

## An Exploratory Study of Communicative Competencies in Professors and Health Professional Education

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### Abstract

The goal was to confirm students' perceptions of communication skills in health education. Data were gathered for this exploratory study from a sample of students at a university in Southern Brazil using a questionnaire. Among the participants were 54 students pursuing postgraduate, masters, and doctorate degrees in health science, as well as 71 students from graduate programmes in biomedicine, physiotherapy, speech therapy, and audiology. All students completed a special questionnaire created for this study and signed an informed consent form. Results: Data were analysed using content analysis, which is characterised by the observation of communications using systematic and objective methods for describing message content as well as by indicators that permit the assumption of knowledge regarding the inferred variables of these communications. 106 (84.8%) of the 125 participants were female, with a mean age of 24.8 years (SD=0.41) overall. 119 people (95.2%) thought communication activities in academic education were important. "Content expertise," "adequate speech rate," and "adequate speech articulation" were deemed to be the three communication abilities that were most crucial. The hardest parts were "interaction with the public," "adequate speech rate," and "adequate speech articulation." The attendees also discussed the value of effective communication in oral presentations and conversations as well as the dearth of these skills in the academic and professional settings. Participants mentioned challenges and a lack of preparation in this area. Activities focusing on communication ability can address this at the university. Such treatments promote professional success since a healthcare practitioner must articulate themselves in meetings, public speaking engagements, and scientific settings in addition to maintaining positive client/patient relationships. As a result, effective communication is a crucial ability in the health care industry. It should be mentioned that one of the study's limitations is convenience sampling. Students can use this research to identify challenges that can prevent them from completing their education to the fullest and to apply the best techniques to deal with such challenges. The growth of this field of study also depends on the establishment of established and standardised measures to evaluate these communication abilities.

**Keywords:** Communication; Speech; Speech therapy; Education; Health; Verbal behavior; Nonverbal communication

### Introduction

Voice and speech are crucial components of the communication process, but other components, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, are equally essential to the veracity of speech [1,2]. Communication competency may be defined as the effective use of these resources. It can increase the listener's attention, speed up the learning and memorising processes, and ensure the accuracy of the subject being discussed [3]. The importance of accurate and adequate voice production, articulation and speech pace, body language, facial expressions, posture, equipment usage, effective use of visual aids, social skills and public interaction, language and vocabulary, and appropriate apparel is emphasised [1,2,4-6]. Even though the aforementioned elements of communication situations are all crucial, developing appropriate communicative competence requires more than just verbal and nonverbal abilities alone [2-5]. Sharing thoughts and ideas with others is communication. A person who struggles with listening and empathy abilities will likewise struggle to develop communication competence [5]. In order to affect the patient's motivation for receiving treatment, the healthcare practitioner must be able to link empathy with communication abilities during conversation or public speaking [5-9]. The effective use of these abilities also fosters interpersonal connections through persuasion, dependability, and idea transmission through conversation and oratory arguments [1,5,10-12].

In this setting, effective communication is essential for students, health professionals, and aspiring instructors who want to complete their roles as educators and communicators and build stronger bonds with patients, clients, and coworkers. enhancing their educational

credentials and abilities, including communication in social, professional, and academic contexts [13,14]. Professionals must work together as a team and continuously communicate in social settings. The importance of communication in the health process and in maintaining adherence to therapy is also emphasised. The adherence of patients to treatments can be improved, as well as greater cooperation and integration of the professional within a group, by professionals who have adequate communication skills when dealing with patients/clients, as well as with healthcare team members [7-9,15]. It is well known that cooperation is significantly hampered by experts' communication issues [15]. Contrarily, effective communication contributes to gaining professional success [5]. Since the transition from academia to the job market creates expectations and challenges for individuals to adapt to, it is crucial that educational institutions follow the demands of the job market, resulting in new forms of human relationships and developing new approaches in education for vocational training. The need for continuous development is seen together with a rising demand for

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labour and the standard of quality expected of new professionals [16]. The significance of conducting research in this area must be emphasised because several aspects of communicative competence can be enhanced and built upon, particularly in the academic setting, helping to plan and carry out educational and professional activities [2,12]. The purpose of this study was to confirm graduate and postgraduate students' perceptions of the application and effects of communicative competency seminars and courses at the university.

## Methods

### Sample and study design

This research is both descriptive and exploratory. 125 students from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil, were included in the sample. 54 of the participants were enrolled in postgraduate, Master's, and doctoral programmes in health sciences, and 71 were graduate students in biomedicine, physiotherapy, speech therapy, and audiology. Only students pursuing educational practise and teaching in the field of health education were invited to participate and informed about the study. This discipline, which is a required component of the university curriculum, aims to provide technical instrumentation and critical reflection on health education, allowing students to comprehend the underlying assumptions of educational practise, the assimilation of learning and work performance through the selection of key subjects, as well as the structuring and planning of occupational performance.

### Survey

A structured questionnaire that was adjusted for the participants' educational backgrounds was the method selected for data collecting. This tool was created by speech therapists enrolled in university postgraduate programmes under the supervision of the institution's speech therapy and pedagogy instructors. Individual questionnaires were filled out in a quiet, undisturbed environment. There was no deadline for completion set in stone. To ensure confidentiality and participant anonymity, all participants received instruction on how to complete the questionnaire and were then told to place it in a sealed box once finished. Each participant was expected to read and respond to each question independently; the examiner did not read the questions. To guarantee equal application, the method was always overseen by the same examiner. 11 items made up the questionnaire utilised in this study, which included questions on participant identification,

communication skill evaluation, the value of communication in the educational process, and student self-evaluation of communication skills. The questions covered the following main areas: a desire to pursue academic careers, the necessity of including communication skills activities in graduate and/or postgraduate classes, prior experience in communication skills courses and classes, and those aspects of oral presentation thought to be most crucial, such as voice production, posture, breathing, body and facial expression, subject, articulation and speech rate, language and vocabulary, use of body language, and use of body language. Finally, the respondent needs to have said which of these characteristics they found the most challenging (Table 1).

### Data analysis

Data were analysed using content analysis, which is characterised by the observation of communications using systematic and objective methods for message content description as well as by indicators that enable knowledge inference about the inferred variables of these communications [17]. Descriptive statistics, Fisher's exact tests, and Chi-squared tests were used in the statistical study to compare the factors related to communication abilities. Communication skills and sample factors were compared using the Mann Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests. By using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, normality was evaluated. The programme utilised for statistical analysis was SPSS version 16.0, and the significance level was set at a maximum of 5% (p 0.05).

### Results

There were 106 (84.8%) female participants in the study sample, and there were no statistically significant variations in gender between the graduate and postgraduate groups (p=0.561). The overall mean age was 24.8 years (SD=0.412), showing a statistically significant difference (p0.001) from the postgraduate participants' mean age of 27 years (SD=4.395), which was higher at 28.1 years (SD=4.006) for graduates and lower at 23.1 years (SD=4.006) for postgraduates. 119 (95.2%) of the study's total participants thought it was essential to implement communication initiatives in academic settings and educational institutions. 53 (98.1%) postgraduate students and 66 (92.9%) graduate students were both represented (p=0.386). In addition to the University, 40 students (32%) reported teaching speech and communication classes at other institutions. Of them, 22 (31%) were graduates and 18 (33.3%) were postgraduates (p=0.465).

**Table 1:** Communicative skills considered most important by students. n: individuals number; %: individuals percentage; \*Statistical significance p<0.05.

Communicative Skills	Graduate		Postgraduate		Fisher's exact test	Total	
	n=71	%	n=54	%	P value	n=125	%
Adequate voice quality	15	21	3	5.5	0.019*	18	14.4
Oral production without jargon or colloquialisms	20	28	22	40.7	0.181	42	33.6
Appropriate posture	39	55	24	44.4	0.281	63	50.4
Adequate speech articulation	45	63	35	64.8	1	80	64
Calm breathing	10	14	11	20.3	0.469	21	16.8
Adequate speech rate	47	66	32	59.2	0.458	79	63.2
Appropriate facial expression	6	8.4	4	7.4	1	10	8
Appropriate dress	11	15	3	5.5	0.094	14	11.2
Content expertise	63	89	47	87	0.788	110	88
Appropriate language and vocabulary	17	24	12	22.2	1	29	23.2
Resourcefulness and persuasive presentation	27	38	20	37	1	47	37.6
Appropriate body language	15	21	9	16.6	0.648	24	19.2
Proper use of equipment and visual aids	13	18	16	29.6	0.199	29	23.2
Interaction with public	38	54	29	53.7	1	67	53.6
Other	1	1.4	0	0	1	1	0.8

## Discussion

Studies like the one by Braga and Silva (2006) [18] that aim to propose a methodological foundation for tracking the development of a student's communicative competence help to improve professional development for teachers and student training because people who use appropriate communication are more socially acceptable. By fostering greater openness and communication among its students and providing them with the tools necessary to express themselves in conversations and public speaking exercises, universities that recognise these demands will aid students' transition from the classroom to the working world [2,5]. Participants in this survey noted the value of effective communication in oral presentations and discussions as well as the dearth of these skills in the academic and professional settings. It is acknowledged that communicative treatments can help build and improve a variety of communication skills [2]. Higher education must make an investment in initiatives that can identify a university student's profile in this situation. The goal should be to create effective circumstances for the individual to do well at work in the future while also planning help for the demands of students [19]. It is important to emphasise the importance of these communicative and educational activities in the fields of health and other sciences, whose professional success depends on the calibre of the relationships created between the professional and client and within a team [4,20,21]. This is because professionals with effective communication skills have better integration skills, exhibit assertiveness and competence, strengthen connections in the workplace, and have an impact on the process of adhering.

The most often mentioned factors listed by students as essential for effective verbal and nonverbal communication were "content domain," "adequate speech rate," and "speech articulation." Because communicative skill mostly rests on the theoretical underpinnings of the aforementioned problem, the student's choice for the content domain component is reasonable. It can stimulate the listener's interest and dependability, speed up the learning process, and encourage engagement with the general audience [22]. According to statistics that support the results of this study, speech pace and articulation are the two factors most closely associated to communicative competence when it comes to speech production skills [23]. These authors do, however, also discuss the gaps in the body of knowledge in this area. It should be highlighted that in the therapeutic setting of speech therapy, these communication abilities are frequently enhanced and strengthened. With preventative and instructional actions in schools, universities, and student training facilities, speech rate and articulation can be improved. In schools, universities, and student training facilities, preventive and instructional activities can help students with their speech pace and articulation. "Adequate speech rate," "adequate speech articulation," and "interaction with the public" were among the difficulties mentioned by the research participants. As was indicated in the paragraph above, students value communication abilities that are connected to speech production. These abilities are directly connected to speech comprehensibility, which might hinder message comprehension. When a healthcare expert speaks, this might hinder patient understanding of their health state and prescribed treatments as well as communication between members of the health team.

It was observed that the development of social skills in childhood is a critical factor in preventing the onset of anti-social behaviour and its long-term effects [24] with regard to the social capacity to engage with the public as self-reported by students in this study sample. These writers also draw attention to the link between social skills and adaptive

behaviour, such as successful academic achievement and coping mechanisms for difficult circumstances. This statistic emphasises the value of social skills in both personal and professional activities, such as interacting with the audience during oral presentations. Thus, it is significant that programmes that encourage the development of positive social skills in kids and teenagers exist [25].

Finally, research on studies that examine the communication abilities of health professionals and in teacher education is lacking. A research in this area found that there is a theoretical and practical gap between instructors' preparation and language/communication abilities, which does not appear to favour the connections between communication and skills gained via already-knowledgeable domains. Due to this, fewer reflective practises have researched and addressed communication, despite the fact that its significance in the pedagogical discourse is widely recognised. It has also drawn attention to the paucity of research on the instructor and the students' communicative proficiency and expressiveness. Studies that examine how well health professionals communicate with their patients, particularly youngsters, are also lacking. However, due to the significance of this subject for educational planning and for the professional success of teachers and healthcare professionals, speech therapy is now expanding its actions and processes into educational domains [26]. Despite this, speech therapy is now extending its actions and processes into educational domains due to the significance of this subject for educational planning as well as for the professional success of teachers and healthcare professionals.

## Conclusion

In order to improve the professional education of graduate and postgraduate students in the health sciences, more interventions related to communication skills are required. The main contribution of the current study is the identification of the primary communication difficulties involved in oral presentations and conversations as well as the necessity of more interventions in this area. It has emphasised the need of being aware of the psychological and social issues that may affect students' ability to function in the workplace. It emphasises that the value of effective communication in the health profession influences not only an individual's professional achievement but also their ability to carry out everyday occupational tasks, their interaction with patients/clients, and other members of the work team. In this way, poor communication can affect how well people learn new things and get medical care. The convenience sample and non-standardized questionnaire used to gather information on the communication abilities of the participants in this study should be highlighted when discussing the study's shortcomings. More research is required to explain the argument for and value of developing communication activities, social skills curricula, and speech and voice training in higher education. It can assist students in recognising challenges that can impede their whole educational progress and in employing the proper coping mechanisms. The growth of this field of study also depends on the development of established and standardised instruments to assess these communication abilities.

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## Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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