

## Teacher's Communicative Competence

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on determining the self-assessment and assessment of the development of the communicative competencies of teachers. Since, teacher's communicative competence is an insufficiently investigated research variable, the study addresses the operationalization of communicative competence, i.e., the determination of its constituent elements that can be empirically verified. The sample included one hundred and twenty-eight teachers and two hundred and ninety-seven 8th and 9th grade students from seven primary schools from the southern and northern regions of Montenegro. The research results indicated the presence of a statistically significant difference between teacher's self-assessment of their own communicative competences and socio-educational characteristics as well as of statistically significant differences between student's assessment of teacher's communicative competences and their socio-demographic characteristics.

**Key words:** Teacher, communicative competence, student, competence, variable, significant

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### INTRODUCTION

“Communicative competence” is a two-word expression meaning “competent to communicate”. On the basis of lexical-semantic analysis, the key word in the syntagma “communicative competence” was found to be the word “competence”. This term has been introduced to our pedagogical literature from the English language and has multiple meanings without precise conceptual definitions. In Serbian, there are two terms in parallel use: competence and competency. However, despite their terminological similarity they cannot be used interchangeably. Competence has a broader meaning than does competency. Competence comes from the Latin word *competens* meaning “competent, relevant, formally or really qualified, capable of a job” and competency derives from the Latin word *competentia* meaning “competence, jurisdiction, ability to compete with multiple persons for a certain place” (Orlovic, 1999). Roe (2002) defines the core of competency as “the learned ability to perform a task, duty or role adequately”. Kurtz and Bartram (2002) explain competencies as “repertoires of behavior that are instrumental in achieving desired result and outcomes”. Some researchers Poole *et al.* (1998) interpret the concept of competencies quite broadly, noting that competency is the possession of knowledge, skills, motivation and personal characteristics that make an individual capable of actively and effectively acting in a particular (specific) situation. Another, more widely accepted definition of competency emphasizes that a competent individual is one who is capable of using natural and personal resources in achieving a desired result in his own development. The term has gained popularity in recent years, especially in academic circles and refers primarily to teachers.

When it comes to the term “communicative competence”, theoretical and scientific analysis shows that this concept is a complex system of interconnected knowledge, habits, skills and abilities. Communicative competence refers to the ability of an individual to communicate appropriately within a linguistic community which in addition to his knowledge of vocabulary, phonology and grammar includes his social and cultural knowledge such as knowing when to speak or not to speak what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in a particular situation (Saville-Troike, 2008). The term was introduced by Dell Hymes in the 1970s. He argues that communicative competence involves not only knowledge of the language structures but also the principles of using these structures in various socio-cultural circumstances. There are different interpretations and definitions of communicative competence in literature. An overview of some was given by Parks (1994): the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of adequate communication behavior in a given situation; the ability to formulate and achieve goals, to establish cooperation with others; to be independent; to be able to adapt to situational and environmental changes.

Some researchers Spitzberg and Cupach (1989), Trenholm and Jensen (2000) indicate that teacher communicative competence is understood as his or her ability to communicate well with others in other words, to communicate effectively and appropriately, to adapt their behavior to the situation and achieve their individual and relational goals. Thus, it can be observed that communicative competence is described as a relative value. Communicative competence is not something that is completely present or absent but a variable that everyone possesses at a certain level. This means that an

individual's communication behavior may be more or less competent in certain relationships, situations and with certain participants. In some individuals, the level of communication competence development deserves a passing grade while some others may have an amazing ability to behave in accordance with the situation at hand. Also, communicative competence refers to the success with which one achieves his own individual and relational goals in interaction. This means that the individual is capable of simultaneously achieving both his own goals and seeking for other participants to achieve a certain extent of satisfaction in interaction. In interaction with people, a more important thing than achieving your own goals is to establish and maintain relationships.

A more profound analysis of theoretical considerations points to different understandings of what constitutes the structure of communicative competence. Many researchers Rubin (1982), Wiemann (1977, 1978), Spitzberg and Hecht (1984a, b) support the view that knowledge, skill and motivation are important components of communicative competence. According to Riggio (1986), communicative competence consists of: emotional expressiveness (non-verbal communication skills); emotional sensitivity (the ability to identify and correctly interpret non-verbal and emotional messages of communication participants); emotional control (one's ability to manage emotions and adapt to the situation); social expressiveness (one's ability to verbally express and involve other participants in communication); social sensitivity (a trait considered less desirable in communication and interaction: these teachers care about what others think of them: they are careful listeners of others, overwhelmed by the adequacy of their own behavior or behavior of others); social control (the ability to represent oneself and adapt to every situation). Describing communicative competence as the ability of an individual to effectively communicate with other people, Falkovskaya emphasized that it encompasses the following abilities: the ability to deal with social situations, the ability to determine the personality traits and emotional states of others, the ability to choose appropriate modes of interaction.

Discussing the problem of teacher communicative competence, Holmes and Brown (1976) identify five dimensions of communication competence: controlling-designing messages that control behavior of others, feelings-expressing emotions and attitudes, informing-providing and receiving information, ritual-designing a message that contributes to maintaining social relationships and encourages social interaction, mental creation and conception-designing messages that are creative or related to imaginary concepts.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Social sciences imply that general objects of comparison are social phenomena, i.e., the phenomena in

which certain qualities can be identified and among which a certain degree of possibility of establishing identity, similarity or difference exists (Tancic *et al.*, 2019). Starting from this, the subject of the empirical part of the research is the comparative-critical and systematic non-experimental study, identification, analysis and explanation of the constructive key elements determining the communicative competence of teachers. The aim of the research is to examine the communicative competence of primary school teachers. The following specific tasks which we operationalized in the research process, emerged from predefined subject and formulated research aims: the self-assessment of teacher's communicative competence and student's assessment of teacher's communicative competence. In accordance with the established aim and tasks of the research, the basic and specific hypothesis were defined. The main hypothesis of this research is based on the assumption that teachers and students will correctly identify and realistically evaluate the basic elements of communicative competence. Two specific research hypothesis are further based on the main hypothesis: there is a statistically significant difference in teacher's self-assessment of communicative competence and their socio-educational characteristics; there is a statistically significant difference in student's assessment of teacher's communicative competence with respect to their socio-demographic characteristics. The communicative competence scale Wiemann (1978) which was modified and adapted to the needs of this research was used as a research instrument. After determination of psychometric characteristics, the communicative competence scale for teachers contains 25 items. The reliability of the scale is high (Cronbach's alpha is 0.87). Socio-demographic and socio-educational variables were operationalized using the socio-demographic data questionnaire.

The research was conducted in seven primary schools with a total number of 128 teachers and 297 students being interviewed. The sample included the eighth and ninth grade (final grades) students of elementary school and their teachers. The data was collected in May, 2014 and was processed by the t-test, factor analysis and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The factor analysis (principal component methods with oblique Varimax rotation) extracted a six-factor structure that explained 62.28% of the variance. The selection of six factors was made on the basis of the Kaiser-Guman criterion and the scree plot (Eigen values >1 Fig. 1).

To determine which factors can be extracted from the whole set of variables as well as their number we established eigenvalues and the percentage of variance that the factors explain Table 1. Using first-order factor analysis we obtained 6 factors:

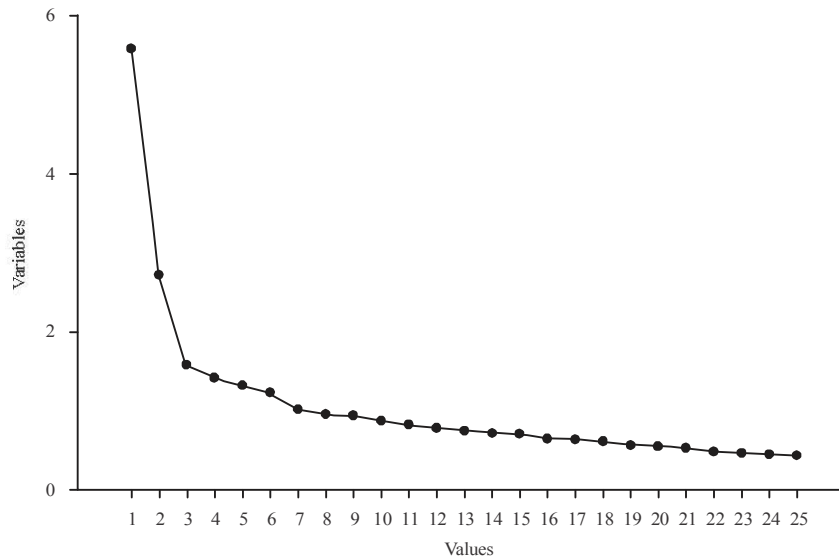


Fig. 1: Cattel's scree test

Table 1: Percentage of explained variance

Factor number	Eigen values	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
Verbal communication	6.819	27.275	27.275
Non-verbal communication	3.121	12.482	39.757
Interaction involvement	1.651	6.603	46.361
Empathy	1.446	5.782	52.143
Facial expression and paralinguistic	1.324	5.297	57.440
Flexibility in communication	1.212	4.847	62.288

Table 2: t-test regarding the factor of teacher verbal communication with regard to their gender

teacher's verbal communication factor	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
Male	35	0.477	1.435	-2.260	0.030
Female	93	-0.145	0.780	-	-

**Teacher's verbal communication:** The term verbal communication means "communication through words or speech, either verbally or in writing". It therefore involves not only speech but also internal processes such as understanding the meaning of words used during communication.

**Teacher's non-verbal communication:** Non-verbal communication is a means by which people convey information through conscious or unconscious body movements, gestures or mimics (Morris 1998).

**Teacher's interaction involvement:** Interactive involvement is the individual's ability to engage in interaction with others.

**Teacher's empathy:** "The ability to alternately and reciprocally take part in the communication process, the ability to identify with the interlocutor, to appreciate the views and opinions of others and to be able to see the problem in the communication process through the eyes of others".

**Teacher's facial expression and para-language:** Facial expressions constitute extra-linguistic non-verbal communication signs while paralinguistic-which

language catchphrases, stress, loudness, speed and rhythm of voice-belong to paralinguistic communication signs; teacher's flexibility in communication-teacher's flexibility in communication should be understood as their ability to adapt behavior to a given communication situation and its participants.

The first factor explains the highest percentage of variance of 27.25% while all remaining factors explain the remaining 35% to the total percentage of explained variance of 62.28%.

The t-test found the existence of statistically significant differences regarding factors 1 and 5 from the Table 1 with regard to the teacher's gender. The results presented in Table 2 show a statistically significant difference in teacher's verbal communication with regard to his gender at the level of 0.05. Male and female teachers differ significantly in their self-assessment of verbal communication in that male teachers assess their verbal communication more highly than do female teachers or it is more pronounced with male teachers.

The results presented in Table 3 show that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the factor of facial expression and para-language in relation to the gender of teachers at the 0.05 level. Male and female teachers differ significantly in the self-assessment of

Table 3: t-test regarding the factor of teacher facial expression and paralinguistics with respect to the gender

paralanguage factor	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
Male	35	0.427	1.149	-2.622	0.010
Female	93	-0.119	0.925	-	-

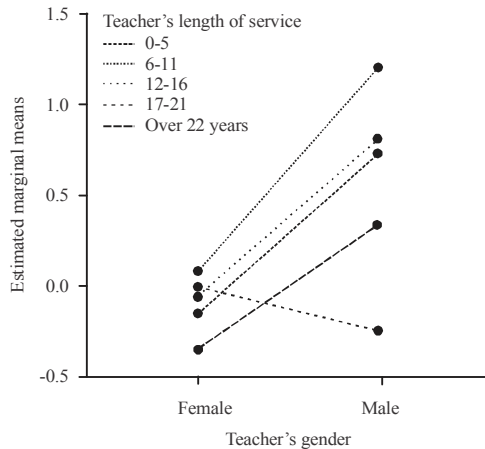


Fig. 2: Line diagram of the obtained mean values regarding the factor teacher verbal communication and variables gender and length of service of teachers

facial expression and paralinguistics in that the factor is better assessed by male than by the female teachers or it is more pronounced with male teachers.

The results of a two-factor analysis (examining the influence of two independent variables and the possible impact of their interaction on one dependent variable) are presented below.

Teacher's gender and length of service and the factor of teacher's verbal communication (Fig. 2). Male teachers showed better results in assessment of verbal communication than female teachers. The highest level of assessment of verbal communication is manifested in male teachers with 6-11 years of working experience. A similar level of assessment of verbal communication is present in female teachers for variables gender and length of service which is different in male teachers. In other words, male teachers seem to be more inclined and oriented toward the verbal component and form of communication than female teachers.

Other profession and professional development and the factor of teacher's non-verbal communication (Fig. 3). Teachers who have not been engaged in other professions show a higher level of assessment of non-verbal communication than teachers who have been engaged in other professions. Teachers who have attended certain forms of professional development also manifest a higher level of assessment of non-verbal communication than

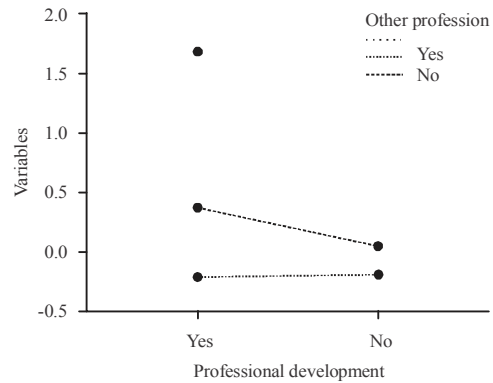


Fig. 3: Line diagram of the obtained mean values regarding the factor teacher non-verbal communication and variables other profession and professional development of teachers

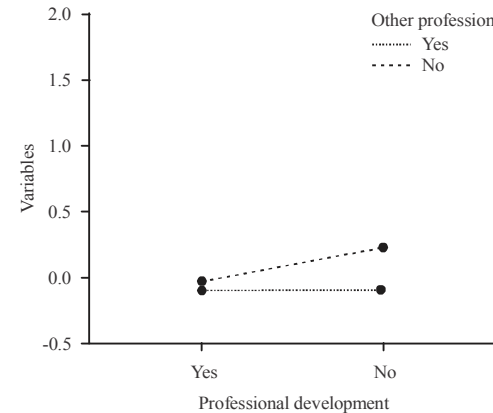


Fig. 4: Line diagram of the obtained mean values regarding the factor teacher's flexibility in communication and variables other profession and professional development of teachers

teachers without any professional development. Teachers who have been engaged in other professions express a similar level of assessment of non-verbal communication, regardless of whether they have attended some form of professional development or not. Thus, teachers who have attended certain forms of professional development and have been engaged in other professions are more capable of using and knowing non-verbal signals and their functions.

Professional development, other profession and the factor of flexibility of teachers in communication Fig. 4. Higher levels of assessment of communication flexibility are shown in teachers with no experience in other professions compared to teachers who have been engaged in other professions. Interestingly, the highest level of assessment of flexibility in communication is shown by teachers who have neither been engaged in other professions, nor have attended any forms of



Table 4: t-test of the interaction involvement factor with respect to gender of students

t-test: student's gender and the factor of teacher's involvement in interaction					
	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
Male	140	-0.147	0.955	-2.272	0.024
Female	157	0.124	1.023	-	-

Table 5: t-test of the teacher empathy factor with respect to student's gender

t-test: student's gender and the factor of teacher's empathy					
	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
Male	140	0.238	0.968	3.726	0.000
Female	157	-0.200	0.985	-	-

professional development. Regardless of the length of service, teachers who have attended certain forms of professional development have a similar and lower level of communication flexibility assessment. The results indicate that teachers who began their working experience in school manifest a greater ability to adapt to communication and communication participants.

As the students assessed the communicative competence of teachers within the second research task, the following results were obtained: the t-test found that there were statistically significant differences with respect to the gender of students regarding the factors of teacher's involvement in interaction and empathy of teachers. The results presented in Table 4 show that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the factor of teacher's interaction involvement with respect to the gender of students at the 0.05 level. Thus, boys and girls differ significantly in their assessment of teacher's involvement in interaction with girls assessing teacher's interaction involvement better than boys.

The results presented in Table 5 show that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the teacher empathy factor with respect to the student's gender at the 0.01 level. According to the results, boys and girls differ significantly in assessing their teacher's empathy with teacher empathy being more effectively assessed by boys than girls.

The t-test also found that there were statistically significant differences regarding verbal and non-verbal communication factors with respect to the grade of students. The results presented in Table 6 show that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the verbal communication factor with respect to the grade of students at the level of 0.01. Therefore, 8th and 9th grade students differ significantly in their assessment of teachers verbal communication skills with 9th grade students better assessing their teacher's verbal communication skills than 8th grade students.

The results presented in Table 7 show that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the factor of non-verbal communication of teachers with respect to the

Table 6: t-test of teacher verbal communication factor in relation to the grade of students

t-test: student's gender and the factor of teacher's verbal communication (Grade)					
	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
8th	147	-0.208	0.826	-3.992	0.000
9th	150	-0.256	1.080	-	-

Table 7: t-test of the non-verbal communication factor of teachers in relation to the grade of students

t-test: student's gender and the factor of teacher's non-verbal communication (Grade)					
	N	Aham	SD	t-values	Sig.
8th	147	-0.263	0.924	-4.441	0.000
9th	150	0.255	1.008	-	-

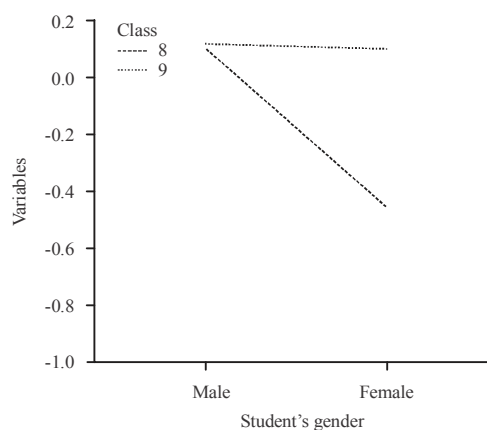


Fig. 5: Line diagram of obtained mean values regarding the teacher's empathy factor and variables gender and grade of students

grade of students at the level of 0.01. According to the results, 8 and 9th grade students differ significantly in assessing their teacher's non-verbal communication skills with 9th grade students better assessing the ability of teachers to apply and understand non-verbal signals.

The results of two-factor analysis (examining the influence of two independent variables and the possible impact of their interaction on one dependent variable) are presented below.

The gender and grade of students in relation to the factor of empathy of teachers shows that eighth and ninth grade students have different assessments of teacher's empathy Fig. 5. Older students have a better assessment of their teacher's empathy in comparison to younger students. We can conclude that boys have a better assessment of teacher's empathy than girls that is boys find teachers more empathetic than girls.

The gender and class of students regarding the factor verbal communication of teachers Fig. 6. Eighth and

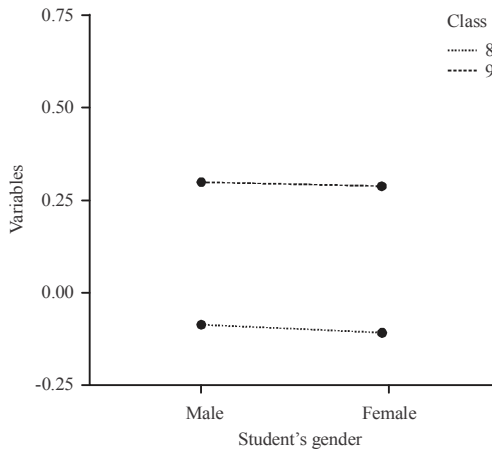


Fig. 6: Line diagram of obtained mean values regarding the factor of verbal communication of teachers and variables gender and grade of students

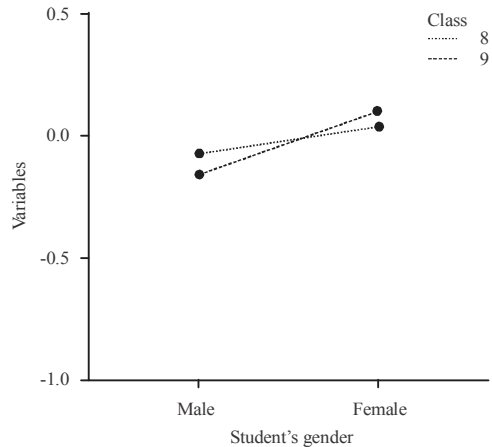


Fig. 7: Line diagram of the obtained mean values regarding the factor non-verbal communication of teachers and variables gender and grade of students

ninth-grade students assess their teacher's verbal communication differently. Male and female ninth-grade students similarly assess teacher's ability in verbal communication and at the same time, perform much better than younger students. Verbal communication of teachers is most poorly evaluated by lower grade girls. In general, male students assess teacher's verbal communication better than female students.

The gender and grade (year) of students and the factor of teacher's non-verbal communication Fig. 7. In relation to the assessment of teacher's abilities in verbal communication, male and female students of the eighth and ninth grades similarly assess their teacher's ability to apply and understand non-verbal signals. The non-verbal communication of teachers is most effectively evaluated by ninth-grade girls and the least by ninth-grade

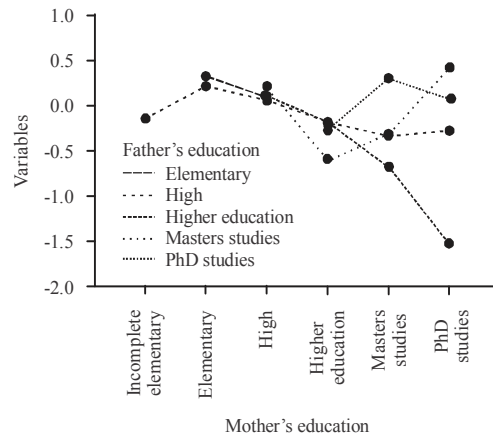


Fig. 8: Line diagram of obtained mean values of the factor teacher interaction involvement and parental education variable

boys. Generally, girls assess teacher's ability to apply and decode non-verbal signals better than boys do. Parental education and the factor of the teacher's involvement in interaction Fig. 8. Based on the line diagram, it can be concluded that there are differences in the assessment of the level of teacher's interaction involvement depending on the level of education of student's parents. Higher levels of teacher's interaction assessment were shown by the students whose parents had the highest level of education (doctorate and master's degree) then students whose parents had secondary education while the lowest level of teacher's interaction involvement was shown by students whose parents had high education.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary teachers need a lot more knowledge in addition to their classical professional training. Daily contacts with students, parents and professional associates require highly tuned communication skills and the ability to communicate successfully. Moreover, teacher's communication competencies should be an incentive in the development of student's communicative competencies. A teacher's communicative competence is based on their ability to clearly understand and logically relate to the presentation; to apply and decode non-verbal signals, to listen actively and carefully, to encourage, to motivate and support the student to engage in communication, to empathize and try to understand the experience and feelings of his students and adapt to communication and its participants.

Within the examination of teacher's communicative competence, teacher's self-assessments and student's

assessments of teacher's were similar, so, it can be concluded that teachers and students assessed each other's communicative competencies with a high degree of objectivity. Based on the results obtained from the research, it can be concluded that more attention should be paid to developing an ability to apply and decode non-verbal signals in communication. Monitoring and understanding non-verbal signals as an essential element of communicative competence is very important for quality pedagogical communication. This represents a complex task which teacher needs to permanently learn and improve. The ability to recognize, understand and interpret non-verbal signs makes communication between people high-quality and successful. A teacher who is well versed in the types of non-verbal gestures and their situational expressions will easily understand that his work is either good and it should continue or is not good and something needs to be changed. Non-verbal signals cover everything but words and according to some theorists, represent a vital aspect of group communication (Brilhart *et al.*, 2001). Application of non-verbal signals in teaching is an auxiliary means in supporting or replacing verbal communication. The proper use of non-verbal signals in pedagogical communication is a professional skill that is learned during throughout a teacher's school career. It is necessary for the teacher to pay more attention to analyzing the impact of non-verbal gestures on teaching effectiveness, i.e., to engage in a system of exercises that will enable him/her to master non-verbal communication. Practical implications that can be singled out from the research are recommendations that can be potentially helpful at faculties preparing candidates for a teaching career, introducing study subjects or program contents, organizing various lectures, workshops and professional seminars through which the candidates will be able to use, know and interpret non-verbal signals and their functions.

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