

Communication with Parents Using Modern Communication Media: Attitudes of Future Preschool Teachers

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Abstract – The paper presents the results of a pilot study conducted on a sample of 91 students of undergraduate professional study of preschool education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences in Pula. The aim of the research was to establish their attitudes regarding the use of modern communication media in the communication with the parents of children enrolled in institutions of preschool education.

Keywords- communication, preschool teachers, parents, ICT, social networks.

1. Introduction

Communication is a fundamental life activity that meets the basic human needs for exchange of information, knowledge, experience and learning. As a basic model of social interaction, it allows people mutual understanding, co-ordination and co-operation of their activities [11]. It is a process without which it would not be possible to imagine the establishment of cooperation and contacts between people. The meaning of communication is the acquisition and articulation of knowledge and

only with acquired knowledge and skills based on scientific knowledge, it is possible to count on the expected success in every professional activity [11] and therefore in the communication of preschool teachers with the parents of children enrolled in institutions of preschool education.

„ One of the first social environments of a child, along with the family, is the preschool institution.

It is the social resource that should stimulate, encourage, assist and, if necessary, give guidance to parents in their upbringing efforts.“ [13].

Even though the education of children is primarily a parents concern, [15] it is very important to establish a quality relationship between preschool teachers and parents.

The word *communication* originates from the Latin word *communicare*, which means *to share, to communicate*. The literal meaning of the word communication is *to make something general or common* [14]. It represents the act of transferring information from one place to another. Human communication is unique because of its extensive use of the language [1].

While Pejić Bach and Murgić [12] state that communication is an activity consisting of the transfer of meaning by sharing a mutual system of signs or semiotic rules, Weick and Browning [19] define communication more simply – as the process of transferring messages from one person to another, where it is important to understand the information.

Communication is defined as the process of sharing information through an agreed system, usually through language. Communication is usually described with three main dimensions– content, form, and purpose. The content and the form of communication together create messages which are sent to the target, usually another person. Therefore, communication is an important process in the daily lives of people and their interactions [14]. Studies show that communication is the most important feature of our time and an essential condition for the development of all social processes [4]. Fox [8] states that messages consist of a series of symbols represented by words, gestures, images, sounds or

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movements which are usable as to people more or less agree on the objects, events and feelings to which these symbols relate. Furthermore, he states that people select information based on their needs and desires. The meanings which they derive from them are influenced by linking or integration with previous experience as well as with our needs and expectations.

Borg [3] defines verbal communication as a process of exchanging messages by speech or words. He argues that, in the process of communication, speech is used to present information about certain events or facts, to state our feelings, thoughts, attitudes or beliefs, to ask something or give instructions to others what to do. Speech also affects the behaviour of other interlocutors because conversation is the basic form of verbal communication and for verbal communication to be successful, we need at least two or more participants.

Public communication is the most important and most useful skill in human life [12]. By communicating, we transmit the message from one person to another, from the sender to the recipient of the message. „Man is the only living being able to communicate at a comprehensive level, by sharing information about the present, the past and the future, by stating feelings, and acquiring and developing knowledge based on the data he has collected, processed and systematized.“ [10]. Reardon [16] states that it is necessary to know the person we are communicating with, that is, to whom we send a message i.e., it is necessary to adapt it to the interlocutor. Knowledge of the situation also affects the formation of a message.

In the beginning, we communicated with words, smoke signals, drums, while in modern times we use innovative technologies, i.e. modern communication media like SMS, email or social networks. The Internet as a communication medium has become an indispensable factor of mutual communication. With the introduction of ICT, new forms of literacy have emerged that need to be learned and are generally described by the term information literacy. This is the so-called tertiary literacy and it includes the ability to use text messages, the Internet, computers [2]. Smartphones, tablets and all other devices which enable communication by voice using IP technology should be added. Many new communication channels have appeared on the market. The best known are Skype, Viber and WhatsApp, but there are also many applications and social networks (the line is very thin) that use the same technology.

According to the communication medium, we distinguish between traditional and digital communication. The traditional communication ceased with the development of digital and technological discoveries [7]. In the last few decades,

we have noticed significant changes in communication. The shift from the traditional media (newspapers, magazines, various prints, radio and even television) to the Internet has brought the educational community to the edge of change [12], [7]. The Internet as a communication channel is a supplement to the traditional communication with users and enables easier interaction. The possibilities of communicating through social media in education are numerous. Social networks offer numerous opportunities for developing relationships between preschool teachers and kindergarten parents. The availability of communication tools does not disclaim the liability arising from the possibility of abusing data on children in kindergartens. Therefore, strict privacy policies should be consistently applied and the confidentiality of information about the child and his parents must be respected. In other words, the growing use of new technologies, applications and platforms like social media creates new opportunities for preschool institutions, but also requires raising privacy and security measures (HIMSS – healthcare information and management system society) [12]. Therefore, the privacy and the security of data sharing cause a wide range of problems [17].

Communication is perhaps the most important and the most difficult activity that man can be engaged in. It is a sensitive membrane through which people can share thoughts, ideas, feelings, dreams and disappointments. Communication is the key component in mutual interaction [9].

Among other things, modern communication media include text messages, electronic mail and social networking. A few words about each of them.

SMS MESSAGES (*Short Message Service*) is a system that enables mobile phone users to send and receive text messages [21]. SMS messages can be sent or received during a call through a mobile phone. This is possible because SMS messages use the signalling channel while the conversation takes place over the data channel.

The SMS service first appeared in 1990 in some GSM networks and was intended for the very narrow needs of network security and control, as well as for some strictly business domains, i.e. areas. Because of the complex usage and unpreparedness of most devices for the SMS service, it was initially considered that this new form of communication would not be massively used. Moreover, at the very beginning, the SMS service was free. The fact that 192.192 SMS messages are sent every second worldwide may help us understand how much the use of that communication channel has increased [22].

ELECTRONIC MAIL (*e-mail*) is the transmission of messages through communication networks, both textual and non-textual documents,

which were previously adjusted to the requirements of sending.

Messages are transmitted between two computers. Messaging is also possible through mobile phone devices or similar that are interconnected by a computer. Message contents are sent in digital form, most often as a text to which an attachment can be added. In this way, the electronic mail has a significant impact on business, scientific and personal communication [5].

Each message is precisely formatted, i.e. the form how an e-mail message must look like is defined. The message can be sent to one or more recipients at once, i.e. simultaneously. For this reason, the electronic mail is a very effective, very useful and powerful communication tool. It is used in communicating with partners in arranging business meetings, sending letters, information, documents, notices.

Communicating via e-mail, i.e. sending and receiving e-mails is provided by Internet services, the so-called *webmail*. These are network sites that allow registered users to send, receive and store mail, and they are accessed through a network browser from any computer in the world. [5]. The largest such Internet services are *Hotmail*, *Gmail*.

It should be noted that there is a great disadvantage or a bad side of the e-mail. Namely, along with many useful notices and messages, we often find the so-called *spam* or *junk mail* – it is a useless post, mostly promotional material that may contain dangerous contents. With the electronic mail, there is also a risk of computer viruses and similar contents that can cause great damage.

SOCIAL NETWORKS are the most popular global communication phenomenon because man is a social being and because he is interested in and attracted by social communication [6]. It is a service that connects people and allows them to share information, images, files and to chat with the members of a network. It can be in the form of a website or a portal. In order to use a social network, every person is required to register.

The first forms of social networks appeared in the 90s of the last century. In that, they have assumed an important role in the life of man and are an integral part of our lives.

There are numerous Internet services today and among them, the best known are *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and *Instagram*. The most famous business social network is *LinkedIn*.

Facebook is one of the most popular social networks and from the very beginning, it attracts more and more users. The users of this social network publish their photos every day and share their experiences and memories with their Facebook friends. How enormous the popularity of this social network is, it is best illustrated by the fact that this social network has over two billion active users around the world today.

Twitter is a social network used for publishing micro-blogging, that is, short messages that we call *tweets*. It provides its users with a lot of different features, so its great popularity is not surprising. The data indicate that this social network has currently around 350 million active users.

You Tube is a popular social network used for exchanging videos. Users can post their own original creations, but also works of others for which they have permission of the owner. Posting pornographic content, violence, content that supports criminal activities, content with the intention of disgrace, defamation, and inappropriate advertising is forbidden. Studies show that this social network is visited by about 20 million users a month.

Instagram is a social network for fast and free sharing of personal photos and short videos via mobile phones (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone) on social networks including Facebook, Twitter and other networks. This interesting application allows you to process your photos with different, special effects. It is estimated that this social network has about 400 million active users.

2. Research

The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of students of preschool education studies *on the use of modern communication media in communication with the parents of children enrolled in institutions of preschool education*.

From the so-defined goal, the following **questions** arose:

- Will future preschool teachers use modern communication media (SMS, electronic mail, social networks) in communication with parents?
- Will future preschool teachers have data on the parents of their kindergarten children on their friends list?
- Will future preschool teachers open a separate profile for communication with parents only?
- Will future preschool teachers be available to parents for communication through modern media (via SMS messaging, electronic mail or social networks)?

- To examine the attitude of future preschool teachers on whether the communication with parents is still better in person than using modern media.

With regard to the aim and the questions, the following **research hypotheses** have been set:

H₁: *It is most acceptable to communicate with parents using modern communication media (SMS messaging, electronic mail, social networks).*

H₂: *Preschool teachers will have data on the parents of their kindergarten children on their friends list.*

H₃: *It is useful to have a separate profile on a social network for communication with parents only.*

H₄: *Preschool teachers will be available to parents for communication through modern media (via SMS messaging, electronic mail or social networks).*

H₅: *Communicating with parents is still better in person than using modern media.*

For data collecting, a **measuring instrument** was used in the form of a questionnaire, designed for the purpose of this research. It consisted of two independent variables (*gender and study year*) and seven dependent variables based on the Likert type assessment scale, where respondents should opt for one of the answers (1 = I fully agree to 5 = I fully disagree).

3. Results and discussion

The population that could potentially be questioned in this research is very broad and includes all students of preschool education studies at all faculties in the Republic of Croatia where preschool education studies are organized. **The sample** of the pilot study consisted of 91 students which enrolled in the preschool education study program at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Juraj Dobrila University in Pula.

With regard to gender, all participants in the study were females. So, in the sample, we had 91 female students of the preschool education study program. Therefore, the processing of data will not – since it is not possible - consider the independent gender variable.

The structure of the respondents with regard to the year of study: first year 41.7%, second year 27.5%, third year 30.8%.

We asked the participants in the research to answer whether the preschool education studies were their first choice or they enrolled in this study programme because they had failed to enrol another, more preferred study. For the vast majority of the respondents (81.3%) the preschool education studies were the first choice and for 18.7% of them they were not the first choice.

The consideration of the data (obtained in the research) and the results (obtained by processing these data) were directed towards the aim of this research, which was to verify the phenomenon of using modern communication media in the communication with parents of children of kindergarten (preschool) age based on opinions and attitudes of the students of preschool education studies.

The first statement given to the participants in the research to state their opinion about was: *When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using SMS-messages.* Only 2.2% of respondents fully agreed with this statement, 13.2% agreed with it. The vast majority of the research participants, almost a half of them (48.4%) could not state their opinion about this statement, while 36.2% mostly disagreed (13.1%) and (23.1%) fully disagreed with the statement.

The next statement which the participants had to state the opinion on was: *When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using electronic mail.* 30.8% of the research participant fully disagreed with this statement (18.7%) or mostly disagreed with it (12.1%). Almost a quarter of respondents or 23.0% of them fully agree (5.5%) or mostly agree (17.5%) with the statement. A large number of research participants (46.2%) could not state their opinion about this statement as well.

When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using social networks was the next statement about which the respondents were to state their opinion. Only 6.6% of the respondents fully agreed with the statement (3.3%) i.e. – as many of them mostly agree with it. As many as 41.7% of the research participants could not state their opinion about this statement, while over half of them (51.7%) mostly disagree (8.8%) or even fully disagree (42.9%) with the statement.

These three statements were the basis for setting the **H₁** hypothesis. Given the results obtained and presented here, it can be stated that the set hypothesis: *The most acceptable way to communicate with parents is through modern media (by SMS messages, electronic mail, social networks)* **was not confirmed.**

The statement *Future preschool teachers will have information about the parents of their kindergarten children on the social network friends list* – was the next statement which the research participants states their opinion about. Just over a third of respondents (34.1%) could not state their opinion about the statement. Almost two-thirds of them (62.6%) mostly disagreed (5.5%) or fully disagreed (57.1%) with the statement. Only a small number of the research participants – 3.3% of them –

fully agreed (2.2%) or mostly agreed (1.1%) with the statement. The results obtained show that the set hypothesis (H_2): *Preschool teachers will have information about the parents of their kindergarten children on the social network friends list* **was not confirmed**.

Regarding the statement *I will open a separate profile for communication only with the parents of their kindergarten children*, as many as 63.7% of the research participants fully disagreed (57.1%) or mostly disagreed (6.6%) with the statement. For this statement as well, there was an insignificant number of respondents – 4.4% of them – who fully agreed (2.2%) and – just as much – who mostly disagreed with the statement. There were 34.1% respondents who could not state their opinion about the statement. The results obtained and presented indicate that the set hypothesis (H_3): *It is useful to open a separate profile in a social network for communication only with the parents of kindergarten children* **was not confirmed**.

The penultimate statement which the research participants stated their opinion about was: *Future preschool teachers will always be available to parents of their kindergarten children through modern communication media* (by SMS messages, electronic mail, social networks). Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63.8%) expressed a positive opinion about the statement: 37.4% respondents fully agreed and 26.4% of them mostly agreed with the statement. 18.7% research participants could not state their opinion about this statement and 17.5% of them mostly disagreed (14.3%) i.e. fully disagreed (3.2%) with the statement. The obtained results enable us to **accept the hypothesis (H_4): *Preschool teachers will be available to parents for communication through modern communication media*** (by SMS messages, electronic mail, social networks).

The last statement which the research participants were to state their opinion about was: *However, the communication with parents of kindergarten children is better in person than by using modern communication media*. As much as 96.7% respondents stated their attitude that communicating

with parents of kindergarten children was better in person than by using modern media: 89.0% respondents fully agreed and 7.7% of them mostly agreed with the statement. Only 1.1% of research participants could not state their opinion about this statement and 2.2% mostly disagreed with the statement. None of the respondents fully disagreed with the statement. The results obtained and presented enable us to **accept** the set hypothesis (H_5): *However, the communication with parents of kindergarten children is better in person than by using modern communication media*.

The descriptive indicators, the correlation matrix, the nonparametric estimation and the *F*-Ratio with respect to the independent variable *the year of study* are shown in Table 1.

The correlation matrix shows that five correlations are significant at the level .05, nine of them are significant at the level .01, and the remaining seven correlation coefficients are not statistically significant. The negative correlation was established with five statement pairs. Furthermore, it is evident that two particles (the first) *Future preschool teachers will always be available to parents of their kindergarten children through modern communication media* ($\bar{X} = 2.20$) and (the second) *However, the communication with parents of kindergarten children is better in person than by using modern communication media* ($\bar{X} = 1.16$) are in the acceptance zone; as opposed to the remaining five: *When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using* (1) *SMS-messages*, (2) *electronic mail*, (3) *social networks*, and *Future preschool teachers* (4) *will have information about the parents of their kindergarten children on the social network friends list* and (5) *will open a separate profile for communication only with the parents of their kindergarten children* which are in the negation zone.

All nonparametric estimations are higher than the limit value in the χ^2 (Chi-square) distribution with 90 degrees of freedom at 5% significance level.

Table 1. Descriptive indicators, correlations of variables, nonparametric estimations and F-Ratios (according to the independent variable the year of study)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1.	1	.323**	.504**	.360**	.239*	.226*	– .063
2.		1	.489**	.227*	.410**	.238*	– .131
3.			1	.489**	.558**	.248*	– .140
4.				1	.385**	.144	– .194
5.					1	.307**	– .135
6.						1	.070
7.							1
\bar{X}	3.42	3.21	3.85	4.14	4.14	2.20	1.16
σ	1.055	1.111	1.125	1.071	1.081	1.185	.543
χ^2	55.648 ^a	43.890 ^a	76.418 ^a	112.022 ^a	106.198 ^a	29.824 ^a	199.769 ^b
F	1.018	2.155	2.296	.691	5.154	3.755	.239
(Sig.)	(.366)	(.122)	(.107)	(.504)	(.008)	(.027)	(.788)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Description: **1.** When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using SMS-messages. **2.** When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using electronic mail. **3.** When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using social networks. **4.** Future preschool teachers will have information about the parents of their kindergarten children on the social network friends list. **5.** I will open a separate profile for communication only with the parents of my kindergarten children. **6.** Future preschool teachers will always be available to parents of their kindergarten children through modern communication media. **7.** However, the communication with parents of kindergarten children is better in person than by using modern communication media.

a. cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 18.2

b. cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 22.8

Table 1. also shows the F-values regarding the independent variable *year of study*. It can be noted that the F-values for the statement: *When I finish my studies and get employed, I will communicate with parents using social networks* (2.296), the statement: *I will open a separate profile for communication only with the parents of my kindergarten children* (5.154) and for the statement: *Future preschool teachers will always be available to parents of their kindergarten children through modern communication media* (3.755) are higher than the limit value $F = 2.25$ at the significance level .05 with 6/84 degrees of freedom. The variance analysis has shown that there were statistically significant differences in respondents'

responses with regard to the independent variable *year of study*. The other F-values are less than the limit, so the responses of the research participants by the observed independent variable are not statistically significant.

Table 1. also shows the values of seven arithmetic means. By using the variance analysis, we examined whether there are statistically significant differences between these seven arithmetic means. Table 2. shows *the sum of squares between groups* (671.41), *the sum of squares of variability within groups* (686.26), and *sum of squares for the total* (1357.67). The F-ratio, which is $F = 13.70$ is also shown.

Table 2. Values of the variation analysis

Variation source	Degrees of freedom (df)	Sum of squares between groups (SS)	Average sum of squares (MS)
Between groups	6	671.41	111.90
Within groups	84	686.26	8.17
Total	90	1 357.67	
$F = \frac{111.90}{8.17} \approx 13.70$.			

The limit value in the *F*- distribution at the .05 level of significance with 6/84 degrees of freedom is 2.25. Since our *F*-ratio (13.70) is higher than the limit value, it means that it is statistically significant. Therefore, in order to determine the significance of differences of arithmetic means, we calculated the critical difference, and it is *C.D.* = 1.12. Twelve (12)

differences of arithmetic means (there are 21 differences) do not reach the critical difference, which means that they are not statistically significant, whereas 9 differences – see Table 3. – reach the critical difference, so these differences of arithmetic means are statistically significant.

Table 3. Differences of arithmetic means reaching the critical difference (according to the absolute value)

1 – 6 = 1.22	2 – 7 = 2.05	3 – 6 = 1.65	4 – 6 = 1.94	5 – 6 = 1.94
1 – 7 = 2.26		3 – 7 = 2.69	4 – 7 = 2.98	5 – 7 = 2.98
Note: Image 1 – 6 = 1.22 is the first arithmetic mean (3.42) minus (–) sixth arithmetic mean (2.20) = 1.22; etc.				

5. Conclusions

Communication is an integral part of man's everyday life. Already in 1978 Watzlawick P., Beavin J. H. & Jackson D. D. [20] set the thesis that it is not possible not to communicate. Every interaction with one or more people is an act of communication. Communication is always two-way. From that, we can exclude the mass communication using old (e.g. newspapers and television) and new (computer) media where communication is one-way. The computer, along with smart phones, tablets and other smart devices connected to the Internet, was just what enabled instant and direct communication through new communication channels. According to the still actual theory of Shannon C. E. and Weaver W. [18], communication is the transmission of messages from sender to recipient through channels and codes understood by all communication participants. Modern communication media have innovated the channel and the code. They offer many possibilities, but they also involve a large number of risks. In everyday communication, the modern communication media are widely used and they are also present in the communication of preschool teachers with the parents of children of preschool age. This inevitable and very significant form of communication can be useful for the preschool teacher and parents. However, along with the unquestionable advantages of modern communication media, we must also be aware of the dangers that this form of communication brings. These dangers - to a certain extent – may be removed by the proper use of modern communication media. To discuss about communication in any domain (area) without using modern communication media,

including the communication between preschool teachers with parents of kindergarten children, is no longer possible. It is inevitable to use these modern tools and channels in communication with parents, still, the question is to what extent. The aim of this study was to contribute to understanding how new generations of preschool teachers will behave regarding the use of modern media of communication.

The conducted research has shown that most future preschool teachers have no intention of using modern media for communicating with parents, even though they are aware of the parents' needs, therefore, they will use certain media in order to be available. Two-thirds of future preschool teachers do not want to have parents on their social network friends list. This suggests that they have clearly defined boundaries between professional and private life. Most respondents do not consider it useful to open a special social network profile for communication with parents only. This can be interpreted in a way that most respondents perceive social networks as part of their private life. Although they expressed a negative opinion about certain media, when it comes to availability, nearly two-thirds of the respondents will always be available to parents of their kindergarten children for communication through modern communication media. Almost all future preschool teachers agreed that direct communication is better than indirect communication through modern media. Finally, we can conclude that our respondents, future preschool teachers, are aware of the need to be always available to parents of their kindergarten children for communication using modern communication media, but also of the fact that modern technology cannot replace “personal” communication.

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