

AN EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND EMPATHIC TENDENCIES OF STUDENTS ATTENDING POLICE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out whether Police Vocational School of Higher Education students comprehend the duties and responsibilities of being a police correctly and practice what has to be done through correct methods within this context; to evaluate their empathy tendencies and communication skills; to find solutions if they have any shortcomings in communication skills; to make up for their shortcomings in showing empathy or to strengthen their existing skills. The study included a total of 909 students attending Samsun 19 Mayıs Police Vocational School of Higher Education. Of these 909 students, 207 (45,6%) females and 247 (54,4%) males were in their first year while 252 (55,4%) males and 203 (%44,6) females were in their second year. The data was collected through a 25-item 5 likert scale developed by Korkut (1996) in order to understand how individuals evaluate their communication skills. The scale is scored from (1) never to (5) always. To find out empathy tendencies, Empathic Tendencies Scale developed by Dökmen (1988) was used. The scale is a Likert type scale; it includes 20 questions which are scored from 1 to 5. The lowest score a person can get from the scale is 20 while the highest score is 100. Frequency percentage was used to find out the age distribution of the group. Mean and standard deviation were used to present the group's communication skill levels and independent groups t-test was used to present the state of differentiation based on gender, age and question factor. General communication skills of the research group were below the average communication level score while their empathy tendencies were high. There were significant differences in communication levels in terms of their year of study, gender and their department at high school ($P<0,05$). As a result, studies of individual development in the education of professional groups which are interlocked with humans will enable an increase in communication, correct management of communication processes, developments in overcoming deficiencies and having mutual common sense.

Key Words: Communication Skills, Empathy, Students of Police Vocational School of Higher Education

1. Introduction

All kinds of behaviours people show based on the information, skills and abilities they have along with their characteristics affect their lives. One of the important skills is communication skills. There are different definitions of the concept of communication in literature. According to one definition, communication is “the transfer of information in the form of symbols, signs, behaviours and mimics” (Budak, 2005). Another one defines communication as “the process of information leaving a unit, reaching a counter unit where it creates an effect and the return of this effect to the first unit” (Köknel, 2005). It is also communication that enables individuals to be together in society and to continue their relationships (Gürgen, 1997). Communication, which is used in interpersonal relationships by an individual for shaping oneself and fulfilling the changing necessities, is an indispensable part of life and it is the essence of the process of socialization. “Wherever there is communication, there is also interaction and wherever there is interaction, there is also communication” (Zillioğlu, 1993). Individuals, group (s) and society population are in need of communication as long as they exist.

Using communication tools well is directly proportional to the skills and abilities of the people who communicate. With this ability we can define as communication skill, parties can understand each other and express themselves. If this skill is not developed, parties cannot understand each other properly and thus, permanent partnerships and associations cannot be formed. Communication that people use in every area of their lives makes up a natural and very important part of their lives. People communicate to be together with other people, to express themselves and to impress other people, in other words, people communicate to socialize.

In addition, people get the opportunity to define their characteristics by communicating with themselves and others. A great number of factors influence the communication process and affect this process positively or negatively. These factors are: personal factors, physical factors and social factors. Personal factors include a person’s feelings, ideas and values; physical factors include heredity and how a person looks and social factors include status (position) and societal reputation (Koçel, 2010).

As a matter of their social structure, people are in communication with other people during their lives. A healthy environment depends on healthy human relationships. There are various definitions of communication in literature. Communication is a psychosocial process that puts two people in a relationship (Cüceloğlu, 2000). In another definition, communication is the exchange of message between two units, that is, it is the process of producing knowledge and making a sense of it (Dökmen, 1994). According to Miller, communication is “the transfer of messages from a source to a receiver in order to affect the receiver’s behaviour intentionally” (cited. Ergin and Birol, 2000).

Effective communication skills play a facilitative role on human relationships. A healthy relationship enables meaningful and satisfying relationship and being able to deal with problems people face during their lives whereas an unhealthy relationship causes not being understood by other people, not being able to meet one’s own needs and a feeling of loneliness (Korkut, 1996).

Another concept which is closely related to communication is empathy. Considering that communication is a case of action and reaction, the necessary response for a situation or a problem and information and message exchange; including empathy in the process is inevitably seen as an extremely important solution in terms of enabling people to get along better and to solve their problems in the most effective ways (Yiğit and Deniz, 2012).

The concept of empathy has an undeniable significance in daily life, especially in a healthy communication. People feel understood and important when other people show empathy towards them. Being understood and being cared for by other people makes us feel comfortable and better (Dökmen, 1994).

Being a police is one of the occupations that require most communication. Forming relationships based on effective communication and trust is possible only by developing the skills of empathy and building open and sincere communication. Communication, situation analysis and governance should be seen as processes that complete each other (Yiğit and Deniz, 2012).

The objectives of this study are to find out whether the students comprehend the duties and responsibilities of being a police in terms of communication processes and empathy tendencies; to present the differences between the students in terms of their genders and their years of study; the effects of where the students live, which department they graduated at high school, the education level of their families and the number of siblings; to practice the things that need to be done by using correct methods and if there are any lacks in communication skills and empathy tendencies, to make up for these in their educational process or to strengthen their existing skills and tendencies.

2. Method

Study group

The study included a total of 909 students; 207 (45,6%) female students with an average of $19,04 \pm 1,15$ years of age and 247 (54,4%) male students with an average of $19,40 \pm 1,22$ years of age who were in their first year and 252 male students with an average of $20,1 \pm 1,09$ years of age and 203 male students with an average of $20,4 \pm 1,19$ years of age who were in their second year.

Data Collection Tools

The scale developed by Korkut (1996) had 25 items and it was 5 likert type. The scale was initially prepared for high school students, later it was implemented on university students and 61 adults. Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES) was developed to understand how individuals evaluated their communication skills. The items in the scale are scored from never (1) to always (5). High scores taken from the scale mean that individuals have evaluated their communication skills positively (Korkut, 1997).

As a result of the reliability test which was done with retest method, reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .76 ($p < 0.001$). Alpha value for internal consistency

coefficient was found to be 0.80 ($p < .001$) (Korkut, 1996). As a result of retest done after three weeks, reliability coefficient was found to be .69 (Korkut, 1997).

The scale, which was tested for validity and reliability, can be used to collect data in determining individuals' levels of perceiving their communication skills. The highest score that a person can get from the scale is 100, while the lowest score is 0. The highness of the score means that a person perceives himself/herself to be successful in communication skills.

Empathic Tendencies Scale (ETS) was developed by Dökmen (1988) to measure the empathy developing tendencies of individuals. The scale is a Likert type scale, it has 20 items and every item gets a score from 1 to 5. The lowest score a person can get from the scale is 20 while the highest score is 100. Total score is the participants' empathic tendency score. A high score shows that the individual's empathic tendency is high while a low score shows that the individual's empathic tendency is low. ETS was administered to a student group of 70 people with test-retest method, twice in three weeks. The reliability of this scale is 0.82. Split-half reliability between the scores of the subjects from odd and even numbers was found to be 0.86. Reliability of the scale was tested by Dökmen (1988).

Data Collection

The scales used in the study were administered to the students studying their first and second years at Police Vocational School of Higher Education in their free hours after making the necessary explanations. The results from the scale were turned into tables with the help of Excel program in order to be analyzed.

Data Analysis

Frequency percentage was used to find out the age distribution of the students. Mean and standard deviation were used to present the group's communication skill levels and independent groups t-test and variance analysis were used to present the state of differentiation based on gender, age and question factor.

Findings

Table 1. Percentage and Frequency Values of Subjects by their Year of Study

Age	First Year		Second Year	
	N	%	N	%
18	145	31,9	0	-
19	156	34,3	117	25,7
20	83	18,2	186	40,9
21	42	9,2	88	19,3
22	24	5,3	42	9,2
23	3	0,7	13	2,9
24	1	0,2	8	1,8
25	0	-	1	0,2
Total	454	100	455	100

Table 2. Total Communication Levels and Empathy Levels of Subjects

Groups	N	X±S.S	Max	Min
Communication Level	909	43,81±11,5	91	25
Empathy Level	909	64,77±7,4	94	20

Table 3. Communication Levels and Empathy Levels of Subjects by their year of study

Groups	N	Communication	Empathy
		X±S.S	X±S.S
First Year	454	42,72±9,29	64,27±6,54
Second Year	455	44,9±13,2	65,28±8,2
P Value		0,004*	0,04*

*P<0,05

Table 4. Communication Levels and Empathy Levels of Subjects by their Gender

Groups	N	Communication	Empathy
		X±S.S	X±S.S
Male	459	42,91±10,74	65,35±7,09
Female	450	44,74±12,17	64,19±2,23
P Value		0,017*	0,019*

*P<0,05

Table 5. Communication Levels and Empathy Levels of Subjects by their department at high school

Department	N	Communication	Empathy
		X±S.S	X±S.S
Verbal	92	44,16±11,8	64,4±9,6
Mathematical	285	45,37±11,7	64,4±7,4
Turkish-Mathematics	492	42,74±11,2	64,9±6,8
Language	7	51,07±19,3	64,14±7,3
Sports	3	41±4,3	65,66±3,7
Others	29	44,44±8,5	67,24±8,8
P Value		0,022*	0,49

*P<0,05

3. Discussion

Through communication, people find the opportunity to express, share and assess the concepts and ideas in their minds. With the help of communication, people can impress other people, be impressed by them, benefit from people, be beneficial and achieve things (Çalışkan, 2003). Communication skill means social communication, interpersonal communication and social interaction (Çevik, 2011). As well as people who think that communication skills occur intuitively, there are also people who advocate that most of the elements of communication skills (verbal, audial, tactual, physical, etc.) can be learned (Egan, 1994).

Özerbaş et al., in a study they conducted in 2007, investigated the effects of the levels of communication skills that the students studying at the Faculty of Education had on their academic success and concluded that their education and academic success had an effect on their levels of communication. Similarly, a significant difference was found in our study between the students' communication levels and the departments they studied in high school ($P < 0,05$).

One study investigated whether prospective teachers' communication skill perceptions differed in terms of their year of study and their genders. The study found significant differences in terms of year of study while there was no significant difference in terms of gender. As for our study, significant differences were found in the communication skill levels in terms of gender and year of study. The difference between the aforementioned study and our study is thought to have been caused by the different occupational necessities and educational curriculums of the two different professions. In terms of year of study, significant differences were found for both occupations. This result can be explained by low levels of communication skill experienced by the freshmen of both professions since it is their first year and by the fact that the students socialize and need to communicate in their following years.

An important criterion for the police is being respectful to people in all actions and processes. Thus, while using force, police should also consider the legal documents that secure human rights. In terms of Turkey, we can see that complaints about police are not different from the complaints of other countries. One of the behaviours that put the police on the spot is a number of police using excessive force. In terms of international context, police should be sensitive about the human rights and ethical values (Osmanoğlu, 2013). In this sense, it is thought that people who are being trained to become police need appropriate activities and curriculum during their training in order to be able to deal with psychological situations, communicate and empathize with people.

Communication is a basic human activity which a basic need such as eating and drinking and which is indispensable if people want to live together in a social environment. The fact that communication is a human activity is also a clear indication of the fact that communication is inevitable in every setting where there are people (Dursun, Ö. and Aydın, C., 2011). Empathy is the process of a person putting himself/herself in another person's shoes and understanding that person's thoughts and ideas correctly and conveying this situation (Dökmen 1994). A large number of studies on communication and empathy have studied professional groups and students and found significant differences resulting from administrative views, year of study, occupational perceptions

and personal characteristics (Keçeci and Taşocak, 2009, Tepeli and Arı 2011, Çevik, 2011, Aydoğan and Kaşkaya, 2010, Kılıcagil et al. 2009, Özşaker, 2013, Pala, 2008). One study compared the communication levels of elite athletes and found that the average of their communication skill scores were 90 and over (Şahin, N., 2012). It has been thought that while preparing the curriculum and performing activities, there should be social lessons related to sports and popularizing sports in order to minimize the negative processes resulting from the differences in communication levels.

In a study they conducted in 2006, Can and Yazılıtaş investigated the students studying at Police Vocational School of Higher Education in terms of the factors that were influential in their choosing this occupation, the problems they encountered at school and whether they had the talent to fulfill the necessities of their occupation and as a result, it was found that the students faced problems such as communication problems, difficult lesson contents, insufficient equipment and activities and insufficient substructure. The study is in parallel with our study in terms of communication.

The results showed that there is a need to give a more efficient psycho-social support to the students of police vocational school of higher education based on their needs. Thus, police vocational schools of higher education should have counselling services, and if they have counselling services, they should be made more efficient and students should get psycho-social support (Yükseloğlu et al. 2010). The results of this study reflect needs similar to our study. When the psychological processes of the students of police vocational schools of higher education are considered, it can be seen that both pressures of the occupation and the curriculum affect their behaviours, empathy tendencies and communication levels negatively.

Professional activities happen in an order within specific rules. Within this process, employees acquire the subjective, objective and societal features of the occupation. A person who has comprehended and understood the philosophy of his/her occupation can become integrated with his/her occupation (Fındıklı, 2010). Professional ethics is defined as the effects of professionals' actions and activities on society and as legal and moral responsibilities in terms of adaptation to the norms of the society. It is possible to define police occupational ethics as "all the moral values related to being a police". Just as people have to behave in accordance with some moral values to ensure peace in societal life, police also have to act in accordance with the moral rules of their occupation. Most of the rules that make up the professional ethics of police are in the texts that organize the foundation and functioning of the foundation. However, legal rules and ethic rules may not always overlap. Or maybe, ethic rules may have not taken their place in the law yet because laws generally come into being after ethic discussions. The behaviours of a police which are in accordance with the professional ethic will ensure people's trust and support, too (Bedük et al, 2010).

While making an occupational definition, the association of theoretical and practical concepts is important. This understanding is among the information that occupational groups must get during educational processes. However, when studies are reviewed, it can be seen that professional definitions and applications do not overlap. Theoretical information is not reflected on application. This brings to mind that chain of command and cyclical structure affect personal behaviours and communication levels negatively.

In a study conducted by Korkut in 2005, communication skill training for adults was found to increase the communication skill levels of adults. Although no systematical skill

training was given, when the significant difference between the year of study was considered ($p < 0,05$), an increase was found in our study in the communication levels of the students who finished their first year of study and the reason for this increase can be the lessons that contain communication processes and the students's increasing experiences. In addition, another result that was found in the same study was the higher scores that female subjects got than male students in terms of communication skills. This result is also in parallel with our study.

It is an undeniable fact that individuals should educate themselves about communication (Çevik, 2011). Because being proficient in education is effective in solving problems between individuals and facilitating adaptation. As long as people's mistakes during communication are shown and they are guided about how to communicate, it can be seen that these enable them to develop their communication skills (Çevik, 2011). An individual with good communication skills can instantly understand the behaviours of the person he/she is communicating with (Cüceloğlu, 1995).

For a police, communication skills, gender differences and age factor are important in terms of showing behaviours appropriate for the environment and situations that they are in. The characteristics of a police are important both while starting the profession and in his/her professional life. Effective communication skills can be a facilitator of relationships both in personal and professional areas. Especially those who work in professions that necessitate being with people more should master communication skills more.

4. Results and Suggestions

When the groups in the study were analyzed in terms of their year of study, it was found that the students studying their first year were in 18-19 age group with percentages of 34,3% and 31,9% respectively and those studying their second year were in 19-20 age group with percentages of 40,9 % and 25,7 % respectively.

As a general assessment, it was found that the groups' communication levels ($43,81 \pm 11,5$) were low since they were below the average of communication skills scores while their empathy levels were found to be sufficient ($64,77 \pm 7,4$). By considering these results, it can be said that operating processes that can strengthen communication skills, increasing studies and classes on communication skills can increase communication skill features.

When the groups' communication levels and empathy levels were examined by their year of study, a significant difference was found ($P < 0,05$). Although it was not a big difference, it results from the fact that communication levels and empathy levels of the students studying their first year are lower than those of the students studying their second year. More orientation for the new students, building social communication environment and increasing activities for developing personal skills can remove this difference.

When the groups' communication levels and empathy levels were examined by their genders, a significant difference was found between communication levels and empathy levels ($P < 0,05$). This difference is caused by the low scores of male students. It has been

found that female police are more farsighted and are better at managing communication processes. Thus, they can have more place and duty in management.

When the groups' communication levels and empathy levels were examined by their department at high school, a significant difference was found between communication level and the department at high school ($P < 0,05$). However, no significant difference was found in empathy levels. Although the majority of the students' department at high school was Turkish-Mathematics or Mathematics, the department which had the highest communication level was the language department. The reason for this may be the fact that students are continually in communication in language departments and they get more education on communication processes. Thus, this situation can be assessed and the curriculum in police vocational schools of higher education can include sample studies applied in the language departments.

As a result, in the education processes of professions which engage with people, studies of personal development, developing problem solving skills, forming various approaches about human relationships and behaviours will enable people working in these professions to behave correctly, to increase interaction, to manage communication processes well and to act with common sense.

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