



## **Teachers' communicative style: The role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness**

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### **Abstract**

Teachers' communicative style has been recently addressed by researchers, yet the reason why teachers use a certain style remains unexplored. This study aimed to identify profiles of teachers' communicative style and how these relate to teachers' needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence) and students' performance. The sample comprised a total of 48 teachers and 1150 students. At the student-level, latent profile analysis showed three profiles: gain-framed messages (GFM), no-messages (NM), and all-messages (AM). At the teacher-level, multilevel profile analysis showed an active and a passive profile. Results indicated that both, the thwarting and the fulfilment, of teachers' basic needs was related to the communicative style they adopted. Likewise, the communicative style adopted by teachers was related to student's performance. Thus, present findings help to better understand why teachers adopt certain behaviours and how these relate to student outcomes.

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Amongst the strongest promoters of student's outcomes teachers and their behaviours have become focal points of research and educational policies. Researchers have shown that teachers' communicative style has an impact on student. Yet, more evidence is needed to understand why teachers adopt a certain communicative style and how that might relate to student performance. Thus, we aim to: 1) test if teachers' basic needs are related to their communicative style; and 2) examine if students' performance is related to teachers' communicative style.

Following the message framing theory (Rothman & Salovey, 1997) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), teacher's communicative style is defined as the messages' teachers rely on to engage students in school tasks. These messages are characterized by focusing on the consequences associated to certain outcomes which can either be favorable (*gain-framed*) or unfavourable (*loss-framed*). The messages are also characterized by supporting either external, introjected, identified or intrinsic motivation (*motivational appeals*).

Regarding teachers' basic needs, research has shown that the fulfilment of teachers' needs would not only be essential for their optimal functioning and well-be, but it would also affect their teaching behaviours, whereas the thwarting of these needs would lead to negative teaching outcomes and less effective teaching behaviours. For instance, Korthagen and Evelein (2016) teachers with fulfilled needs displayed a highly influential and proximal behaviour. Given the evidence, we expect to find that specific profiles would relate to teachers' basic needs. We also expect to find differences in students' performance based on their teachers' communicative style.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Participants were 48 teachers (60.4 % women; age range=26-58; Mean age=46.38) and their 1150 students (50.4% women; Mean age=15.15) from grades 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Instruments**

The following instruments were used: Teachers' Communicative Style Scale (Author et al., 2019) and the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration

Scale (Chen et al., 2015). Students' performance was measured using their grades retrieved from schools' records.

### **Data Analyses**

We performed a single and a multilevel latent profile analysis. Latent profile analysis is used to explain the variability within a population using the fewest number of latent profiles possible (Korpiää et al., 2019). The multilevel version of this analytic approach is used to explore the profiles at a higher level (i.e. students at Level 1, and teachers at Level 2) (Collie et al., 2020). A two-step procedure was followed: 1) estimate a single latent profile analysis to decide the number of clusters at L1, and 2) based on these results, estimate a multilevel latent profile analysis to explore teachers' profiles with different percentages of L1 profiles. At Level 1, to analyse differences in the performance of students between the different profiles, we used the BCH method. At level 2, we compared the performance between the different profiles using the delta method.

### **Results**

At the single level, three profiles were found: Profile GFM, students classified their teachers as relying on gain-framed messages, and on motivational appeals with the highest levels of self-determination; Profile AM were students classified their teacher as using all kinds of messages; and Profile NM with students whose teacher did not use any message. Overall, the fulfilment of teachers' needs increased the likelihood of pertaining to the GFM, whereas the thwarting of these needs was related to a higher likelihood of pertaining to the NM or the AM profile. Finally, students in the GFM profile had higher performance.

At the multilevel, two profiles were found: an active profile of teachers who used gain-framed messages and motivational appeals with the highest self-determination and a passive profile of teachers who did not use any kind of message. Analysis of the relation between the profiles of teachers' communicative style and their needs yielded significant results only for autonomy. Finally, students who perceived their teacher as "active" showed higher performance.

### **Discussion**

The present study helps us understand the influence of teachers' basic needs on their teaching behaviors and adds to our understanding of the relation between teaching

behaviors and student outcomes. It is well known that teacher behaviors have a solid link with student outcomes, as demonstrated by previous research and the current one. However, whilst this relation is strongly supported, teachers' basic needs and their influence on their own teaching behavior has been poorly addressed (Korthagen & Evelein, 2016).

The present findings highlight the impact of teachers' need fulfilment and thwarting on their communicative style and the impact of their communicative style on students' performance, both at the student-level and teacher-level. Given these relations, if we want to improve teaching behaviors and student outcomes, attending to the teachers' inner side should be a priority. Schools that provide a context where the three basic needs are satisfied have proven to positively influence teaching behavior and teachers' well-being. Therefore, actions can and should be taken at the school level.

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