

SOCIAL SKILLS IN STUDENTS OF JOURNALISM

Habilidades sociais em estudantes de jornalismo

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to characterize the repertoire of social skills of journalism students. **Methods:** participants were 89 students of Journalism UNESP/ Bauru, 63 females and 26 males, aged between 18 and 28 years, who responded to the Social Skills Inventory IHS – Del – Prette (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001). **Results:** the data indicated that the students of journalism had social skills rated “Good above average” for the overall score, the social communication skills (F1), assertive coping (F3), empathic (F4) and work (F5). The only factor that had classified as “Good below average” was the social skills of civility (F2), which corresponds to express affection to friends, thank you, introduce yourself, greet and say goodbye. There was no statistically significant difference among the five factors studied and genders regarding the results of the overall score and the scores of the five factors of the IHS – Del – Prette. **Conclusion:** it was found that the participants showed themselves as more extroverted in relation to the demands of coping and social ease and less significant in the positive and negative feelings .

KEYWORDS: Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences; Evaluation; Students; Journalism

■ INTRODUCTION

Individuals with greater social skills tend to present more productive, satisfactory and lasting personal and professional relations¹. Social Skills (SS) are specific behaviors which result in assertive and positive social interactions of interpersonal communication². It is one’s skill to emit behaviors in an interpersonal context which expresses feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions or rights in a suitable manner, respecting others and being able to solve immediate problems, likely to minimize future problems³. Social skills also include communication, cooperation and interpersonal performances skills in professional activities⁴.

More and more, the growing complexity of social demands, both personal and professionally, requires that people improve their social and communication skills, and in the professional context, social

competence has been required and valued in any area of knowledge.

Journalists inform and advise people, thus, they need elaborate social skills to obtain information from unfamiliar persons, groups and companies, and credibly transmit it. Hence, for journalists to succeed professionally, they have to work on the development of these skills since their university training⁵⁻⁷.

Social skills can be classified according to the social performance of each subject. For these skills to be characterized in researches with college students, Del Prette and Del Prette (2001)¹ developed and validated the commonly used Social Skills Inventory (SSI-Del-Prette)^{1,5,7-9}. Studies conducted in this field, have shown that social skills are related not only to academic adjustment and professional performance, but also to the welfare of college students^{5,8,10-13}. A pilot study with four college students of industrial design, mechanical engineering, chemistry and architecture, showed that social skills ranged from bad to excellent⁸.

The knowledge of the social skills of journalism students allows new strategies for the development of the communicative function, since these skills are closely related. Speech pathology acts in the communication development and improvement

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process⁹, through the expansion of new conversational strategies, but few studies have, so far, described the characterization of the social skills of journalism students, thus, this research aimed at characterizing them.

■ METHODS

This is an exploratory and descriptive study conducted at the Bauru School of Dentistry of the University of São Paulo (FOB/USP and approved by the Ethics in Research (CEP) under protocols No. 045/2008.

Eighty-nine journalism students of the Paulista State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” – UNESP/Bauru, being 63 (71%) females and 26 (29%) males, between 18 and 28 years and mean age 21 yrs ± 1yr and 10 months, participated in this study.

The criteria were as follows: be 18 or older and study Journalism in any period of the course. These criteria aimed at probing the knowledge of these college students at the beginning of their professional training.

Following the authorization of the dean and teachers, the researchers visited classrooms from the first to the fourth year of Journalism, explained the goal of the study to the students and invited them to participate. No one refused to join the research.

The Social Skills Inventory (SSI)³, whose purpose is to characterize social performance in different daily situations (work, school, family) and allows the analysis of psychometric characteristics in young populations, was the tool used to assess and analyze the social skills.

SSI comprises 38 items and each one describes a situation of social performance demand and the possible reactions to it (never or seldom; little frequency; regular frequency; quite often; always or almost always). Out of the 38 items, 31 were divided into five factors (F1, F2, F3, F4, and F5) and the other seven were analyzed separately, according to the manual’s instructions:

- F1 Social communication skills: corresponds to asking and answering questions; gratifying and complimenting; asking and giving *feedback* in social relations; initiating, keeping and finishing a conversation (items 1, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29);

- F2 Social civility skills: refers to self-affirmation skills, being also related to a part of the assertiveness concept; say “please”; say “thanks”; introduce oneself; greet; say “goodbye” (items 03, 06, 08, 10, 28, 30, 35);
- F3 Assertive social coping skills: presupposes knowledge of the rules of everyday relationships; express opinion, agree, disagree; request, accept and refuse requests; apologize and admit fault; establish emotional/sexual relationship; end a relationship; express anger and ask for behavioral change; interact with authorities; handle criticism (items 13, 17, 19, 22, 24, 36, 37);
- F4 Empathic social skills: portrays situations which involve approaching unfamiliar people; paraphrasing; reflecting feelings and expressing support (items 9, 14, 23, 26);
- F5 Social work skills: involve reaction and control of anger and aggression; group coordination; speaking in public; solving problems; making decisions and mediating conflicts (items 18, 31, 38).

The remaining seven items of the questionnaire (02, 04, 25, 27, 32, 33, 34) refer to the following situations: “Ask someone to change his/her behavior”, “Interrupt someone else’s speech”, “Deal with fair criticism”, “Express dislikes to friends”, “Request help from friends”, “Negotiate the use of condom” and “Refuse abusive requests”.

The students were given the questionnaire and answered it in the presence of the researchers who explained the directions, emphasizing that there were no correct or incorrect answers and highlighted the importance of responding all items. They were available for any clarification and guaranteed the anonymity of the respondents. On average, the questionnaire was applied in 20 minutes.

For data analysis, the overall score (sum of the responses of the 38 items) and the specific score of the five factors of each student, were calculated according to the manual’s instructions³. The scores were converted into percentile (P) and divided according to the classification proposed by the authors³, these being: Need for training (P1 to P25), Good below average (P26 to P49), Medium (P50), Good above average (P51 to P75) and Quite elaborate (P>75) (Table 1).

Table 1 – Results of the overall score and the five factors of the SSI

Respondent's percentile ranking				
Social Skills				
Need for training	Good below average	Median	Good above average	Rather elaborate
1 to 25	26 to 49	50	51 to 75	Above 75

The remaining seven items of the questionnaire, not included in the five factors, were analyzed separately and classified according to the presence or absence of difficulty in such behaviors.

The chi-square test was used for the statistical analysis of this study and the Mann-Whitney for proportions, so as to verify possible differences between the genders, for each variable of interest, and the value $p < 0,05$ was considered as the significant result.

It is worth noting that the age range is quite small, thus, the age variable did not have a significant effect on the statistical comparison tests, and being homogeneous, the distribution of students, per year, was not submitted to isolated or comparative analysis, according to the year attended.

■ RESULTS

The analysis of the social skills of journalism students participating in this study, as to the five factors of the Del-Prette SSI, showed a classification "good above average" for four of the five factors and for the overall score (Table 2).

No difference was seen in the comparison between the scores of the five factors and overall score of the Del-Prette SSI for male and female students (Table 3).

More than 50 % of the students reported difficulty in two of the remaining items not included in the five factors of the Del-Prette SSI (Table 4): "interrupt someone else's speech" and "express dislikes to friends".

No difference was seen between male and female students, regarding the seven items of the Del-Prette SSI (Table 5).

Table 2 – Mean, SD, minimum and maximum values of the scores of the five factors and overall score of the Journalism students.

Factor	Social Skills	Mean	StandardDeviation	Minimum	Maximum	Classification
F1	Communication	62.50	25.60	7.50	100	Good above average
F2	Civility	47.50	26.44	2	100	Good below average
F3	Assertive coping	70	31.60	2	100	Good above average
F4	Empathy	67.50	26.74	4	98	Good above average
F5	Work	55	23.89	2	100	Good above average
	Overall score	60.50	29.44	3.5	99.60	Good above average

Table 3 – Mean values and SD of the scores of the five factors and overall score, according to the gender of the students and comparison between them.

Factor	Social Skills	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	p*
F1	Communication	Female	62.50	23.86	0.555
		Male	57.50	29.43	
F2	Civility	Female	47.50	25.57	0.780
		Male	47.50	28.83	
F3	Assertive coping	Female	71.25	31.52	0.954
		Male	62.50	32.37	
F4	Empathy	Female	62.50	26.51	0.081
		Male	82.50	26.39	
F5	Trabalho	Female	53.75	23.21	0.598
		Male	65.00	25.79	
	Overall score	Female	66.25	28.92	0.842
		Male	67.50	31.18	

*Mann-Whitney test – $p < 0.05$.

Table 4 – Percentage of answers regarding the presence or absence of difficulties in the items not included in the five factors.

Items	Items not included		Total
	With difficulty (%)	With no difficulty (%)	
Ask for behavioral change (Q02)	29.03	70.97	100
Interrupt someone else's speech (Q04)	59.68	40.32	100
Deal with fair criticism (Q25)	33.87	66.13	100
Express dislikes to friends (Q27)	62.9	37.1	100
Request help from friends (Q32)	30.65	69.35	100
Negotiate the use of condom (Q33)	11.29	88.71	100
Refuse abusive requests (Q34)	30.65	69.35	100

Table 5 – Comparison of the results of the seven items not included in the five factors, between genders.

Items	Items not included			p*
	Gender	With difficulty (%)	With no difficulty (%)	
Ask for behavioral change (Q02)	Female	29.03	70.97	0.278
	Male	40.74	59.26	
Interrupt someone else's speech (Q04)	Female	59.68	40.32	0.184
	Male	44.44	55.56	
Deal with fair criticism (Q25)	Female	33.87	66.13	0.773
	Male	37.04	62.96	
Express dislikes to friends (Q27)	Female	62.90	37.10	0.496
	Male	70.37	29.63	
Request help from friends (Q32)	Female	30.65	69.35	0.113
	Male	48.15	51.85	
Negotiate the use of condom (Q33)	Female	11.29	88.71	0.812
	Male	25.93	74.07	
Refuse abusive requests (Q34)	Female	30.65	69.35	0.801
	Male	33.33	66.67	

* Chi-Square test – $p < 0.05$.

■ DISCUSSION

Effective interpersonal communication is achieved through social interactions of individuals with competent social skills and for the development of such skills, they have to refine their repertory, so as to identify which skills are present and which ones need to be enhanced. From this knowledge, the improvement of oral communication, necessary for professional life, can be done in an assertive manner.

In this research, the social skills of journalism students were rated as “Good above average” for the overall score and four of the five factors analyzed: communication (F1), which involves asking and answering questions; gratifying and complimenting; asking and giving *feedback* in social relations; beginning, keeping and ending conversations; assertive coping (F3), manifesting opinion, agreeing, disagreeing; requesting, accepting and refusing requests, apologizing and admitting faults, establishing an affective/sexual relationship, ending a relationship, expressing anger and asking for behavioral change, interacting with authorities and dealing with criticism; empathy (F4), “social skill”, approaching unfamiliar people, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings and expressing support; and social work skills (F5) which establish reacting to and controlling anger and aggressiveness; group coordination; speaking in public; solving problems, making decisions and mediating conflicts. This

result corroborates the study with psychology college students, except for F5, classified, in that study, as “Good below average”.

The positive data from the social skills of these college students may indicate that they have experienced healthy family environment and social contexts, for the construction of a socially skilled repertory takes place naturally, through the interactions between parents and children, pupil and student or among peers, at school¹³. Nevertheless, college students should present social skills rated as “rather elaborate”, by the end of their formation process, in order to succeed professionally. For Del Prette et al. (2004)¹, higher education should include interpersonal development as part of academic goals, mainly in those areas in which performance depends, critically, on the quality of professional-client relationships.

The only factor to rate as “Good below average”, in the present study, was that of civility social skills (F2) which corresponds to self-affirmation and assertiveness; expressing affection to friends, saying please, thanking, introducing oneself, greeting and saying goodbye. The same classification for F2, has been verified in the study with psychology students². The fact that both journalism and psychology students showed a lower performance in this civility-related social skill may be related to the stage of life. It is known that this aspect of social skill (F2), is one of the first to be developed, being learnt in childhood with the guidance of parents and

educators: “use the magic words please”, thank you and I am so sorry”, and also “say good morning to grandpa”, “give your uncle a hug”; “say you liked the gift”, “ask your friend to excuse you”, among many others. One imagines that this skill has been potentially and maximally developed in adults, but not always this happens. Students are mostly young people who are in a period of transformation and in search of their identity and at this stage, there is often a tendency to deny the standards and rules learnt.

Based on this assumption, college students should be aware of the importance of civility aspects in their professional lives, since gentle people who respect such rules are more welcome, accepted and more likely to have better opportunities.

The present research showed no statistical difference between the genders, in relation to the results of the overall score and the scores of the five factors of the Del-Prete SSI⁵. Such findings pointed that college students from both genders are equally skilled in social interactions, in all aspects, corroborating studies with college students in the field of Human, Exact and Biological Sciences⁹ and with Psychology students².

Regardless of the gender, most students presented no difficulty in five of the seven items not included in the five factors, these being: “ask for behavioral change”, “deal with fair criticism”, “request help from friends”, “negotiate the use of condom” and “refuse abusive requests”. This result showed the self-esteem, maturity and self-assurance of these young college students, from both genders. No studies describing the results of these seven items, specifically, were found in the literature.

The two items in which most students showed difficulty were “express dislikes to friends” and “interrupt someone else’s speech”. The difficulty in

these aspects may arise from the desire not to hurt others or to avoid conflicts.

Although apparently positive, this attitude of not expressing dislikes and not interrupting someone’s speech, it is important that these skills be assertively developed, strengthening the interpersonal relations.

Students should be encouraged to develop these skills, in an assertive way, in order to strengthen their interpersonal relationships. All social skills are fundamental to the full development of humans, both personal and professionally, and are directly related to the ease of interpersonal verbal communication. The improvement of social skills will enable young college students to establish, throughout their lives, more productive and long lasting personal and professional relationships.

One who masters the art of interacting in different situations, will not only succeed professionally, but also live better and happy.

■ CONCLUSION

Students of journalism present social skills which allow them to have healthy social interactions, both personal and professionally, however, these skills were not shown in their maximum potential, and the ones that proved most in need of nimbleness were those related to “civility” and “expressing positive and negative feelings”. The knowledge of the social skills of young college students attained in this study is very important to speech pathology, aiding in the development of new communication strategies. On the other hand, by helping in the improvement of interpersonal communication, speech pathologists will facilitate the expansion of social skills.

RESUMO

Objetivo: caracterizar o repertório de habilidades sociais de estudantes de Jornalismo. **Métodos:** participaram 89 estudantes de Jornalismo da UNESP/Bauru, sendo 63 do sexo feminino e 26 do masculino, com idades variando entre 18 e 28 anos, os quais responderam ao *Inventário de Habilidades Sociais IHS-Del-Prette* (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001). **Resultados:** os dados indicaram que os estudantes do curso de jornalismo apresentaram repertório de habilidades sociais classificados “Bom acima da média” para as o escore global, as habilidades sociais de comunicação (F1), assertivas de enfrentamento (F3), empáticas (F4) e de trabalho (F5). O único fator que apresentou classificação como “Bom abaixo da média” foi as habilidades sociais de civilidade (F2), que corresponde a expressar afeto aos amigos, agradecer, apresentar-se, cumprimentar e despedir-se. Não houve diferença estatisticamente significativa entre os cinco fatores estudados e os gêneros com relação aos resultados do escore global e os escores dos cinco fatores do IHS-Del-Prette. **Conclusão:** Estudantes de jornalismo apresentam habilidades sociais que lhe permitem interações sociais saudáveis, mas estas não se apresentaram no seu potencial máximo. As habilidades sociais que se revelaram com maior necessidade de desenvoltura foram as de “civilidade” e de “expressar sentimentos positivos e negativos”.

DESCRITORES: Fonoaudiologia; Avaliação; Estudantes; Jornalismo

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