

Students–teachers’ communication competence: basic social communication skills and interaction involvement

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Abstract

Current teacher pre-service education draws attention to communication competence as a highly important component of teacher professional competencies. The study explores the social communication skills and interaction involvement of two student–teacher generations. 195 students–teachers educated at the departments of primary school class teacher education, answered the items of two instruments – Social Skills Inventory and Interaction Involvement Scale. The analysis of the quantitative data indicates that there are no differences in the degree of development and the structure of social communication competence. The correlations between basic social skills components and interaction involvement components are significant. Student-teachers’ self-assessed communication skills are developed at a moderate level, thusly being a proper basis for advancement in this domain.

Keywords: communication competence; social competence; social communication skills; interaction involvement; student–teacher

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the research literature on the impact of teachers’ communication on the quality of teaching process and students’ achievement has experienced remarkable growth (Fenton & O’Leary, 1991; O’Hair & Wright, 1990; Zgaga, 2006). As “teachers spend much of their time in communication activities” (Rubin & Feezel, 1986, p. 252), this study focuses on the communication competence of students–teachers (students–future teachers) and the similarities and differences of two generations of students–teachers.

Communication competence is a fundamental component of teacher professional and personal orientation. It may be considered as a unique, comprehensive, and probably the most relevant indication for the effectiveness of teacher role in general. Communication competence is one of the three key competences of teachers’ professional activities – educational competence, program competence, and communication competence (Bjekic & Zlatic, 2006). Teachers’ communication competence involves the knowledge of adequate and effective communication behaviours, development of the repertoire of skills comprising proper and efficient means of communication, and a possibility to act adequately and efficiently in an interaction (Rubin, 1990, p. 96, according to Barclay, 2012, p. 8).

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework of teacher’s communication competence

Educational communicology formulates the following principles of the teachers’ communication: mutual respect and esteem of students (the actors in education);

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arousing students to communicate, communication process reversibility; awareness of the communication activities and means repertoire; awareness of the communication behaviour and the manner of the changing. The social functioning of teachers is associated with their personality and competence. According to the polysemantic nature of the concept of teachers' (professional) competence (Potolea & Toma, 2019), communication competence as a polysemantic concept integrates knowledge, skills, attitudes, personality properties and supported contextual dimensions.

Communication competent teacher (Bjekić & Zlatić, 2006; Zlatić, Bjekić, Marinković, & Bojović, 2014):

- is adaptable and flexible;
- is involved in the conversation – teacher manifests the involvement in the conversation by behavioural manifestations (gestures, visual direction), and by cognitive activities (concluding, repeating key sentences, paraphrasing);
- has the skills to manage conversation (to regulate interaction and control social situations, define and change the aims of the conversation);
- considers the social relations and make a plan of the engagement;
- has developed empathy;
- is effective in the communication process – sustain the aims of conversation and personal aims;
- has expectations coordinated to the situation; is ready to teamwork;
- is learning continually about the communication process, and is gaining insights about communication situation;
- is aware of his/her own behaviour;
- continually develops the communication skills, train and test messages exchange;
- continually masters the use of different communication means (the means of the ICT in teaching, increasing the teachers' informatics literacy, dealing with PC as the functional teaching means to demonstrate and investigate technical processes and phenomena).

Spitzberg and Cupach (1989) considered communication competence as a person's ability to choose communication behaviour which is suitable to achieve the aim of the social relation.

Having all previous characteristics in mind, it is necessary to identify how the definitions (terminological and essential) and overlapping of these aspects of competence and its structures affect the researches on teachers' social competence and teachers' communication competence.

Ever since the 1990s the terms such as social competence and interpersonal competence, frequently used as synonymous terms, have dominated the researches on interpersonal relations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Specific social competences are essentially relational, describing how a person behaves in the context of interpersonal and group relations (Schoon, 2009). All definitions emphasize that communication competence, or more precisely, a system of communication competences, is an essential component of social competence. At the same time, communication competence is a basic form of manifestation of social competence. Thus, accepting communication competence in its basic definition (Bjekić & Zlatić, 2006), we considered social-communication competence as a system of knowledge, abilities, skills, motivational dispositions, and personality traits that provide relevant communication and social behaviour and success in social situations which happen through communication processes. Zwaans, Dam, and Volman (2006) differentiated four aspects of this competence – attitudes, knowledges, reflections, and skills.

Social skills are most often studied as the components of social competence. In some studies, the term social skills have the same meaning as the term communication skills; hence, the two terms are used interchangeably or they are blended into social-communication skills (Riggio, 1986; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).

The concept of social-communication skills as the basic components of social competence has been the focus of many researches (Brdar, 1993; Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson, 1994; Reardon, 1998; Riggio & Carney, 2003). Due to the existing relations between various pedagogical and communication variables, that are crucial to the

teaching process, and social skills as defined by Ronald Riggio (Fenton & O’Leary, 1991; Juchniewicz, 2010; Oudova, 2006; Riggio, 1986, 2014), his theoretical concept of social skills is accepted in this study.

Riggio usually uses the term social skills, but sometimes he also uses the term basic social-communication skills. Riggio’s definition of basic social skills “assumes that such skills are learned social abilities and strategies; thus, the term skill is used broadly” (Riggio, 1986, p. 650). Riggio recognized basic social communication skills as an individual difference in communication patterns, which allows individuals to manage their emotions and adapt their behaviours according to the social environment (Riggio, 1986, 649-651, according to Zlatić, Bjekić, & Bojović, 2011).

According to Riggio and his associates (Riggio & Carney, 2003; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Riggio, Tucker, & Coffard, 1989), the term social skills means the operationalization of understanding social competence as the constellation of six social communication skills organized in two dimensions. Skills of receiving and skills of sending social information are considered as key communication skills (Hall, 1979; according to Riggio et al. 1989). Riggio added the skills of controlling information as a part of the first dimension of the model of socio-communication skills. The second dimension focuses on two domains – emotional and social. According to Riggio (1986, 2005), the six basic skills model involves skills in sending, receiving, and controlling communication in two separate domains – emotional and social. He considered an emotional dimension as nonverbal domain, and social dimension as verbal, more cognitive supported domain of broader communication skills:

- 1) Emotional expressivity (emotional expressiveness) refers to the ability to communicate and display emotions, attitudes, and other messages of interpersonal orientation nonverbally, the ability to display the experienced emotions exactly and spontaneously and to express one’s attitudes and orientations in interpersonal communication;
- 2) Emotional sensitivity refers to the skill of noticing, receiving, and interpreting nonverbal or emotional expression of others;
- 3) Emotional control refers to the ability to control and regulate emotional and nonverbal displays, the ability of acting and masking emotions;
- 4) Social expressivity (social expressiveness) refers to the ability to communicate verbally and skill in engaging others in social interaction;
- 5) Social sensitivity refers to the ability to understand verbal communication and general knowledge of social rules and norms;
- 6) Social control refers to skills in social self-presentation and role-playing.

According to Riggio’s theoretical framework, Riggio’s team designed the Social Skills Inventory (SSI) initially to assist with research in communication and social interaction processes. However, SSI has been found useful as well in counseling, in social skill training programs in organizational settings, assessment centers, and in screening for individual differences. It has also been used as a supplement to behavioural measures of social skills, as an alternative to elaborate behavioural assessments, for work with various clinical populations, in research in industrial settings, and in examining the role that social skills play in psychological and health outcomes (Riggio & Carney, 2003, p. 6).

Cegala, Savage, Bernard, and Conrad (1982) considered that communication competence is most directly recognized in the contexts of direct interpersonal communication during a conversation (direct verbal communication), hence they focus on interaction involvement. Interaction involvement is a fundamental dimension of interpersonal communication competence (Cegala, 1978, 1981; Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004). According to Cegala et al., interaction involvement “explains interpersonal communication as a transactional relationship involving the elements of self, others, and situations” (Cegala, 1978, p. 3). Therefore, interaction involvement can be viewed as a multidimensional construct involving the awareness of self-behaviour and awareness of other people behaviour. Highly involved individuals integrate feelings, thoughts, and experiences with the ongoing interaction; their consciousness is directed toward the self, others, and conversation topic; their speech

can be marked as consistency and understanding; they focus on the message meanings and importance; they are more effective to take information (Bjekić, Bjekić, & Zlatić, 2015, pp. 368-369).

Although it is behavioural skill (Reardon, 1998, p. 83), it encompasses, to a large extent, interpersonal awareness (cognitive skills of communication competence) and integrates it with the behaviours in direct communication interactions (behavioural skills). Some researchers (Cegala, 1978, Cegala et al. 1982; Villaume & Cegala, 1988; Rubin et al, 2004; Reardon, 1998) have discussed the status of interaction involvement arguing that it may be a trait – relatively permanent characteristic but also a state. Various researches show that it is more often measured as a trait. The authors of the Interaction Involvement Scale (Cegala et al. 1982) believe some components of interaction involvement are induced by the context characteristics, hence they develop the methods of measuring interaction involvement in specific interactions (Rubin et al. 2004).

Interaction involvement is a characteristic of the individual in the situation of the personal interaction with the other person” (Cegala, 1984). It consists of three components (Bjekić et al., 2015, p. 371; Cegala et al., 1982; Cegala, 1984): attentiveness — awareness of communication behaviour of the other person in interaction process (awareness of the signs in social environment); perceptiveness — knowledge of the meanings which a person contributes to their own behaviour and behaviour of communication participants based on listening and perceiving; (cognitive) responsiveness — tendency to react mentally to the social circumstances and adapt by knowing what to say and when to say it.

A recent research of teacher and student-teacher communication skills and communication education (Zlatić et al., 2014) suggests that teacher communication competence is increased in the process of communication education, its specific competencies being emphasized (social sensitivity, non-violent verbal communication, integrative style of conflict management, interaction involvement).

3. Methodology

3.1. Objective

It is important to advance understanding of teacher socio-communication competence for their social efficacy; hence, the extent of development of teacher-specific social and communication competencies such as social skills, specific communication behaviors, and traits is the rationale for this study.

This study seeks to explore the communication competence of the students-teachers (future teachers for the first cycle of primary education) as well as the existing levels of two components of communication competence – basic social-communication skills and interaction involvement. Also, the study addresses the comparison of the extent of development of communication competence between two generations of students studying in two different educational environments.

Hypotheses

The general hypothesis is that the students-prospective teachers’ perceived level of communication competence (basic social-communication skills and interaction involvement) is moderately developed. Specifically, it is assumed that there are generation differences considering the degree of certain skills between the students who had status of students in 2006 and those who had undergraduate student status in 2018; the former did not attend the courses focused on developing communication skills while the latter attended the courses directly or indirectly aimed at acquiring communication competence.

Variables

The following variables are used in the study:

- Basic social-communication skills (Riggio & Carney, 2003) refer to learned social abilities and strategies of receiving, sending, and controlling social information in communication which consists of six components: emotional sensitivity, emotional expressivity, emotional control, social sensitivity, social expressivity, and social control;
- Components of basic socio-communication skills: social sensitivity, social expressivity, social control, emotional sensitivity, emotional expressivity, and emotional control (as elaborated in the theoretical framework section);
- Interaction involvement (Cegala et al., 1982) refers to “the degree to which people are engaged, cognitively and behaviourally, in their conversations with others” (Rubin et al., 2004: 187); components of the interaction involvement include attentiveness, perceptiveness, and (cognitive) responsiveness;
- Generational affiliation: two generations of students–teachers were investigated in the study – the students who studied in 2006 and 2018 (12-year difference), and at the moment of research, their age ranged from 20 to 23 years old. The difference between these two generations refers to higher education system and educational background: the students-teachers of generation 2006 were studying in non-Bologna higher education settings and with no focus on communication competence in their education; those of generation 2018 were studying within Bologna educational framework and with the focus on development of student-teachers communication competence in different courses in university settings.

3.2. Participants

The research was realized at the University of Kragujevac in Serbia, at the departments for primary school teacher education (class teachers in the first educational cycle) during 2006 and 2018. In this study, 195 undergraduate students–teachers were administrated two self-report instruments of social-communication skills: the 2006 sample consisted of 115 students-teachers; the 2018 sample consisted of 80 students–teachers.

3.3. Instrument

Two instruments are used in the study: Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS) and Social Skills Inventory (SSI).

The IIS (Cegala et al., 1982) was constructed to assess the components of interaction involvement: attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness. The self-assessment scale consists of 18 items to assess a person’s interaction involvement — one’s behaviour and emotion in the conversation process (the five-level Likert scale is used in this research). Psychometric characteristics of the IIS are the following (Rubin et al., 1984): “test-retest reliability has ranged from 0.81 (after a 6-week delay), and 0.61 (after one year). It is internally consistent - alphas for responsiveness subscale have ranged from 0.69 to 0.86; alphas for the perceptiveness subscale have ranged from 0.63 to 0.88; alphas for attentiveness subscale have ranged from 0.64 to 0.87; alphas for the IIS have ranged from 0.83 to 0.90.”

The SSI (Riggio & Carney, 2003) was constructed to assess basic social communication skills on two dimensions – emotional (nonverbal) and social (verbal), and three modes – expressivity, sensitivity, and control. It is a five-level self-assessment scale which consists of 90 items distributed on six subscales: ES – emotional sensitivity, EE – emotional expressivity, EC – emotional control, SS – social sensitivity, SE – social expressivity, and SC – social control. The six subscales are described in detail below (Riggio & Carney, 2003, pp. 3-6).

The three “emotional skill” scales - emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity, and emotional control - can be used to assess emotional intelligence (Riggio & Carney, 2003, p. 6). The Emotional Expressivity Scale measures the skill the individuals use to communicate nonverbally, particularly in sending emotional messages; it also includes the nonverbal expression of attitudes, dominance, and interpersonal orientation. Besides, this scale reflects the ability to express felt

emotional states accurately. Highly emotionally expressive persons are animated and emotionally charged and can arouse or inspire others from their ability to transmit feelings. The Emotional Sensitivity Scale measures the skill in receiving and interpreting the nonverbal communication of others. Emotionally sensitive individuals attend to and interpret the subtle emotional cues of others accurately. Those who are highly emotionally sensitive are aroused by others, empathically experiencing their emotional states. The Emotional Control Scale measures the ability to control and regulate one’s own emotional and nonverbal displays. Emotional control includes the ability to convey particular emotions on cue and to hide feelings behind an assumed mask - laughing appropriately at a joke or putting on a cheerful face to cover sorrow. Persons whose scores are very high on this scale may tend to control against the display of felt emotions.

Table 1. Representative items of SSI (Riggio & Carney, 2003, pp. 3–4)

Scale	Representative Items
Emotional Expressivity	“I am able to liven up a dull party.
Emotional Sensitivity	I sometimes cry at sad movies.
Emotional Control	I am easily able to make myself look happy one minute and sad the next.
Social Expressivity	When telling a story, I usually use a lot of gestures to help get the point across.
Social Sensitivity	Sometimes I think I take things other people say to me too personally.
Social Control	I can easily adjust to being in just about any social situation.”

The three social skills scales - social expressivity, social sensitivity, and social control – “can be used to assess the domain of social intelligence” (Riggio & Carney, 2003, p. 4). The Social Expressivity scale (SE) assesses the skill in verbal expression and the ability to engage others in social discourse. High scores on this scale are associated with verbal fluency in individuals who appear outgoing and gregarious, and who are skilled in initiating and guiding conversations on just about any subject. In extremes, particularly when the scores on social control are low, socially expressive persons may speak spontaneously without monitoring the content of what they are saying. It should be noted that although the Social Expressivity subscale seems consistent with the notion of extraversion, it is theoretically and statistically distinct from it (Riggio & Carney, 2003, p. 4). The Social Sensitivity scale (SS) assesses the ability to interpret the verbal communication of others. It also assesses an individual sensitivity to and understanding of the norms governing appropriate social behaviour. Socially sensitive persons are attentive to social behaviour and are conscious and aware of the appropriateness of their actions. Extremely high scores on this scale, in conjunction with moderate to low scores on social expressivity and social control, may indicate that self-consciousness may inhibit participation in social interaction. Indeed, there is a slight positive correlation between SS and neuroticism. The Social Control scale (SC) assesses the skills in role-playing and social self-presentation. Persons whose social control skills are well developed are generally adept, tactful, and self-confident in social situations and can fit in comfortably in just about any type of social situation. Social control is also important in guiding the direction and content of communication in social interaction. Too much emotional and social control can be costly for individuals, both cognitively and interpersonally (Richards & Gross, 2000, according to Riggio & Carney, 2003).

The Social Skills Inventory is used for the assessment of individual differences in skills of social communication and relationship with some social properties (Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Groves, 2006; Riggio, 1986; Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Segrin & Flora, 2006): the results of the SSI showed positive correlations with leader effectiveness in group, and negative correlations with the measures of loneliness, shyness, depression, social maladaptation.

The characteristics of the SSI instrument are as follows (Riggio & Carney, 2003, pp. 21-29): the test-retest reliability and internal consistency of the SSI scales are favorable, with test-retest reliabilities ranging from .81 to .96; Cronbach’s alpha

coefficients for the SSI scales range from .65 to .89 (M=.73) for the adult sample and from .64 to .89 (M=.79) for the college sample. As for validity, the SSI scales and the overall SSI score demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity in a series of validity studies reported in Manual of SSI (Riggio, 1986, p. 21) and by others (according to Riggio & Carney, 2003, pp. 26-29).

3.4. Procedure

The students–teachers of the generations 2006 (the first generation of the participants) and 2018 (the second generation of the participants) were given the instruments for self-assessment during the regular classes of Psychology university courses. The self-assessment lasted 60 minutes in each generation of the participants.

3.5. Data analysis

The measures of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and ANOVA were used for data processing by the SPSS 25.

4. Results

Although the instrument SSI (Riggio & Carney, 2003) was applied in Serbia for explorative purposes and was not standardized, the results obtained in this research give deeper insight into the degree of development and the structure of basic social communication skills of the students–teachers.

According to students’ self-assessment, the basic social communication skills of student–teachers are moderately developed (M=283.84, the possible minimal score being 90, and possible maximal score being 450, SD=25.385; obtained results Min=215, Max=378, Table 2). Such a moderate degree of communication skills development does not meet the demands of the qualitative teaching standards (considering referential studies).

Certain statistically significant differences in the development of socio-communication skills (differences of two students’ generations), according to Riggio’s concept, were recorded (Table 2).

Table 2. Basic social-communication skills (SSI) of students-teachers

	Both gen. M	Gen. 2006 M	Gen. 2018 M	F	Sig.
Emotional expressivity 15-75	43.62	42.03	45.90	22.219	0.000**
Emotional sensitivity (15-75)	52.02	51.60	52.63	1.026	0.312
Emotional control (15-75)	44.22	45.26	42.72	8.948	0.003**
Social expressivity (15-75)	48.61	48.10	49.35	1.151	0.285
Social sensitivity (15-75)	49.95	50.70	48.88	2.689	0.103
Social control (15-75)	45.52	40.50	52.74	183.063	0.000**
SSI overall (90-450)	283.84	278.18	292.21	15.487	0.000**

** p < 0.01

The students of the generation 2006 showed a significantly higher level of emotional control and lower level of emotional expressivity compared to the students of the generation of 2018. The participants who belonged to the generation of 2018 showed a significantly higher level of emotional expressivity and social control. The overall self-assessment of the developed basic social-communication skills indicated the significant difference between two generations – the students of generation 2018 had a higher overall SSI score than their colleagues of generation 2006.

Interaction involvement is a crucial teacher's skill since their basic professional activities are realized as various forms of social interaction. As the IIS subscales have different numbers of items, in order to compare the scores of individual components of interaction involvement the self-assessments of each subscale are scored as values ranging from 1 to 5 (Perceptiveness M=3.28, SD=0.687, Attentiveness M=3.53,

SD=0.708, Responsiveness M=3.40, SD=1.002). The obtained results indicate that the individual aspects of interaction involvement are equally developed.

Two generations of students showed different levels of interaction involvement, as illustrated in Table 3. The students of generation 2018 perceived themselves as having higher levels of the overall interaction involvement and its aspects compared to their colleagues who had been students 12 years before.

Table 3. Interaction involvement (IIS) of students-teachers

	Both gen. M	2006 M	2018 M	F	Sig.
Perceptiveness (4-20)	13.11	11.91	14.84	73.466	0,000**
Attentiveness (6-30)	21.20	18.90	24.50	141.007	0.000**
Responsiveness (8-40)	27.17	21.86	34.81	302.103	0.000**
IIS (18-90)	61.49	52.68	74.15	318.339	0.000**

** p<0.01

What changed in the education of students-future teachers from 2006 to 2018? And did these changes influence the difference in the levels of their basic social-communication skills and interaction involvement?

In the period 2006-2018, the institutional and program context for educating students-prospective teachers went through substantial changes. These changes refer to pre-graduate education curricula (at both the primary and secondary education levels, the students had courses that facilitated various communication skills – e.g. Civic education as well as other optional courses) and to teacher initial education at a university (the courses such as Psychology of Communication, General and Educational Communicology were realized; the development of prospective teachers’ communication competence was also guided and encouraged through other academic courses). The shift to the student-prospective teachers’ communication competencies led to learning new communication behaviours.

The correlation analysis was carried out to determine the potential relationships between the basic social-communication skills and components of interaction involvement and whether these phenomena have certain commonalities.

The scores of the SSI is positively significantly correlated with the scores of the IIS (r=0.41, p<0.01). Also, the obtained results showed significant correlations between certain components of social skills and interaction involvement (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation matrix of SSI components and IIS components

Basic socio-communication skills	Interaction involvement			IIS overall
	Perceptiveness	Attentiveness	Responsiveness	
Emotional expressivity	0.23**	0.25**	0.27**	0.29**
Emotional sensitivity	0.27**	0.19**	0.13	0.20**
Emotional control	-0.04	-0.01	-0.08	-0.06
Social expressivity	0.16*	0.22**	0.05	0.13
Social sensitivity	0.14	0.11	-0.06	0.02
Social control	0.54**	0.62**	0.72**	0.74**
SSI overall	0.39**	0.42**	0.32**	0.41**

N=195 **p<0.01 **p<0.05

The particularly strong correlations were registered between three components of interaction involvement and social control, which is a component of social skills. As interaction involvement was self-assessed in conversational context (a social context that enables higher levels of control and awareness of the situation), the strong correlations between communication skills, recognizable during conversation and social skill of communication control can be ascribed to the importance of the individual students’ feelings that they are responsible for their performance (in this case, successful conversation).

Simultaneously, there were no correlations between the components of interaction involvement and two basic social-communication skills – emotional control and social

sensitiveness, though these are notable components of all the interactions in teacher professional action. Such a result may be explained by the existing possibility of emotional control and social sensitiveness still being the students-prospective teachers' developmental potential. Furthermore, being at the age of late adolescence, they did not still identify themselves with their professional roles – they were to develop these two components that activate responsibility toward the others.

Although Cegala (Cegala, 1978, Cegala et al., 1982) considered interaction involvement as “a fundamental dimension of interpersonal communication competence”, which means that relations or intertwining with various social-communication skills are to be expected, the obtained results question the hypothesis on significant relations between the components of interaction involvement and components of basic social-communication skills and polarize conclusions. The components of interaction involvement (perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness) significantly correlate with that basic emotionally coloured social-communication skill – social control.

5. Discussions and conclusions

Considering the students–prospective teachers' awareness of their communication competences as important prerequisite of improving these competences, this study explores the students-prospective teachers' perceived levels of basic social communication skills (emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity, and emotional control; and social expressivity, social sensitivity, and social control) as well as interaction involvement (perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness) of students-prospective teachers.

The findings showed that the students–prospective teachers' basic social-communication skills as well as their interaction involvement were moderately developed. The individual components of social skills and interaction involvement correlate significantly. Generally, the self-assessed communication skills of the students-prospective teachers are developed at a moderate level. However, paying particular attention to these skills in the teaching context, we can point out that the obtained level does not present a sufficient foundation for quality teaching communication. Therefore, it is crucial to develop these skills further during undergraduate academic studies.

As the control – whether explicitly or implicitly – is the essence of almost every definition of communication competence (Parks, 1994), this article seeks to explore the components of students-prospective teachers' communication competence that may be the contents of self-assessment, but also contain recognizable cognitive dimensions and are included in self-concept. Some components of communication competence such as “communication guidelines and basic skills in interpersonal relations, and self-expression were found to significantly predict self-esteem” (Çevik, 2018, p. 90). Simultaneously, “interaction involvement explains interpersonal communication as a transactional relationship involving the elements of self, others, and situations“ (Cegala, 1978, p. 3).

In order to improve their communication competence, students-prospective teachers should be aware of their levels of communication competence at any moment; in other words, they should be connected with themselves, with what they are, as to regulate their actions. Relying on the hierarchical theory of communication competence (Parks, 1994) and the concept of self in Gestalt (psycho)therapy, self-regulation of communication behaviour of students-prospective teachers is considered a base for strengthening their communication competence; if they reach full awareness of their own communication they will know what to do, how to do it, what are the alternatives and which choices to make (Zlatic & Bjekic, 2015, p. 79). The participation of students-prospective teachers, in this study in which the self-assessment of interaction involvement (based on Cegala's conceptualization and instrument) and basic social-communication skills (based on Riggio's conceptualization and instrument) has been carried out, not only has contributed to the enlargement of knowledge with regards to these communication categories but has

also realized a practical goal of initiating the students' processes of self-knowledge of communication behaviours needed in quality future professional engagement in teaching process.

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