University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola
Faculty of Education – Bitola

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DEVELOPING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE INTERACTION

Jasminka Kochoska
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola, Faculty of Education – Bitola
jasminka.kochoska@uklo.edu.mk

Blagojche Anastasov
Primary School with Resource Center, "Kocho Racin" – Bitola
blagojche.anastasov@uklo.edu.mk

Abstract

Social communication is a fundamental component of human interaction, enabling individuals to exchange information, ideas, emotions, and meanings within diverse social contexts. Effective social communication is essential for building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, fostering inclusion, and promoting understanding across cultural, social, and economic differences. This study explores the role of social communication in education and the critical function of the social pedagogue in developing these skills among students. Social pedagogues act as mediators, mentors, and facilitators, employing strategies such as workshops, role-playing, counseling, and inclusive programs to enhance verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, empathy, assertiveness, and conflict resolution skills. The development of these competencies supports students' personal growth, improves social interactions, and prepares them to navigate complex interpersonal and professional situations. Furthermore, the study emphasizes social communication as a tool for intervention, highlighting principles such as relevance, transparency, inclusiveness, empathy, interactivity, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability. By strategically applying these principles, social pedagogues can foster positive social change, resolve conflicts, and promote active participation within communities. This study demonstrates that the cultivation of social communication skills through targeted pedagogical interventions contributes not only to individual development but also to broader societal cohesion, collaboration, and equity.

Keywords: *social communication, social pedagogue, communication skills, inclusion, interpersonal interaction*

1. Introduction

Social communication is a fundamental mechanism by which interpersonal relationships are established, developed, and maintained. It represents a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, feelings, and information that not only facilitates understanding between individuals but also builds the foundation for healthy and sustainable relationships. In everyday life, social communication plays a central role in connecting people. Effective communication is the key to creating harmony and understanding, whether it concerns family, friendships, or professional relationships. In a modern society characterized by cultural diversity, economic inequality, and rapid technological advancements, the social pedagogue plays a crucial role in building bridges between different groups. His work demands a high degree of commitment, empathy, and professionalism to promote inclusiveness, understanding, and effective conflict resolution while placing special emphasis on enhancing social communication. The social pedagogue acts as a mediator, mentor, and facilitator who comprehends the complexity of interpersonal relationships. As a specialist in recognizing the social needs of diverse groups, he develops strategies to foster connection and cooperation among them. Through his work, the social pedagogue supports individuals and groups in overcoming barriers that hinder effective communication. He engages in conflict resolution, helps create a positive environment based on respect and trust, and promotes the importance of empathy and active listening.

One of the most important aspects of a social pedagogue's work is enhancing communication among groups from diverse social, cultural, or economic backgrounds. To achieve this, the social pedagogue employs different strategies, methods, and approaches to connect individuals, foster their ability to solve

problems independently, and enable them to actively participate in building a more inclusive society. The commitment to enhancing communication across diverse groups is crucial to fostering a society founded on understanding, tolerance, and collaboration. As a cornerstone of social cohesion and integration, the social pedagogue plays an indispensable role in the pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive society.

2. Concept and meaning of social communication

Social communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and meanings among people within a social context. It represents a fundamental component of human existence and functioning, as it is through communication that interpersonal relationships are created, maintained, and transformed. Social communication encompasses a range of verbal and nonverbal skills that enable individuals to effectively engage in and navigate various social interactions (Barrow, 2023). It involves an act through which one person provides or receives information from another concerning needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. The information or content (the message) is transmitted in a specific form by the sender (encoder) to a particular destination (receiver or decoder). Communication is also defined as a process through which we convey and construct meaning in an attempt to achieve mutual understanding. For this process to be effective, it necessitates a diverse set of skills, including listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating (Vladimirova, 2017). Communication occurs within the family, school, workplace, community, and broader social structures. Moreover, well-developed social communication skills facilitate the development of advanced linguistic abilities that are crucial for abstract thinking, deductive reasoning, and comprehending the interconnections among concepts (Barrow, 2023). The development of social communication begins at birth through face-to-face interaction and leads to the competent use of language and the competent and flexible use of nonverbal communication. Social communication consists of:

- social interaction (speech style and context, culture, problem-solving, social tasks - joining peer groups, cooperative games, etc.);
- social cognition (theory of mind - the ability to understand one's own and others' mental states and act accordingly, reasoning, inference, executive functions - organizing, planning, problem solving);
- pragmatics (nonverbal communication - body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, gaze, and verbal communication - requests, responses, comments, responsibility, maintaining the topic) and
- language processing (language comprehension, spoken and written language expression, morphology, syntax, semantics, phonological skills) (Dilberović, 2023).

Social communication is a broad term that describes how both verbal and nonverbal communication are used in social situations. In its most basic sense, it is the way people interpret and communicate with each other. It is often referred to by various terms, including pragmatics, pragmatic language, social language, social skills, functional communication, and interpersonal communication (Therapy, 2022).

Key elements in defining social communication are:

- The process of exchange: communication involves sending, receiving, and interpreting messages, whether they are verbal (words) or non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions);
- Interaction within a social context: Social communication occurs within a specific environmental, cultural, and social framework that shapes its meaning and interpretation.
- The transfer of meanings: communication is a process through which people share and create shared meanings.
- Dynamism: social communication is dynamic and adapts to changing circumstances, social rules, and cultural values.

Social communication involves the creation, exchange, and transformation of information among individuals, groups, and social organizations. Many dimensions of social communication could include the following divisions - horizontal and vertical communication; verbal (through language) and nonverbal communication (gestures and other forms of expression); formal (through official channels of communication) and informal communication, intentional and unintentional communication, centralized (in which there is a coordinator, who occupies a central position in the group) and decentralized communication (where all members of the group can freely communicate with each other), and personal and impersonal communication (Oleksiak & Warwas, 2023).

2.1 Social communication skills

Social communication skills play a key role in building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships in personal, professional, and social life. They represent a set of abilities that enable effective interaction with other people, the expression of one's own ideas and emotions, as well as understanding the needs and feelings of others. Among them are the following social communication skills.

Verbal communication refers to speech, that is, the way in which language is used in everyday speech. It involves the use of clear and appropriate language in expressing thoughts and ideas. Content can be conveyed from one person to another through various channels, such as speech, writing, and other forms of expression. Language skills are essential abilities that everyone can and should develop to enhance personal growth and improve relationships and interactions with others. Since the primary goal of verbal communication is the accurate transmission of information, it is crucial to understand the interlocutor's perspective and adjust one's manner of expression accordingly (Vladimirova, 2017). Equally important in verbal communication is the ability to adapt one's speech to the situation, audience, or context, while expressing thoughts constructively and unobtrusively.

Nonverbal communication involves the recognition and use of nonverbal cues, including facial expressions, gestures, body movements, eye contact, vocal intonation, and posture. What is commonly referred to as body language is, in fact, a form of unconscious nonverbal communication. The body employs both reflexive and deliberate movements to convey messages to those attuned to receiving them. According to some research, 55% of communication is attributed to body language, gestures, and eye contact, 38% to tone, color, volume of voice, and 7% to the content of the words used in the communication process (Vladimirova, 2017).

Active or effective listening is a key skill for social communication that involves paying attention to the other person without interrupting, and showing interest and understanding of what is being said. This skill does not just mean listening to what the other person is saying, but also hearing what they really have to say. Active listening facilitates understanding of the speaker's message and significantly enhances motivation within any conversation. This skill encompasses paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, and demonstrating empathy. The ability to actively listen means absorbing not only the surface facts but also delving deeper into the content. This is the essence of active listening, ensuring that communication becomes a two-way process rather than a one-sided exchange. "Active listening encompasses an essential part of the process, by providing feedback to the one who initially conveys the message" (Влашчева, 2011).

Assertiveness is a social communication skill that helps interlocutors learn how to express their thoughts and feelings clearly and respectfully, without being aggressive or passive. Assertiveness involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in an honest and socially acceptable manner, while respecting the rights of other people. An assertive individual respects the opinions and perspectives of others, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. With assertive behavior, a person maintains their own boundaries and dignity in situations in which there is a real danger of being manipulated. Therefore, assertive communication is highly valuable in challenging situations and is an essential skill for managing, preventing, and resolving conflicts. People who apply it act confidently and securely in what they do, with complete control over the situation (Станојковска, 2020).

Empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and experience the emotions, needs, and perspectives of others. It is the foundation for building healthy interpersonal relationships and is one of the most important aspects of social communication. Empathy is an important social-emotional skill that requires self-awareness and active listening, which leads to improved communication (Лау, 2021). It plays a crucial role in nurturing meaningful connections with others and is a fundamental element of effective social communication. This skill helps to recognize the feelings of others, that is, to "get into someone else's shoes," without taking on the weight of the emotional state. Empathy is associated with the skill of reading signals, understanding the feelings, attitudes, and perspectives of the other person, as well as showing concern and understanding for their emotional state. Communicating in a way that fosters trust and support, genuine understanding, and sharing feelings increases the possibility of effective communication.

Conflict resolution is a skill that enables effective handling of disagreements, differences, and conflicts in a way that preserves communication, builds trust, and achieves constructive outcomes. This skill is essential in everyday social interactions, as conflicts are an inevitable part of interpersonal relationships. It also facilitates understanding, prevents the deterioration of relationships, and encourages constructive interaction. This skill not only creates harmonious relationships but also helps in personal and professional growth, preparing people to deal with challenges in interpersonal relationships maturely and effectively (Radola, 2016).

Digital communication is based on interactions between potential internet users and the information provider. The term "digital communication" refers to any (communication or marketing) action that is oriented towards promoting products and/or services through digital media. Digital literacy is a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to the use of digital devices such as desktops, laptops, smartphones, and similar devices. For successful professional work in any field, young professionals need to master appropriate basic and advanced communication skills adapted to new digital collaborative platforms and work tools built on traditional methods, which have been used for decades. In this way, a culture is created that fosters an approach to digital development with digital productive tools and flexible communication practices with access to new opportunities for more effective work and efficient communication in the new digital era (Киров, 2020).

The development of social communication skills is a complex process that involves learning and acquiring various abilities that enable individuals to communicate effectively, collaborate, and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. These skills are crucial for success in personal life, professional life, and society as a whole (Кочоска, 2025).

2.2 The role of the social pedagogue in the development of communication skills

Viewed from a scientific bio-psychosocial, pedagogical-social, and psycho-pedagogical perspective, social pedagogy can be defined as an "integrative science, i.e., an integral discipline" (Marburger, 1987). Modern social pedagogy is the science, theory, and practice of preventing and alleviating the difficulties of social integration of people with behavioral disorders, especially by providing special assistance in education, both to individuals and to certain social groups (Uzelac, 1995). The profession of social pedagogues is an integral part of the classification in which they belong to the group of experts in education and rehabilitation. The recognizable identity of this profession is determined by the competencies, based on specific theories and knowledge, and ethical and professional values. The very fact that the social pedagogue with his function plays an important role within society, is emphasized by the fact that "the study program in social pedagogy prepares experts for scientific research and practical work for primary prevention, detection, diagnosis, early interventions and treatment, processing and subsequent care for children, young people and adults at risk or behavioral disorders and their social environment, in the function of education, socialization, rehabilitation and social integration" (Kochoska & Anastasov, 2020). The competencies that a social pedagogue should possess can be divided into two groups:

1. **Core competencies**

- Knowledge (bio-psycho-social paradigms).

- Understanding (individual and social phenomena).
- Assessment (characteristics of individuals and communities).

2. **Specific competencies**

- Communication and thinking.
- Collaboration (with different stakeholders).
- Preparation, management, and evaluation of projects.
- Analytical and research work for the needs of practice (Kochoska & Anastasov, 2020).

Communication is the basis for the development of a person as a social and conscious being. It enables the transfer of information, ideas, and feelings between people, thus improving the educational and social climate. It is one of the important specific competencies of the social pedagogue. In this context, his role is also crucial for the development of communication skills among students and in the wider social environment. The social pedagogue has a wide scope of action, which includes counseling and mediation between the student, teacher, and parent, building bridges of cooperation and understanding. In the area of communication, the social pedagogue focuses on encouraging and developing verbal and non-verbal skills, as well as listening and assertive expression skills. His approach includes individual work with students, group activities, and creating an environment that encourages open and positive communication. One of the primary tasks of a social pedagogue is to identify barriers that hinder communication among students, such as low self-esteem, fear of public speaking, or lack of empathy, and through individual work and group activities, he trains students in communication skills.

Developing communication skills has numerous benefits for students, including improving students' self-confidence and empathy; reducing conflicts in the school environment; encouraging open and constructive dialogue between all stakeholders in the educational process; and preparing for future social and professional challenges (Practice, 2022). To achieve these goals, the social pedagogue uses various methods for developing communication skills, such as:

- Workshops and interactive sessions that encourage teamwork and develop the ability to cooperate among students through their activities.
- Role-playing allows students to practice different communication scenarios in a safe environment.
- Counseling, in which individual sessions help students overcome personal barriers to communication.
- Inclusive programs that provide support for students with special educational needs or students from marginalized groups (Team, 2024).

The role of the social pedagogue in the development of communication skills is essential for creating a positive environment in the school and in the community. Through carefully planned activities and an individual approach, the social pedagogue can contribute greatly to building self-confident and socially competent individuals. To strengthen this role, support from the educational system is needed, as well as continuous cooperation between the social pedagogue, teachers, and parents.

3. Social Communication as a Tool for Intervention

Social communication is an essential part of human relationships and plays a key role in the formation and functioning of social communities. Its significance is much more than a simple exchange of information because it can also be a powerful instrument for intervention, enabling problem-solving, changing behavior, and improving social conditions (Njoroge, 2023). Intervention through social communication implies the strategic use of communication methods and tools to achieve specific goals. The most significant ones are the following:

- Disseminating information to raise awareness about a specific issue, such as health issues, climate change, or social injustice.
- Using communication strategies to encourage positive changes in individual and collective behaviors.
- Using communication skills to defuse tensions and find solutions to conflict situations.
- Encouraging communities to become active and participate in solving common problems.

3.1 Principles of intervention in social communication

The principles of effective intervention in social communication are the basis for designing effective communication strategies that can contribute to positive changes in individual and collective behavior (Ogbanga, 2024). Respecting these principles allows the social pedagogue to be more effective in his work, to build positive and trusting relationships, to provide support for students, and to create conditions for their personal and social development. This is important both for the quality of communication but also for maintaining his professional and ethical attitude in his work. The most important key principles for intervention through social communication are:

The principle of relevance and transparency. Effective communication should be tailored to the target audience, taking into account their needs, cultural values, and language. Understanding them is the basis for a successful intervention, and relevant messages increase the level of acceptance and understanding. On the other hand, openness and honesty are essential for building trust. Transparency allows for the creation of a stable relationship between the sender and the receiver of messages. When the audience feels that the communication is sincere and relevant, it is ready for active involvement. The principles of relevance and transparency are key to effective social communication. They create the basis for a reliable and influential exchange of information, which is especially important in the context of interventions, education, and promotion of positive social changes. Through their application, communication becomes a means of fostering awareness, understanding, and active inclusion (Baraibar-Diez & Odriozola, 2015).

The principle of inclusiveness in social communication is a key principle that ensures equal participation and representation of all individuals and groups in the communication process. This principle implies the recognition of diversity and the active engagement of all members, regardless of their social, cultural, economic, or physical status. Social communication should provide information that is accessible to all, including marginalized groups, people with disabilities, and those living in remote communities. Inclusivity refers to respecting cultural, linguistic, gender, and other types of diversity, which leads to the conclusion that the inclusion of all stakeholders and target groups ensures that communication will be balanced and targeted at the unique needs and perspectives of different groups (Rozaki, Kovačić, Charalampous, González, & Gabriels, 2020).

The principle of empathy is an essential principle in social communication, which enables a better understanding of the feelings, needs, and experiences of other people. It represents the ability to put oneself in someone else's perspective and to establish an emotional connection, which is crucial for effective and meaningful communication. Empathy is expressed through the skill of active listening, which involves giving the interlocutor full attention, showing understanding, and responding to their words and feelings. With an empathetic approach, messages are adapted to reflect the emotions and needs of the audience, enabling better understanding and acceptance. In social communication, empathy is applied through: listening and recognizing the needs of the interlocutor; using emotionally relevant messages; avoiding direct and imposed advice and solutions; showing sincere interest in the interlocutor's problem. The principle of empathy enables connecting with people on a deeper emotional level, fostering trust and creating a basis for achieving positive changes (Abrahams, 2024).

The principle of interactivity in social communication refers to the two-way exchange of information and influence between individuals or groups, which is the basis for creating deep and effective communication processes. This principle implies the active participation of all communicators in the exchange process, where each participant not only receives but also gives information, expresses

opinions, and influences others. Key aspects of interactive social communication can be listed as: two-way communication; reciprocity or a two-way exchange process; choice of channels and format of communication; and active involvement in listening (Burgoon et al., 2002).

The principle of cultural sensitivity in social communication refers to the awareness and respect for differences between cultures, as well as the ability to communicate in a manner that is respectful and seeks to avoid cultural discomfort and conflict. This principle plays a key role in a globalized world, where people from different cultural backgrounds often meet and communicate in different contexts. To be culturally sensitive, it is important to understand the different values, beliefs, languages, customs, and norms of other cultures. This is very important because different cultures have different communication styles, including verbal and non-verbal communication. This principle also requires the avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices that can affect the way in which interlocutors communicate. The application of cultural sensitivity in social communication not only helps to avoid conflicts but also contributes to better understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between different cultures (Smith, 2023).

The principle of sustainability in social communication refers to the creation and maintenance of communication processes that are long-term, effective, and ethical, to achieve stability and positive results in mutual relationships. This principle aims to ensure that communication is not only productive and constructive in the moment, but also that it will continue to have a positive effect in the future, without harming the participants, society, or the environment. Sustainability in communication is achieved through constant and open communication, respect for diversity, empathy, and honesty in contacts. It not only refers to continuous communication, but also to achieving positive results that can be in the form of joint solutions to problems, improving social conditions, or developing new ideas and innovations that benefit all parties. This principle also includes the ability to adapt communication strategies to new circumstances and needs, which is especially important in globalized and rapidly changing societies (Weder, 2023).

The principles of social communication intervention are the foundation for creating effective, healthy, and productive interpersonal relationships in a variety of contexts. Communication-based on these principles creates strong and sustainable connections, encourages collaboration, and ensures the development of positive social change.

Conclusion

Social communication forms the foundation for the development of social competence and interpersonal relationships. Its significance lies not only in facilitating the exchange of ideas, feelings, and information but also in fostering trust and understanding among diverse groups. The role of the social pedagogue is crucial in promoting and refining these skills through individual support, group activities, and the application of inclusive methods. Developed communication abilities, such as empathy, assertiveness, active listening, and nonverbal communication, enable better collaboration and effective conflict resolution. Social communication also serves as a tool for intervention, encouraging positive change and active participation within the community. Overall, the study emphasizes that cultivating and enhancing communication skills through the work of the social pedagogue significantly contributes to creating a more inclusive, harmonious, and socially responsible environment.

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