

Communication skills practice with middle school students

Research Project

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Abstract

This research is a field research conducted in the center of Erbil and its surroundings. The objective of the research is to; (1) address student’s satisfaction with communication style of the social workers within schools, (2) investigate perspective of the social workers towards the importance of communication skills in social work practice, and (3) propose a list of suggestions and recommendations for developing communication skills for social workers in schools.

To achieve the goals of this study, we used mixed methods (both Quantitative and qualitative approaches together) and (Qualitative). We conducted a survey in secondary schools and distributed one hundred and sixty-two questionnaires among students in grade seven, eight and nine. We also conducted 5 semi-structured interviews with social workers in the targeted schools.

After conducting this research we found that a large number of students are satisfied with the way social workers communicate. The social worker s who have graduated from the Department of Social Work also have good communication skills that reflect the theories and materials they have learned during the learning process. However, the researchers still need more training and opportunities to develop their communication skills.

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# **Chapter One: Introduction**

# 1.1 introduction

Social work in the education sector is an important and continuous need, because the education sector is a comprehensive sector and affects other sectors of life, and the education sector has a role in educating future generations, teachers, researchers, and achieving school goals because communication is not the process of sending messages but an attempt to create a positive impact in school” (Alkbriy, 2012, p44)

1.2 Research problem:

Social work is a new specialty in theKurdistan , yet understanding of this scientific field and its role in Kurdish society is relatively unknown. Based on our best knowledge, there is no research attempt especially in terms of what kind of specialty social workers need to play a good role in education settings. Someone can argue that the role of social workers is important to facilitate the process of teaching and learning within schools. Hence, communication skills could be the key to play that vital role. This is something that researchers should investigate and reveal how it can be developed. Regardless of simple discussions around the role of school social workers, it seems that there no public debates and academic efforts to shed light on this issue.

1.3 The objectivities of the research

This research is intended to;

* Address student’s satisfaction with communication style of the social workers within schools.
* Highlight social worker’s perspective towards importance of communication skills in social work practice,
* Propose a list of recommendations and suggestions to develop communication skills for social workers in schools.

# Research questions:

# To what extend are students satisfied with the communication style of school social workers?

# How do school social workers perceive the importance of communication skills in social work practice?

# What can be done to develop communication skills of school social workers?

# 1.5 Definition of Concepts:

## 1-5.1 communication skill

communication skills enable individuals to understand others and to be understood themselves. A variety of aspects are important in the context of these skills, such as listening, speaking, observing and empathy in everyday life. These skills are required to communicate ideas to others, develop a confident attitude, respect for others and public speaking (Careere,G,2023,p2)”

It is also defined as “ the abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include communicating new ideas, feelings or even an update on your project. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathising. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications like email and social media (saavedra.J,2019 ,p4)”

## 1.5.2 Social Work Practice:

## “ Social Work Practice means the professional activity directed at enhancing, protecting or restoring people's capacity for social functioning, whether impaired by physical, environmental, or emotional factors. It is the professional application of social work values, principles, skills, and knowledge directed to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counselling or psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups to provide and/or improve social and health services(Parker.J,2020,p11)”

Others define it as” it is the professional application of social work values, theories, and interventions to one or more of the following: enhancing the development, problem-solving, and coping capacities of people; promoting the effective and humane operations of systems that provide resources and services to people; linking people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities; developing and improving social policy(Kadooka ,J, Marfin,2000,p93)”

1.5.3 School Social Worker

"School social workers are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success they work directly“(DEE stalnaker,9th march2022 ,p132,)

Other scholars also define it as "social worker is a person who has a bachelor's degree or above in social and psychological fields, including graduates of psychology, social work, sociology and psychological work guidance on the basis of expertise helps students"(Linda ,G, press,,2008,p12)

# **Chapter Two:**

# **Literature Review:**

Researchers in Arab world have investigated the role of communication skills in education settings and its effects not only on student’s achievement, but also educational development and community engagements. Ghana Mahmoud (2013) conducted a research on this subject with particular focus on Syrian context. The study discusses how principals, teachers and social workers can build good relationships with students. The importance of relationships between students, teachers and researchers addressed in this research to see how it affects students' grades, and how it can increase students' efforts and enthusiasm and motivations. It also investigates the importance of daily verbal and non-verbal communication in school and how researchers, educators, and student families can use it to engage with students and improve their communication skills, activities, and community engagement to improve education.

Noteworthy to mention that, this research is a master's thesis conducted in Damascus. The researcher employed quantitative approach. The sample size of this study is 284 teachers participated from 84 schools (4 mixed schools, 18 girls' schools and 62 boys' schools).

Relatedly, Lamya Ramadan (2018) also conducted a research on the same issue but investigated it in the context of Gaza City. This research also utilized quantitative approach and applied questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The sample of this study was 335 cases, both male and female teachers to answer the research questions.

This research aimed at (1) activating community participation through parents, school committees and develop solutions and suggestions, and (2) promoting a culture of community participation among school principals and encourage them to activate it in order to make the educational process successful.

The content of this research addresses two main points: the extent of knowledge of communication skills of teachers, researchers and school principals and how it is related to the activation and participation of society. He sees the importance of the difference between teacher evaluation and communication skills and how important communication skills are in solving student problems.

Recently, Mahmoud Hamza (2022) conducted a research in the Kurdistan region well relevant to our research’s subject. Looking at the title of his research, which is “the role of social researchers in public and non-governmental high schools in Erbil,” it is well apparent that this research to some extend is relevant to what we are investigating. This research is a master thesis submitted to the Department of Social Work of Salahaddin University. The researcher gathered data in Erbil. Social workers included in this research had backgrounds in four different majors in the sample as follows: public high school (86%) sociology (14%) psychology but in private schools (69%) sociology (15%) psychology (8%) social work and (8%) psychological. He used a triangular method consists of quantitative, qualitative and central data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that social workers in public high schools are more involved with students and parents when they have problems, so they face more threats on.., on the other hand, researchers in private schools develop student skills and invite parents to parties, so parents are more aware of the role of social workers in non-public high schools. Another finding was that counselling the theories studied in college, apart from social work and psychological guidance in the workplace, have had little benefit for the profession of social workers, especially those who studied sociology, and how social workers can play an effective role in schools embodying his work in schools in a scientific and modern way and solving students' problems and developing students' abilities in educational institutions.

**Chapter three: Methodology**

3.1 Research methods

It is defined as “the strategies, processes, or techniques used to gather data or evidence for analysis in order to reveal new information or create a better understanding of a topic “ ( Williams, C.,2007p5)”

As we applied mixed methods to achieve the goals of this research, it is really important to define the methodological concepts here including mixed method, quantitative research, qualitative research, questionnaire, and interview.

**3.2 mixed methods**

**“This type of methods is** combination of elements of quantitative research and qualitative research in order to answer your research question. Mixed methods can help you gain a more complete picture than a standalone quantitative or qualitative study, as it integrates benefits of both methods, mixed methods research is often used in the behavioural, health, and social sciences, especially in multidisciplinary settings and complex situational or societal research.” (George.J, 2022, P1)

3.3 Quantitative research

Scholars define it as “the process of collecting and analysing numerical data. It can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations.” (Bhandari, 2020). It is also described as “emphasizing on objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon.”(Targett,D,2012,p20)

In this research we applied both quantitative and qualitative methods. We distributed one hundred and sixty two forms to the students of the seventh, eighth and ninth grades of both sexes. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions, our research community included public and private secondary schools in Erbil and its surroundings.

3.4 Questionnaire

“It is a commonly used tool for data collection for research in order to build this tool in such a way that it is a strong scientific support and resource for the research topic.”( Jan.P.deruiter,p180,2012)

 3.5 Qualitative research

“It involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.” (Bhandari, 2020)

Qualitative research methods are designed to help to reveal the behaviour and perception of a target audience with reference to a specific topic. There are different types of qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnographic research, content analysis, and case study studies that are usually used. The results of qualitative methods are more descriptive and inferences can be easily drawn from the data obtained. Qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioural sciences.

3.6 Interview:

“It is a method of data collection that involves two or more people exchanging information through a series of questions and answers, the questions are designed by a researcher to elicit information from interview participant on a specific topic or set of topics typically interviews involve an in-person meeting between two people, an interviewer and an interviewee.” (Bryman,A ,2012,P.469)

Also other definition to "Interview :is that it is a conversation with a deliberate  purpose that the participants accept an interview resembles a conversation in many ways both involve verbal and non verbal communication btween people during wich they exchange ideas ,attitudes ,ans fellings both are usually face to face interactions,aside from the telephone interview or conversation"(Kadushin,A&Kadushin,G ,2012,p4)”

For this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data and the choice of these methods is a very good way to collect data. As well as trying to get in-depth opinions from participants, its important qualitative method can attitudes and behavioral experiences, as well as using methods that interview tools semi-structured interviews to want to know specific information to gain knowledge of comparisons and disparities in other interviews from social workers perspective.

The selection of qualitative research was the best choice for data collection and the use of methods that is interviews. Participants included social work graduates and sociologists to answer our research questions, we conducted six interviews with social workers in public and private schools. We asked eleven questions and the answers were recorded face to face. It was an interview via mobile phone.

**Chapter Four : Finding , Discussion , conclusion:**

4.1 Findings:

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| --- |
| 1. Have you ever needed to talk to your school social worker for help? |
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|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **69%** | **111** | **Yes** |
| **31%** | **51** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

1. The first question asked to the participants was: Have you ever needed to talk to your school social worker for help?

Participants' responses were as follows:

In this table we can see that 69% (111) of the respondents answered (yes) and 31% (51) of the respondents answered (no), which shows that more than half of the respondents needed to talk He was with the researcher to get information and solve problems.

|  |
| --- |
| 2. How comfortable can you tell the social worker what happened? |
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|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **28%** | **45** | **Many** |
| **34%** | **55** | **Little** |
| **38%** | **62** | **to a certain extent** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

The second question asked the participants was: How confident are you to tell the social worker about everything that happened?

The participants' responses were as follows:

In this table we can see that 28% (45) of the participants answered (very) means they can talk, and (34%) or (55) participants answered (less), and (38%) That is, 62 of the participants answered (somewhat). It is noteworthy that more than half of the participants still do not have the confidence to tell the researcher everything without hesitation, ie they have fear and anxiety or there may be other reasons such as lack of trust between the social worker and students.

|  |
| --- |
| 3. Based on your experience or that of your friends, do you feel that your school social worker has been helpful enough in solving problems? |
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|
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|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **83%** | **134** | **Yes** |
| **17%** | **28** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

3. The third question asked to the participants was: According to your experience or that of your friends, do you feel that your school social worker has helped to solve the problems?

In this table we can see that 83% or 134 respondents answered yes, 17% or 27 respondents answered no, and 1% or only None of the participants answered “sometimes”, indicating that a large proportion of participants supported that the school researcher helped solve the problems.

|  |
| --- |
| 4. According to your experience or that of your friends, when any problems occur, the social worker sits alone with the students to solve the problems? |
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|
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|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **36%** | **58** | **Often** |
| **54%** | **87** | **Sometimes** |
| **10%** | **17** | **Never again** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

4- The fourth question asked to the participants was: According to your experience or your friends, when any problems occur, the social worker sits alone with the students to solve the problems? 54% (87%) of the respondents answered (Sometimes), and 10% (17%) answered (Never). The results show that more students sometimes have the opportunity to sit down with a social worker to solve their problems, which may be due to the lack of a private room for the researcher.

|  |
| --- |
| 5. How well do you think your school social worker is doing his job? |
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|
|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **63%** | **102** | **Very good** |
| **27%** | **43** | **To Some Extent** |
| **10%** | **17** | **He is not good** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

5. The fifth question asked to the participants was: How well do you think the social worker of your school does his job? The answers of the participants were:

In this table we can see that 63% (102) of the respondents answered (very good), 27% (43) respondents answered (somewhat), and 10% (17). None of the participants answered “not good”. As a result, we find that more than half of the participants support that the researcher is doing his job well, which is a pleasant result.

|  |
| --- |
| 6. How satisfied are you with the way your school social worker talks? |
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|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **59%** | **95** | **I'm very satisfied** |
| **17%** | **27** | **I agree to some extent** |
| **25%** | **40** |  **No satisfaction** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

6- The sixth question asked to the participants was: How satisfied are you with the discussion method of your school social worker? The answers of the participants were as follows: 59% of the participants answered (95%) and (95%) 17% (27) of the respondents answered (somewhat satisfied), and 25% (40) of the respondents answered (not at all satisfied). The answers of the participants show that most of the students are satisfied with the researcher when he discusses with them and uses good methods.

|  |
| --- |
| 7. Do you see your school social worker every day wherever he is at school? |
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **80%** | **130** | **Yes** |
| **20%** | **32** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

7. The seventh question asked to the participants was: Do you see the social worker of your school every day? The answers of the participants were:

In this table we can see that 80% or 130 of the participants answered yes, and 20% or 32 of the participants answered no He takes his work seriously and is in front of the students so that they can talk to him whenever they want.

|  |
| --- |
| 8. Is your school social worker easily available to talk to whenever you need him? |
|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **79%** | **128** | **Yes** |
| **21%** | **34** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

8. The eighth question asked to the participants was: Whenever you need your school social worker, is he easily available to talk to? The responses of the study participants were:

In the following table we can see that 79% or 128 of the respondents answered yes, and 21% or 34 of the respondents answered no Yes, the school social worker can talk to you whenever they need to.

|  |
| --- |
| 9. Do you have the phone number of your school social worker so that you can call him whenever you want? |
|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **60%** | **98** | **Yes** |
| **40%** | **64** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

9. The ninth question asked to the participants was: Do you have the phone number of your school social worker so that you can call him whenever you want?

In this table we can see that 60% (98) of the participants answered (yes), and 40% (64) of the participants answered (no), which shows that a significant number of participants can contact the researcher directly through Telephone communication.

|  |
| --- |
| 10. Have you ever wanted to talk to your school social worker about something but didn't have the opportunity? |
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **44%** | **71** | **Yes** |
| **56%** | **91** | **No** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

10. The tenth question asked to the participants was: Have you ever wanted to talk to the social worker of your school and did not have the opportunity? The answers of the participants were: 44% (71%) of the participants answered (yes), and (56%) or (91) of the participants answered (no). Talk to the researcher to solve their problems and in terms of opportunities Sometimes students complain that the social worker does not provide opportunities, or school rules and regulations are such that students can only visit the social worker during breaks

|  |
| --- |
| 11. Gender |
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **56%** | **90** | **Female** |
| **44%** | **72** | **male** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

 11. The eleventh question asked to the participants was: Gender:

56% (90) of the participants are female and 44% (72) of the participants are male.

|  |
| --- |
| 12. Class: |
|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **41%** | **67** | **7** |
| **32%** | **52** | **8** |
| **27%** | **43** | **9** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

12. The twelfth question asked to the participants was:

41% or 67 of the participants were in grade 7, 32% or 52 were in grade 8, and 27% or 43 were in grade )be. This means that the most students who were accepted as participants in the study is the seventh stage because it is a sensitive stage and a new stage for students to have more problems and need social workers, and students participated in all three stages.

|  |
| --- |
| 13. Gender of your school social worker: |
|
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|
|
|
|
| **Percentage** | **Number** | **Categories** |
| **74%** | **120** | **Female** |
| **26%** | **42** | **Male** |
| **100%** | **162** | **Total** |

13. The thirteenth question asked to the participants was: Gender of your school social worker:

74% or 120 of the researchers were female and 26% or 42 of the participants were male There were two or three female researchers, but no male researchers

**4.2 Discussion**

One of the objectives of our research was to find out how satisfied students are with the way social workers communicate. Although the majority of students are satisfied with social workers, which may be related to the fact that students at each stage of education have different attitudes towards social workers, we can say that students in early adolescence are more sensitive Social workers are satisfied because of the social worker's expertise, but still 34% of students are dissatisfied with the social worker, which is questionable. This may be partly related to the fact that social workers do not have good communication skills Some of us social workers are graduates of the Department of Sociology, not graduates of the Department of Social Work, who have not received special courses on how to communicate with students Sociology graduates are less experienced than social work graduates in dealing with students in schools (Muhamed, M, Hamza, 2022p13)

The importance of communication also affects students and students' academic performance and grades because, according to previous research has proved that a healthy relationship between students and school staff, including social workers has positive results on achieving grades and increase students' efforts in school. Gh, Abdulmouli, 2013, p13) Another reason why students communicate with social workers is that adolescent students need more understanding as they change their age and build successful relationships and trust

Another objective of our research was: How do school social workers perceive the importance of communication skills in social work practice?

We concluded that the researchers who graduated from the Department of Social Work are more familiar with communication methods and benefited more from the skills and expertise they have studied The theories that talked about building relationships and trust with students have been very useful for field work and now after playing the role of social researcher has helped me to do my job well.

In contrast, the researchers who graduated from the Department of Sociology indicated that they have not studied any subjects about communication and how to build relationships and trust with students Previous research has shown that researchers who graduated from the Department of Social Work and Psychology are more familiar with the duties and roles of researchers and can communicate better Create with students (Muhamed,M,Hamza,2022,p12)

In response to the third question of our research, which was: What can be done to develop communication skills of school social workers? It became clear that despite the importance of communication and its great impact on students, communication can be a motivational factor for students, but we see that not enough attention is paid to this field There has been no positive impact, especially for sociology graduates, because a broad field such as communication within a few days is not as useful as it should be compared to social work graduates who are taught courses, seminars and workshops They do not pay enough attention to the importance and role of communication as a good factor for student development .

**4.3 conclusion**

After conducting this research we found that a large number of students are satisfied with the way social workers communicate, but at the same time researchers need more training and opportunities, because the concept of communication is new to some researchers More because some of them have received training or the concept has been part of their education system, so social work researchers are more experienced in terms of communication than sociologists.

**4.4 Recommendation:**

Our recommendation: First, the Ministry of Education should review the list of social workers, should pay attention to the recruitment of social workers in schools, and the Ministry of Higher Education, especially the Department of Sociology should review the methods and mechanisms. Accredited courses can also be opened for researchers to develop their communication skills in schools. I also suggest that future researchers can take more samples from schools, more researchers or primary and secondary schools

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