Passive Communication - Style and Its Impact on Teachers' Professional Development

Bîrsan Elena[1]

Abstract: **Objectives**: This study examines educational communication, with a particular focus on the defining traits of passive communication and its impact on personal and psychological crises that undermine self-esteem. **Prior Work**: The research extends contemporary understanding of passive communication, identifying it as a significant barrier to teachers' professional development. **Approach**: Employing a scientifically grounded analytical framework, the study investigates the dynamics of educational communication and the psychological mechanisms influencing teachers' communicative behaviors. **Results**: The findings reveal the distinctive features of educational communication and systematically illustrate how passive communication distorts teachers' interaction patterns and negatively affects self-perception. The study identifies key barriers associated with the adoption of a passive communicative style in educational environments. **Implications**: The study highlights the formative role of communicative behavior in shaping teachers' professional identity and their capacity to foster self-esteem, both personally and among the beneficiaries; it delineates the behavioral profile of passive communicators, and it examines the professional and relational consequences associated with this communicative style. **Value**: This research clarifies the concept of educational communication and emphasizes its significance for the professional development of teaching staff; additionally, it reveals behavioral deficiencies and dysfunctions that may arise from the prolonged adoption of a passive communication style.

Keywords: Educational communication; passive communication; passivity; teaching staff

---

[1] PhD, Associate Professor, Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University of Chişinău, Republic of Moldova, Address: 1 Ion Creanga Street, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, Corresponding author:elena.birsan32@yahoo.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3900-1687.

Communication is a fundamental phenomenon across nature, society, science, technology, religion, and the arts. Its centrality has made it a subject of inquiry since antiquity, especially in Ancient Greece, where it emerged as a multifaceted concept that gradually acquired discipline-specific meanings. In the Middle Ages, the expansion of the Church and the development of early state structures introduced new dimensions, as communication became institutionalized through the work of officials responsible for recording events, drafting documents, and formulating laws. This underscored its essential role in governance and social organization. The modern era brought a profound transformation: scientific and technological progress created new channels and media that expanded both the scope and the complexity of communication, facilitating exchanges between individuals, groups, and communities.

Scholars have proposed numerous definitions of communication, highlighting its fundamental role in shaping human experience. This conceptual diversity reflects the importance of communication in both individual development and social interaction. Șoitu (2004, p. 57) emphasizes that communication is central to interpersonal relationships, as it enables individuals to interpret the symbolic structures that organize social life. These structures may preserve social stability or, alternatively, promote change at both personal and collective levels. Similarly, argues that individuals cannot fully develop their identities or internalize societal values without engaging in communicative processes. Pâslaru (2008, p. 68) stresses the transformative function of communication, describing it as the transition from nature to culture, a process through which identity and cultural belonging are established.

Communication is widely recognized as a complex, dynamic process essential to social life. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley define it as "the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behavior of other individuals (communicatees)." Charles Osgood conceptualizes communication as a system of influence in which a source affects a receiver through signals transmitted via a shared channel. Romanian scholar Popescu Neveanu (1978) situates communication within a systems-theoretical framework, describing it as an exchange in which each participant is both reflected and transformed through interaction with the other. This perspective anticipates contemporary interactive models that emphasize reciprocity and mutual influence. From a psychological standpoint, Sillamy highlights the relational and perceptual dimensions of communication, asserting that "communication is, above all, a perception" (p. 75).

Romanian researchers Stanciugelu and Tran (2015) outline several defining features of human communication. These include the establishment of social bonds, the pursuit of goals and the transmission of meaning, metacommunication (the implicit meanings beyond words), and intracommunication (the individual's internal dialogue). They also stress the importance of psychological, social, cultural, physical, and temporal context, along with communication's dynamic and irreversible character (Stanciugelu & Tran, 2015, p. 86).

From a pedagogical perspective, Cristea describes educational communication as an "axiomatic principle of the educational process" involving an instructional message formulated by the educator. This message is intended to generate a formative response in the learner, which can be assessed through both external and internal feedback (Cristea, 2004, p. 15). Educational communication sustains the entire instructional process, regardless of its content, level, form, or participants. It is therefore distinct from general human communication in several respects:

1. The participants include teachers, students, parents, inspectors, and others, interacting within defined educational environments such as schools, families, or related social contexts.

2. Its aims are explicitly educational, focusing on instruction, development, learning, and behavioral correction.

3. The context is psychosocial and cultural.

4. All types of communication are used, including externalized messages, metacommunication, and intrapersonal communication.

5. It employs diverse codes, such as pedagogical language, oral and written forms, visual and auditory signals, gestures, and behaviors.

6. Educational crises can accelerate development.

7. The relationships are generally asymmetrical.

8. Messages are often complex and intervention-oriented, with persuasive or corrective intent.

9. The process is dynamic and transactional.

10. It is student-centered (Stanciu, 2014, p. 53).

Viewed from this perspective, educational communication represents a distinct form of interpersonal, instrumental, and continuous interaction. It facilitates knowledge acquisition, skill development, motivation, and personality formation across formal,

non-formal, and informal learning environments. These educational goals are achieved through deliberate methods and communicative strategies tailored to specific contexts. The wide range of definitions associated with educational communication reflects both the conceptual complexity of the term and the ongoing need for scholarly investigation into its role in the learning process.

The accelerating pace of change in contemporary society has made education in the 21st century essential. This perspective was emphasized in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, issued by the European Commission in October 2000 following the Lisbon Council. The document asserts that people represent the most valuable resource and stresses that education and training systems must adapt to new social and economic realities. As a result, education occupies a central position in contemporary policy frameworks, with teachers identified as key actors in any strategy for sustainable social and economic development (Huncă, 2016, p. 7). In this context, Iucu (2001, p. 47) observes that "the teacher is no longer a mere executor of prescribed methods, but becomes an active agent in the educational process, learning alongside those whom he or she teaches, while simultaneously engaging in ongoing professional development." From this perspective, teacher education should be conceived as a long-term strategic priority, ensuring that schools are able to meet contemporary social demands while maintaining high standards of instructional quality.

Teaching demands a wide range of competencies and personal qualities. The preparation of teachers, especially at the beginning of their careers, places particular emphasis on cultivating broad general knowledge. Novice teachers are expected to establish solid foundations in disciplines such as literature, the arts, and history, thereby equipping themselves to address the diverse and evolving responsibilities of the classroom (Andrițchi, 2014, p. 89). At the same time, they seek recognition, guidance, and consistent support. Many value opportunities to participate in decision-making, to receive professional feedback, and to pursue clear pathways for growth, factors that are closely tied to job satisfaction. Andrițchi (2014, p. 53) identifies multiple dimensions that influence teacher satisfaction, including *the nature of teaching work, collaboration with families, student engagement and achievement, access to ongoing training, performance evaluation, recognition, career advancement, collegial support, mentoring, leadership opportunities, job stability, workload, institutional climate, and perceptions of fairness in policies.* Taken together, these factors point to the need for teachers who can offer students meaningful and well-structured learning experiences. Achieving this objective

depends on sustaining a teaching workforce that is consistently supported and encouraged to grow. It also requires addressing and removing barriers that hinder the development of early-career teachers.

Within this conceptual framework, L. Iacob highlights the fundamental role of communication in education, defining it as "that which mediates the realization of the educational phenomenon as a whole, regardless of its content, levels, forms, or partners involved" (Iacob, 2011, p. 34). This perspective highlights the centrality of teachers' communicative practices. Kan-Kalik defines pedagogical communication style as "the individual pedagogical characteristics of socio-psychological interaction between teacher and student" (Kan-Kalik, 2014, p. 114). In a complementary view, Marcus and Catina contend that such styles reflect the teacher's personality, expressed either through distinctive individual traits or typological patterns shaped by experience and character. Furthermore, Dragu conceptualizes pedagogical behavior as a structured repertoire of attitudes, actions, and techniques through which teachers deliver instruction, foster personal development, stimulate intellectual growth, and influence students' ideas and behaviors (Dragu, 2012, p. 147).

Scholarly inquiry has long acknowledged the importance of teachers' communicative practices in the pedagogical process. The ways in which classroom interactions are organized and regulated exert a determining influence on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral development. Pedagogical communication, situated within the broader framework of communication theory, is grounded in psychological principles such as determinism, feedback, information exchange and regulation, the unity of consciousness and activity, developmental and historical conditioning, and systemic interrelations (Bîrsan, 2015, p. 77). Within this perspective, the teacher operates as a mediator of meaning, shaping students' attitudes, dispositions, and orientations toward cooperation, inquiry, and the shared construction of knowledge. The communicative behavior of teachers therefore represents a constitutive dimension in the establishment, consolidation, and continuity of the educational environment.

In social interaction, individuals typically employ a range of behavioral styles, most commonly identified as *aggressive, passive-aggressive, passive, and assertive*. While a substantial body of research has examined assertive behavior and its defining attributes, the present study shifts the focus toward passive communication and behavior. This orientation is adopted because passivity frequently functions as

an impediment, creating barriers that affect both personal relationships and professional engagement

Cungi describes passive behavior as characteristic of "those who do not dare enough," a formulation that captures its association with withdrawal and avoidance. In the literature, passive communication is frequently conceptualized through the metaphor of the "doormat syndrome," a condition linked to feelings of helplessness and a perceived lack of agency in managing one's own life. Previous research has emphasized that novice teachers, in particular, require consistent support and validation in order to facilitate their successful professional integration and to counteract communicative patterns that may hinder their effectiveness.

The decision to enter the teaching profession entails a distinctive form of risk, since preparation for both instructing and guiding others in the learning process can never be regarded as fully complete. Teaching demands patience, perseverance in the face of uncertainty and discouragement, and sustained intellectual effort. The outcomes of this commitment are not always quantifiable, nor do they manifest immediately. Teachers are expected to foster and sustain students' curiosity, shape their social conduct, strengthen their self-confidence, and support them in the construction of personal identity. To accomplish these objectives, however, teachers themselves must demonstrate assurance and courage in their professional practice.

Owing to limited experience and a tendency toward hesitation, novice teachers frequently encounter difficulties in articulating their ideas with clarity or in taking decisive action. These constraints may impede their professional growth and create obstacles to sustained development. Central to overcoming such challenges is the notion of *pedagogical vocation*, conceived as both a calling to the profession and the capacity to assume its responsibilities. According to Hubert, this vocation is defined by three interrelated elements: *pedagogical love, commitment to social and cultural values, and a strong sense of responsibility* (as cited in Vicol et al., 2021).

According to the *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova*, the educational ideal promoted in schools emphasizes the development of individuals who demonstrate initiative and the capacity for self-development. Such individuals are expected to acquire not only the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in the labor market but also independence of thought and action, alongside a commitment to intercultural dialogue grounded in both national and universal values. Achieving this ideal requires teachers to uphold their professional rights and to engage actively in the pursuit of educational objectives.

In this context, it is important to examine the defining characteristics of a passive communication style. A core feature of passive behavior is the neglect of one's own rights: individuals may fail to assert these rights, minimize their importance, or defer to others to avoid conflict. For teachers, the capacity to advocate for oneself is particularly important, as it models for students the value of principled action, self-respect, and responsible engagement in social and professional contexts.

Passive communicators frequently subordinate their own needs to those of others, refrain from expressing emotions, and display conformism, accepting routines, ideas, or decisions without critical reflection. They may demonstrate limited initiative, rely excessively on others' approval, and avoid responsibility for their own feelings and actions. This combination of behaviors can restrict autonomy, diminish influence in interactions, and reduce the capacity to engage proactively in professional tasks.

When passive communication predominates, individuals often struggle to assert themselves, defend personal and professional rights, and participate effectively in decision-making processes. For teachers, these tendencies may create substantial obstacles to personal growth, instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and the establishment of constructive, reciprocal relationships with students, colleagues, and parents.

Existing studies also identify several disadvantages and limitations commonly associated with passive communication, including the following:

➢ *Reduced self-esteem*. Individuals who consistently exhibit passive behavior often feel undervalued and overlooked. By routinely suppressing their own needs and preferences, they may internalize the belief that their thoughts and emotions are unimportant, while the needs of others take precedence. Over time, this pattern can contribute to lower self-esteem. In her work on self-worth, V. Satir uses the metaphor of a "vessel" to describe an individual's capacity to value themselves and act with dignity and realism. According to Satir, *high self-esteem* is reflected in traits such as *integrity, honesty, responsibility, love, and* competence. In contrast, individuals with *low self-esteem* may anticipate *rejection or deception*, leading to feelings of victimhood. To cope, they may withdraw from social interaction, rely on mistrust, and retreat into isolation (Gavril, 2015, p. 38).

➢ *Emotional dissatisfaction and resentment*. Frequent avoidance of conflict and habitual deference to others can give rise to unacknowledged frustration and internalized resentment. When these emotions remain unexpressed, they

144

may emerge in uncontrolled or maladaptive forms, potentially contributing to psychological difficulties such as anxiety or depression.

➢ *Interpersonal difficulties*. Healthy relationships depend on mutual respect and balance. Passive communication can disrupt this balance, often creating dynamics where one party exerts undue influence over the other. Over time, this imbalance may cause strain and damage interpersonal connections, including friendships and partnerships.

➢ *Obstacles to personal achievement*. Individuals who struggle to express their needs and intentions clearly are less likely to realize personal or professional goals. Passive behavior tends to inhibit assertiveness, the ability to set boundaries, and the capacity to negotiate, skills essential for progress and fulfillment.

➢ *Increased stress and risk of burnout*. A tendency to please others, accept all demands, and avoid refusal can lead to excessive workloads and increased stress. Without limits, this pattern may ultimately result in burnout.

➢ *Ineffective communication*. When individuals rely on indirect messages, vague suggestions, or silence, their communication is often misinterpreted or ignored. Passive behavior reduces transparency and can undermine the clarity and openness required for effective interaction.

As noted in this study, individuals may demonstrate more than one communication style, depending on the context. It is neither feasible nor desirable to rely exclusively on a single approach. This raises an important question: *under what circumstances is passive communication appropriate?* In some situations, it may be considered acceptable when the potential cost of confrontation outweighs any possible benefit. However, it becomes problematic when the stakes are high and the intended outcome carries significant personal or professional importance.

To examine the conditions that foster passive communication, it is important to identify the defining characteristics of this style:

• *Persistent avoidance of conflict***:** Passive communicators often tolerate unsatisfactory situations rather than risk disagreement. This tendency is frequently rooted in fear of disapproval or a desire to avert negative responses.

- *Difficulty in refusing requests*: Individuals may comply even when lacking the time, energy, or willingness to do so, often leading to overextension, frustration, and internalized resentment.

- *Use of vague or apologetic language*: Passive communicators frequently employ expressions such as "Perhaps…," "I'm not sure, but…," or "I'm sorry to bother you, but…," which can weaken the speaker's position and reduce the clarity and effectiveness of the message.

- *Suppression of emotions and personal needs*: Feelings such as anger, frustration, or disappointment are often internalized, contributing to psychological strain, including anxiety and, in some cases, emotional outbursts (Bîrsan, 2015 pp. 75–76).

- *Failure to advocate for oneself:* Passive behavior is evident when individuals do not articulate their needs or preferences, allow others to make decisions on their behalf, or feel unable to decline requests.

- *Diminished autonomy in interpersonal interactions:* More broadly, passive communication reflects a set of attitudes and actions that inhibit the direct and honest expression of thoughts, feelings, and intentions, often resulting in reduced agency in interactions with others.

Recognizing these characteristics is particularly important in educational settings, where a teacher's communication style shapes not only classroom dynamics but also broader pedagogical outcomes. The following section examines the challenges faced by teachers who predominantly rely on a passive communication style:

- *Lack of classroom control:* Teachers exhibiting passive behavior frequently encounter difficulties in maintaining discipline. They may hesitate to establish clear rules or enforce consequences when rules are violated, often due to concerns about being perceived as overly strict or unapproachable. This reluctance can produce inconsistent expectations and diminish the teacher's authority.

- *Difficulty setting and maintaining boundaries:* Passive teachers are susceptible to external pressures from students or parents, which may lead them to accept unreasonable demands, grant unwarranted extensions, or revise decisions in ways that compromise educational standards. While these actions may be intended to preserve harmony, they can ultimately undermine professional judgment.

- *Avoidance of confrontation:* In an effort to prevent conflict, teachers may overlook problematic behaviors in the classroom. Although this strategy may temporarily reduce tension, it can communicate to students that behavioral expectations are optional, thereby diminishing the perceived importance of rules and accountability.

- *Negative impact on student learning:* Passivity can create a permissive classroom atmosphere in which students are not held accountable for their actions or academic performance. This environment may foster disengagement, hinder learning progress, and gradually erode the teacher's credibility. Ultimately, a passive or non-assertive communication style can compromise classroom structure and clarity, affecting both classroom management and student development.

In conclusion, although passive behavior may function as a short-term strategy to circumvent conflict, it frequently produces long-term challenges that impact both emotional well-being and interpersonal functioning. Passive communication reflects an individual's limited capacity or reluctance to assert and defend their rights within social and professional contexts. For teachers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, this style of communication can constitute a significant barrier to effective classroom management, professional development, and the establishment of constructive relationships with students, colleagues, and parents.

References

Andrițchi, V. (2012). *Fundamente teoretice și metodologice ale managementului resurselor umane în învățământul preuniversitar* [Theoretical and methodological foundations of human resource management in pre-university education] [*Doctoral dissertation*]. Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University.

Bîrsan, E. (2015). *Asertivitatea pedagogică: Note de curs* [Pedagogical assertiveness: Course notes]. Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University.

Cojocaru-Borozan, M., & Ohrimenco (Boțan), A. L. (2019). *Psihologia comunicării: Suport de curs* [Psychology of communication: Course support]. Garomont Studio.

Cristea, S. (2000). *Dicționar de pedagogie* [Dictionary of Educational Terms]. Litera Internațional.

Dragu, A. (1996). *Structura personalității profesorului* [The structure of the teacher's personality]. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Gavril, O. (2015). *Aplicații didactice pentru teoria educației*: Comunicare educațională asertivă [Didactic applications for the theory of education: Assertive educational communication]. Performantica. https://dppd.tuiasi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Comunicare-educationala.pdf

Huncă, M. (2016). *Formări profesionale continue ale cadrelor didactice centrate pe interconexiunea nevoilor personale şi instituţionale* [Continuous professional development of teachers focused on the alignment of personal and institutional needs] [Doctoral dissertation abstract, Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University]. http://www.cnaa.md/files/theses/2016/24837/mihaela_hunca_abstract.pdf

Iacob, L. (2004). Comunicarea în context educativ şi didactic [Communication in educational and didactic context]. Didactica Pro…, 2, 34–40.

Ionescu, M., & Chiş, V. (1992). Strategii de predare–învăţare [Teaching–learning strategies]. Editura Ştiinţifică.

Iucu, R. (2004). Formarea cadrelor didactice: Sisteme, politici, strategii [Teacher training: Systems, policies, strategies]. Humanitas Educaţional.

Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. (2014, July 17). Codul educaţiei al Republicii Moldova [Education Code of the Republic of Moldova] (Code No. 152). Monitorul Oficial, No. 319-324, art. 634. Version in force from January 14, 2019, amended by LP269 of November 23, 2018, MO 467-479, art. 794.

Pâslaru, V., & Cojocaru, S. (n.d.). Pentru o educaţie eco-estetică [For an eco-aesthetic education]. Arta, 19, 67–80. http://tinread.usarb.md/publicatie/arta/arta19/Pislaru.pdf

Popescu Neveanu, P. (1978). Dicţionar de psihologie [Dictionary of psychology]. Albatros. https://ru.scribd.com/doc/47998261/Paul-Popescu-Neveanu-Dictionar-de-psihologie

Sillamy, N. (1998). Dicţionar de psihologie [Dictionary of psychology]. Univers Enciclopedic.

Şoitu, L. (2008). Psihologie socială [Social psychology]. Editura Universităţii din Târgu Mureş.

Vicol, N., Pogolşa, L., Isac, Ş., Patraşcu, D., Afanas, A., Cotoviţchi, D., Cebanu, L., & Vrabii, V. (2021). Dimensionarea societală şi psiho-pedagogică în referenţierea traseului de profesionalizare a cadrelor didactice în procesul formării continue [Societal and psycho-pedagogical dimensions in framing the professionalization pathway of teachers within continuous education]. Chişinău: Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University.

Кан-Калик, В. А. (1979). *Основы профессионально-педагогического общения* [Fundamentals of professional pedagogical communication]. Grozny.