

Improving Student's Professional Communication Abilities – A Part of Career Success?

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Abstract

Communication is the essence of interpersonal relations. The outcomes of all the activities we carry out depend on how we communicate, and in spite of the fact that it is essential that we prove our communication skills, we are poorer and poorer at doing so. Our study aims at revealing whether and to what extent young graduates of Romanian universities are aware of the importance of acquiring, practising and improving their communication skills, the more so that such abilities are decisive when it comes to achieving success in one's career. Our study was conducted between 2-13 May, 2019 on the basis of an online questionnaire. The research methodology used in order to achieve the objectives formulated in the study consists in quantitative research, by means of a survey supported via an online questionnaire. The analysis of the data collected by means of the questionnaire was done using techniques such as: frequency of occurrence of the answers to the questions addressed to the participants in the study, multiple response analysis and, where appropriate, in order to enhance the interpretation of the results, the calculation of the interquartiles applied to the questions quoted on a 10 point Likert-type scale. The 195 answers received were validated, analysed and processed econometrically using the SPSS for Windows and ANOVA applications. On the one hand, We have noticed that universities do not ensure minimum training to the future graduates with respect to the acquisition and development of communication and negotiation skills. For this matter we intend to extend the study in the near future, to see if this is the result of a lack of concern/interest on the part of the universities and/or on the part of future graduates. At the same time, we have found that the future university graduates are not stimulated to become aware of the importance of developing their communication and negotiation skills or to actively participate in various forms of scientific interaction such as national or international scientific sessions, round tables, meetings with outstanding representatives of the business environment, etc. Obviously, we are aware of the limitations of our study. Thus, we consider that its addressability was rather restricted. The group of respondents included very young graduates of economic higher education institutions. On the other hand, the respondents were not previously selected, so that there is the risk that the points of view expressed would be based not only on experience, but on intuition. Extending the respondent base (both in terms of age/expertise and field of activity) is also an important point for future action. Finally, we have formulated several proposals meant to contribute, in our opinion, to giving more importance to the training and development of business communication and negotiation abilities as a prerequisite of career success.

Keywords: career success, graduates, communication abilities, interpersonal relations

1. Introduction

Career success is decisively conditioned for each and every one of us by the need to display our communication skills. Nevertheless, there are still too few people

who realize the overwhelming importance of communication for both professional and personal success.

Communication skills are among the most important abilities pursued by employers in candidates aspiring to obtain a job (Mark, 2008:2). Yet, in most cases employers are deeply disappointed with the candidates' proven communication skills. More often than ever, many graduates display serious communication problems. As shown by experience, there are situations in which errors in message transmission generate different perceptions and interpretations of facts with the same meanings. Under these circumstances we can no longer talk about the ability but, on the contrary, about the inability to communicate. Such situations emerge from an attitude of indifference to the challenges of reality and daily life. And from indifference to ignorance there is only one step.

Regardless of the field of study, more frequently than ever, all graduates must prove strong interpersonal communication skills. For this to happen, the major responsibility lies with the universities. Such skills are useful for all graduates irrespective of their field of study. Nothing prevents a highly trained *IT* graduate from demonstrating the same excellent communication skills as a graduate in the field of foreign languages, architecture, medicine, agronomy or polytechnics. And yet, there is a very important drawback: the quality of training at pre-university, university and post-university levels in the field of communication.

In connection with the given facts, this study has a double purpose. First of all, to establish an indicative level of the future graduates' development in the field of interpersonal communication (written and oral). Secondly, to raise the alarm regarding the urgent need for pre-university education and, above all, university education, to provide sound training in the formation and development of soft skills, in a professional and profoundly responsible manner – this being the key to success in any kind of career.

2. Literature Review

Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson et Nelson, 2000:6). We share meaning in what we say and how we say it, both in oral and written forms, so we have to reflect on the matter that the biggest communication problem is that we do not listen to understand, but to reply. That is why many people speak about communication even if just a few know how to communicate effectively, especially due to the fact that, as Ford points out, "*whether you think you can or you think you cannot, you are right*" (Ford, 1941). According to Stevens (2004:17), the success in business life is decisively conditioned by the acquired and practised communication skills. Specialists are unanimous in pointing out that, as a matter of priority, employers are looking for the following skills in future candidates for a job: written and oral communication skills, public speaking abilities (Tanyel, Mitchell et McAlum, 1999; Ryan, 2016; Popescu et State, 2017); leadership skills, teamwork, and interpersonal skills, in particular (Wardrope, 2002; Sleeman, 2017; Bakshi, Downing, Osborne et Schneider, 2017); intercultural and international awareness and sensitivity, data collection, analysis, and decision-making skills, time and resource management, flexibility, adaptability, and professionalism (Sleeman, 2017; Ryan, 2016; Bakshi, Downing, Osborne et Schneider,

2017; etc.). Equally, in numerous surveys, graduate students, employers and others specialists continue to list oral and written communication among the most critical skills needed by business students today (Pittenger, Miller et Mott, 2004:329-330). Likewise, managers who can express themselves clearly and communicate effectively across functional lines will have an important competitive advantage over those who cannot (Rubin, 1996:11). In the US as well, managers along the Gulf Coast identified oral interpersonal communication as being one of the most important competency for college graduates entering the work force (Maes, Weldy et Icenogle, 1997:19). Moreover, a study by Stevens (2014:7) shows that Silicon Valley employers are not satisfied at all with the communication skills demonstrated by the candidates to a job in this geographic area, because they give maximum relevance to IT & C abilities. In his doctoral thesis, Pope (2015:19) emphasized that Interpersonal Communication Skills (ICS) are extremely important for a successful employment process, especially if they are developed by students during college. In this context, a private university in Ohio identified the need to enhance ICS studies, but in spite of their efforts there were not enough competent teachers in the field. For the benefit of future graduates, teachers should become more actively involved in the teaching of communication, collaboration, conflict management and cultural awareness. It is a well-known fact that career debut is crucially conditioned by proving the competences gained in the field of activity. Usually, demonstrating professional competences is conditioned by the restrictions imposed by job descriptions. This includes all the tasks, responsibilities and associated competencies to achieve the individual goals of the job holder. University graduates are very likely to have professional skills that they can not use as the job description does not certify these skills. (Popescu and State, 2017:19).

Unfortunately, recent evidence suggests that the proven level of communication skills of young university graduates is worryingly low. Basically, in no Romanian education cycle are there teaching modules dedicated to oral and / or written interpersonal skills. And if attempts are made to tackle the issue, these are reluctant. In some authors' opinion (Bové, 2016), Business Communication courses can help future graduates to be part of a more-effective online and offline networking team; interact with people up and down the corporate hierarchy; position themselves for promotional opportunities; solve problems ("There are no problems, only solutions" - Popescu and State, 2018:4); understand audiences' expectations; avoid and resolve disputes; use communication technology professionally; lead and participate in more effective meetings; communicate efficiently, etc.

Communication is important to our career. Even if we have the greatest or most wonderful ideas, they are not useful to our company or to our career if we cannot express them clearly and persuasively (Bové, 2018). Communication is also important to our company (Bové, 2016) because it helps business in numerous ways, from investors, bankers, and government regulators to employees, customers, and business partners.

Providing practical information, giving facts rather than vague impressions, presenting information in a concise and efficient manner, clarifying expectations and responsibilities, and also offering persuasive arguments and recommendations, "...*all this makes business communication effective*" (Bové, 2018).

Some specialists suggest that we should think and educate creatively (Glăveanu, 2018;

Amabile et Pratt, 2016; Karwowski et al., 2016; etc.). Consequently, we should reflect: “Educating which creativity?”. As Glăveanu (2018) shows, today creativity is largely considered synonymous with success. Therefore we are wondering: “Can we think and can we be creative if we don’t know how to communicate effectively?”. How can the school teach future graduates to think creatively when they lack even the most basic notions of communication – be they interpersonal or organizational -?

How do we persuade future graduates to realize that the age of learning “by heart” has passed, that their way of thinking belongs to them and not to those who require them to memorize “ad litteram” more or less useful things, which they can have access to very quickly now in the digital age (Popescu et State, 2017), the era in which, as the specialists revealed (Bernard, 2018, Ranger, 2018, etc.), the *Internet of Things (IoT)* increasingly dominates the “information market”, just as the benefits of *e-learning* have been increasingly acknowledged (Kee, Omar et Mohamed, 2012: 9). Furthermore, as specialists demonstrated, the new era of *Student-Centered Learning (SCL)* is currently attracting a great deal of research attention worldwide, driven by the growing concern of educators with ideal teaching and learning methods (Zuraidah, Jamaludin et Iranmanesh, 2015:9).

The way of thinking imposed by an era of informational progress with an often peculiar dynamics no longer allows “traditionalism” in the form of “active” teaching / memorizing methods. We no longer have the right to ask and / or to force students to learn what we “deliver” to them because “that’s the right way” or because “so it should be”. As we no longer have permission to ask students to respond creatively, but as we want to. And if they do not respond as we want them to, then we usually think they are wrong (Popescu et State, 2017).

Even if communication is discussed in relation to language and learning, models and imitative learning, social skills and human relationships and communication skills (Day, 1977), it becomes obvious that the current education can no longer resort to the teaching / learning methods of the '70s - '80s. Therefore, interaction with the students (Barret, 2013) becomes one of the fundamental facilitators for the development of interpersonal communication skills.

We believe that the development of the communication skills of future graduates and generally of any person should be closely correlated with the use of some fundamental elements of neurolinguistic programming (*NLP*) and transactional analysis (*TA*). Practically, in our opinion, the use of *NLP* and *TA* should be part of the basic education of graduates of any higher education field. The development of communication skills is primarily conditioned by the identification and penetration of the preferred communication channel used by the interlocutor, the verbal and nonverbal behavioral mimicry and by the science of using the *VAKOG* system through *NLP*. Equally, decoding the values system used by the interlocutor is a *sine qua non* condition of empathy and it allows us to better understand what our interlocutor wants. Also, if we know how and when to control and / or impose certain behaviours, we will build a relationship based on sincerity, openness and mutual trust. The scientifically based adopting with deep discernment of one of the states of mind (Berne, 1973) can only develop efficient and effective interdependence with the people in front of us. The elements provided by the literature review have led us to undertake a study that would

allow me to find out whether and to what extent young university graduates are aware of the importance of acquiring, practising and developing their communication skills as an essential way of achieving success in their career in particular, and in life in general.

3. Objectives, Hypotheses and Work Methodology

Our research was conducted between 2-13 May 2019, on the basis of an *online* questionnaire (see *Appendix 1*), available at <https://www.isondaje.ro/sondaj/591105696/>. The *research methodology* (see *Table 1*) used in order to achieve the *objectives proposed* in the *study*, consists in *quantitative research*, by means of the mentioned survey.

When choosing the work hypotheses we took into account aspects stemming from our professional practical activity, in an academic context, as well as at entrepreneurial level. Thus, we have noticed that: The graduates (and not only) have very poor interpersonal skills; what employment agencies, like any employer, are confronted with in the first place is not a lack of professional skills, but a lack of communication abilities of the prospective employees.

These findings have led us to formulate the following three hypotheses for my research:

H1: *The lack of advanced interpersonal communication skills adversely affects the professional career of higher education graduates;*

H2: *Universities (especially those with an economic profile) tend to neglect the development of the future graduates' communication skills;*

H3: *Higher education graduates tend to neglect the development of their communication skills during their studies.*

In order to verify the research hypotheses we resorted to the opinions of 195 higher education graduates with favourable professional results (with a graduation average above 9 out of 10). They were invited to express their opinions regarding, on the one hand, the importance they had given throughout their study years to the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline, and on the other hand, the usefulness of the practical knowledge acquired during the respective course and proven by their interpersonal communication skills in their work place.

The research was designed according to the objectives set by the three work hypotheses. More specifically, we wanted to verify if there was any correlation between the variables related to the graduates' communication skills and their education. Each hypothesis aimed to compare two research questions/ideas, in order to verify a truth/reality.

Table 1: Research Methodology

<i>Type of research</i>	Quantitative research
<i>Research methodology</i>	Survey
<i>The primary data collection tool</i>	<i>Online</i> questionnaire
<i>Measuring instrument</i>	Nominal and ordinal scale
<i>Sampling method</i>	Mixed methods; the snowball method is predominant
<i>Sample volume</i>	195 people
<i>Target grup</i>	Romanian citizens, graduates of a higher education institution, using the personal computer as a means of communication

Type of research	Quantitative research
Territory	Romania
The analysis process	Descriptive statistics, Analysis of Response Frequency; Multiple Response Analysis, Interquartile Calculation
The period of data collection	Ongoing research; the questionnaire - available <i>online</i> at: https://www.isondaje.ro/_sondej/591105696/
Data analysis	IBM SPSS and ANOVA Application

Source: Synthesis by the author

Data analysis of the recorded responses collected through the questionnaire was performed using *analysis techniques* such as: *frequency* of answers to the questions addressed to the participants in the study, *multiple response analysis* and, where appropriate, in order to enhance the interpretation of the results, calculation of the *interquartiles* applied to the questions quoted on a 10 point *Likert*-type scale.

The *interquartile score*, as a measure of dispersion, indicates to what extent there is a *consensus* among the *respondents' opinions* regarding the various pointed aspects addressed in the questionnaire (<http://www.achilleaskostoulas.com/2014/02/23/how-to-interpret-ordinal-data/>, accessed on March 15th, 2020). Thus, a *low score of the interquartile* represents an *indication of consensus*, while a *high score*, above the average of the scale used, is a *sign of polarization of the respondents' opinions*.

By distributing the questionnaire exclusively *online*, we intended to give the participants in the study the opportunity to express themselves freely, without feeling constrained, which contributes to diminishing the interviewing effect, while also providing a higher level of focus on the responses, as well as anonymity.

4. Results

The questionnaire placed *online* at <https://www.isondaje.ro/sondej/591105696/> was filled in by 195 people, higher education graduates. Most of the respondents were young (20 - 24 years old). All the responses to the 15 questions in the questionnaire were validated (Table 2):

Table 2: Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		TOTAL	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
What is the field you are working in? * The respondent's gender	195	100.0%	0	0.0%	195	100.0%

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

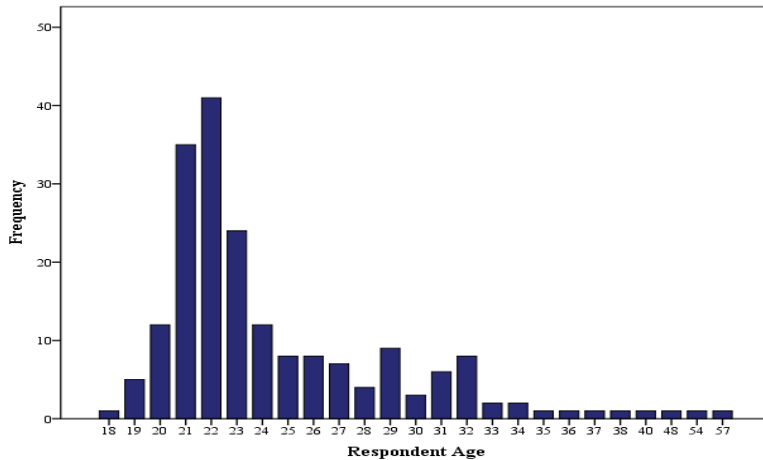
The demographic data included in the questionnaire indicates the following structure of the participants in the study: 78 men and 117 women, grouped around the general age range of 20 to 60 years old (Table 3 and Figure 1).

Table 3: *Statistics: Respondents' Biological Gender*

N	Valid	195
	Missing	0

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	78	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Female	117	60.0	60.0	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

**Figure 1:** *Respondents' age*

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The participants in the study are working in the *private* or *public* sector, in a wide range of professional areas (economic, technical, educational, medical, legal, etc.) - see *Table 4* and *Figure 2*:

Table 4: *Fields in which the respondents are working * Respondent's Gender Crosstabulation*

Count		Gender		TOTAL
		Men	Women	
What is the field you are working in?	Private Entrepreneur	19	8	27
	Economic	27	61	88
	Technical	4	3	7
	Medical	2	0	2
	Agronomy	1	0	1
	Law	3	2	5
	Higher Education	8	15	23
	Other	14	28	42
TOTAL		78	117	195

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

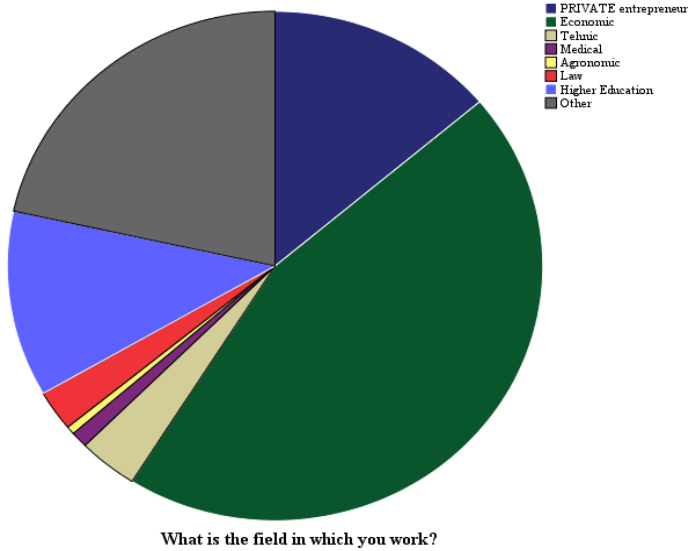


Figure 2: Fields the respondents are working in
 Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

As can be seen, most of the respondents are either working in the private sector as entrepreneurs (27 people, representing 13.85% of the total number of respondents), or in the economic field (88 people, accounting for 45.13% of the total). Regarding the time span of the graduation of university studies, more than half of the study participants (66.6%) graduated in the academic years 2016-2017 (see Table 5)

Table 5: Time span of graduation of university studies by respondents * Respondents' Gender Crosstabulation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Before 2000	4	2.1	2.1	2.1
	2000 - 2010	25	12.8	12.8	14.9
	2010 - 2015	36	18.5	18.5	33.3
	2016	33	16.9	16.9	50.3
	2017	97	49.7	49.7	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The importance given by respondents to *communication skills* is highlighted by the answers to the 3rd question: **On a scale of 10 (maximum) to 1 (minimum), how important do you think communication skills are for your career?**, with answer variants from 10 to 1.

The frequency of the responses, as shown in the Table 6, indicates that 132 respondents, representing 67.69% of the total study participants, give maximum importance to communication skills (10 points).

Table 6: The scale of importance given by respondents to communication skills

Count	Respondents' Gender		TOTAL	
	Men	Women		
<i>On a scale of 10 to 1, how important do you think communication skills are for your career?</i>	10	52	80	132
	9	9	20	29
	7	10	9	19
	5	4	4	8
	4	1	0	1
	3	1	2	3
	2	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2
TOTAL	78	117	195	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The in-depth analysis shows that the highest share in the replies is held by the recent graduates of higher education (130 people, graduated in the years 2016 and 2017) - as shown in Table 5.

Continuing the analysis, we have found that 132 graduates who are working as *entrepreneurs* or *economists* consider communication skills to be of maximum importance (see Table 7).

Table 7: The importance of communication skills for the graduates * When did you graduate the university? Crosstabulation

Count	When did you graduate the university?					TOTAL	
	Before 2000	2000 - 2010	2010 - 2015	2016	2017		
<i>On a scale of 10 (maximum) to 1 (minimum), how important do you think communication skills are for your career?</i>	10	3	19	28	20	62	132
	9	0	2	4	8	15	29
	7	0	2	3	2	12	19
	5	0	2	0	2	4	8
	4	0	0	0	0	1	1
	3	0	0	0	1	2	3
	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
	1	1	0	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	4	25	36	33	97	195	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

In terms of the *importance allocated to communication skills for their career*, the respondents gave the answers included in Table 8:

Table 8: The importance of communication skills for the graduates' career * What is the field you are working in? Crosstabulation

Count	What is the field you are working in?								TOTAL	
	Private Entrepreneur	Economic	Technical	Medical	Agronomy	Law	Higher Education	Other		
On a scale of 10 (maximum) to 1 (minimum), how important do you think communication skills are for your career?	10	25	57	1	1	1	3	16	28	132
	9	0	14	2	1	0	1	4	7	29
	7	2	12	2	0	0	0	1	2	19
	5	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	3	8
	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
TOTAL		27	88	7	2	1	5	23	42	195

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

On a scale of 10 (maximum) to 1 (minimum), how important do you think communication skills are for your career? As we can observe, 132 people (67.69% of the total respondents) give maximum importance (10 points) and another 29 (14.87% of the total) great importance (9 points) to communication skills for their career. Regarding the 4th question (Where did you acquire the communication skills which you consider to be essential for your career? (multiple possible responses,) we received 457 affirmative answers. They were interpreted using the method of multiple response analysis and a synthesis can be seen in Table 9.

The frequency of occurrence of the affirmative answers indicates that most of the respondents consider that they acquired the communication skills which are *essential for their professional activity at university* (144 respondents, representing 31.5% of the total survey participants and 73.8% of the total selected answers).

The second most important category of respondents includes people who consider themselves to be *self-educated* (89 respondents, representing 19.5% of the total survey participants and 45.6% of the total selected answers respectively).

The *personal development courses/training* are the main source of acquisition of communication abilities for 86 respondents, accounting for 18.8% of the total survey participants and 44.1% of the total selected answers, while 66 respondents representing 14.4% of the total survey participants and 33.8% of the total selected answers respectively consider that the *source* was the *family*.

Table 9: Where did you acquire your communication skills? Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Where did you acquire the communication skills which you consider to be essential in your career?^{2a}	• <i>at home</i>	66	14.4%	33.8%
	• <i>in primary school</i>	19	4.2%	9.7%
	• <i>in lower secondary school</i>	25	5.5%	12.8%
	• <i>in pre-university education</i>	28	6.1%	14.4%
	• <i>at university/undergraduate education</i>	144	31.5%	73.8%
	• <i>on the occasion of personal development courses/training</i>	86	18.8%	44.1%
	• <i>autodidact</i>	89	19.5%	45.6%
TOTAL		457	100.0%	234.4%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The usefulness of the “*Business Communication and Negotiation*” discipline, seen from the perspective of the communication skills acquired during the university education, is revealed by the answers to question 5: *From the point of view of the communication skills acquired (if any) in the faculty, how useful did you consider the “Communication and Business Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) to have been for you?.* The response frequency recorded in Table 10 indicated the fact that a relatively big number of respondents (62 people, representing 31.8% of the total study participants) consider that the respective subject is *extremely important* with respect to the communication abilities acquired during the faculty. 28.71% of the respondents think that this discipline is *very important* or *important* and only 14.36% of them believe that this subject is *not necessarily useful*, *useless* or *a loss of time* for acquiring the necessary communication skills for their future profession.

Table 10: From the point of view of the communication skills acquired (if any) in the faculty, how useful did you consider the “Communication and Business Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) to have been for you?

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Fundamental</i>	7	3.6	3.6	3.6
	<i>Extremely important</i>	62	31.8	31.8	35.4
	<i>Very important</i>	36	18.5	18.5	53.8
	<i>Important</i>	20	10.3	10.3	64.1
	<i>Useful</i>	18	9.2	9.2	73.3
	<i>Quite useful</i>	24	12.3	12.3	85.6
	<i>Not very useful</i>	13	6.7	6.7	92.3
	<i>A lot of headaches</i>	5	2.6	2.6	94.9
	<i>A loss of time</i>	4	2.1	2.1	96.9
	<i>Completely useless</i>	3	1.5	1.5	98.5
	<i>N/A</i>	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The usefulness of the “*Business Communication and Negotiation*” discipline with respect to its professional, practical applicability was revealed by the answers to question 6: *In your practical activity, have you come across the notions studied as part of the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline)?*. The answers recorded in Table 11 fully highlight the fact that *the notions acquired in class are/ can be equally useful and necessary for good training in this field*. Thus, 82 of the respondents, representing 42.1% of the total survey participants said that they had encountered the notions studied as part of this discipline *every day*, both in their professional and personal life, and 38.16% of the respondents (74 people) stated that they had encountered such notions *very often*, *quite often* or *daily*, but only in their professional activity, while approximately 10% of the respondents (20 people) considered that *the notions acquired during the course were completely useless*. 19 of the survey respondents (9.74% of the total) believed that the notions studied during the “*Business Communication and Negotiation*” course were partially useful (“so-so”).

Table 11: In your practical activity, have you come across the notions studied during the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline)?

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Every day, both in my professional and my personal life</i>	82	42.1	42.1	42.1
	<i>Every day, but only in my professional life</i>	4	2.1	2.1	44.1
	<i>Very often</i>	23	11.8	11.8	55.9
	<i>Quite often</i>	31	15.9	15.9	71.8
	<i>Often</i>	16	8.2	8.2	80.0
	<i>So-so</i>	19	9.7	9.7	89.7
	<i>Not really</i>	12	6.2	6.2	95.9
	<i>A lot of useless talk What’s the point of studying this? Fairy tales</i>	6	3.1	3.1	99.0
		2	1.0	1.0	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The importance the respondents attached to the study of the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline during their faculty years is revealed by the answers to question 7. The response frequency presented in Table 12 indicates the fact that most of the study participants, namely 154 people (78.97% of the total survey respondents), gave an essential, very high, quite high or high importance to the mentioned discipline. Answers such as *None*, *Didn’t they have anything better to do?* or *I was even annoyed by some „stuff”* are reduced in numbers (20 of the respondents, representing approximately 10.25% of the total survey participants).

Table 12: The importance given to the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) at the faculty

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	<i>Utmost</i>	8	4.1	4.1	4.1
	<i>Very high</i>	38	19.5	19.5	23.6
	<i>High</i>	50	25.6	25.6	49.2
	<i>Quite high</i>	24	12.3	12.3	61.5
	<i>Relatively high</i>	34	17.4	17.4	79.0
	<i>So-so</i>	14	7.2	7.2	86.2
	<i>Almost none. I wonder what communication is all about</i>	17	8.7	8.7	94.9
	<i>I was even annoyed by some “stuff”</i>	1	.5	.5	95.4
	<i>Didn’t they have anything better to do?</i>	2	1.0	1.0	96.4
	<i>None</i>	4	2.1	2.1	98.5
	<i>Not applicable. I didn’t study such a subject at the faculty</i>	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

A very small number of respondents, 13.84% of the total study participants, said that they had paid importance (in different degrees: *high*, *very high*, *utmost*, etc.) to the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline.

If they were to retake their university studies, only 8.2% of the total respondents would attach importance to this discipline, as indicated by the information presented in *Table 13*.

Table 13: If you were to retake your university studies, how important would you consider the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) to be?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Essential for my success, in general</i>	87	44.6	44.6	44.6
<i>Very important for my career</i>	21	10.8	10.8	55.4
<i>Important, especially in terms of the skills acquired</i>	37	19.0	19.0	74.4
<i>Quite important, but no more than other subjects</i>	14	7.2	7.2	81.5
<i>Interesting for the general culture</i>	11	5.6	5.6	87.2
<i>“Acceptable”, it may be useful</i>	9	4.6	4.6	91.8
<i>Valid Another way to compel us to learn what they want...</i>	3	1.5	1.5	93.3
<i>Not so useful. We could have done something better...</i>	5	2.6	2.6	95.9
<i>Almost not important at all. Just for the sake of some professor's teaching load</i>	4	2.1	2.1	97.9
<i>NOT AT ALL. It should be part of the common sense of each of us...</i>	4	2.1	2.1	100.0
TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The high interquartile range calculated for the responses to the previous questions (Table 14) confirms the major interest manifested by the study participants for the „Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline).

Table 14: Descriptors

Interquartile Range	Statistics
<i>From the point of view of the communication skills acquired (if any) in the faculty, how useful did you consider the “Communication and Business Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) to have been for you?</i>	9
<i>How much importance did you give to the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) in the faculty?</i>	7
<i>If you were to will retake your university studies, would you give importance to this discipline?</i>	8
<i>In your practical activity, have you come across the notions studied during the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline)?</i>	9

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The respondents’ opinion regarding the usefulness of the „Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline for managing strained relationships was expressed in the answers to question 9: “Do you think this discipline can help you deal with delicate, difficult, conflicting situations? And if YES, to what extent?”. According to the results recorded in *Table 15*, the response frequency indicates that most of the study participants consider that studying the discipline is very important in case one has to deal with difficult situations in life. This opinion was shared by 98 of the respondents (representing 50.3% of the participants), while 20 of them (10.25% of the total) said that what mattered was *being able to „manage”*. Only one study participant, representing 0.5% of the total, considers that *money is what matters, not being able to communicate*.

Table 15: Do you think this discipline can help you deal with delicate, difficult, conflicting situations? And if YES, to what extent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Definitely YES, 100%	98	50.3	50.3	50.3
	YES, but not fundamentally (about 75%)	47	24.1	24.1	74.4
	YES, a little bit, so-so (about 50%)	29	14.9	14.9	89.2
	Not really, what matters is to know how to "manage" (25%)	20	10.3	10.3	99.5
	NOT AT ALL, what matters is money, not being able to communicate... (0%)	1	.5	.5	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The extent to which the interpersonal communication skills prove useful in solving certain potentially conflicting situations is highlighted by the answers to question 10: *If you mastered communication knowledge and succeeded to prove your interpersonal skills, to what extent do you think that you would be able to handle (potentially) conflicting situations and even defuse/ solve them?*

The response frequency (see Table 16) indicates the fact that *most of the respondents consider communication knowledge extremely useful*. Thus, 155 respondents (79.49% of the total) believe that communication skills are "Decisive", "Very important" or "Important" in order to solve potentially conflicting situations. Answers like „Really, don't you have anything better to do?"; „Again these people with their ideas about communication!... ", I think these are just nice "stories", nothing more?" or „I don't really see the importance"...; are quantitatively insignificant (10 of the participants, representing about 5% of the total).

Table 16: If you mastered communication knowledge and succeeded to prove your interpersonal skills, to what extent do you think that you would be able to handle (potentially) conflicting situations and even defuse /solve them?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Decisively	77	39.5	39.5	39.5
	Very much	53	27.2	27.2	66.7
	Much	25	12.8	12.8	79.5
	Such skills would be useful, why not?	22	11.3	11.3	90.8
	It might be interesting, but I don't know how useful	3	1.5	1.5	92.3
	I've heard of such things before, but life hasn't demonstrated to me yet	5	2.6	2.6	94.9
	I really don't see the importance	7	3.6	3.6	98.5
	I think these are just nice "stories", nothing more!	1	.5	.5	99.0
	Again these people with their ideas about communication	1	.5	.5	99.5
	Totally useless. Really, don't you have anything better to do?	1	.5	.5	100.0
TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0		

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

For the 11th question (*"Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you didn't know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills?"*), the response frequency (Table 17) is more than eloquent: 151 of the participants in the study

(77.9% of the total) *admit that they have failed, in various situations, because they were unable to prove their communication skills*. 35 respondents (17.44% of the total) admit that they have **rarely** or **very rarely** failed/missed out because of not being able to prove excellent communication skills, while 9 people (4.62% of the total) consider that it was just by accident (3 people), or see no connection with the lack of communication skills (4 people). Only one respondent said that the ones who had created the questionnaire could have better done something else...

Table 17: Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you didn't know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills?

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	<i>Yes, always</i>	11	5.6	5.6	5.6
	<i>In most situations</i>	23	11.8	11.8	17.4
	<i>Often</i>	42	21.5	21.5	39.0
	<i>Quite often</i>	50	25.6	25.6	64.6
	<i>Sometimes, fifty-fifty...</i>	26	13.3	13.3	77.9
	<i>Rarely</i>	22	11.3	11.3	89.2
	<i>Very rarely</i>	12	6.2	6.2	95.4
	<i>It was just by accident...</i>	3	1.5	1.5	96.9
	<i>Not at all. I really don't see what communication has to do with such situations!</i>	4	2.1	2.1	99.0
	<i>Really, don't you have anything better to do?</i>	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0		

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

For the 12th question (“*In my opinion, communication skills are a matter of?*”), the response frequency in *Table 18* indicates the fact that a considerable number of respondents (86 people representing 44.1% of the total participants in the study) consider that communication abilities *are generated by our hard skills and „certified” by proven soft skills*, while only 15.4% of the respondents think that these abilities are related to *intuition* or *will power*.

Table 18: In my opinion, communication skills are a matter of...

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	<i>Hard skills</i>	24	12.3	12.3	12.3
	<i>Soft skills</i>	55	28.2	28.2	40.5
	<i>Generated by our Hard and “certified” by the proven Soft skills</i>	86	44.1	44.1	84.6
	<i>Intuition</i>	17	8.7	8.7	93.3
	<i>Will power</i>	13	6.7	6.7	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

In what concerns the 13th question (“*Considering your knowledge and skills in the field of interpersonal communication, how important do you think is people's ability to stand disturbing, annoying or even exasperating situations?*”), the response frequency indicates that 138 respondents (70.77% of the total survey participants) *consider that our personal capacity to stand disturbing, annoying or even exasperating situations is decisive*. 21 respondents representing

10.77 of the total survey participants stated that they either didn't pay attention to such details or that others, and not them, should learn to communicate. One respondent even said that „learning to exercise one's communication abilities is a real waste of time when there are so many more important things to take care of". The statistic results of the econometric analysis of the replies to question 13 are synthesized in Table 19:

Table 19: Considering your knowledge and skills in the field of interpersonal communication, how important do you think is people's ability to stand disturbing, annoying or even exasperating situations?

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	<i>Vital, conditioning our success in a decisive manner</i>	90	46.2	46.2	46.2
	<i>Very important</i>	48	24.6	24.6	70.8
	<i>Very important, even if only in principle</i>	24	12.3	12.3	83.1
	<i>Important. It's good to know as much as possible...</i>	12	6.2	6.2	89.2
	<i>Quite important</i>	4	2.1	2.1	91.3
	<i>So-so</i>	12	6.2	6.2	97.4
	<i>It may be important, but not so much... What is important is to know how to „manage"</i>	1	.5	.5	97.9
	<i>It's other people's fault that we get annoyed, not ours. And if they can't communicate, let them learn...</i>	1	.5	.5	97.9
	<i>I don't pay attention to such details. Moreover, it seems a waste of time to me...</i>	1	.5	.5	98.5
	<i>Don't you have anything better to do than annoy me with such questions?..</i>	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0		

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

As demonstrated by experience, leadership is also characterised by good communication skills. Taking this into consideration, the participants in the study were also invited to answer question 14: *From the point of view of their communication skills, true leaders should know which is the most important question they should ask themselves* (only one answer accepted). The response frequencies place the option "What am I supposed to do?" on the first place in the respondents' preferences (122 respondents, representing 62.6% of the total participants in the study). Only 42 respondents (21.54% of the total) are asking themselves the question that a real leader should be asking himself/herself every day: *What is expected of me?* The responses to this questions are included in Table 20:

Table 20: From the point of view of their communication skills, true leaders should know which is the most important question they should ask themselves:

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	<i>What am I supposed to do?</i>	122	62.6	62.6	62.6
	<i>What do other people think of me?</i>	10	5.1	5.1	67.7
	<i>What do I have to do to master my subordinates?</i>	16	8.2	8.2	75.9
	<i>What do I have to do to please my superiors?</i>	5	2.6	2.6	78.5
	<i>What is expected of me?</i>	42	21.5	21.5	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

Finally, the way in which the respondents perceive communication is reflected in the answer to the 15th question: *Finally, from your experience, demonstrating one's communication skills is...* (choose one answer only). The response frequency places communication as *the science and art of accepting humiliation, especially in delicate situations*, this being the answer chosen by 108 of the respondents, representing 55.4% of the participants in the study, but also as *a school of life/ learning from one's own life experience especially at personal level*, this being the answer with which 71 respondents (representing 36.4% of the participants) agreed. (Table 21).

Table 21: Finally, as experience demonstrates, improving one's communication skills is ...

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<i>learning from one's own life experience, especially at personal level</i>	71	36.4	36.4	36.4
	<i>learning the science and art of accepting humiliation, especially in delicate situations</i>	108	55.4	55.4	91.8
	<i>A learning situation for those who do not know how to manage</i>	10	5.1	5.1	96.9
	<i>useless. We do not need school, but practice, evidence...</i>	5	2.6	2.6	99.5
	<i>absurd ...</i>	1	.5	.5	100.0
	TOTAL	195	100.0	100.0	

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

5. Discussions

At the end of the research, we tested the validity of the work hypotheses and we are presenting it in what follows:

The manner in which the professional career of higher education graduates is influenced by their interpersonal communication skills is reflected in the answers to question 11: *Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you did not know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills?*

The first hypothesis we wanted to test if our research study is formulated as follows:

H1: *The lack of advanced interpersonal communication skills adversely affects the professional career of higher education graduates;*

The recorded answers are assimilated to a 10 point Likert scale, where 10 is "Yes, always" and 1 means "Really, don't you have anything better to do?..." (Likert, 1932:44). To verify this hypothesis we used the comparison of the means, completed with variance analysis (ANOVA) and the linearity test (Şandor, 2012:252-253) in order to establish if there are significant differences in the values taken by the studied variables.

The work hypotheses for H1 were formulated as follows:

The null hypothesis (H0): *there are no significant differences between the responses selected by the respondents / the respondents display an equal preference for the same response variant.*

The alternative hypothesis (H1.1): *One of the response variants prevails in the respondents' preferences.*

The analysis of the data using the IBM SPSS application is made by grouping the results by the variant "What is the field are you working in?". The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 22. The mean values for each category of respondents, as well as for the total scale, are situated in the upper part of the Likert scale. In this way, we obtained

a first image of the way in which *the lack of performant interpersonal communication skills has a negative impact on the higher education graduates' career*. The categories of respondents which are representative in supporting this statement are the ones working as *private entrepreneurs and in the economic field*, and they had a mean of 7.22 and 7.03 points respectively (115 people representing 58.9% of the total participants in the study). The same high scores characterise the other categories of respondents as well, thus being confirmed the fact that *the lack of communication abilities has a negative influence on all the respondents' career*.

Table 22: Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you did not know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills?

Report

What is the field you are working in?	Mean	N	Minimum	Maximum	% of Total N
Private Entrepreneur	7.22	27	Sometimes, fifty-fifty...	In most situations	13.8%
Economic	7.03	88	Really, don't you have anything better to do?	Yes, always	45.1%
Tehnical	5.71	7	Very rarely	Often	3.6%
Medical	6.50	2	Rarely	Often	1.0%
Agronomy	5.00	1	Rarely	Rarely	0.5%
Law	6.80	5	Very rarely	In most situations	2.6%
Higher Education	6.87	23	It was just by chance...	In most situations	11.8%
Other	6.48	42	Really, don't you have anything better to do?	Yes, always	21.5%
TOTAL	6.85	195	Really, don't you have anything better to do?	Yes, always	100.0%

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The mean values / scores obtained led us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative one, according to which one of the response variants was prevailing in the options expressed by the respondents. In spite of this, we opted for a high degree of accuracy in the interpretation of the results, which meant undertaking a more in-depth analysis by using the *variance analysis* and *the linearity test*. The values obtained following the *ANOVA* variance analysis confirmed the fact that the differences in the study participants' response preferences are not significant, the *Sig* value being higher than the threshold value of 0.05 in all cases (Table 23):

Table 23: ANOVA Table

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
<i>Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you did not know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills?</i> <i>*What is the field you are working in?</i>	Among Groups	(Combined)	25.309	7	3.616	1.048	.399
		Linearity	8.404	1	8.404	2.435	.120
		Deviation from Linearity	16.905	6	2.818	.816	.558
	Within Groups		645.378	187	3.451		
TOTAL			670.687	194			

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The respondents' work place has a minimal influence of only 3.8% on refining the response preferences (Table 24):

Table 24: Association Measures

	<i>R</i>	<i>R Squared</i>	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Eta Squared</i>
<i>Has it happened to you to fail/miss out because you did not know, more than intuitively, how to prove your communication skills? *What is the field you are working in?</i>	-.112	.013	.194	.038

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The results obtained after processing the recorded results have eventually confirmed the alternative hypothesis according to which one of the response variants is prevalent in the respondents' preferences. Thus, the first research hypothesis (H1) was confirmed: The lack of performant communication abilities has a negative impact on the higher education graduates' professional career.

The daily interaction with the students, doubled by the inclination to respond to the requests regarding the adaptation of the university curriculum to the needs of the young generation stimulated me to find out how much importance universities in general, and economic universities in particular, attach to developing the communication skills of their future graduates. To this effect, we performed the multiple correspondence analysis of the answers to two questions referring to the usefulness of the „Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline in terms of the communication skills acquired in the faculty and its usefulness as far as its practical applicability is concerned, as perceived by the participants in the study.

(5): From the point of view of the communication skills acquired (if any) in the faculty, how useful did you consider the “Communication and Business Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline) to have been for you?

(6): In your practical activity, have you come across the notions studied during the “Business Communication and Negotiation” discipline (or another similar discipline)?

The research hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H2: Universities (especially those with an economic profile) tend to neglect the development of the future graduates' communication skills;

The summary of the bidimensional model we have created is presented in Table 25. The first dimension, given by the usefulness of the „Business Communication” discipline is 90.67% covered, with a very good internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha = 0.897). This estimate takes into account the possible values of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient: the values around 0.90 are considered „excellent”, those around 0.80 „very good” and those around 0.70 „adequate” (Popa, 2008:4).

The second dimension, given by the usefulness of the „Business Communication” discipline related to its practical applicability is 79.72% covered, the internal consistency being good this time too. (Cronbach Alpha = 0.746); the eigenvalue being supraunitary in both cases.

Table 25: Model Summary

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Accounted For		
		Total (Eigenvalue)	Inertia	% of Variance
1	.897	1.813	.907	90.673
2	.746	1.594	.797	79.719
TOTAL		3.408	1.704	
Mean	.826^a	1.704	.852	85.196

a. The Cronbach Alpha Mean is based on the Eigenvalue mean

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

The graphic representation in *Figure 3* is the result of data processing using the IBM SPSS application. This representation has confirmed the fact that universities do not give due attention to developing their future graduates' communication abilities. In this sense, the extremely small number of answers grouped in the first quarter of the graph, characterised by positive values of both dimensions, is more than revealing.

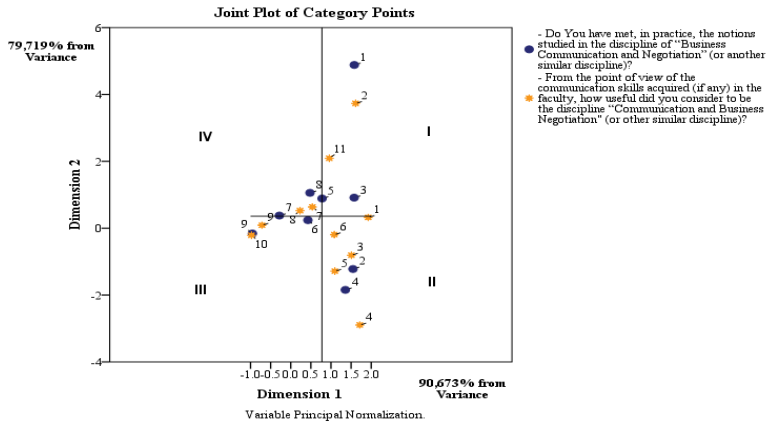


Figure 3: Dispersion of the importance given by universities to developing their future graduates' communication abilities

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

Similarly, the same trend is also noticed in *Figure 4*, where all the responses received are presented..

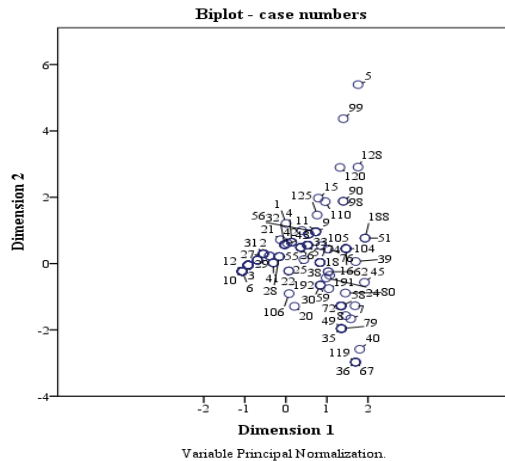


Figure 4: Dispersion of all the answers to the questionnaire

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

Out of curiosity, we continued the analysis to see to what extent the conclusion we had reached was also valid for the *universities with an economic profile*. To this effect we

performed the factor analysis applied to the category of respondents working in the economic domain. The results presented in Table 26 have confirmed, once again, that universities tend to neglect the development of their future graduates' communication abilities. The two extracted answers have the same value.

Table 26: Component Matrix^{a,b}

	Component 1
* <i>From the point of view of the communication skills acquired (if any) in the faculty, how useful did you consider the "Communication and Business Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline) to have been for you?</i>	.945
* <i>In your practical activity, have you come across the notions studied during the "Business Communication and Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline)?</i>	.945

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

a. 1 component extracted

b. Only the cases when "What is the field you are working in?" = Economic were used in the analysis phase

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

Since we also wanted to find out how interested higher education graduates are, during their studies, to develop their communication skills, we formulated the following research hypothesis:

H3: *Higher education graduates tend to neglect the development of their communication skills during their studies.*

How much importance did you give to the "Business Communication and Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline) in the faculty? Please rate your answer from 10 (utmost) to 1 (none) with response variants: 10 - Utmost; 9 - Very high; 8 - High; 7 - Quite high; 6 - Relatively high; 5 - So-so; 4 - Almost none. I wonder what communication is all about; 3 - I was even annoyed by some "stuff"; 2 - Didn't they have anything better to do?; 1 - None. Not applicable. I didn't study such a subject at the faculty.

Although the response frequency presented in the first part of the paper was eloquent *in confirming (or not) the research hypothesis*, we wanted to complete the analysis in order to increase its reliability. For this purpose I used the *mean comparison method, completed with the (ANOVA) variance analysis and the linearity test.*

We proceeded in the same manner as when testing the first hypothesis, by assimilating the recorded answers to a 10 point Likert-type scale, where 10 is „essential” and 1 „None. Not applicable”.

The work hypotheses were the following:

Null hypothesis (H0): there are no significant differences among the response options selected by the respondents - the respondents have an equal preference for the same response variant.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): one of the response variantes prevails in the respondents' preferences.

In this case too, processing of the data in the *IBM SPSS* application was done by grouping the results by the variable *"What is the field you are working in?"*.

The results in *Table 27* confirm in the case of this analysis too the high value of the mean for each group of respondents, „inviting” us to reject the null hypothesis in favour of the

alternative one. It is easy to notice that there are three groups of respondents who considered the „Business Communication” discipline as essential during their studies: in order, from the highest to the lowest score, the graduates of the technical, economic and other fields of study.

Table 27: How much importance did you give to the "Business Communication and Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline) in the faculty?

<i>What is the field you are working in?</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Total N</i>
<i>Private entrepreneur</i>	7.41	<i>So-so</i>	<i>Very high</i>	27	13.8%
<i>Economic</i>	6.73	<i>None</i>	<i>Utmost</i>	88	45.1%
<i>Technical</i>	8.43	<i>Almost none. I wonder what communication is all about</i>	<i>Utmost</i>	7	3.6%
<i>Medical</i>	8.50	<i>High</i>	<i>Very high</i>	2	1.0%
<i>Agronomy</i>	8.00	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	1	0.5%
<i>Law</i>	6.00	<i>None</i>	<i>Very high</i>	5	2.6%
<i>Higher Education</i>	6.57	<i>None</i>	<i>Very high</i>	23	11.8%
<i>Other</i>	6.88	<i>None</i>	<i>Utmost</i>	42	21.5%
TOTAL	6.90	None	Utmost	195	100.0%

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

Completing the study with *variance analysis (ANOVA)* and with the *linearity test* highlighted the following:

1. The values obtained following the *(ANOVA)* variance analysis confirmed the fact that the *differences among the response preferences of the study participants are not significant* and that in all the cases the *Sig* value is higher than the threshold value of 0.05 (*Table 28*).

Table 28: ANOVA Table

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>How much importance did you give to the "Business Communication and Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline) in the faculty? *What is the field you are working in?</i>	<i>Among Groups</i>	<i>(Combined)</i>	38.904	7	5.558	1.309 .248
		<i>Linearity</i>	2.010	1	2.010	.473 .492
		<i>Deviation from Linearity</i>	36.894	6	6.149	1.448 .199
	<i>Within Groups</i>		794.244	187	4.247	
TOTAL		833.149	194			

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

2. To a great extent, the respondents’ work place reflects their study profile and has a minimum influence, of merely 4.7%, on how they refine their response preferences (*Table 29*).

Table 29: Association Measures

	<i>R</i>	<i>R Squared</i>	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Eta Squared</i>
<i>How much importance did you give to the "Business Communication and Negotiation" discipline (or another similar discipline) in the faculty? *What is the field you are working in?</i>	-.049	.002	.216	.047

Source: author processing of replies to the questionnaire

3. The results obtained after analysing the recorded answers confirmed in this case too the alternative hypothesis, according to which one of the response variants is predominant in the respondents' preferences. *During their studies, higher education graduates give a relatively high importance to developing their communication skills, this refuting the third hypothesis formulated in this research study.*

6. Limitations of the Study

We consider that the addressability of my study was rather restricted. The group of respondents included very young graduates (2016 and 2017) of economic higher education institutions. On the other hand, the respondents were not previously selected, so that there is the risk that the points of view expressed would be based not only on experience, but on intuition. Extending the respondent base (both in terms of age/expertise and field of activity) is also an important point for future action.

7. Conclusions

The study entitled “*Improving students' professional communication abilities - a part of career success?*” was conducted between 2-13 May 2018, on the basis of an *online* questionnaire. Our research had three work hypotheses and was motivated by two factors:

1. The desire to practise our written communication skills in English;
2. The wish to propose feasible and sustainable solutions to a situation which is becoming more common, namely the quality of the students' training is constantly decreasing and their capacity to prove their communication and negotiation skills remains just wishful thinking instead of a practice.

The research was carried out on a sample of 195 graduates, most of them very recent graduates of universities with an economic profile (in 2016 and 2017).

Essentially, the study has revealed the following main ideas:

1. Universities do not give due attention to the acquisition, practice and development of the future graduates' interpersonal communication skills;
2. In spite of their higher or lower interest in developing their business communication and negotiation skills, university graduates do not yet have the level of expertise in this field which would ensure a part of their career success;
3. The university curriculum should be updated and all the faculties in Romania should include „Business Communication and Negotiation” at least as an optional discipline.

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