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## ORIGINAL

### PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ABOUT COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES OF THE FUTURE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

### PERCEPCIONES DEL PROFESORADO SOBRE COMPETENCIAS COMUNICATIVAS DE FUTUROS MAESTROS DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA

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#### ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to know the perception of university teachers about the communicative competence of future teachers of Physical Education. A duly validated questionnaire of 16 item was emploted, which was completed by 76 university teachers. The data obtained were subjected to statistical treatment via the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19.0. The results show the importance that university teachers give to the training in communicative competences of teachers, as well as the lacks which they notice in future teachers to achieve a proper teaching in the school.

**KEYWORDS:** Communicative competence, College students, Physical education, Pre-Service teacher education, Higher education.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación fue conocer la percepción del profesorado universitario sobre la competencia comunicativa de los Maestros de Educación Física en formación. Para ello se empleó un cuestionario de 16 ítem, debidamente validado, que fue cumplimentado por 76 profesores de Universidad. Los datos obtenidos fueron sometidos a tratamiento estadístico mediante el software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), versión 19.0. Los resultados revelan la trascendencia que los profesores universitarios otorgan a la formación de los docentes en competencias comunicativas, así como las carencias que perciben en los futuros maestros de Educación Física para el desempeño de la docencia en los centros escolares.

**PALABRAS-CLAVE:** Competencia comunicativa, Estudiantes universitarios, Educación física, Formación inicial del profesorado, Enseñanza superior.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modern dynamic and changing societies require a new type of teacher training, to prepare educators to attain new skills and undertake new roles adapted to current social needs (Conde and Martín, 2016). To this end, higher education is immersed in a process of change that affects both methodological approaches and evaluation of teaching-learning processes (Castejón, Santos y Palacios, 2015). There is a proposal to improve teaching quality via better training of professionals, through skills development (Ávila and Paredes, 2015; García, Guzmán and Murillo, 2014) In this sense, there is a clear tendency to bring the educational and professional worlds closer together in the search for new synergies of improvement (UNESCO, 2005).

From this perspective, in the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE) there is a clamour for a paradigmatic shift from knowledge-based teaching to skills learning. This approach, which has the objective of being an alternative that contributes to create better quality training processes, is highlighted in the description in the White Book of the National Agency of Quality and Accreditation Evaluation (ANECA, 2005), on generic and specific transversal skills that future Graduates in Teaching must acquire, as well as on basic Graduate-specific skills, in accordance with the established criteria in the European Qualifications Framework (European Commission, 2008), in the Spanish Framework of Higher Teaching Qualifications (Government of Spain, 2009) and in the key competences for lifelong learning recommended by the European Parliament and Council (European Council, 2006). All of them draw

attention to the importance of communication and language skills, and information and communication technologies.

Both in the national and international context (Danielson, 2011; Gauthier, 2006; ITE, 2000; Gouvernement de Québec, 2001; Martinet, Raymond and Gauthier, 2004), a new teaching profile is demanded for 21st century teachers, in terms of new competencies. In contrast to academic based training, skills-based training “favours the future development of the professional, thus facilitating the integration of content to the work context and to life itself, where experiences give rise to the creation of learning applicable to complex situations” (Paredes and Inciarte, 2013, pp. 126-127). The different skills designs all highlight the figure of the teacher as a mediator and promotor of learning situations, in which interrelation, interdependence, collaboration and tutoring, amongst other key professional attributes, are paramount, and the value of communication skills is underlined.

Knowledge and use of communicative resources (verbal and non-verbal) is considered as key to the effective carrying out of professional activity (AGAEVE, 2010; Camacho and Sáenz, 2000; Government of Chile, 2008; Perrenoud, 2004a; Roncallo, Uribe and Calderón, 2013; TDA, 2007). However, to presume its command on the part of teachers is as uncertain as it is idealistic. Thus, Camacho and Sáenz (2000) perceive communication problems in teachers, which they attribute to different causes, including: lack of knowledge of the keys to effective communication; inadequate transmitter/receiver behaviours, and other external circumstances that can affect the reception and understanding of messages.

In general, communication is perceived as an interpretive process via which people interact, responding and creating messages. Each specific communicative process is characterised by the conjunction of coordinates that make it unique and unrepeatable (specific individuals and spaces and particular moments and circumstances). When communication occurs in the classroom, it is referred to as educational communication, and is produced between teachers and students, on the whole, with a decidedly education and training-based intention; however, by extension, communication also occurs between teachers and institutions, such as the family, etc.

Notwithstanding, it is no less certain that the majority of teachers do not receive specific communication training and only recently have proposals of this type appeared in new teacher training plans. A lack of necessary correspondence is detected between theoretical studies on content and the development of communication skills and the empirical studies on the real need for this competence. Further, there are scarcely any studies on the valuation by university teachers on their students' command of communication skills and the level and manner in which they attempt to develop this competence in their classrooms.

To this end, it is tempting to know the state of the matter through interviews with the agents involved (students and professors). In this regard, a preliminary study (Gallego y Rodríguez, 2014) revealed that Physical Education (PE) teachers do not reveal a positive perception of the level of development and command of communication skills for their future professional development, admitting numerous limitations and considering the training received during their university course as insufficient. As a result, it follows to contrast this information with the opinion of the university professors involved in the training of future PE teachers and discuss the results in light of the study.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

In particular, the objectives of the study were; 1) Establish the perception of university professors on the level of importance that communication skills should have in the training of future PE teachers; 2) Know the perception of the teachers who impart knowledge in this specialised area (PE), in terms of the level of achievement reached by the students; 3) Ascertain to what extent university professors admit that they should work on this skill in the classroom; 4) Suggest some strategies for optimising the development of this competence in the initial training of PE teachers.

## 3 MATERIAL AND METHODS

A quantitative, descriptive methodology was used and a “social research via survey” (Bisquerra, 2014) was employed, which consists in putting questions to a representative sample of subjects in a specific population, to obtain information from their statements (Schutt, 2001).

### 3.1 Population and sample

The population was made up of professors from the University of Granada who teach the PE teacher degree course in the different campuses and institutions. The total number of professors involved was ninety-five (N=95), of which seventy six responded (n=76), attesting to the representativeness of the sample. For a sampling error of 5%, we obtained a confidence level of 95%, which guarantees the level of representativeness statistically demanded from a research sample, according to the calculation of the following formula (Morales, 2012):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + \frac{e^2 (N-1)}{z^2 p q}}$$

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

We used a questionnaire, composed of 16 Likert type items with 5 alternatives, which collected the fundamental sub-dimensions that make up the teaching communication skill, according to the bibliography consulted: transmitter,

receiver, communicator in the classroom, participant in meetings and tutorials. The university teaching staff of the future PE teachers were asked to reflect on the level of importance they gave to this competence in order to perform an effective teaching role, and to what extent were the different sub-dimensions of this competence present in the training of future teachers.

We followed ethical research criteria to assure the anonymity of the collaborating professors at all times, whose participation in the study was voluntary.

To determine the appropriateness of the questionnaire, the following was evaluated; a) content validity according to experts; b) construct validity, via a factor analysis which indicated that the questionnaire was coherent and its variables were well-designed and grouped; and c) its reliability via the Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha=0,651$ ), whose value can be adequately (sufficiently) estimated for the purposes of this study, as it involves an exploratory study that seeks to obtain initial knowledge, an approximation to the situation for future constructs. However, prior to the factor analysis, other operations were implemented: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy ( $KMO=0.646$ ) and Bartlett's sphericity test (Chi-square  $X^2=659.415$  and very high significance  $p=0.000$ ). From the results obtained in the factor analysis, we observed that just five components between them explained 65.16% of the total variance. The analysis of minor components (with varimax rotation) determined the consistency of the internal structure of the test.

Furthermore, the consideration of communicative teaching competence as being the group of skills and qualities that make effective participation in strictly educational situations and contexts possible (Domingo, Gallego y Rodríguez, 2013), allowed us to establish the dimensions that are the object of study:

- Competence as a good transmitter. Refers to the total knowledge, skills and abilities considered necessary to fulfil their roles as good, efficient transmitters of information (oral and written) in the teaching centres.
- Competence as a good receiver. This section asked the university professors about the knowledge, skills and abilities required to capture, interpret and utilise (manage) messages and draw inferences from them.
- Competencies and skills as a communicator in the classroom. In this case, the different communication skills that PE teachers should manage in the classroom were specified: employing different types of questions, using criticism and praise productively, etc.
- Communicative competency for meetings. We then asked the university professors about their competence to act successfully in meetings with parents or colleagues, to pay attention to what they said, regulate their own

interventions and those of others, and maintain a measured, courteous and constructive tone...

- Communicative competence for tutorials, that is, competence to plan an interview, create a suitable atmosphere, know how to interpret the meaning of verbal and non-verbal signs.

And, in relation to these, we asked the them to evaluate four questions, via the Likert-type scale (1 to 5).

1. To what extent do you consider this competence as important for the training of future PE teachers?
2. To what extent do these skills facilitate your subject matter?
3. To what extent do students in your field attain this competence?
4. To what extent to you think that this competence should be taken into consideration throughout the university course?

We analysed the data with the help of the software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19.0.

#### **4 RESULTS**

Then, the data were synthesised and percentages were detailed, taking into account that the values 1.00 and 5.00 represent the lowest/highest perception of the command of communicative ability (1. No command; 2. Insufficient command; 3. Sufficient command; 4. High command; 5. Very high command).

Firstly, on the general importance given by the educators to the communication competence for the teaching action, a high score (5) was frequently observed, endorsed with 91.2% of responses. Not one professor gave the score 1, which represents the non-existent importance of this skill.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that the professors admitted to sufficiently employing the skill in 53.3% of cases, against the 40% who thought they employed it little or insufficiently, and 6.7% who did not employ it. In addition, the majority (66.6%) of university professors considered communication skills as quite important or highly relevant for the training of future PE teachers. However, some professors considered it of little importance (16.7%) or relatively important (16.7%).



#### **4.1 Competence as a good transmitter**

In general, the professors considered that they employed this skill in the classroom sufficiently (43.1%) or even to a great extent (27.6%), or very highly (2.6%), although there are still those who admit to not doing so sufficiently (26.3%). Attention may be drawn of the lack of score 1 in the responses.

However, in the opinion of the professors, the students were not progressing adequately with this skill. In percentage terms, 47.4% of responses obtained the score of 2, although 3 (sufficient) was also noteworthy, with a percentage standing at 32.9%. It thus comes to light that the professors considered that this skill is insufficiently attained by students, or they simply did not attain it (6.6%), and a mere 3.9% admitted a complete, or high command (9.2%).

Further, it turns out that a majority percentage of university professors (76.6%) thought it necessary to deal with this competency in teacher training study plans. It is worth underlining, however, the absence of the values 1 (non-existent) and 2 (insufficient), on the need to improve this skill. These data show how the professors, in their daily tasks, agree on the necessary effort that must be dedicated to communicative activity to improve the competence of their students as transmitters of messages, to thus favour their later professional development.

#### **4.2 Competence as a good receiver**

The professors considered that competence as a receiver was sufficient (3 score) with 50%, or even high (27.6%), or very high (5.3%), although some admitted to not doing this enough (17.1%). Once more, the absence of the score 0 in the responses of the university professors is confirmed.

Nevertheless, whereas some professors considered this skill to be insufficiently acquired by students (31.6%) or simply not acquired (3.9%), others stated that 42.1% of PE teacher degree students acquired this skill to a satisfactory degree, 15.8% to a high degree, and 6.6% completely. To this end, this fluctuation between scores 2 and 3 suggests a certain trend towards a level of sufficient command of active listening on the part of trainee PE teachers as receivers.

Finally, a high percentage of the professors agreed on the great importance of the attainment of receiver competence in students (69.4%), confirming the relevance of this skill in teaching practice. Additionally, the score 1 (non-existent) was once more been rejected.

#### **4.3 Competencies and skills as a communicator in the classroom**

To facilitate the educational task, future teachers will have to make use of a wide range of communication skills to achieve a certain empathy with their students. According to the data obtained, the professors held the opinion that, in general, they employed these skills sufficiently (44.7%), highly (22.4%) or very highly (7.9%), although there were still those who considered that they did so insufficiently (23.7%), or simply did not employ these skills (1.3%). Therefore, it is worth pointing out that the scores 2 (insufficient) and 4 (high) obtained similar percentages, to which perceptions were very polarised, although the mid-score (sufficient) predominates, as already indicated.

Furthermore, the professors understood that the command of this skill was acceptably developed in trainee PE teachers. In effect, we were able to confirm that the score 3 (sufficient) was predominant (48.7%), but, in contrast to the abovementioned case, the score 2 obtained a similar percentage (38.2%), and it was much higher than score 4, as occurred in the previously. That is, it is thought that these skills are sufficiently acquired by students (48.7%), acquired to a high degree (2.6%) or even always (5.3%), although 38.2% admitted that some trainee PE teachers did so insufficiently and 5.3% considered that they do not acquire these skills.

Lastly, 73.7% of the professors thought that these skills should always be employed throughout the university course, 17.1% that they should be employed a lot and 7.9% sufficiently. Only 1.3% of the university professors considered them to be of little relevance. To the other extreme, it is also noteworthy that there was an absence of the score 1 amongst the responses, which represents the complete lack of importance given to these skills.

#### **4.4 Communicative competency for meetings**

If the development of communication skills for carrying out the teaching activity is important, it is no less so in order to perform successfully in meetings with parents or colleagues. An evaluation of whether the professors take into account the development of communication skills for meetings in their teaching tasks reveals a trend towards sufficient command. In effect, the responses, as well as being concentrated in the 3 score (43.4%), were distributed amongst the scores 2 (25%) and 4 (22.4%). Despite the large dispersion, we detected a slight advantage or trend towards lower values: 1 and 2 (total percentage for both 31.6%), in detriment to the higher ones: 4 and 5 (25% accumulated values), although the difference is not significant. Therefore, in the opinion of the professors, these skills were sufficiently taken into account in their classrooms (43.4%), or even largely (22.4%), or to a great extent (2.6%), although 25% thought they were not sufficiently taken into account and 6.6% stated that these communication skills were not worked on.

But the professors considered that the trainee PE teachers did not have command of this skill [60.5% of responses concentrated around scores 2 (50%) and 1 (10.5%)]. Just 34.2% of the professors understood that the students



gained sufficient communication skills to perform in meetings. The electing of the higher scores of 4 (2.6%) and 5 (2.6%) is revealing.

Attention might be drawn, however, to the fact that in contrast to previous blocks, in which the importance of working on specific communication skills was indicated, the item that points to the level at which these skills should be worked on did not reach percentages as high as score 5 (60.5%). Notwithstanding, if we add to this the noteworthy proportion of professors who selected the score 4 (32.9%), the concern for developing communication skills for meetings with parents or colleagues tends towards the maximum scores (4 and 5), in 93.4% of responses. In addition, it can be pointed out that there is an absence of the mid-score of 3 (sufficient) and the score 1 (non-existent).

#### **4.5 Communication skills for tutorials**

In general, the professors surveyed considered that they make efforts in tutorials with undergraduate PE teachers, a key task in their role. In percentages, 32.9% of the professors opted for the score 3, although the similar percentage they gave to the score 2 (28.%) cannot be ignored, which is very close to the majority percentage. This leads us to think that, although the mid score is the most important, there is a downward trend due to the high percentage of the 2 score, on the whole, but also 1 (28.9% and 14.5%, respectively), compared to the scores 4 and 5, whose percentages are much lower (18.4% and 5.3%, respectively).

The majority of university professors, however, did not think that their PE students had the communication skills necessary for tutorials, as the majority (42.1%) was concentrated on the 2 score (insufficient command). The high percentage (14.5%) of professors who considered this command to be non-existent is also worthy of mention. The notable percentage the professors assigned to the 3 score cannot be ignored either, representing sufficient command of this skill (32.9%). The lack of assignments to the 5 score (very high command) should be pointed out, along with the fact that the 4 score (high command) only obtained 10.5%.

An evident majority of the university professors surveyed (78.9%) indicated the need to work on this skill (5 score) and therefore think that it should always or frequently be focused on throughout the university degree course. A mere 2.6% considered it to be of little relevance. In accordance with these results, it is necessary to consider implementing specific actions in the classroom that favour the development of communication skills for the effective carrying out of the tutorial. It should be noted, lastly, that the professors ignored the 1 score (non-existent).

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We have determined the level of importance, from the viewpoint of the university professors who lecture on the PE degree course, of communication skills for carrying out the teaching role, as well as the level of achievement attained by future PE teachers in competencies as transmitters, receivers, classroom communicators, and participants in meetings and tutorials.

Initially, it should be pointed out that university professors, as already indicated by different reports (AGAEVE, 2010; ANECA, 2005; AQU, 2003; European Commission, 2008; European Council, 2006; Government of Chile, 2008; Government of Spain, 2009; Gouvernement de Québec, 2001; ITE, 2000; TDA, 2007) and various authors (Camacho and Sáenz, 2000; Danielson, 2011; Domingo et al., 2013; Gauthier, 2006; Martinet et al., 2004; Perrenoud, 2004b; Triadó, Aparicio and Elasri, 2013), afford capital importance to the need for PE students (future teachers) to develop communication skills, which they admit are employed in their respective subject matters although in an unequal and non-systematic manner.

The university professors, however, observe and perceive insufficient achievement or command of communication skills by PE students, which would make it a priority objective for the improvement of forthcoming study plans and teaching programmes undertaken in the university context. This finding is consistent with the data in the AQU document (2003), which warns that university degree holders reveal evident weaknesses in basic interpersonal skills (oral and written expression), and this is backed up by reports from Domingo et al. (2013) and Triadó et al. (2013), who draw attention in view of the results obtained in their respective studies to the fact that university professors doubt the level of achievement obtained by future teachers, or that just 22% clearly achieve communicative capacity in higher education.

Nearly all of the professors surveyed believed that communication skills are unavoidable in the initial training of future PE teachers, in harmony with that put forward in other studies (AGAEVE, 2010; AQU, 2003; Camacho and Sáenz, 2000; Danielson, 2011; Domingo et al., 2013; Government of Chile, 2008; Perrenoud, 2004b; TDA, 2007). The responses to the preliminary question are focused on the maximum score. Additionally, for all of the dimensions of the questionnaire that refer to its transcendence, there was almost unanimity for the highest score, on the part of the university professors.

Generally, although placing greater emphasis on some dimensions over others, the university professors who teach PE degree courses recognised that they sufficiently employ these skills, although in a non-systematic way, which differs from the information drawn from another prior study that demonstrated scarce attention to this area in university classrooms (Domingo et al., 2013).

Despite everything, the professors considered the level of achievement reached by the PE students as insufficient, especially regarding their capacity for participating as teachers in meetings, or to give tutorials. This perception of the professors coincides, in general terms, with the opinion of the PE students (future teachers) themselves, who admitted their greatest weaknesses were in competencies for giving tutorials or in their meetings skills (Gallego and Rodríguez, 2014). The limitations indicated, regarding the command of the communication skills necessary to be effective in meetings, along with the lack of skills for tutorials, are disheartening, especially when different jobs mention relevant competencies as being those related to knowing how to involve parents in children's learning (Allan, Clarke and Jopling, 2009; Valdemoros and Lucas, 2014). These findings, however, contrast with the perceptions of working primary and secondary school PE teachers, who consider themselves as very competent in establishing fluid relationships with other members of the educational community (Del Valle, De la Vega and Rodríguez, 2015).

Furthermore, the university professors considered that trainee PE teachers had an acceptable command of transmission, reception and communication classroom skills, an opinion generally shared by the trainee PE teachers themselves (Gallego and Rodríguez, 2014).

Nevertheless, a prudent interpretation of these findings is recommended, taking into account that a generalisation of results in any context cannot be deduced from the analysis carried out. It is a first exploratory study, and requires other complementary works in which, for example, there is a focus on wider samples of university professors, the data collection strategy is complemented by qualitative instruments, or there is a development of new strategies and instruments for monitoring and corroborating the effective acquisition of competencies on the part of future PE teachers.

However, despite the provisional nature of these data, a number of guidelines or strategies may be put forward to improve the communication skills of this group: 1) incorporate a regulated development of communication skills in future teaching guides; 2) analyse different communicative contexts for implementing specific strategies for each situation; 3) know and manage different linguistic and non-linguistic resources to keep the group's attention; 4) orientate future PE teachers on how to build and structure oral/written messages; 5) integrate non-verbal communication into the overall communication process.

As a result, the improvement of initial training for PE professionals constitutes a big challenge for training systems in the near future, in order to respond to the changes and expectations imposed by the knowledge society. In this regard, skills-based education is today a potent alternative model, capable of allowing educational systems, in general, and professional training, in particular, to modify their teaching practices, in order to favour learning situations in which future teachers can carry out a more active role and employ new ways of being and acting. From this viewpoint, attention is drawn to the fact that

“contextualisation, from practical situations related to the carrying out of the profession, seems to be the most appropriate channel to favour skills development and guarantee greater consistency in training” (Martinet et al., 2004, p. 218).

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