The Impact of Psycho-Pedagogical Training on Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Communicative competence is a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Hence, communicative competence (self-assessment based on CCS - Communicative Competence Scale - Wiemann, J.M) becomes compulsory for students who will assist in further research on the subject. The present research is a comparative longitudinal study, performed on 40 engineering students (2 groups), studying Computer Science, Electronics and Telecommunications, in their first and third years who followed a psycho-pedagogical training program (30 ECTS), additional to the "must take" subjects and on 40 students (2 groups, studying at the same faculty) in their first and third years who did not follow this particular training program. The research aims at identifying the extent to which communicative competence modifies due to the Psycho-pedagogical training program and its impact on the engineering students.

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1. Introduction

The didactic process, understood as a teaching-learning-evaluation process that unfolds in a compulsory, organized, systemic and planned way, is by far a communication process between the teacher and the learner.

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Communication represents the main instructive and formative educational means and its quality goes hand in hand with the quality of the communication processes.

The concept of communicative competence may be interpreted from at least two perspectives:

- **Linguistically**: greatly based on the ability to communicate efficiently in a certain language;
- **Psycho-socially**: unveiling the ability of the members of a particular community to establish rapport with one another and manipulate their interlocutors so as to achieve their personal objectives.

The question to be posed is what communicative competence means after all? Communicative competence represents a construct hard to be made operational since it includes such aspects as behaviour, theoretical assumptions, context appropriacy or goal achievement. The conceptualization of communicative competence differs from one author to another according to literature reviews. Hence, for De Vito (1988, p. 6), communicative competence refers to „one’s own knowledge of various social communicative aspects”. For a better understanding of the concept, the author makes an useful comparison: we acquire communicative competence the same way we learn how to use the fork and the knife: looking at others, through explicitly given instructions, by trial and error etc. More conceptualizations of the communicative competence tackle the ability to display context appropriate communicative attitudes (Spitzberg,1987, p. 32). Hymens (et al. 1994, p. 175) argues that communicative competence is a set of skills, basic resources that a communicator is capable of use in communication; these resources include strategic knowledge (about adequate communication norms and rules) and skills (characteristics and abilities such as coding and decoding). According to Grigorovita (1995), communicative competences are closely linked to personal relationships, their knowledge in the field and awareness of interdependencies. Hence, communicative competence can be acquired and demonstrated in a given social context. In line with this assumption, the academic study programs may or may not provide students with sufficient contexts to develop communicative competences. Students, irrespective of their field of study, require teachers capable of developing such a competence and help them practice various communication ways in different real life contexts. So much so that researches reveal that communicative competence proves the students’ professional performance and success (Harvey, 1999). Regarding communicative abilities, the teacher’s mastery and talent depend on his/her capacity to „produce” an active interlocutor, versed in the „art of conversation” and capable of making conversation by himself/herself. It is not enough for the pupil/student to learn to speak nicely and accurately, to write correctly and coherently rather he/she must learn how to keep a conversation going, elaborate texts and arouse the interlocutor’s interest (Ezechil, 2002, p. 111). As a consequence, higher education systems must focus more on communicative competence and its contribution to the designing of the curriculum (syllabus, study program) as well as on the teaching-learning-evaluation process. Therefore, our research deals with communicative competence and its possible changes (throughout two academic years) in the case of students attending technical training programs in comparison with students also attending a psycho-pedagogical training program.

2. Methodology

Throughout the academic year 2011/2012 we administered the CCS questionnaire (Scale of Communication Competence Wiemann, 1977) that addresses the communicative competence analyzed by means of self-assessment. The target group was made of students in their first academic year, studying at the Faculty of AC, ETC and ET (Computer Science, Electronics and Telecommunications) from the University „Politehnica” of Timisoara. The CCS scale (Scale of Communication Competence Wiemann, 1977) includes various communicative aspects: listening, extraversion, beginning, understanding, effectiveness, flexibility and empathy and it was used to identify the students’ communicative competence through self-assessment. Some students opted and participated in the Psycho-pedagogical training program – Level I at the same time with their studies in the field. Their major studies are in line with a technical curriculum that, throughout the first two years, includes the study of Foreign Languages (1 year), Culture and Civilization (1 semester), Professional Communication (1 semester). The psycho-pedagogical training program consists of a curriculum that facilitates the development of the communicative competence essential for the students’ graduation process, teachers-to-be in pre-university education system. After 2 years, at the beginning of the third academic year, we administered the CCS once more to the same target group, so that we could select a total of 80 students, 40 students for each educational program. The gender classification is as follows: male 48 (60%), female 32 (40%), and for the two educational programs: 25 boys (31.25%)/technical, 23 boys (28.75%)/educational,
15 girls (18.75%)/technical, 17 girls (21.25%)/educational. Designed as a longitudinal study, we checked for possible significant differences in former communicative competence between the two target groups. By comparing the statistical means, (Mean 117.10, standard deviation 11.987 for the technical program and Mean 117.40 for standard deviation 11.558, respectively, for the educational training program), we have noticed an insignificant difference \((t=0.114\) insignificant for \(p=0.981)\). Hence, the research hypothesis was formulated based on the assumption that “there is a significant difference in communicative competence between students studying technical programs and students studying a psycho-pedagogical training program at the same time”.

3. Findings and Results

The research data were obtained by statistical means (SPSS18). The communicative competence was analyzed according to: differences of statistical means for paired samples (former and latter competence for the same target group) and differences of statistical means for independent samples (final competence for the target groups). For each technical training program, we calculated the t Test for the paired samples. A key observation is that communicative competence, regardless of the study program undertaken, takes time to develop, as shown by the significant statistical difference between former and final self-assessment for both study programs \((t=13.91\) significant, \(p=0.000\) for the technical study program and \(t=13.59\), significant \(p=0.000\) for the educational study program).

Table 1. Significant Mean differences in communicative competence for students attending both study programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>Mean/Average</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS1</td>
<td>117.10</td>
<td>11.987</td>
<td>(t=13.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS2</td>
<td>130.58</td>
<td>13.255</td>
<td>significantly, (p=0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS1</td>
<td>117.40</td>
<td>11.558</td>
<td>(t=13.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS2</td>
<td>143.93</td>
<td>12.727</td>
<td>significantly, (p=0.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One conclusion is that the technical program provides students with sufficient opportunities to develop their communicative competence in time. Moreover, the participants in the educational training program benefited, at the same time, from the technical study program. Therefore, we compared the statistical means for the two different samples (the two study programs) concerning the final communicative competence (CCS2). The t Test for independent samples \(t=4.59\) proves significant for \(p=0.001\), and thus we can infer that students who followed both programs achieved a higher level of performance of communicative competence. This is good news since the CCS scale (Scale of Communication Competence Wiemann, 1977) is made up of various aspects of communication: listening, extroversion, beginning, understanding, flexibility and empathy, prerequisites for the future teacher, graduate of the educational study program. With regard to teachers’ communicative competence, the literature reviews (Shaunessy, 2009; Cooper, 1997; Kearney, 1985; Bruschke, 1991) have emphasized the teacher’s ability to put across accurate messages, to listen to and give feedback. Yuksel-Sahin (2008) considers empathy, active listening, feedback and self-disclosure as efficient communication features within any educational context as all this leads to high satisfaction of the student-teacher relationship, trust and learning motivation.
Regarding the possible difference between the two genders in communicative competence the research has revealed no significant statistical differences. As far as the final communicative competence is concerned CCS2 for both study programs, a key observation is the statistical means that indicate high values for boys studying the technical program and high values for the girls studying the educational program. These values may imply that boys participating in technical program may benefit more from class communication (asking questions, swapping opinions, debating) and they are more engaged in communication than girls. Furthermore, active students prove a more developed communicative competence both inside and outside the classroom (Canary and MacGregor, 2008).

Table 2. Significant statistical means in communicative competence for both genders and study programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples test CC2</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Programe</td>
<td>Female (15)</td>
<td>129.33</td>
<td>15.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p=0.00</td>
<td>significantly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Programe</td>
<td>Female (17)</td>
<td>148.65</td>
<td>10.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Programe</td>
<td>Male (25)</td>
<td>131.32</td>
<td>11.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p=0.010</td>
<td>significantly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Programe</td>
<td>Male (23)</td>
<td>140.43</td>
<td>13.083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, significant differences have been obtained between the final communicative competence for boys in different study programs t= 2.677, significant for p= 0.010, as well as for girls t=4.089, significant for p=0.00, in favor of those who attended the educational study program. Hence, the educational study program seems to foster the communicative competence for both boys and girls.

4. Conclusions

The present research deems it fit to highlight the fact that the more a person is exposed to social situations, the higher the level of communicative competence. The development of this competence for students in the psychopedagogical training program (at the same time with the technical study program) is greatly and more successfully achieved than in the case of students who followed only the technical program (for both gender categories). The results are encouraging since a good communicative competence is vital for future teachers. Likewise, greater interest should be shown in designing the curriculum for the higher educational system, mainly in carrying out the didactic process so that communicative competence should be develop for both gender categories.
References


