

Evaluation of teachers' perception of effective communication skills according to gender

Serdar Yavuz^{1*} and Ümmühan Güzel²

¹Turkish Education Department, Education Faculty, Firat University, Turkey.

²Hazro Imam Hatip Secondary School, Ministry of National Education, Turkey.

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ABSTRACT

Living things express themselves verbally, textually or physically and it is called communication. Since the first moment of life, human beings are able to express their feelings and thoughts through various methods. Communication through these transfers has sometimes resulted in teaching. Teaching generally takes place in the classroom and teachers are expected to have an effective perception of communication skills for an effective communication process in the classroom. This study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom by taking gender into account. In this descriptive study, the participants consisted of 381 teachers. For data collection, the Classroom Effective Communication Skills Scale was administered. The five-point Likert type scale consisted of 23 items with four dimensions. The results revealed that although male and female teachers had high scores in terms of effective communication skills, no significant difference was observed between male and female teachers. According to the findings, female teachers had slightly higher scores than male teachers.

Keywords: Teacher, gender, classroom communication, effective communication.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: serdaryavuz@firat.edu.tr.

INTRODUCTION

Language, which is a result of the language skills of the society and provides reconciliation, is defined as indicators that enable a certain group of people to communicate (Vardar, 2007). It may also be Language, which is the most basic tool of lifelong learning and development, enables many other actions including reading, writing, listening, speaking, questioning, problem solving, and thinking, which will ensure mental, social, and emotional development. Language has an important place in expressing feelings and thoughts, communicating, transferring culture, and solving problems (Güneş, 2011) and all these processes are possible through only communication. Communication, which is a means of an agreement between living things, can be defined as a verbal exchange of thoughts (Zillioğlu, 2010) or as the exchange of feelings and thoughts among people (Cüceloğlu, 1987). Not only people but all living things in the universe communicate in certain ways. People have improved their innate speaking ability by including their minds and abilities and

prioritize this skill throughout their lives (Gönenç, 2007).

The quality of communication individuals establish is one of the most important factors affecting satisfaction with life (Selanik Ay, 2015). As a process, communication is dynamic and continuous and all elements of communication affect each other (Pearson and Nelson, 2000). More specifically, all the relations that occur among people depend on communication to be established. This communication process among people results in either a positive or negative way depending on problems that may occur (Korkut, 1996). The results of this process are affected by the moods of the individuals, their personality traits, the way the message is sent to the receiver, feedback from the receiver, and so on. A conflict that occurs between individuals may only be prevented through communication that is established in a healthy way.

Effective communication is the basic skill that each individual needs in order to be able to express himself, to understand the others, to solve problems arising by

preventing possible conflicts, and to get in touch with himself and his social environment both in his private and professional life (Uzuntaş, 2011). People with effective communication skills have positive relationships with other people. Effective communication also has a facilitating effect on the professions performed in the society. While effective communication is important in all professions, it is much more important in professions that are directly related to human beings. Examples of these professions are teachers, psychologists, social workers, healthcare professionals, lawyers, policemen, and salespeople (Korkut, 2005).

Teaching constitutes the most important profession in terms of communication with people. In teaching, which shapes the generations of societies by working as an artist, students form the material. The path to the student is through the communication between the teacher and the parent. Improving the teacher-parent relationship is vital for schools to develop as learning communities. Therefore, teachers should be specifically trained to communicate with parents and students (Graham Clay, 2005). The emergence of a good outcome in schools depends on teacher's effective communication skills, which is an open communication (Johnson, 1999). Teachers who need to have effective communication skills need to be constantly changing and developing in accordance with today's world conditions. With the spread of technology, it becomes easier for students to access all kinds of useful and harmful information. This, in turn, affects the psychology of students who face negative content, and they become more sensitive in their communication. Increasing the efficiency of students and bringing them to a beneficial position in the community depends on effective classroom communication.

Classrooms are the most important social setting for teachers and students. The educational activities that take place in the school environment are effective for students and teachers in adapting to social life. Informal or formal education that occurs in the classroom and outside the classroom cannot be expected to be independent of communication (Çengelci, 2011). High quality interaction with the students in the classroom, eye contact to be established during the lesson, using body language effectively, having clear and understandable expressions in his speech, understanding emotions and thoughts of his students by establishing empathy and demonstrating an equal approach are the traits that teachers should have. A teacher who communicates effectively can also activate this skill in the classroom and ensure that his students are included in the teaching and learning process. In such a classroom environment, the quality of education increases; students are able to gain the desired behavior; and the level of success increases. On the other hand, in an environment where there is no effective and healthy communication between teachers and students, students may lose their interest in the

course, and, in turn, academic achievement will be negatively affected (Aksungur, 2018).

In short, the importance of communication in all relationships, especially human relationships, is undeniable. Especially considering the importance of teaching, which is one of the professions in the society, the communication network that teachers will create with students is of much more importance. This study has a critical contribution to the literature since it compares male and female teachers' perceptions of effective communication. The main goal of the study is to determine any possible differences between male and female teachers' perceptions of effective communication with students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research model and hypotheses

A descriptive study was conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in classrooms in terms of gender. To this end, the study relies on a descriptive screening model, in which individuals are asked various questions about a case or situation and their responses are examined to understand the case/situation. Büyüköztürk et al. (2018) stated that in the screening research model the goal is to take the picture of a situation in order to describe it.

The hypotheses for this particular study are as follows:

H1: There is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom based on gender.

H2: There is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of effective speaking skills based on gender.

H3: There is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of effective listening skills based on gender.

H4: There is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of empathy skills based on gender.

H5: There is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of their ability to use body language effectively based on gender.

Participants

The universe of the study consisted of teachers working in Turkey disregarding where they work. The data was collected from 381 teachers. For data collection, a questionnaire was created by using Google forms. There exist various groups for teachers on social media sites including Facebook and Instagram. The link of the form was shared in these two sites. Participation in the study was voluntary based. The online form was available from June 9th through August 10th in 2019. A total of 381 teachers (115 male and 266 female) filled out the form.

There was no missing data in the obtained forms.

Data collection tools

The online form included information about the study and privacy and protection of the data. Since teachers' perceptions about effective communication skills were investigated based on gender, teachers' gender was asked at the beginning of the online form. In addition, the Effective Communication Skills Perception Scale developed by Gülbahar and Aksungur (2018) was included in the form. The five-point Likert style scale consisted of 23 items with four dimensions including effective speaking, effective listening, empathizing, and effective use of body language. The correlations among the dimensions were between .33 and .70 and significant. The Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as .91 for the whole scale, .725 for Effective communication dimension, .709 for effective listening dimension, .730 for empathizing dimension, and .805 for effective use of body language dimension.

Data analysis

The data obtained were transferred into the electronic format. Correction formula was not applied to the answers given by the teachers and the analyses were carried out based on the answers of the teachers. Statistical operations were carried out based on the average scores for each dimension. Before the analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to determine whether data was normally distributed. It was found to be significant. Then, the K-S test was used to calculate the skewness and kurtosis coefficients. The values were -.867 and 1.255, respectively. Since the values were in the acceptable range according to George and Mallery (2010), the data was accepted as normally distributed (Çil Koçyiğit and Gök, 2019:61; Yıldırım et al., 2012:127). For gender comparisons, an independent sample t-test was used.

FINDINGS

In this section, the results related to whether there is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom based on gender are provided. An Independent sample t-test was conducted to reveal whether there was a significant difference in teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom based on gender. The perception of the effective communication skills of male and female teachers in classroom was found to be high (Table 1). However, as a result of the t-test, it was observed that there was no significant difference in

teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom between male and female participants ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, H1 hypothesis was rejected.

An Independent sample t-test was conducted to determine gender differences in the dimensions of the scale. The results are provided in Table 2. The results revealed that there is no difference between male and female teachers in terms of the effective speaking, effective listening, empathizing, and effective use of body language dimensions. Therefore, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

People's connections both with themselves and with the outside world occur through communication. School is one of the most important places where communication takes place, and here, communication between student and teacher comes to the fore. Educators often interact with students directly and communicate with them face-to-face. Due to the changes in generations and their perceptions, student-student and student-teacher conflicts are increasing; therefore, established communication requires special attention both at the macro and micro level (Hentera et al., 2015: 675). This study aims to determine gender differences in terms of teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills. More specifically, teachers' perceptions about their effective speaking skills and listening skills, empathy, and their ability to use body language in the classroom were investigated by taking gender into account. The data was collected from 381 teachers. The results revealed that teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in the classroom were at a high level and there is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions. Although the results of this study is similar to the findings of Bozkurt Bulut (2003), Çakmak and Aktan (2016) found a significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills. Çakmak and Aktan (2016) found that female teachers had a significantly higher score in their perceptions comparing with male teachers. In all teacher education programs, teacher candidates are subjected to take courses related to teaching and learning and effective communication regardless of their gender, which implies that both male and female teachers should have effective communication skills in the classroom.

Another finding of the study is related to the effective speaking dimension of the effective communication skills scale. While male and female teachers' effective speaking scores were high, there was no difference between them. Although non-significant, female teachers had slightly higher scores compared with males. The reasons for this finding may be due to women's motherly structure, the fact that the teaching profession is considered more suitable for women by the society

Table 1. Teachers' perceptions of effective communication skills in classroom based on gender variable.

Gender		N	Mean	Ss	t	p
Perceptions of effective communication skills in classroom	Male	115	4.3595	.35140	-.467	.641
	Female	266	4.3784	.36566		

Table 2. Gender difference in dimensions of the scale.

Gender		N	Mean	ss	t	p
Effective speaking	Male	115	4.2821	.41451	-1.3310	.184
	Female	266	4.3450	.42707		
Effective listening	Male	115	4.3623	.44276	-.53200	.595
	Female	266	4.3885	.43952		
Empathizing	Male	115	4.3583	.46302	1.705	0.89
	Female	266	4.2639	.50951		
Effective use of body language	Male	115	4.5884	.45313	-1.299	.195
	Female	266	4.6491	.40296		

and/or the fact that women are more open to communication and warm-hearted than men. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Kayhan (2014). In another study, Sırmaz Çoban (2019) investigated gender differences in terms of teachers' speaking skills and found that female teachers had higher self-efficacy skills in terms of speaking than male teachers.

In terms of effective listening, both female and male teachers had high scores based on the findings of the current study and female teachers had slightly higher scores compared with male teachers. In another study, Kuşçu (2010) found that male teachers had better listening skills compared with female teachers. Listening skills have a critical role in order to establish a healthy communication among people. In communications where effective listening is ignored, individuals have difficulty in understanding other people, which results in some social problems. In classrooms, for effective communication, teachers need to listen to students' problems, complaints, and requests. This effective listening positively affects the classroom climate. As Duta (2014) states, open communication increases trust level individuals have and, in turn, increases the productivity and motivation of the members in the group without any restrictions. Thus, in order to increase students' achievement in schools, teachers must have effective listening skills regardless of gender.

Another finding of the study was related to teachers' empathy skills. Although there is no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of empathy skills in terms of gender, their scores in this dimension were high. More specifically, male teachers had slightly higher scores than

female teachers. Similar results were found in other studies conducted by Elikesik and Alım (2013) and Bulut and Düşmez (2014). On the other hand, Şahin et al. (2019) found that female teachers had significantly higher scores in terms of their empathy scores comparing with male teachers. As Motataianu (2014) suggested, the effectiveness of the educational process depends on the empathy and communication skills of the teachers. Therefore, future research must examine the factors that enhance teachers' empathy skills.

According to the findings related to teachers' perceptions about the effective use of body language, although there is no significant difference between male and female teachers, their perceptions were high. In his research, Muchemwa (2014) found that teachers' effective use of body language in their communication with students positively affected students' learning and classroom discipline. He also concluded that non-verbal cues are powerful tools for both teaching and classroom management, so they should be used skillfully to improve classroom teaching. In their study, Yusof and Halim (2014) found that although teachers used their facial expressions effectively, they did not have enough eye contact with their students. Nonverbal clues are powerful tools for both teaching and classroom management. Therefore, they must be used skillfully to improve teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

As in other studies, this study also has limitations. The first limitation is related to the number of participants. This study was conducted with 381 participants. More research is needed with different samples from a larger population to verify the results of the current study. The second limitation is the data collection method. In order to

examine the gender differences in terms of communication skills, a questionnaire was administered to the participants. Future research must include other scales to ensure about the results. Also, classroom observations must be included in the studies to better examine teachers' speaking and listening skills, empathy skills, and use of body language.

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