twelve questions, including question number 10 which contains 16 items.

When it comes to **question no. 10**, students were asked to indicate what kinds of digital technologies they use in their studies. They had to choose from laptops or desktop computers for gathering information; to digital audio technologies; to CD's, DVD's or memory sticks; to internet infrastructure. Students used codes to indicate what was the main digital technology used for communicating with somebody or for doing different learning activities. Research's data was centralised with Semantic Differential Scale in table. 2.

If we analyse the scores we can observe that students prefer to use **a lot** "internet infrastructure"; to use **moderate** "laptops / desktop computers" and **a little** "digital audio technologies" in order to communicate with different persons (colleagues, teachers, friends, family) or to accomplish different learning tasks.

The third part of the questionnaire contains beside question number 10, another **eleven questions on e-learning**. In order to centralized and interpret the results to these questions I used codes as follows: disagree strongly - 1, disagree - 2, neither agree nor disagree - 3, agree - 4 , agree strongly - 5 or not applicable - 0, and then I applied the Semantic Differential Scale. The results are centralized in table 3.

The scores for questions no. 11 - "e-Learning is an important element of my courses" (3,91); no. 13 - "e-Learning is one of a number of important components of my courses" (3,70); no. 14 - "e-Learning makes my courses more enjoyable" (4,13); no. 16 - "With e-learning I interact more with other students and/ or teachers" (4,00); no. 20 - "e-Learning makes studying easier for me" (3,91) and no. 21 "It would be good if there was much more e-learning in my courses" (3,85) - show that **students agree** with the fact that technology can shape student - teacher interaction, student participation in class and that the use of ICT means can significant improve teacher-student communication in and outside the class.

To question no. 12 - "Without e-learning I would be unable to study", the score was very high (4.72), which mean that students **strongly agree** when they think that they can not study or communicate in our days without ICT means. When we discussed the answers to this question with them during some informal interviews we realised how dependent they are from these digital and informatics technologies in order to learn and to communicate with anyone.

If we look to the average score for each question we can observe that the third and fourth hypotheses also confirm.

3. Suggestions for improving teacher - student communication

Communication connects students with teachers, improving the classroom atmosphere. **One way** to improve teacher-student communication satisfaction is like teachers to communicate effectively with their students and use an assertive communication style in order to interact better, to encourage students to participate actively during class activities and give them appropriate and helpful feedback. Teacher - student interaction is extremely important for a successful relationship through the entire semester or academic year.

Communication manifests itself in attitudes as accuracy and openness of information exchange. Effective communication is the heart of creating and maintaining an effective school (Rafferty, 2003). So, for a student to be satisfied with the communication with an instructor, the last one has to have a positive attitude towards students and to give them all the information they require. Teachers have to be open to students demands and offer them all the information they need.

A teacher and student who communicate well and show respect in the classroom, if the teacher shows interest in teaching, will establish a positive relationship in the class. Teaching becomes difficult if there is no proper communication between teacher and students. **A second way** to improve teacher - student communication satisfaction concerns the instructors: - teachers need to continuously monitor students in order to be aware of any difficulties students are having. Understanding the students' problems, fear, or confusion will help teachers better understand students' learning difficulties. Once the teachers becomes aware of the problems, they will have more patience with students, making them feel secure or less confused when learning is taking place in the classroom. Communication between the student and the teacher serves as a connection between the two, which improves the classroom atmosphere. Of course, teachers will not understand every problem of every student in their classrooms, but will acquire enough information for those students who are struggling with specific tasks. "Academic achievement and student behaviour are influenced by the quality of the teacher and student relationship" (Jones & Jones, 1981: 95). The more that teachers communicate with their students, the more likely they are to be able to help students learn quickly and at a high level.

A third way of improving teacher-student communication satisfaction is to use the right communication channels. In our days there are different modern ways / technologies for information to circulate, but this doesn't mean that we necessarily have to use them, unless its helping us to deliver the message in the best way possible or to understand it (receive it properly). However we should not forget that communication channel capacity is influenced by the ability to transmit multiple signals simultaneously, to facilitate rapid feedback in both ways and establish a personal communication. Face-to-face discussion is the greatest capacity for interaction that allows direct reception of multiple signals and immediate feedback.

It is important like teachers and students to understand that each communication channel has advantages and disadvantages and all can be effective and efficient in the right circumstances. Selection of these channels must be made according to message type, arising out the key to success in choosing the appropriate channel for the right message.

Noise or distractions factors occur along the message path from transmitter to receiver and can affect the quality of communication, distorting its meaning through a filter, blocking, jamming, etc. that can act in the encoding, transmission, and / or decoding messages.

Feedback appears when the receiver responds to the transmitter with a different message; when the feedback is missing, communication takes place in a single direction, and when it appears, the communication gets a double valence. *Feedback is a very powerful tool that can be used to improve efficiency and effectiveness of communication*, because it makes possible to verify the correct understanding of the message.

To be effective, feedback should not only achieve its goal, but to keep open the relationship with the interlocutor, it must be an invitation to interaction through communication and to the creation and deepening of relationship. This aspect is important for successful communication because it takes place on two interrelated levels - relational and information, the communication is not limited at the transmission of information, but is limited to induce a particular behaviour.

This type of interaction occurs frequently in teacher-student communication, the teacher providing positive or negative feedback to influence the actions of students, guidance, advice, training and information for evaluation also calls for student feedback and should be able to receive it. To be effective, feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative - evaluative words generates defensive reactions and blocks communication channels.

Students should be able to discern between good and useless feedback and useless based on its communicator experience to assess the validity and credibility of the source, to take into account the emotional state of the providing or receiving feedback (especially in negative feedback). Skills for supply and demand feedback are part of teacher competence to communicate, his positive attitude in all these acts of communication is essential.

Thus, because of the multitude of disturbances or communication barriers, the only way to determine whether the communication was carried out successfully is to use feedback that people communicate, whether it is a verbal response(s), a nonverbal response (a raised eyebrow, a smile, an angry expression) or no answer - to be interpreted as indication that the message has not been heard, understood or accepted (Sigband, 1982).

A fourth way to improve teacher-student communication satisfaction is, for them, to know or to learn how to do efficient and effective listening. Why listening is an important component of communication process? Because a good communicator is first of all a good listener. An efficient and effective listening

involves not only correct understanding of the message, but its suitable content retention in time.

For teachers is important to learn the skill of active and interactive listening. Active listening involves a series of activities designed to ensure proper receipt and retention of message when the opportunity to interact directly with the student is limited (e.g. in case of an oral presentation during a lecture). Interactive listening involves opportunity to interact directly with the student in two ways: by putting questions and by requesting confirmation (by paraphrasing, perception checking the message, request additions and summarization).

The fifth way, and the last modality we proposed in this sub-chapter, is like teachers and students to use as much as possible the assertive communication style. Why? Because in most of the cases is a win-win situation for both parts. It is a style where both parts are confidence to communicate in an open manner, without games or manipulation strategies. This communication style will build a trusting relationship between teachers and students. We was aware of the fact that we can not have all the parts involved in the communication process, practicing an assertive style. Especially because we have a large number of students and is actually impossible for all of them to use the same communication style, or to have the same positive attitude towards communication process. Still, we think it is very important like the teacher to practice an assertive communication style. In this way he / she can attract and convince more students to be receptive and eventually use the same communication style.

4. Including ICT solutions in enhancing persuasive teacher-student communication and relations

We will start this sub-chapter by explaining two important concepts, which can also lead to improvement of teacher-student communication, interaction and relationship: information and communication technologies and e-learning.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)—which include radio and television, as well as newer digital technologies such as computers and the Internet—have been touted as potentially powerful enabling tools for educational change and reform. When used appropriately, different ICTs are said to help expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, and raise educational quality by, among others, helping make teaching and learning into an engaging, active process connected to real life. (Tinio V., 2002)

ICTs stand for *information and communication technologies* and **are defined** as a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information.” (Blurton C., 2002). These technologies include *computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony*.

Although most commonly associated with higher education and corporate training, *e-learning* encompasses learning at all levels, both formal and non-

formal, that uses an information network—the Internet, an intranet (LAN) or extranet (WAN)—whether wholly or in part, for course delivery, interaction and/or facilitation. Others prefer the term *online learning*. *Web-based learning* is a subset of e-learning and refers to learning using an Internet browser (such as Netscape or Internet Explorer).

Next I will present some **benefits** for using ICT in teacher-student communication.

One of the main advantages is the fact that teachers and students no longer have to rely solely on printed books and other materials in physical forms for their educational needs in order to communicate and interact in a better way.

ICT can enhance the quality of teacher-student communication in several ways: by increasing students' motivation and engagement, by facilitating the acquisition of basic skills and by enhancing teacher training.

Another advantage results from the fact that ICT encourages interactions and cooperation between teachers and students, regardless of where they are. ICT provides students the opportunity to communicate with teachers, mentors or experts from everywhere, helping them to enhance their communication skills.

Each of the different ICTs—print, audio/video cassettes, radio and TV broadcasts, computers or the Internet—may be used for presentation and demonstration, the most basic of the five levels. Except for video technologies, drill and practice may likewise be performed using the whole range of technologies. On the other hand, networked computers and the Internet are the ICTs that enable interactive and collaborative learning best; their full potential as educational tools will remain unrealized if they are used merely for presentation or demonstration. (Tinio V., 2002).

One important benefit of using ICT is the fact that these technologies changes face to face communication (e.g. during a lecturing or a seminar). For example, in the case of bigger audience, teacher's figure can be captured by a video camera, magnified and projected on a screen. In some subjects, an important component of the lecture content is given by visual images other than that of the speaker. Most lecturers traditionally use a blackboard or an overhead projector. In some subjects like mathematics, this appears inevitable.

ICT extensions of this communication are based on projection technology. Now, a combined computer and projector open new possibilities and generate a new culture of oral communication accompanied by screen images.

In comparison with pre-computer lectures, this new technology allows the following:

- The speaker can combine pre-recorded images (including text) with images made during a lecture. Pre-recorded video fragments can be included accompanied by sounds if needed.
- Images of real objects obtained via cameras can be downloaded to a computer or connected directly to the projector.

This technology allows for clearer visualization, and saves time the lecturer needs to spend on writing. However, lecturers need to be aware of the following:

- Text on the screen should be economical.
- *Times New Roman* fonts (like this) are easier to read on screen.
- Do not read the text from the screen; screen text is a tag to what you are saying.
- Leave a little time for an audience to absorb each slide.

It is often helpful to give listeners a printed copy of all slides from a presentation to take away with them (for example, these can be printed six slides per page). The natural screen image of a lecture usually calls for two screens: one to enlarge the figure and face of the speaker, and the other for the visual-textual part of the speech. Of course, digital video images can accompany transmitted and recorded lectures, placing the lecturer's face or figure on part of the screen, and surrounding it with other material, or simply using the lecturer as a background voice.

Today, teacher-student communication – whether face-to-face, live, synchronous, or online – is carried out within strict temporal and spatial boundaries. These boundaries are largely imposed by the school timetable with its:

- sub-division of the class period into a lecture or demonstration (sort of one-way broadcasting) and consecutive conversations with individual students that may or may not involve attention and participation from the rest of the class; and
- sharp divide between in-class and out-of-class time, where no direct communication is supposed.

Assuming the university's information space is digitized, these boundaries might be easily crossed, or broken down technically. However, to get there, we first must face two new problems. The first is how to weave a reliably functioning network, or a web of mutual interconnections between all persons involved. The other is to allow enough time for each network user to communicate adequately with other network users.

A good teacher needs time and space to respond to students' questions, statements, raised hands, looking through the window, smiling, and other types of verbal and non-verbal behavior, as well as to encourage their participation in group activities. This vital human component is not thrown out by the use of ICT. Indeed, we should think about elements of the teacher's role as being supported or automated by ICT. At the same time, *ICT make possible new forms of teacher-student communication*. As we know, email has revitalized letter writing, while voice mail and answering machine sometimes help when wanting to say something that is hard to do face-to-face.

Screen presentations can help students even more than teachers. There are many cases where a student who is considered weak in oral communication develops eloquence, and even confidence, by using screen presentation support.

A new opportunity provided by computer technology today is bi-lateral interactivity. Students can answer the questions teachers ask, and ask them questions, too, all in a written form, from wherever they live. Naturally, a CD and regular textbooks can accompany the course of such lectures.

For the teacher, the digitized lecture has other advantages. First of all, the lecture can be transmitted online (synchronously with the real event) to many places at once. Feedback is possible in the form of written notes sent by students. The teacher can show on screen the face of a student who has asked a relevant question. Other students asking questions that might be anticipated can receive standard answers generated by assistants or automatically. The second option is to distribute a recorded lecture in canned form, recorded on DVD or videotape, or via the Internet. The advantages of these media are:

- mass distribution, multiplied audience;
 - better quality text accompanied by pictures, and additional readings;
- and
- availability anytime, anywhere, at a learner's convenience.

ICT (printing and recording) make a considerable difference in delivering lectures.

Other benefits for students in using Information Communication Technologies are:

➤ *in class*: Students take much more control of their own learning because resources exist for them to discover things on their own. Students develop life long learning skills.

➤ *in writing*: Student uses a word-processor to do first draft and shows file to peers, mentors, or teachers for advice. Student is able to do many changes while polishing the work. Finished copy has been revised many times.

➤ *in research activity*: Student has access to a variety of online resources to supplement the available print resources. Online resources are more than documents. Students can communicate with subject experts or students in remote places.

➤ *in getting help*: Student can contact teacher by email. Student has access to a wider group of mentors or peers through e-mail, discussion areas, or Ask An Expert web sites.

The main advantages for teachers in using Information Communication Technologies are:

- Computer technology handles data collection and makes it immediately available.

- Teacher enters evaluation data on an ongoing basis. Administrators and counselors have convenient access to student and class data. Reporting process is handled from a central location.

- Communications technology allows the absent student to keep in touch with classmates and the teacher. Assignments can be submitted on time and student can question and get feedback from instructor and classmates.

- Computer based systems handle circulation and collection information giving the librarian improved access to information about the use and state of resource collection. The ability to provide students with information is greatly expanded with Internet resources.

As we saw earlier, in the beginning of this sub-chapter the *Internet* is considered as being part from information and communication technologies. *The advantages of using internet* are relatively well known. The proliferation of the Internet technology has changed the student –teacher communication because:

1. *Free or Low Cost Online Materials.* To keep their students' focus teachers try presenting materials in a more cohesive and innovative fashion. But it's not the presentation what matters most. The quality of educational materials defines the quality of education. The Internet is a world of free or reasonably priced materials that can be either downloaded or viewed on the spot. However, think critically deciding on the credibility and quality of an internet source. Note that the Internet also contains large quantities of futile resources - inappropriate, incorrect, outdated and offensive sites.

2. *Virtual Tours, Virtual Classes, Virtual Learning.* *The Internet serves as visual and audio aid in preparation for classes. The Internet has transformed the way we view traditional classroom environments. Students who experience virtual multimedia based learning styles are likely to produce better results and remember things. With a projector and a pc connected to the Internet teachers can tutor students by actually showing them how and where scientific theories get applied. For instance, Google Earth is just perfect for Geography classes.*

3. *Enhanced the Professor - Student Relationship.* *You can always reach your professor and ask him questions online. Classes like this encourage students' active participation, interaction, and self-expression. Shy students do not face any communication barrier and can be very active online. From timetables, homework assignments, event notifications, grade reports to campus job ads everything can be put on the university website. It is convenient for students and teachers. University web sites and email systems is a part of modern schooling.*

4. *Distance Education.* *The distance education is yet another great feature made possible by the Internet.*

5. *Basic Study Habits.* *The Internet has changed our basic study habits. While students can't imagine writing a paper without logging on to the Internet, their professors spend hours in preparation for classes doing research online. The Internet is now rooted deeply in the foundation for effective class and homework. Many studies have confirmed that students performance is positively affected by Internet use.*

6. *Study Groups.* *The Internet is allowing students who live off campus to maintain a relationship with their academic environment from a distance. For instance, the Internet provides an easy way to collaborate, relay and clarify information with other students. Most students strongly agree that the Internet has been beneficial to the relationships they have with classmates.*

Other aspects that teachers and students should take into consideration when using ICT means.

E-mail, classroom websites and electronic platforms have all become easy methods for teacher – student communication. They allow for conversations outside of class, convenient access to assignments and resources, provide a real-

world application of technology, and encourage learning to continue outside of the classroom.

Electronic communication is also frequently used in informal manners among friends. It is important for teachers to remember to keep these channels of information formal and professional when using them with students. This helps to avoid potential problems that arise when necessary and expected boundaries are blurred between teacher and student.

Teachers have to maintain a professional and ethical relationship with their students. This holds true even when communication is outside of the classroom. Teachers using online, texting, or instant messaging tools with students need to remember to keep all communication professional and authoritative.

In order to maintain a professional tone in electronic communication, teachers should be conscious of the expected student-teacher boundaries. They should keep language in posts and other communications formal and think before sending; rereading the language to make sure it cannot be mistaken for being suggestive or inappropriate.

One way to maintain the professionalism relationship and communication style between students and teachers is to confine topics of electronic communication to class topics and information. Posting and clarifying assignments, providing class information, and moderating student discussions in online class-related venues will help keep boundaries in place.

Conclusions

Student – teacher communication satisfaction was measured in this paper with the help of a questionnaire adapted from Hecht, Goodboy, Martin and Bolkan, which was also developed by us in order to assess student communication satisfaction with a particular instructor, as well the relation between these parts and also if ICT means help improving the communication process.

This paper attempted a qualitative research in order to determinate if the four research hypothesis established confirm or not. In general we wanted to observe if teacher's communication style influences students' satisfaction, if it affects the relations with students, if ICT can increase student-teacher interaction or participation in class and outside the classroom.

The present research is important especially for us, as a teachers, because we were able to asses students' communication satisfaction for the seminars and courses they had with us, during the second semester of the 2009/2010 academic year; it is also important for our students, because they found out more on teacher-student communication styles, interaction and relations; and it can also be important for some of my teacher colleagues, in case they want to asses their communication satisfaction with students or to understand what motivates students to interact better and participate actively during classes.

We involved in this research 122 students from six groups that were having seminars on *Analysis and organisational behaviour*. All students were from Public

Administration specialisation, Faculty of Management, Academy of Economic Studies Bucharest. They were 26 men and 96 women, with age between 18 to 29 and most of them (83) from urban areas.

The questions in the second part of the questionnaire focused on issues such as measuring communication satisfaction with an instructor and also the degree of students' participation and interaction during seminars.

The results to question no.6 were a little surprising for us, in the sense that the scores obtained with the help of Likert scale centralisation of data, indicates that students are generally satisfied with the teacher-student communication, that we practice in general an assertive communication style and that we have a good relationship with them.

The answers to questions no. 7, 8 and 9 were not so surprising because their active participation during classes is valued with 10% from the final mark; they also have different themes to present during seminars, so they usually come at the beginning or at the end of the class to ask for more information; and they also indicated that communication between teachers and students is important for two reasons: one, it helps them clarify the class requirements along with expectations of the teacher, and, second, it build confidence in communication skills of students and creates a positive learning atmosphere.

Research questions in the third part of the questionnaire focused on issues such as ICT means used by students especially in learning process, in communicating with teachers and colleagues, for interacting better in and outside the class.

Quite interesting the findings in this part of the questionnaire proves that students prefer and sometimes are dependent on ICT means in order to learn, to communicate, to interact or to develop a good relationship. These also resulted from different informal discussions with students and colleagues of ours.

The limits of this paper come once with the limited number of the interviewed and questioned students (the dimension of our research group of students). This is why the present research can not lead to generalised results. Even in these circumstances the present pilot qualitative research we have done can be considered a starting point for further more detailed researches and conducted on a larger scale, in this way the present paper makes the connection between the present work investigations in the field and what can be run in the future from this study. Because of the paper limits it is necessary to formulate some future research directions. First we will start by presenting *the limits of this research study*. They come once with the limited number of the interviewed and questioned students. This is why the present research can not lead to generalised results. Even in these circumstances

However, the research result help us to improve our communication style with students, actually to be more attentive when we try to answer to them or to explain them something, although maybe we have already done that a number of times. The present pilot qualitative research we have done can be considered *a starting point for further more detailed researches and conducted on a larger*

scale, in this way the present paper makes the connection between the present work investigations in the field and what can be run in the future from this study. This research is particularly interesting, since this issue was not sufficiently studied and developed in literature or in practice in Romania. It helps us to be aware that sometimes we use aggressive control tactics in order to determine them to accomplish our seminars' objectives for that day, and in the end of the paper we realised how important are ICT communication means for them, how it helps them in the communication and learning process. In the end, the paper presents some suggestions for improving teacher – student communication, relations, and interaction in and outside the classroom. We think most of them can be easily applied by both teachers and students.

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