

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN TECHNOLOGICAL HIGH SCHOOL 9TH GRADE

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to evaluate the decisive contribution of educational classes to the development of communication skills, socialization and ethical relationships, as well as to the choice of the future profession according to each student's strengths and limitations. This scientific approach is therefore useful to a wide range of beneficiaries. Students are led step by step to overcome their limits, to self-discover and choose their future profession according to their moral and psychological profile, teachers have the opportunity to self-evaluate and discover useful strategies to develop their students' transversal skills, and parents learn to communicate with their children and guide them correctly in life. We highlighted the importance of communication in all key areas of daily life, starting with education and continuing with social life, family life and work life. As research methods we used observation and a questionnaire applied to teachers and students, as well as interviews with 9th grade students. On the basis of the observation sheet we were able to follow the students' progress in terms of communication skills, but also in terms of empathy, socialization and increasing tolerance towards others.

Keywords: communication skills, interpersonal skills, relationship skills, students, career decisions;

INTRODUCTION

Today, communication is the foundation of socialization and the agent of each person's successful integration into a society/group. The act of teaching is based on communication, and relationships between people of the same age and social status, as well as between people of different ages and different social roles, start with communication. (Abric, 2022, p.14)

1. CONTEXT AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The subject is topical and of particular importance for the reasons listed above; in addition, choosing the ninth grade takes into account the fact that this stage in the life of a teenager is important because it brings about the transition from secondary school to high school and the intense preparation for taking on the responsibilities that characterize adult life. (Enache, 2019 A, p.80). The teacher has a great responsibility in the formation of communication skills, career guidance and orientation in life. (Bolota, 2019, p.43)

The educational interaction within the collective has improved, and many students have realistic career options that correlate with their communication skills, acquired or emerging vocational skills, and interpersonal skills, beginning in 9th grade.

The use of effective cross-curricular skills development strategies has led to increased tolerance and empathy among student groups and the voluntary offering of peer help whenever necessary. (Enache, 2019 B, p.20)

2. METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

Because in any teaching activity the teacher-student tandem is involved, the questionnaires with the nine questions were addressed to both students and teachers, many of the questions being shared in order to obtain an objective overview of the quality of communication in the institution where the research was carried out, but also of the importance that the social actors involved in the teaching process attach to communication and relationships. The research instruments are: student questionnaire, teacher questionnaire and individual interview with three students. All 53 parents consented to the students answering the questions and the parents of the 3 students selected for the interview also gave their consent for their sons/daughters to answer both the questionnaire and interview questions.

The research objectives are: To raise awareness of the importance of communication among students, teachers and form masters; To measure the coefficient of the importance of communication in high school relationships between students, teachers-students and teachers; To provide guidance to form masters at the beginning of their careers in developing communication and interpersonal skills at the beginning of high school.

General Hypothesis - If, as part of the educational class the teacher is concerned with the development of cross-curricular skills, especially communication and interpersonal skills, then educational interaction will improve and students will have realistic career options and make career decisions that are in line with their potential in the area of communication and interpersonal skills (cooperation, empathy, tolerance).

Derived Hypothesis - If the form master frequently uses effective strategies to develop cross-curricular skills, then students will be more tolerant and empathetic and willing to help those who need it and ask for help in return; these are the prerequisites for a better society that can be built in school.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

From the form masters' perspective, the relationship skills that they use most in their educational classes are: teamwork (42), helping out (11) and projects (10). The strategy applied by the form master has achieved its goal, as it has provided students with relationship skills that improve the atmosphere within the group, such as increased cooperation, helping out and tolerance. Form teachers' choices have also proved to be very effective because they allow students to self-evaluate objectively. The rankings obtained from the centralization of the form masters' answers correspond completely to those obtained from the students' answers, which shows the following aspects: the form masters answered the questions with the utmost sincerity, the students were helped to develop their communication and interpersonal skills, the class is a close-knit group and the atmosphere in the educational classes is constructive.

The research results verified the hypothesis and the students' progress in personal development, especially in communication and interpersonal skills. The corroboration of the answers to the students' and teachers' questions identified the following weaknesses in the development of communication and interpersonal skills in 9th B and 9th C, the two classes at Lazăr Edeleanu Technological High School in Ploiesti: The present research found strengths in the development of communication and interpersonal skills in 9th B and 9th C at Lazăr Edeleanu Technological High School Ploiesti: 1. The ongoing development of communication and interpersonal skills in the educational classes; 2. The insistence of form masters to generate contexts conducive to open expression, to manifest the students' creative force and critical thinking. The opportunity that derives from this strength lies in the fact that students will have the ability to discuss any topic with diplomacy and discernment.

The theme of this paper is topical and significant, as one of the fundamental roles of schools is to prepare for the labor market and society young people who are professionally competent, empathetic, tolerant and able to communicate orally and in writing with their managers, co-workers, family members, members of society and beneficiaries of their work.

In the paper Development of Communication Skills and Interpersonal Relationships in the 9th Grade, the theoretical part of the study, based on works on communication and teaching activity in the present age, is complemented by the personal experiences from my teaching activity as a teacher and as a form master.

The paper aims to assess the decisive contribution of educational classes on developing communication skills, socialization and ethical relationships, and the choice of the future profession according to each student's strengths and limitations.

This scientific approach is thus valuable for a wide range of beneficiaries. Pupils are led step by step to overcome their limits, learn about themselves and choose their future profession according to their moral and psychological profile, teachers have the opportunity to self-evaluate and discover valuable strategies for developing their pupils' transversal skills, and parents learn to communicate with their children and guide them correctly in life.

While the first chapter aims to highlight the importance of communication in all important areas of everyday life, starting with education and continuing with social life, family life and work life, the second chapter focuses on research, the research tools used being: observation and questionnaire of teachers and students, and interviews with 9th-grade students.

Based on the observation card, we have been able to follow the students' progress in terms of communication skills and also in terms of empathy, socialization and tolerance towards others.

The first part of the paper highlights the need for students to have role models in school, family, street and media, and the research demonstrates the positive role of these role models in shaping the personal development of lower secondary students.

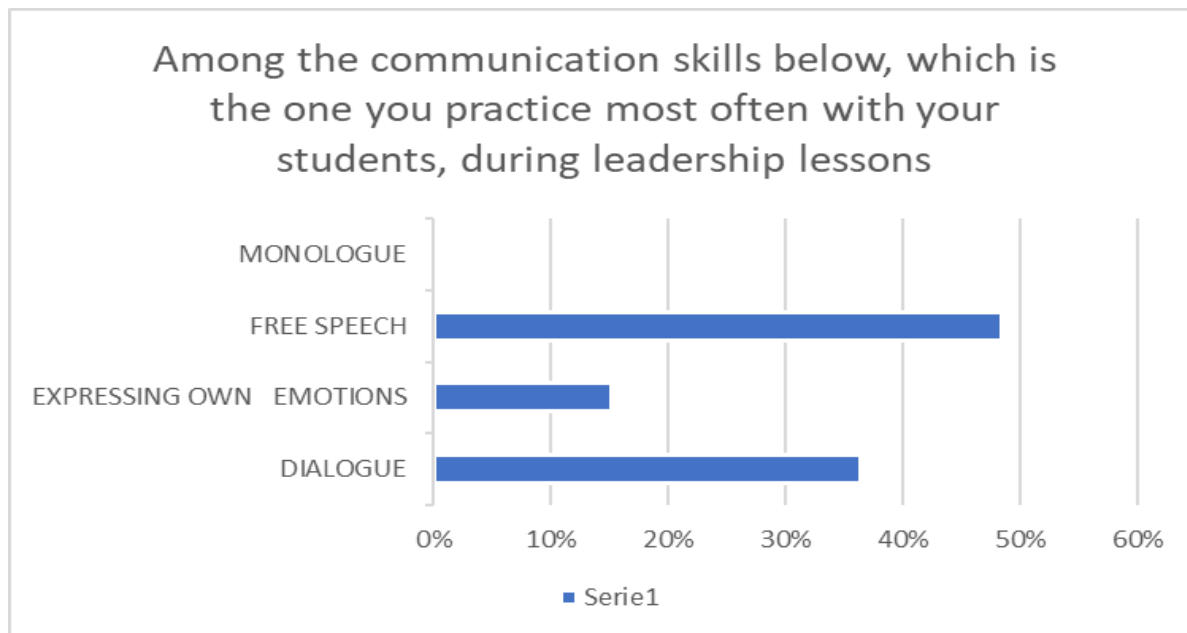


Figure no. 1. Diagram of the communication skills shown most often by form masters in educational classes

It can be seen from the answers of the teachers participating in the research that there is greater freedom of expression in the educational classes, as almost half of the respondents chose the option of initiating contexts that encourage students to express themselves freely. It is essential to develop this skill in pupils.

No form master has chosen the didactic monologue because classroom discussion is no longer monopolized by the adult, but students are stimulated to communicate through different effective strategies.

It can be seen that the lessons meet the needs of the students and no longer run like the lessons of the past, when the head teacher imposed their authority by lecturing the students for 40 minutes, writing the grades in the students' report cards or adding an extra hour of Romanian, mathematics or chemistry (the subject the form master taught) to the students' timetable.

Fewer teachers have chosen to express their emotions because often, when teachers express their feelings openly, they become vulnerable in front of their students, and their students may become vulnerable in front of those to whom they listen.

In conclusion, there is an agreement between the answers given to the previous question and the answers given to this item.

The competence most strongly manifested in the teaching communication process in the teachers who responded to the questionnaire questions.

Note: After centralizing all the responses, helping/encouraging comes out on top as the most preferred communication skill in the teachers' view, followed by: explaining and expressing feelings freely.

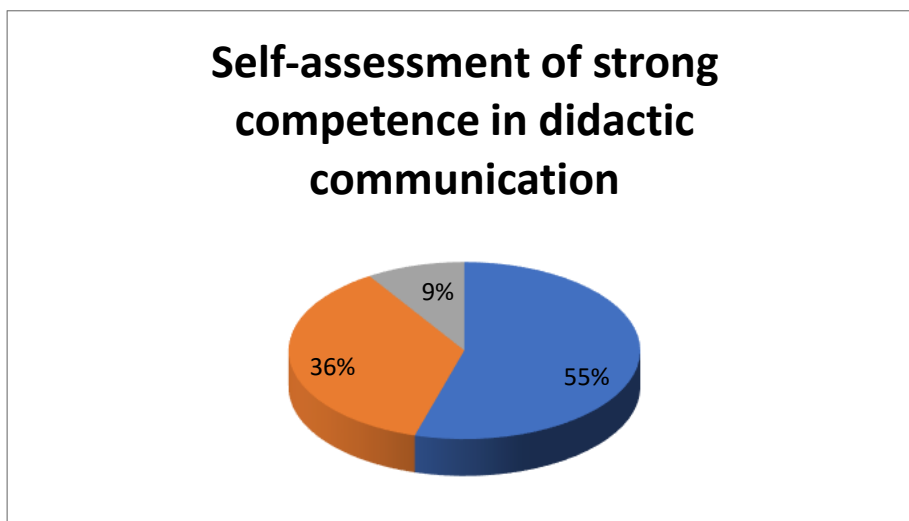


Figure no. 2. Diagram of the communication skills frequently and strongly expressed by the teachers who responded to the questionnaire questions

The high number of respondents who chose to offer help/encouragement (55%) to students demonstrates the teacher’s concern that the new scientific or life knowledge they impart is understood by students and applied in practice to solve problems. Teachers also encourage students to propose original solutions.

A minority of teachers have chosen the expression of feelings (9%) because this manifestation in didactic communication would often represent a departure from the topic under discussion. For example, a literature teacher must be impartial in teaching all writers, works and literary trends without insisting on the lessons that they like best.

Item 8: interpersonal skills frequently demonstrated during the lessons.

Note: *Teamwork* is the preferred relationship skill for form masters for their students, used in counselling and personal development classes, followed by support/help and volunteering.

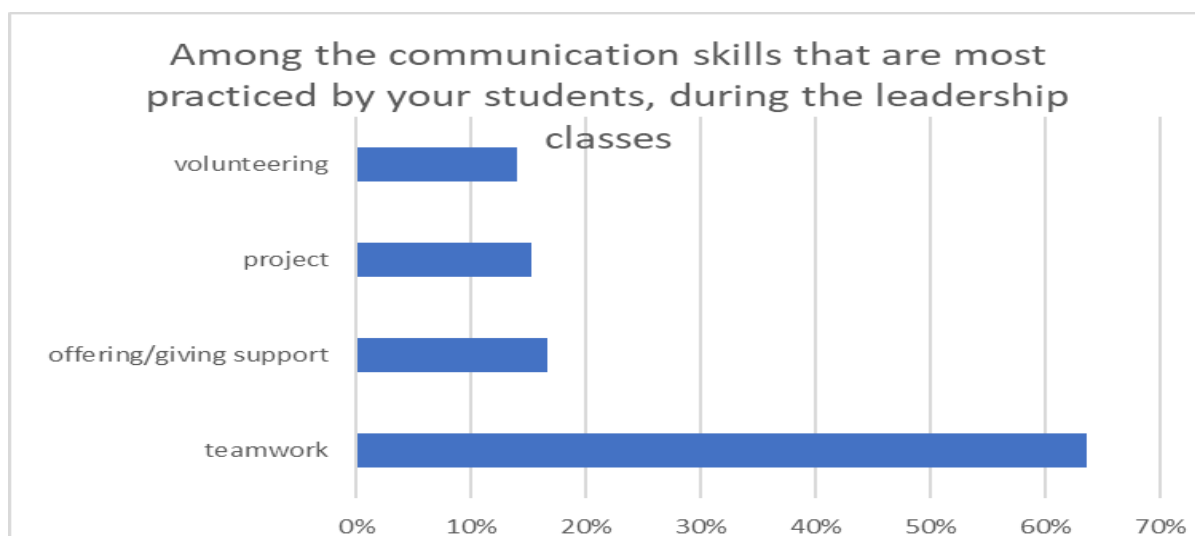


Figure no. 3. Diagram of the interpersonal skills practiced by the form masters during educational lessons

A total of 42 form masters have chosen teamwork because it is based on the cooperation that is the basis of any collective, and when it goes well, it is a guarantee of success. It is essential to supervise students during teamwork so that each one carries out a task.

The number of students who have chosen to offer help or support is lower (11) because teenagers are free to act independently and organize themselves. Few respondents chose “volunteering” because this skill involves allocating material resources and time. This explains the low percentage of teachers who have chosen “volunteering”.

Although it is a form of altruism, it involves moving around and collecting materials such as food for the underprivileged or seedlings to be planted, sometimes also special protective equipment, as in the case of greening actions.

Item 9: the relationship component manifested frequently by the teachers participating in the research.

Observation: Cooperation was the relationship component considered the strength of most teachers, followed by empathy, tolerance and helpfulness.

Most teachers cooperate to practice their profession, both with colleagues and students for exceptional results. A total of 28 teachers mentioned cooperation as frequent in and out of the school because the teaching profession continues in teachers’ homes and in their free time.

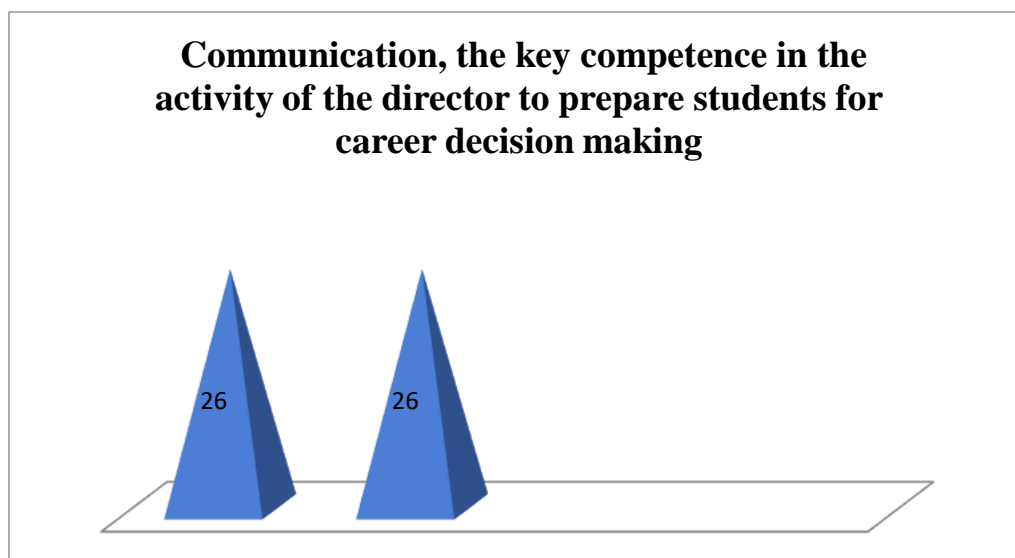


Figure no. 4. Communication is the key priority competence in the form master’s work to prepare students to make career decisions in the view of both categories of subjects

What skills do you think the head teacher should emphasize in order to help you make a career decision - choose only one option

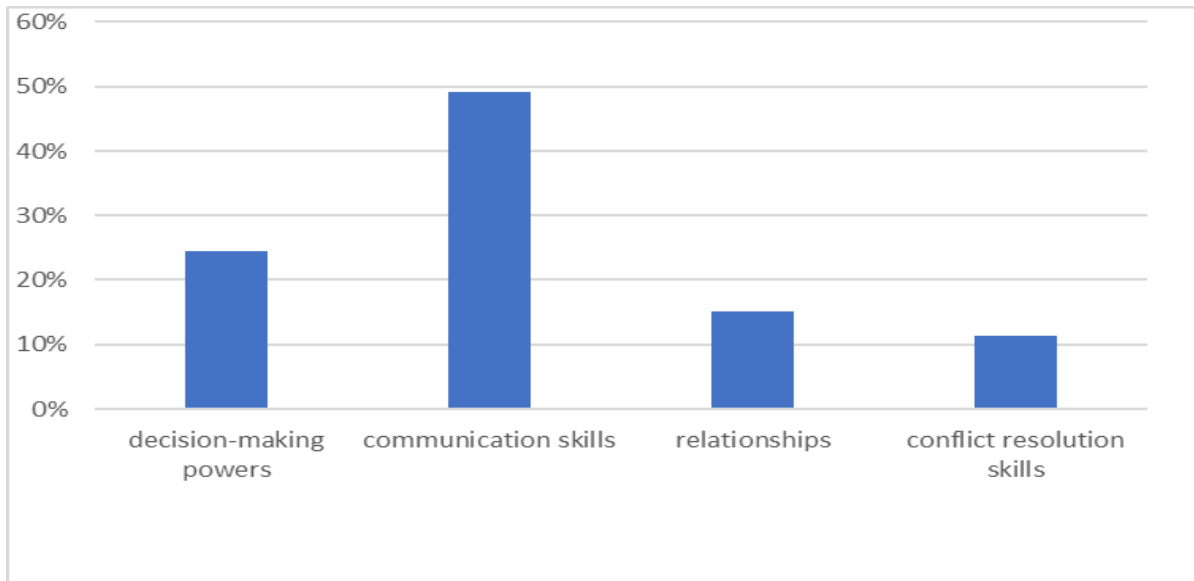


Figure no. 5. Diagram of priority key competencies in the work of the form masters to prepare students to make career decisions in the students' view

The coincidence of teacher-student responses to this item demonstrates the quality of the educational act that made students aware of the importance of communication and relationships in choosing a future profession and the maturity of the lower secondary school students' thinking.

Item 2: the competency rated as a priority in the future career by the students who answered the questionnaire questions.

Note: The ranking of students' responses places the following skills in order: communication, interpersonal, technical and technological skills and conflict resolution, according to the percentages shown in the chart. This item also shows that the teachers' vision coincides with the vision of the students they train, and the centralised results show that there is a common vision and that the counselling and professional development classes are achieving their aim.



Figure no. 6. Diagram of the main competencies in the future career of students in the view of the teachers who answered the questionnaire

A total of 26 students were trained to give communication skills the importance they have in social life, as these skills are also the keys to relating and resolving conflicts and working for a living. A parallel analysis of the teachers' responses shows that the number of teachers who chose communication as a priority competence in their pupils' future professional communication is higher than the number of pupils who ticked the same answer.

We consider that six students chose conflict resolution, given their conflictual or, on the contrary, pacifist nature and the need for a relaxed climate in which to work.

Students who live in a continuous conflict atmosphere at home consider the ability to settle/resolve conflicts as a priority, as well as those marked by conflicts in the community, and on the street.

30 teachers consider communication skills to be a priority in their students' future careers, and 26 students chose the same answer, showing that they understand that communication is at the heart of all activities.

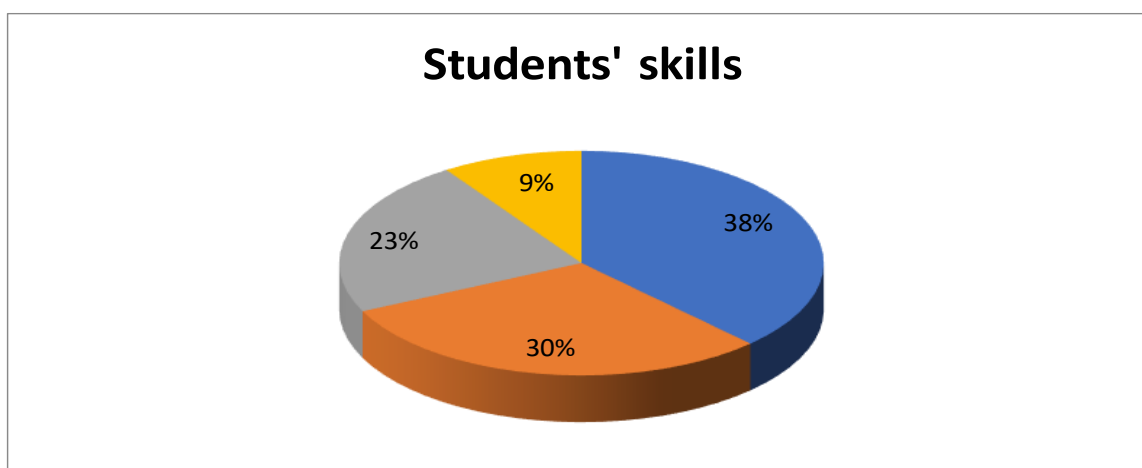


Figure no. 7. Chart of the strong competencies of the students who answered the questions, in their view

Students know how to evaluate themselves objectively. Knowing many of the respondents, we found that they answered the question correctly, accurately indicating the strong competence they possess.

20 students (41%) chose communication because they can communicate expressively and easily on any topic and can follow the rules of polite dialogue. The five pupils (2%) who indicated technical and technological skills as their strength are very good at their chosen jobs and do not excel in communication.

Some of them are introverted because they come from underprivileged families, but they are well oriented, knowing that they will need a job to support themselves, so they are active in their specialist subjects and practical classes.

33 teachers gave the same answer, considering their communication skills their strength. It is important that both categories of respondents indicated the same response and that they identified the importance of communication in educational work.

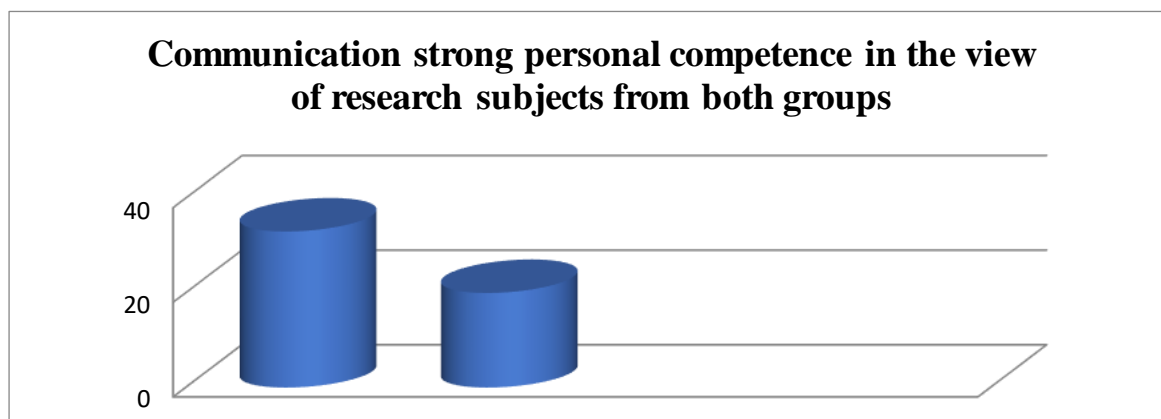


Figure no. 8. Chart of the strong personal competence that tops the responses to this item

Item 5: the most developed communication skill that students have.

Remark: in the close-ended test question on the most developed competence that students consider they possess, there were no contradictions between the previous answers (those of question 4, an open-ended question), the results being identical.

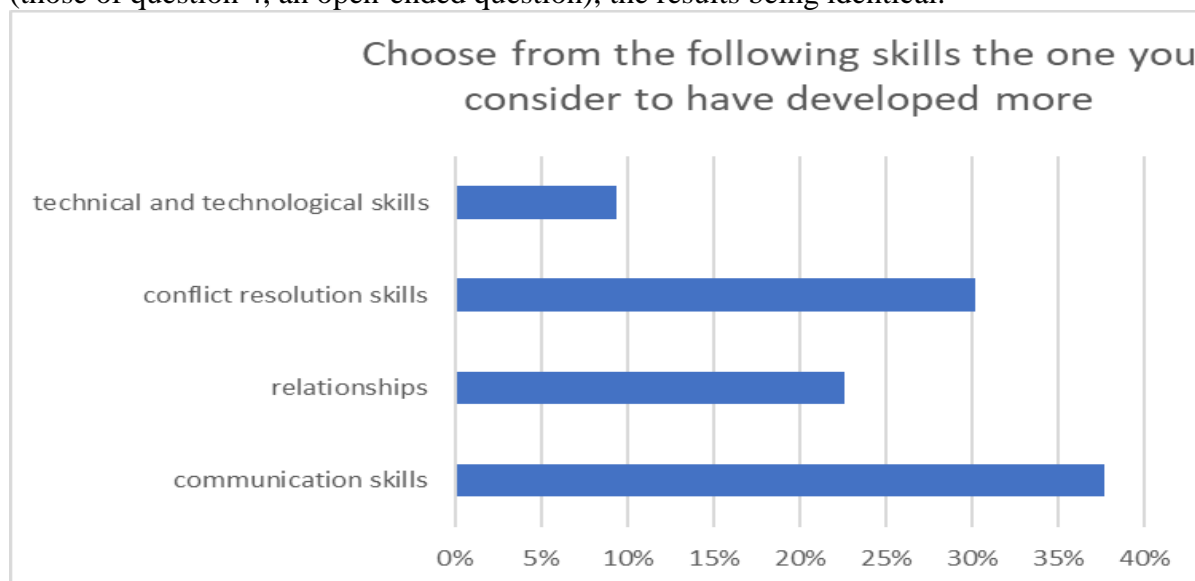


Figure no. 9. Diagram of the most developed skills that students feel they possess

The students were consistent, keeping the answers they had given earlier to the question that partially reiterates item 4. Communication is slightly decreasing. If in item 4, 41% considered it their strong point, in item number 5, 37.7% consider it as their most developed skill. Conflict resolution skills are also down by 2.8%. All percentages moved to technical and technological skills, which are up by 7.4%.

This shows that although many respondents consider communication their strong point, some of them choose technical and technological skills as their most developed.

However, comparing both communication skills and technical skills results, it appears that more emphasis was placed on developing communication skills.

37 teachers chose dialogue as a strong communication skill, and the response demonstrates the emphasis on students being involved in preparing them for the future.

Item 6: Evaluation of the strong competence exercised by the form master in communicating with students, as per their students.

As can be seen, *dialogue* is the strong point of the form master’s communication with their students, followed by the *initiation of contexts conducive to freedom* and the *expression of one’s own emotions*, with *monologue* coming last in the ranking compiled after centralizing the students’ responses.

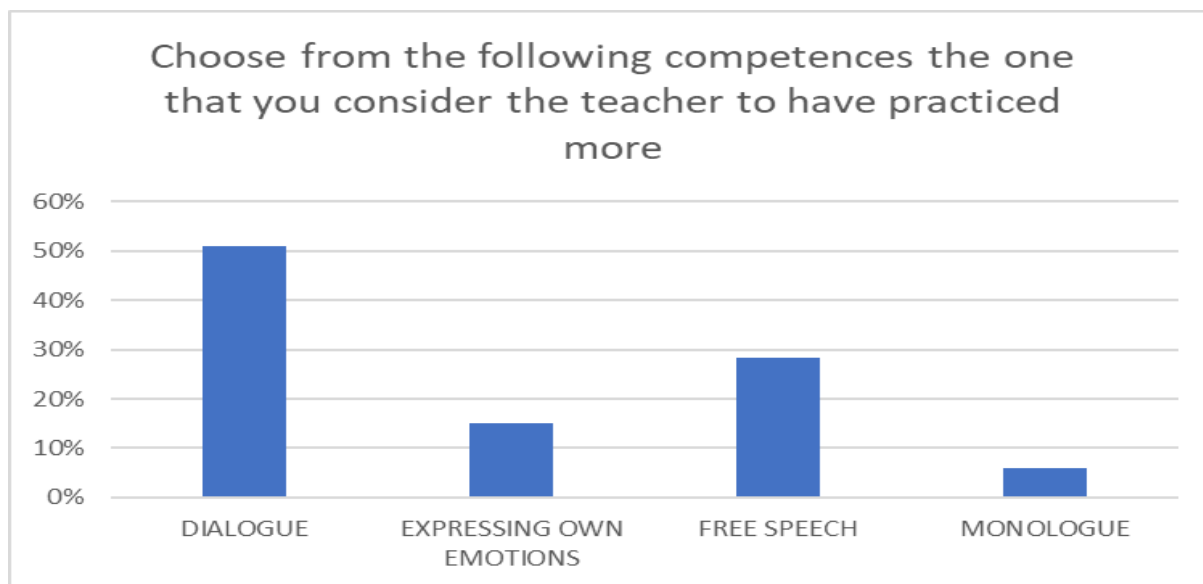


Figure no. 10. Diagram of communication skills frequently used by the form master in the view of their students

In our opinion, the fact that 27 students who responded to the questionnaire indicated dialogue as the communication skill frequently used by the form master in the classroom shows that the form master wants to develop their students’ communication skills and does not monopolize communication.

From the form masters’ perspective, the relationship skills that they use most in their leadership classes were: teamwork (42), helping out (11) and projects (10). The strategy applied by the form master achieved its goal, as they developed relationship skills that improved the atmosphere in the collective, such as increased cooperation, helpfulness and tolerance. The choices made by form masters have also proved very effective because they allow students to evaluate themselves objectively.

The first question of the interview has two coordinates: checking how students have formed an idea about their future career and the relevant quality that qualifies them in their choice. Of the seven students who responded to the interview, two indicated which profession they intended to choose, matching it to their strengths. Student T.N. from class 9 B wants to become a teacher and relies on his patience, knowing that this quality is indispensable to this field.

Student V.I.’s answer links patience to a career, without mentioning the profession they intend to choose. N.D.I.’s answers show that they feel an irresistible attraction to the profession of a forensic scientist, and the qualities that bring the respondent closer to this career are: respect for laws, and an increased ability to pay attention to details. I.L. states that they have a great capacity for long-term memory, without specifying their prospective career,

G.A. believes that self-confidence helps to overcome all obstacles, S.L. wants a profession (without mentioning it) that will make the most of their creative potential, while P.R.S. believes that their spirit of solidarity will enable them to solve people's problems.

The second question of the interview starts with identifying personal limitations that may cause blockages in your future career. Students' maturity of thought can be demonstrated by the ease with which they can evaluate themselves and their ability to express themselves correctly and expressively in writing (no mistakes in their answers), and also by their ideas.

From T.N.'s answers it is clear that they take into account the phenomenon of globalization and the current situation in which people are forced to migrate from one country to another, that's why they consider that not knowing foreign languages will generate bottlenecks in their teaching career, because through international languages they have access to information, but they can also communicate with potential foreign students who will study in Romania. I.L. also mentions the same limitation, which is linked to career blockages.

The fourth question helps students determine what kind of communication they excel in, written or oral and asks them to specify what type of communication they want to develop and the reason(s) why. All seven interview participants want to improve their oral communication skills for the following reasons:

-3 want to speak in public without any problems (P.R.S, V.I, S.L), as they are probably aiming for a career focused on this skill;

-2 feel insecure that they cannot express themselves adequately in certain situations, that they are not persuasive and that they have problems expressing personal wishes, and because of this they feel frustrated;

-2 believe that oral communication skills lead to much quicker and more favorable problem solving, with G.A. pointing out that they developed their written expression skills against a background of shyness, neglecting oral expression skills.

The fifth task asks the students participating in the interview to identify strategies to improve their communication skills and two situations that allow them to do so.

In question six, students had to indicate which activities in school contributed to their communication skills. In their opinion, these activities were:

1. Reading circle and Romanian language and literature classes (3);
2. Extra-curricular activities: school trips, Erasmus-type projects, lessons on anti-bullying in schools, use of modern teaching strategies in lessons (3);
3. An interesting proposal made by student G.A: a 20–30-minute break dedicated to communication between students or student-teachers.

Question seven demands students to rate the usefulness of communication skills to determine whether this skill deserves its rightful place at the top of teenagers' priorities. The close-ended question in the first part gives respondents a chance to argue their choice.

T.N and V.I think of communication skills as a source of originality, highlighting the chance to express feelings and views through communication.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research results verified the hypothesis and students' progress in terms of personal development, especially communication and interpersonal skills. The corroboration of the answers to the students' and teachers' questions identified the following weaknesses in the development of communication and interpersonal skills in classes 9th B and 9th C at

Lazăr Edeleanu Technological High School Ploiesti: The present research found strengths in the development of communication and interpersonal skills in classes 9th B and 9th C at Lazăr Edeleanu Technological High School in Ploiesti: 1. Ongoing development of communication and interpersonal skills in the classroom; 2. Form masters' insistence on generating contexts conducive to free communication, to the manifestation of students' creative force and critical thinking. The opportunity that derives from this strong point is that students will have the ability to discuss any topic with diplomacy and discernment.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As an added value, apart from validating the hypothesis, we conclude that the educational interaction within the group has improved, and many of the students have realistic career options correlated with their communication ability, with the professional skills acquired or in the process of development and with the ability to relate, starting from the 9th grade. (Rebrean, 2023, p.37)

The use of effective cross-skills development strategies has led to an increase in the degree of tolerance and empathy in student groups and the voluntary provision of peer support whenever needed. (Pop, 2021, p.45)

As recommendations we propose

- that all transversal skills become priorities in leadership classes, and that they be correlated with possible professional skills depending on the decisions in choosing the future career;
- the diversification of strategies, as well as the activities within the leadership classes for the development of transversal skills in high school students;
- training students in identifying didactic means and methods to develop communication, relational, and conflict resolution skills.

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