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## The Role of the Communication Discipline at Technical Faculties

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## The Role of the Communication Discipline at Technical Faculties

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### Abstract

Students newly admitted to the university must familiarize with the higher education system, must survive to the transition from pre-university system and adapt to the style of learning/organization/evaluation, basically have to adjust to student life. This change from the pre-university system to the university one has a major influence on the young person on several aspects. Some concern personal life, because it is possible for him to access a university in another city or country and then break up with his friends and his current partner. This factor, among many others, can influence school dropout. Thus, in first years of study, the Communication discipline was introduced in the faculties with a technical profile, precisely to improve and facilitate communication in the new environment in which young people develop and to encourage them to work in a team. The paper presents the analysis of the way in which the aforementioned discipline influences interpersonal communication and obviously friendship relations between new colleagues. Two questionnaires were proposed: one for initial evaluation and one after the semester passed, completed by students at the first and at last seminar. The results showed that this discipline is really important and brings added value to collegial relations.

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### Introduction

As a distinctive skill of human race, communication has proven over time to be a much more difficult challenge than it might have seemed at the first glance. Being a dynamic, a two-way process, during which many distinct aspects and bidirectional actions/reactions are involved, impossible to be controlled by a single player in the process, communication requires a much more thorough study and especially an awareness of its determining/influential elements. Practical reality proves that the adopted communication style has an impact both in the individual's personal and professional life. The state of satisfaction, of well-being, that the individual experience in his daily life depends especially and directly on the quality of the human relationships that he manages to cultivate (Julia T. Wood, 2008, Wood, 2015). In Figure 1 are presented some of components of a successful life.

Studies proved also that career success is closely related to the ability to influence, understanding by this aspect the ability to develop interpersonal relationships based on respect imposed not only by the hierarchical structure of the positions held, but especially on the ability to motivate subordinates and determine them to work in support of the team of which they are a part of. All the above-mentioned aspects are closely related to the communication

skills. (Giri & Pavan Kumar, 2010; Ballard & Seibold, 2006; Pincus, 1986; Goris, 2007).

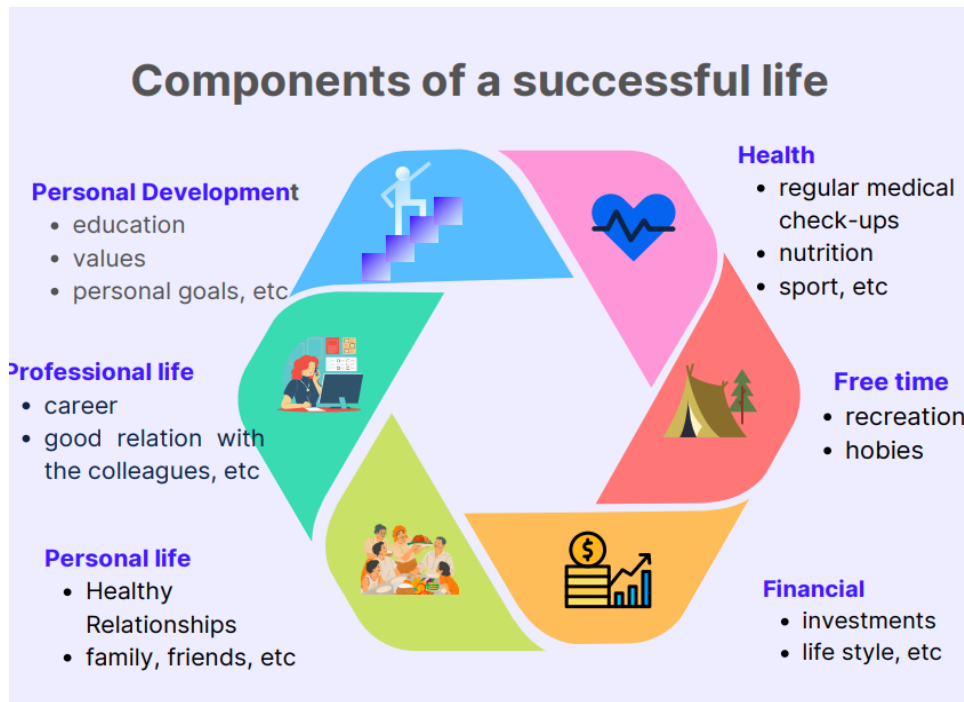


Figure 1. Components of a Successful Life

Not to mention the diplomatic impact that communication has. Today we are witnessing a series of wars that represent practically a failure of communication. These could have been avoided if the correct communication stick had been identified, more effective negotiation techniques had been applied, satisfactory solutions for both parties had been identified and negotiated, etc. (Jonsson & Hall, 2003; L'Etang, 2009).

Engineering students accumulate a multitude of knowledge specific to their field of study, but, from the point where this knowledge has been assimilated and appropriated, the manner in which they know how to access this knowledge and, above all, to communicate it in an accessible form, is extremely important. From this perspective, and not only, communication skills were considered to be of utmost importance in terms of the post-graduation professional trajectory of future professionals.

Moreover, the pandemic period, characterized by the limitation of direct contact between individuals, led to the limitation of socialization possibilities and therefore the communication skills of young people could only be exercised in the virtual environment - which represents a form of communication totally different from the direct one. Once back to direct interaction, young students face communication difficulties, interactions between them being reserved. In the spirit of facilitating and encouraging interactions between students, of strengthening interpersonal relationships within the groups, it is proposed to improve communication skills by introducing a communication course into the study curriculum.

The present paper practically analyzes the impact and effectiveness of teaching a communication course for young engineering students in terms of their interpersonal relationships developed within the group they belong to. Thus,

the type of interactions they had before and after the communication course will be compared. The applications have been designed in such a way that they also address issues related to temperaments and related communication styles, teamwork, appropriate/inappropriate communication attitudes, etc. so that the skills learned help students gain both better knowledge of their own temperament as well as tools by which they can understand and influence the interlocutor's attitude. Thus they will learn the necessary tools to be able to adapt their communication style, aiming to influence the communication process in the desired direction. And this will help them not only in their professional life but also in their personal life giving them a useful tool for their whole life.

Research has shown that, in addition to the skills of expression commonly used, an extremely important role is played especially by those elements that often go unnoticed, such as: visual contact, body language, communication style, active and reflective listening, etc. (Depaulo, B. M., & Friedman, H. S., 1998; Duncan, 1969; Hall et al., 2019).

### **Transition from High School to University**

In our faculty, a technical faculty of Automatics, Computers, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, a high dropout rate has been observed in recent years. Most students gave up after the first year of study, for various reasons: from the fact that the chosen field of study did not match their skills or the disciplines were too difficult. One of the decisive factors was the lack of adaptation to the university environment, the transition from high school to college being very difficult. Thus, without support, some of the newly admitted students cannot integrate into their new world. In addition to the fact that some change their city or country, all of them are faced with trying to establish new connections with the group they joined. So, communication plays an important role, that's why it was introduced as a mandatory discipline in the education plan.

The transition to a new stage comes with new psychological states determined by the contents of the two types and profiles of didactic activities, by the different named status of the person (pupil, student), by the didactic strategies used, by the different way of approaching programs and objectives educational, the aspects followed during the school course, the expectations of each level of education. Entering a new stage is crowded by a multitude of emotions and thoughts of various essences.

First of all, he feels sentimentally worried about the quality of the choice of faculty and its concordance with personal skills, the key to a good start and a good end to the endeavor he opted for. Then it is necessary to trust in one's own strength to start with the right to go through this stage. If this feeling is missing, there is doubt and the feeling of withdrawal because you will not be able to complete your chosen studies.

The newly admitted student experiences the fear of not living the adaptation to the demands imposed by a faculty and of having to change direction. To this will be added the one of loneliness if he moved to another city or another country. So, support is needed in this transition and those who can provide it are the teachers and colleagues. This can be achieved with some communication skills, developed in family or at school. These are very important for the future adult in his career and also in his personal life.

## Method

### Methods to Improve Communication Skills

In this paper, a study of the effectiveness and usefulness of teaching the communication discipline on some classes of engineering students in the beginning years is carried out. Starting from the observing of communication deficiencies accentuated by the pandemic period (students didn't know all their colleagues, they rarely interacted with each other) as well as deficiencies in approaching professional opportunities (their absence from educational fairs, job fairs, etc.) – it has been implemented a communication course. The discipline aims were to help students understand that these difficulties they confront with are not only difficulties they have to deal on individual level, but these are skills that can be improved when you have the properly necessary information and practice.

In this purpose, the available communication methods (oral/verbal, written non-verbal) have been introduced to the students and also it was presented the possible barriers that can interfere in the communication process. It was explained to the students that a good communicator will know to choose the appropriate communication method for the task he deals with and will also know how to request and provide feed-back in order to ensure that the communicated message is correct understood. In this way the students are informed regarding the purpose they must focus on during their life.

In the first part of the study, a questionnaire was applied in order to raise awareness of the level of interpersonal communication at the group level ---- it was proven that although they were in the 2nd year, there were colleagues with whom they had not interacted at all and about whom they knew absolutely nothing. The barriers that can intervene in communication were presented and explained to them. These explanations were accompanied by examples followed by applications. The students applied and practiced situations in which they had to be aware of the barriers that appeared and adopt strategies to counter them like, as it can be seen in Figure 2:

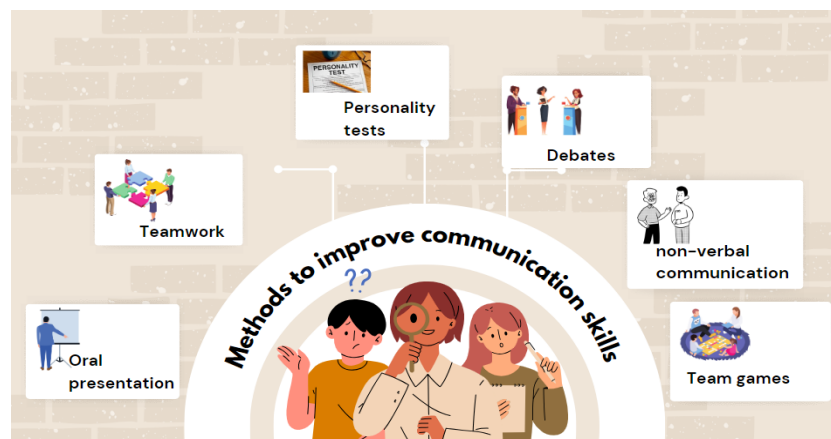


Figure 2. Methods to Improve Communication Skills

- Oral presentation
- Teamwork (they experienced the role of a strategy and a leader within a group)
- Personality tests - identifying your own personality and that of the other members of the group

- Debates – the empathetic expression of a point of view, counterarguments
- Team games
- Identifying and analyzing aspects related to non-verbal communication

At the end of the semester, a new questionnaire was applied that again evaluates communication skills and the impact it had in the dynamics of the student group during this course.

### **The Proposed Questionnaires**

We applied the proposed questionnaires at first class of communication, at the beginning and in the of semester, at last seminar of the aforementioned discipline. The initial questionnaire has 7 items:

1. The study domain
2. The year of study
3. The gender
4. The mean from the previous semester
5. So far you have interacted with: a) 10% from colleagues; b) 50% from colleagues; c) all colleagues
6. The topics covered in the discussions were: a) personal; b) topics of common interest; c) related to school.
7. Interactions with group mates took place: a) at school; b) outside school.

The final questionnaire had the same 7 items from the initial one, and in addition another 7 ones (with only two answers YES or NO):

8. During the communication seminar/course you attended, did you interact with colleagues you had never interacted with before?
9. Did you discover new things about your colleagues?
10. Did the new information you learned about your colleagues change your perception of them?
11. What about you? Did you learn anything new about yourself?
12. Do you think that the new things you have learned about yourself bring/will benefit you in your professional/personal future?
13. Do you think the information you learned/applied contributed to improving your communication skills?
14. Following the activities carried out in the communication course/seminar, have you developed new friends?

## **Results**

### *Frequencies Analysis*

The questionnaires were applied to 111 students from 3 fields of study: Computer and Information Science (named

CTI), second year of study, Electrical Engineering (named IE) – first year, and Electronical Engineering, Telecommunications, and Information Technologies (named IETTI) – first year. The distribution of students by fields of study is shown in Figure 3, by gender - in Figure 4 and by years of study in Figure 5. The faculty has a technical profile, so the female students are in the minority. By years of study, the distribution is balanced. The distribution by means from previous semester is represented in Figure 6. Most of the students have grades between 8 and 9. All analysis were done in IBM SPSS Statistic.

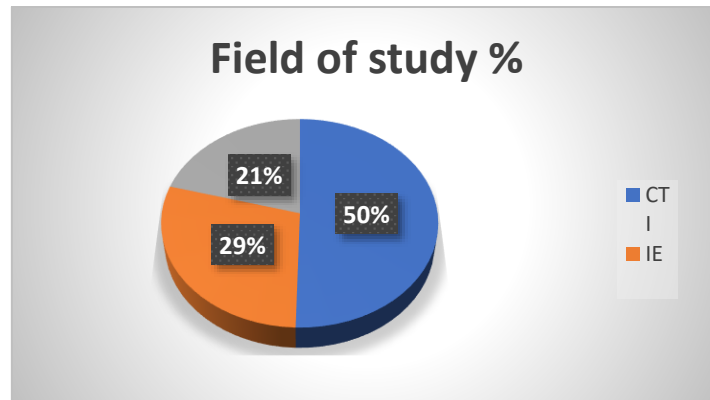


Figure 3. Distribution by Fields of Study

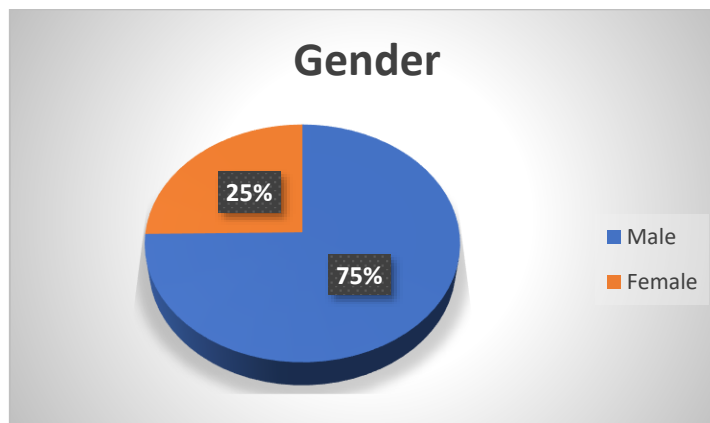


Figure 4. Distribution by Gender

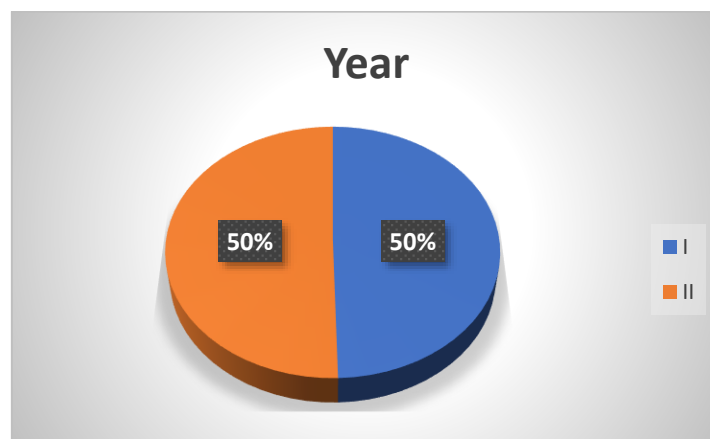


Figure 5. Distribution by Year of Study

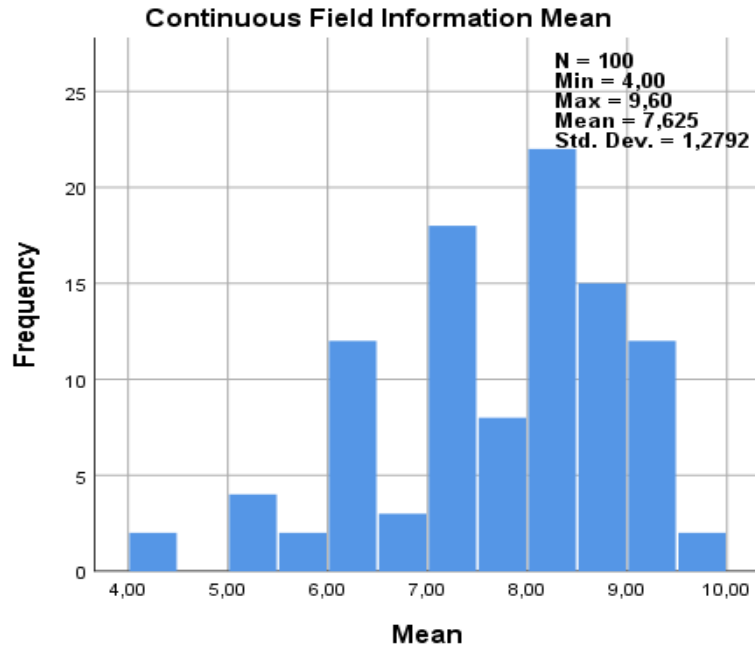


Figure 6. Distribution by Mean

*Crosstabs Analysis*

In this section we present the gender influence on the 3 variables considered: the subjects discussed, the interaction with colleagues and the place where students talk, before studying Communication. The results are showed in the bellow figures (7,8 and 9) and tables (1,2 and 3). It can be observed that most of the students talk about the subjects related to school. Surprisingly, percentage wise, boys talk more than girls about personal topics, they interact with more colleagues outside school. This result is somewhat unusual because usually girls are better at communication than boys.

Table 1. Gender \* Subjects Crosstabulation

		Subjects			
		Related to		Total	
		Personal	school		
Gender	Male	Count	19	64	83
		% within Gender	22.9%	77.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	17.1%	57.7%	74.8%
	Female	Count	6	22	28
		% within Gender	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%
		% of Total	5.4%	19.8%	25.2%
Total	Count	25	86	111	
	% within Gender	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	
	% of Total	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	



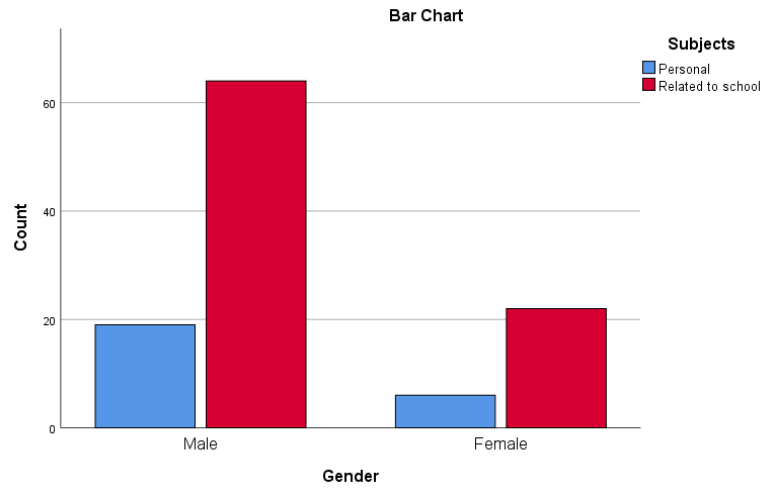


Figure 7. Gender Influence on Discussed Subjects

Table 2. Gender \* Interaction Crosstabulation

		Interaction			Total	
		10%	50%	100%		
Gender	Male	Count	8	24	51	83
		% within Gender	9.6%	28.9%	61.4%	100.0%
		% of Total	7.2%	21.6%	45.9%	74.8%
	Female	Count	5	6	17	28
		% within Gender	17.9%	21.4%	60.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.5%	5.4%	15.3%	25.2%
Total	Count	13	30	68	111	
	% within Gender	11.7%	27.0%	61.3%	100.0%	
	% of Total	11.7%	27.0%	61.3%	100.0%	

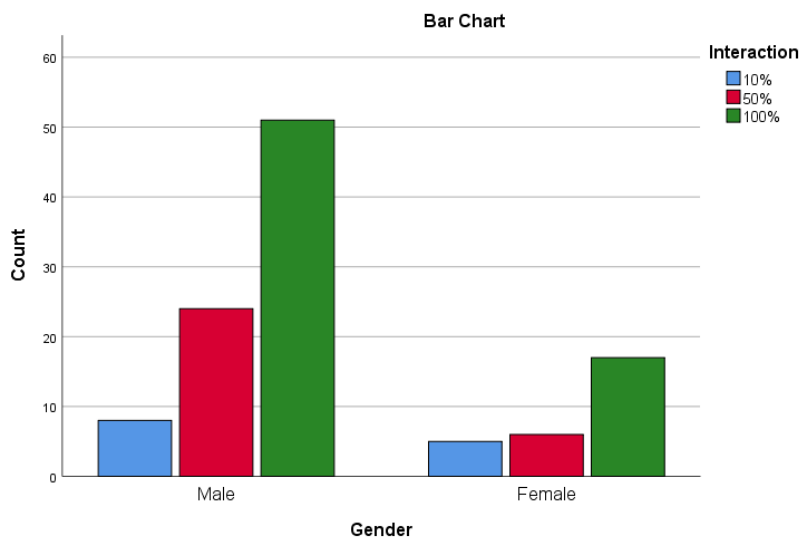


Figure 8. Gender Influence on Colleagues' Interaction

Table 3. Gender \* Where Crosstabulation

		Where			
		At school	Outside school	Total	
Gender	Male	Count	58	25	83
		% within Gender	69.9%	30.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	52.3%	22.5%	74.8%
Gender	Female	Count	20	8	28
		% within Gender	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
		% of Total	18.0%	7.2%	25.2%
Total		Count	78	33	111
		% within Gender	70.3%	29.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	70.3%	29.7%	100.0%

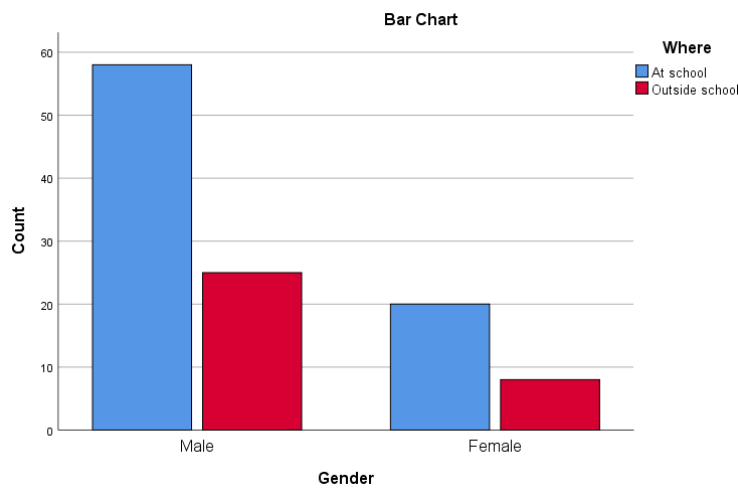


Figure 9. Gender Influence on Place Interaction

In Table 4 are the results of Field of study with Subjects and Gender crosstabulation. The students from all specializations talk about subjects related to school, more than personal ones, no matter what the gender is. In addition, at IETTI, all female students only discuss school-related topics and there are no developed friendships. In Table 5 are presented the results of Field\_of\_study with Interaction and Gender Crosstabulation. Most of the students interacted with all their colleagues. In Table 6 are the results of Field\_of\_study with the place where are the discussion (Where) and Gender Crosstabulation. Most of the students are talking at school. There is a small percent outside school, no matter the gender is.

#### ANOVA Analysis

For those 3 items (Interaction, Subjects and Where) and gender we used ANOVA and the results presented in Table 7 showed that there is no significant difference. Mean is noted with M and standard deviation with SD. The same results are for field of study (see Table 8) and for year of study (see Table 9). In these cases, there are no

significant differences between groups no matter what the field of study or the year.

Table 4. Field\_of\_Study\*Subjects\*Gender Crosstabulation

Gender				Subjects		
				Personal	Related to school	Total
Male	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	7	20	27
			% within Field_of_study	25.9%	74.1%	100.0%
			% of Total	8.4%	24.1%	32.5%
		IE	Count	8	24	32
			% within Field_of_study	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	9.6%	28.9%	38.6%
		IETTI	Count	4	20	24
			% within Field_of_study	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
			% of Total	4.8%	24.1%	28.9%
	Total	Count	19	64	83	
		% within Field_of_study	22.9%	77.1%	100.0%	
		% of Total	22.9%	77.1%	100.0%	
Female	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	6	21	27
			% within Field_of_study	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
			% of Total	21.4%	75.0%	96.4%
		IETTI	Count	0	1	1
			% within Field_of_study	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	0.0%	3.6%	3.6%
	Total	Count	6	22	28	
		% within Field_of_study	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%	
		% of Total	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%	
Total	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	13	41	54
			% within Field_of_study	24.1%	75.9%	100.0%
			% of Total	11.7%	36.9%	48.6%
		IE	Count	8	24	32
			% within Field_of_study	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	7.2%	21.6%	28.8%
		IETTI	Count	4	21	25
			% within Field_of_study	16.0%	84.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	3.6%	18.9%	22.5%
	Total	Count	25	86	111	
		% within Field_of_study	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	
		% of Total	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%	

Table 5. Field\_of\_Study\*Interaction\*Gender Crosstabulation

Gender				Interaction			Total	
				10%	50%	100%		
Male	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	3	4	20	27	
			% within Field_of_study	11.1%	14.8%	74.1%	100.0%	
			% of Total	3.6%	4.8%	24.1%	32.5%	
	IE	Count	4	11	17	32		
		% within Field_of_study	12.5%	34.4%	53.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	4.8%	13.3%	20.5%	38.6%		
	IETT	Count	1	9	14	24		
		% within Field_of_study	4.2%	37.5%	58.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	1.2%	10.8%	16.9%	28.9%		
	Total	Count	8	24	51	83		
		% within Field_of_study	9.6%	28.9%	61.4%	100.0%		
		% of Total	9.6%	28.9%	61.4%	100.0%		
	Female	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	5	6	16	27
				% within Field_of_study	18.5%	22.2%	59.3%	100.0%
				% of Total	17.9%	21.4%	57.1%	96.4%
IETT		Count	0	0	1	1		
		% within Field_of_study	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	3.6%		
Total		Count	5	6	17	28		
		% within Field_of_study	17.9%	21.4%	60.7%	100.0%		
		% of Total	17.9%	21.4%	60.7%	100.0%		
Total	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	8	10	36	54	
			% within Field_of_study	14.8%	18.5%	66.7%	100.0%	
			% of Total	7.2%	9.0%	32.4%	48.6%	
	IE	Count	4	11	17	32		
		% within Field_of_study	12.5%	34.4%	53.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	3.6%	9.9%	15.3%	28.8%		
	IETT	Count	1	9	15	25		
		% within Field_of_study	4.0%	36.0%	60.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	0.9%	8.1%	13.5%	22.5%		
	Total	Count	13	30	68	111		
		% within Field_of_study	11.7%	27.0%	61.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	11.7%	27.0%	61.3%	100.0%		

Table 6. Field\_of\_Study\*Where\*Gender Crosstabulation

Gender	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	Where		Total
				At school	Outside school	
Male	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	22	5	27
			% within Field_of_study	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%
			% of Total	26.5%	6.0%	32.5%
		IE	Count	22	10	32
			% within Field_of_study	68.8%	31.3%	100.0%
			% of Total	26.5%	12.0%	38.6%
		IETTI	Count	14	10	24
			% within Field_of_study	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
			% of Total	16.9%	12.0%	28.9%
	Total	Count	58	25	83	
		% within Field_of_study	69.9%	30.1%	100.0%	
		% of Total	69.9%	30.1%	100.0%	
Female	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	19	8	27
			% within Field_of_study	70.4%	29.6%	100.0%
			% of Total	67.9%	28.6%	96.4%
		IETTI	Count	1	0	1
			% within Field_of_study	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	3.6%	0.0%	3.6%
	Total	Count	20	8	28	
		% within Field_of_study	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%	
		% of Total	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%	
Total	Field_of_study	CTI	Count	41	13	54
			% within Field_of_study	75.9%	24.1%	100.0%
			% of Total	36.9%	11.7%	48.6%
		IE	Count	22	10	32
			% within Field_of_study	68.8%	31.3%	100.0%
			% of Total	19.8%	9.0%	28.8%
		IETTI	Count	15	10	25
			% within Field_of_study	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	13.5%	9.0%	22.5%
	Total	Count	78	33	111	
		% within Field_of_study	70.3%	29.7%	100.0%	
		% of Total	70.3%	29.7%	100.0%	

Table 7. ANOVA/Gender

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interaction	Between Groups	.168	1	.168	.341	.560
	Within Groups	53.580	109	.492		
	Total	53.748	110			
Subjects	Between Groups	.018	1	.018	.025	.874
	Within Groups	77.460	109	.711		
	Total	77.477	110			
Where	Between Groups	.005	1	.005	.024	.878
	Within Groups	23.184	109	.213		
	Total	23.189	110			

Table 8. ANOVA/Field of Study

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interaction	Between Groups	.388	2	.194	.392	.677
	Within Groups	53.360	108	.494		
	Total	53.748	110			
Subjects	Between Groups	.556	2	.278	.390	.678
	Within Groups	76.921	108	.712		
	Total	77.477	110			
Where	Between Groups	.444	2	.222	1.054	.352
	Within Groups	22.745	108	.211		
	Total	23.189	110			

Table 9. ANOVA/Year of Study

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interaction	Between Groups	.183	1	.183	.372	.543
	Within Groups	53.565	109	.491		
	Total	53.748	110			
Subjects	Between Groups	.022	1	.022	.030	.862
	Within Groups	77.456	109	.711		
	Total	77.477	110			
Where	Between Groups	.253	1	.253	1.201	.275
	Within Groups	22.936	109	.210		
	Total	23.189	110			

*Categorical Field Information*

In this section are presented the categorical field information for those 3 important variables: in Figure 10 for

Interaction with colleagues, in Figure 11 for discussed Subjects and in Figure 13 for the place where the students communicate. It can be observed that most of the responders interact with all their colleagues, on subjects related to school at school. In Figure 12 is a representation of a Mann-Whitney test for Subjects with mean and in Figure 14 for Where with Mean.

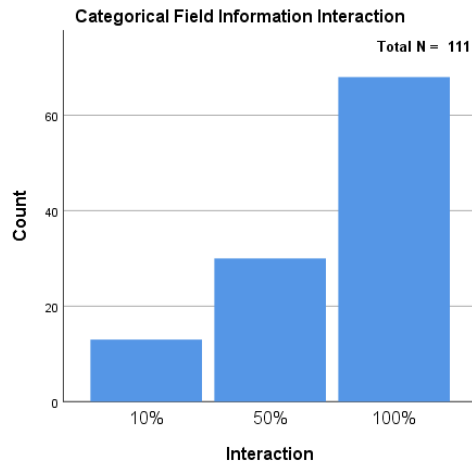


Figure 10. Interaction

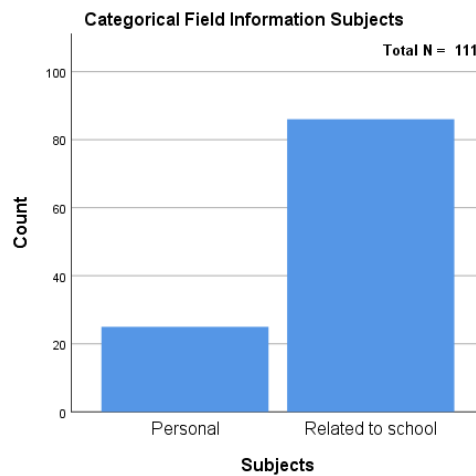


Figure 11. Subjects

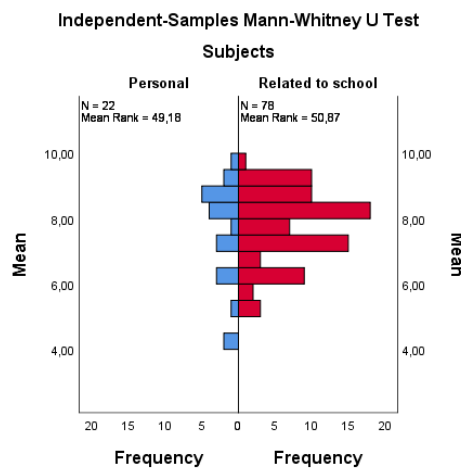


Figure 12. Mann-Whitney U Test for Subjects with Mean

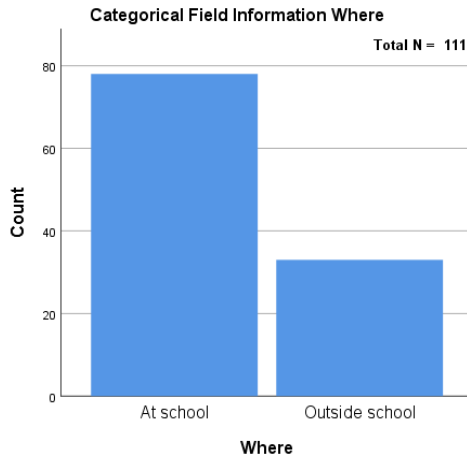


Figure 13. Where

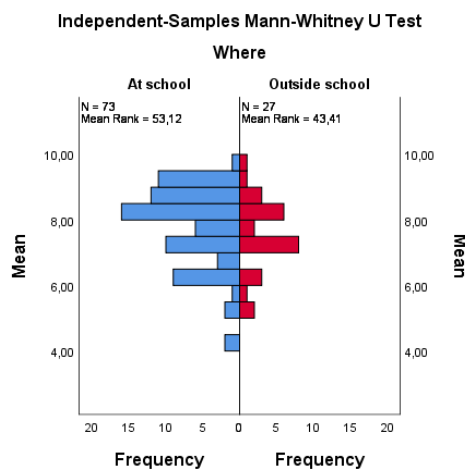


Figure 14. Mann-Whitney U Test for Where with Mean

*Final Results*

In Figures 15, 16 and 17 are compared the results obtained from the initial questionnaire with those applied at the end of the semester.

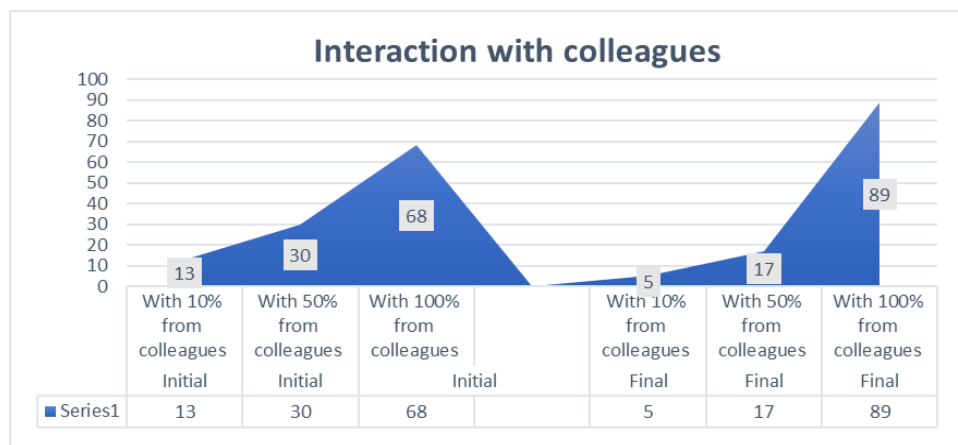


Figure 15. Interaction Initial vs Final



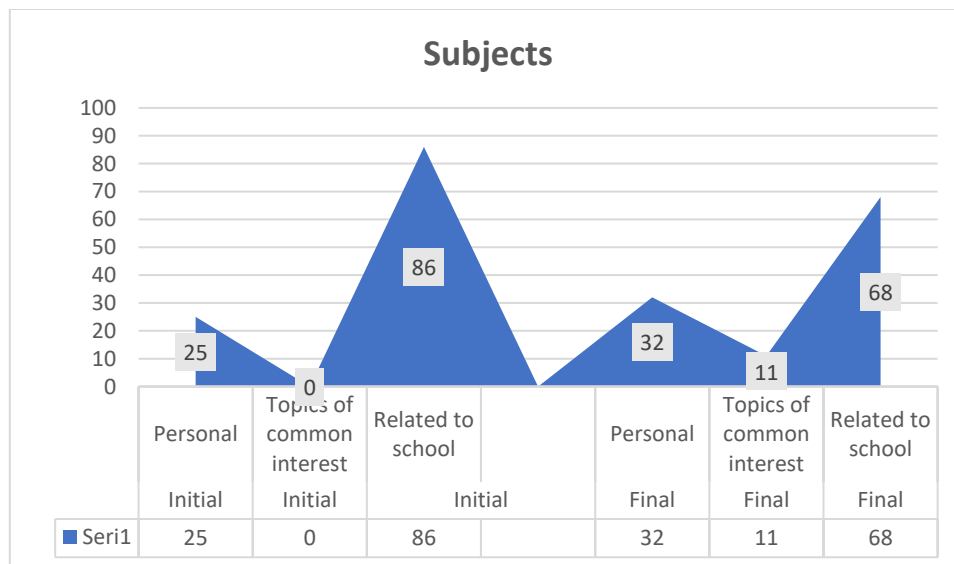


Figure 16. Subjects Initial vs Final

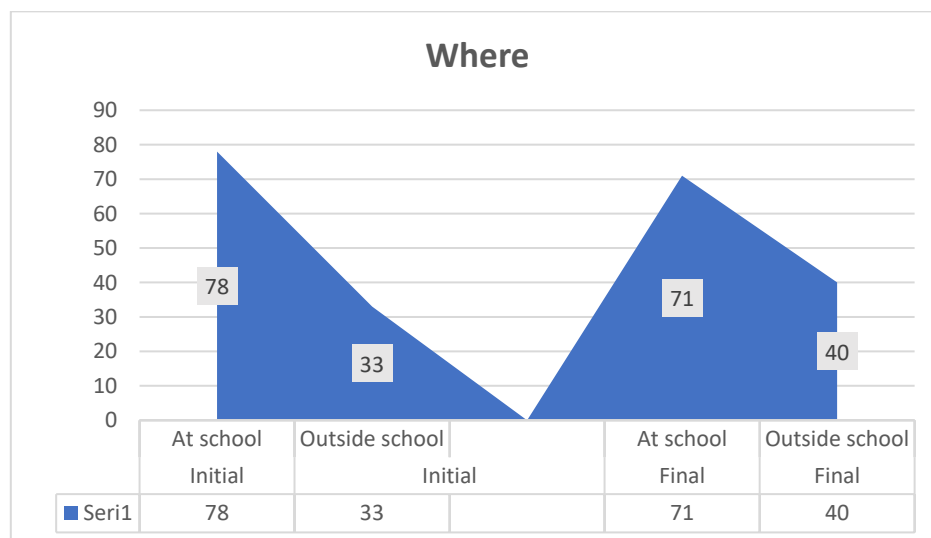


Figure 17. Where Initial vs Final

Comparing the obtained results, it can be seen that the students' communication skills have been considerably improved after completion of the communication course. In the end of semester, at final questionnaire, 63% from respondents create new friendships, 75% discover new things about them, 87% discover new things about their colleagues. Over all, the communication discipline has an important role and they considered that are many techniques and methods that can be used in their personal and professional lives.

## Conclusion

Supporting the transition period from pre-university to higher education is an important factor in reducing school dropout. There are many newly student life aspects that can be affected by this period. Some relate to changing the learning environment and meeting new colleagues, practically new relationships must be developed and integration into the university family must be achieved. So communication skills are important to adapt at this

new stage.

The present paper presents an analysis of communication discipline importance in students' life. There were applied two questionnaires at the beginning and in the end of semester to see the influence of this discipline on interaction with colleagues, on the subjects discussed and on the place where the students interact. All the analyses were done in IBM SPSS Statistic. Comparing the obtained results, it can be seen that the students' communication skills have been considerably improved after completion of the communication course.

The usefulness and applicability of the communication course can be taken to a higher level by its motivational and tutorial side. The communication course can be interwoven with the technical courses in such a successful way that it stimulates and awakens the students' passion for research - which involves both aspects that obviously cannot exist without each other. Knowledge of personality psychology gave students a logical understanding of the communication process. This aspect will practically always be a tool to influence the communication process - both in personal and professional life.

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