



## Knowledge of voice training and self-care among politicians in Sergipe, Brazil

### Conhecimento sobre educação vocal e autocuidado de políticos de Sergipe, Brasil

### Conocimiento sobre educación vocal y autocuidado de políticos de Sergipe, Brasil

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#### Abstract

*Introduction: politicians use professional vocals, particularly during the electoral campaigns. Objective: to identify if there is or there is not a perception among members of the state assembly, of their vocal care during the electoral campaigns. Method: exploratory design, cross, qualitative with content analysis, in a convenience sample design. Within the 24 state deputies, 10 voluntarily agreed to participate, answering a self-applied questionnaire, elaborated for the study. The questions were presented in sections personal profile (age, gender, prior profession before entering politics and time as state deputy; knowledge of use of the vocals and if have had support from speech-language pathologist; perception of vocal behavior changes, prior, during and after electoral campaign; complains of any vocal issues during the collection of data. Results: out of the 10 interviewed, 9 were of the masculine gender, the average age was 45 (38-53) years; the average time of political activity was 15 (11-22) years and they had parallel professions were they utilized professional voice. Two state deputies had received basic vocal education in radio courses. Only 4 take some care of their voice. We identified four categories that we named stereotypes: the “non-caring”; the “without knowledge but caring”; the “supposing correct”; the “theoretically informed but negligent”. Final considerations: only four respondents worried, even if in a rudimental form, with the use of adequate voice. It was observed that there is a lack of knowledge of the contribution of speech-language pathology to the vocal education.*

*Keywords: Politics; Speech-Language Pathology; Voice; Communication; Self-Care*

#### Resumo

*Introdução: políticos utilizam voz profissional, especialmente durante a campanha eleitoral. Objetivo:*

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identificar a existência ou não de autocuidado vocal, na percepção dos parlamentares, no período eleitoral. Método: desenho exploratório, transversal, qualitativo com análise de conteúdo, composto por amostra de conveniência. Entre os 24 deputados estaduais, dez se dispuseram a participar voluntariamente, respondendo a um questionário autoaplicado, elaborado para este fim. As perguntas foram apresentadas em bloco que versavam sobre: a) perfil do respondente (gênero, idade, formação profissional e tempo de atuação como político); b) aquisição de informações sobre o uso da voz e acompanhamento fonoaudiológico; c) autopercepção da voz antes, durante e após a campanha eleitoral; d) queixa vocal atual. Resultados: dos dez respondentes, nove eram do gênero masculino; a média de idade foi de 45 (38-53) anos; a média de tempo de atividade política foi de 15 (11-22) anos e com outras profissões paralelas em que utilizam voz profissional. Destes, dois parlamentares relataram ter recebido orientação básica quanto à educação vocal em curso de radialismo, somente quatro políticos exercem algum tipo de autocuidado sobre o uso da voz. Foram identificadas quatro categorias que nomeamos de estereótipos em relação ao uso e cuidados com a voz: o “descuidado”; o “sem conhecimento, mas cuidadoso”; o “supostamente correto”; e o “teoricamente orientado, mas negligente”. Considerações finais: somente quatro parlamentares pesquisados preocupam-se, ainda que de forma rudimentar, com o uso adequado da voz. Entre os respondentes observou-se que há um desconhecimento da contribuição do profissional de Fonoaudiologia quanto à educação vocal.

**Palavras-chave:** Política; Fonoaudiologia; Voz; Comunicação; Autocuidado.

### Resumen

*Introducción: los políticos utilizan la voz profesionalmente, especialmente durante campañas electorales. Objetivo: Identificar la existencia o no de autocuidado vocal, en la percepción de los parlamentares, en periodos electorales. Método: estudio exploratorio, transversal, cualitativo, con análisis de contenido, compuesto por muestra de conveniencia. Entre 24 diputados estatales, diez se dispusieron a participar, contestando un cuestionario autoaplicado, elaborado para este fin. Las preguntas fueron presentadas en bloques que versaban sobre: a) perfil del encuestado (género, edad, profesión y tiempo de actuación como político); b) adquisición de informaciones sobre el uso de la voz y seguimiento fonoaudiológico; c) autopercepción de la voz antes, durante y después de campaña electoral; d) queja vocal presente. Resultados: de los diez encuestados, nueve eran hombres; la edad promedio fue de 45 (38-53) años; el tiempo promedio en actividad política fue de 15 (11-22) años y con otras profesiones paralelas en que también usaban la voz profesional. Dos parlamentares relataron haber recibido orientación básica relacionada con educación vocal en cursos de locución y solamente cuatro políticos ejercen algún tipo de autocuidado sobre el uso de la voz. Fueron identificadas cuatro categorías que llamamos de estereotipos relacionados con el uso de la voz y sus respectivos cuidados: el “descuidado”; el “sin conocimiento pero cuidadoso”; el “supuestamente correcto” y el “teóricamente orientado, pero negligente”. Consideraciones finales: solamente cuatro parlamentares investigados se preocupan, aunque de forma rudimentaria, con el uso adecuado de la voz. Se observó que hay un desconocimiento de la contribución del profesional de fonoaudiología en relación con la educación vocal.*

*Palabras clave:* Política; Fonoaudiología; Voz; Comunicación; Autocuidado.

### Introduction

Politicians make use of vocal and gestural resources in an individualized way<sup>1</sup>. The Parliamentarians, object of this study, culturally incorporate a voice characterized by strong, constant use of shouting, body language, and facial caricatures, which are able to aggressively impress the electorate and which constitute a model by which the newest lookup. The voice, therefore,

and its elements are crucial in the posture of those entering the political life<sup>2</sup>.

The Politician professional category is aware of the power of voice and communication, as they are guided by marketing strategists about the use of these tools, and how they, of course, influence the listener<sup>2,3</sup>. These professionals have daily vocal demand, which is overload at the time of election campaign and need speech-language pathologist treatment particularly in the prevention of voice

alteration, in the development of expressiveness and in the promotion of vocal care. Previous studies show that the context of talking to the public can be considered as a stressor agent<sup>4,5</sup>.

The voice is modified according to the social role, the context, and intent of communication<sup>6</sup>. The literature indicates that the individual's perception of his own voice and the impact of dysphonia on their quality of life, adds to the perception of clinicians and the general degree of this change<sup>7-9</sup>. From this perspective, the speech-language pathology has as an object of communication study, with regard to its development, improvement, disorders, and differences<sup>10</sup>.

The Speech-language pathology is a science that can offer care with regard to all aspects of voice and speech involved in human communication. Thus, the difficulties to speak to the public can be minimized with speech-language pathology treatment, helping individuals to develop and / or improve their communication<sup>11</sup>. To be able to express yourself is needed for a professional and personal performance, regardless of the fear that some speakers feel about the judgment of listeners<sup>12</sup>.

The Brazilian Society of Speech-Language Pathology - SBFA performed a systematic review, in 2014, regarding communication in public, with or without a focus on professionals that uses the voice as an instrument of work, without restricting the year of publication, in the main databases. They found 34 studies and among these, only five were related to the professional category of politician. Most found work was extracted from conference proceedings thus, making difficult the acceptance and dissemination of the results in the scientific context<sup>13</sup>.

Therefore, although recently there has been a greater awareness about the importance of care for the vocals, there is a knowledge gap that motivates the new research, given the lack of studies involving politicians in aspects related to their vocal care. In this perspective, the goal is to identify the presence or absence of vocal self-care, as perceived by the Sergipe State Deputies, during the electoral period.

## Methods

### Drawing

An exploratory study, cross-sectional, qualitative content analysis<sup>14</sup>, consisted of convenience sample.

### Context, scope

It covers all Members of Parliament of the State of Sergipe in Northeastern Brazil. The accessibility to the research subjects was through the active pursuit of the 24 parliamentarians, existing at the time of this study. Initially, the contacts were made by telephone with their assessors, followed by visits to their offices and meetings in the Legislative Assembly.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Were included all members with state deputy mandate present in meetings or in their offices in the data collection period, regardless of age, gender and professional practice time. Considered losses in the samples were: not answering the questionnaire or doing so incompletely, not agreeing to participate in the study and, consequently, not signing the consent form (Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido - TCLE).

### Research tools

For data collection, it was designed a self-administered questionnaire with possibilities of detailing, by the respondent, and focused on participants' perception of the existence or absence of vocal care during the campaign period.

The questions were presented in blocks that focused on; a) respondent profile (gender, age, profession parallel to parliamentary life and time of professional experience as a politician); b) acquisition of information on the use of voice in courses, lectures, training or other; c) care of the voice and expressiveness; d) speech therapy treatment; e) vocal complaints in the period of data collection; f) voice complaint in the period before, during and after the electoral process.

### Data collection

The questionnaire was distributed by the principal investigator of this study, to the 24 state representatives, of which 10 were returned completed. The document was completed by each respondent in their workplace without the presence of the researcher. The data collection was carried out between August and September 2012.

### Data analysis

After making a pre-analysis on the answers on the questionnaires, a descriptive analysis was carried out to build a demonstrative table of the general findings with absolute numbers (Table I). After, there was a new reading, grouping the participants according to similar responses. Using Bardin<sup>14</sup> benchmark, emerged categories that were named as stereotypes which included: knowledge in vocal education and self-care of the respondents, namely: the “careless - with or without complaints”; the “without knowledge, but careful”; the “supposedly correct”; the “theoretically oriented, but negligent.” The results were presented in a table (Table I).

### Legal aspects of the research

The doctor responsible for the State of Sergipe Legislature health service signed the consent form. All state representatives involved signed the consent form agreeing to the completion and dissemination of this research and its results, according to Resolution 466/12 of the National Council of Ethics in Research - CONEP. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research involving human beings University Hospital under No. CAAE 0392.0.000.107-10 / 2010.

### Results

Among the ten completed questionnaires, nine Members were male; the average age was 45 (38-53) years; the average time on the political activity was 15 (11-22) years. Some, in addition to the political role, also performed activities requiring a professional use of the voice, such as a lawyer, pastor, and journalist.

Only two parliamentarians received information and ongoing guidance, on a radio course, on the use of their voice, and the entire sample denied having received care from a speech-language pathologist. As for self-care with the voice, four politicians describe it in a distinctive way: avoiding loud talking and eating cold food; gargle with water; transmit properly their voice and naturally seek expressiveness, and speak slowly.

Regarding vocal complaint at the time of data collection, four respondents indicate intensely and natural demand of their voice, especially on the weekend, when they exceed in reading aloud for a long time and communicate more directly with voters; difficulty to transmit properly their voice; nervousness; hoarseness; strident voice.

The politicians revealed that the vocal complaints come in different forms, between the three phases of the last election campaign: five different representatives with complaints in the previous phase, five others during and five after the campaign. At the end of the campaign, they state having a worn voice, hoarseness, and report that there has been a natural reduction in the use of the voice.

Nine of these parliamentary perceived they are stressed out in their daily lives (the only one that did not show stress, was a male whose parallel activity, to the political one, is as a Manager). Table 1 shows the information of parliamentarians about knowledge and use of voice and stress self-awareness.

**Table 1.** Information on the knowledge about the use of voice and self-perceived stress of the State of Sergipe Deputies in 2012 (n = 10)

Variables	n
<b>Received vocal and expressiveness information / guidance</b>	
No	8
Yes in radio training/courses	2
<b>It makes use of voice care and expressivity</b>	
No	6
Yes	4
Voice Delivery and naturally seek expressiveness	1
Avoid cold foods and perform gargle with water	1
Speak slowly	1
Avoid cold liquids and speak loud	1
<b>Complaints of the current vocals</b>	
No	6
yes	4
Hoarseness	1
difficulty in using the voice correctly and nervousness	1
At the weekend with intense demand with voters and when outrank reading out loud	1
strident voice	1
the period prior to the last campaign	
Without complain	5
With complain	5
Intense demand of the voice	1
Intense use of the voice allied to gesture of hands, body and face	1
Hoarse	1
Normal voice but precarious facial expressions and gesture	1
Tired vocals	1
<b>Period during the last campaign</b>	
Without complaint	4
With complaint	5
Intense demand and vocal tiredness	1
Speaks in strong intensity	1
Hoarse	1
Tension and difficult in expressing oneself	1
Vocal abuse and tired voice	1
<b>Period after the last campaign</b>	
Without complaint	4
With complaint	5
Hoarse	3
worn voice and reduced use of voice demand	1
Demand and use of voice reduction	1
<b>Stress</b>	
Without complaint	1
With complaint	9

The qualitative analysis of the findings from these parliamentarians, revealed peculiar characteristics that led to the creation of four different stereotypes of knowledge in education and vocal self-care: the “careless with or without complaint”; “without knowledge, but careful”; the “supposedly correct”; and “theoretically oriented, but negligent” (Table I).

Six politicians fall in the first stereotype (careless), three with vocal complaints. All deny having received or follow any kind of guidance or training to the voice with speech-language pathology. They do not use any preventative care treatment to their vocals. This group is characterized by natural intense vocal demand with voice wear complaint; some report daily stress, hoarseness, difficulty in expressing and complaint are cuter in more stressful situations.

The second stereotype (without knowledge, but careful) had two politicians, who also denied

having received or follow any kind of guidance or training to the voice with a speech therapist but reveals some sort of care with their voice. Still, reports voice complaint and constant stress in their daily lives and tired voice and hoarse during the campaign period.

In the third stereotype (supposedly correct), a single politician denies voice complaints but reports stress. He believes that only by following a few guidelines acquired in a radio course (voice intonation and naturally seek expressiveness), would prevent great damage to his vocal health, he even disregards the need to follow up with speech pathologist treatments. It was observed that this parliamentarian concurrently carries two professional careers, both with significant demand for his voice.

In the fourth stereotype (theoretically oriented, but negligent), a respondent received basic guidance on vocal care and way to communicate on a radio course and the only guide which he said to



use is slowly speaking . Also admitted vocal and stress complaint. Despite being oriented, makes use of the voice with all possible intensity in the election period and considers the time immediately after it, the moment for restoration and care.

**Figure 1.** Profile, stereotypes and vocal behaviour of the State of Sergipe deputies in 2012 (n=10).

Sex	Age	Years in politics	Stereotype	Paralel professional	Has received orientation on voice and expressiveness?	Care for the voice and expressiveness ?	Received care from a Speech-language pathologist.	Complaints of the vocals during the collection of data.	Complaints during the eleitoral campaign.			Self -perception of stress.
									Before	During	Posterior	
m	43	13 years	Careless, no complaints	Lawyer	No	No	No	No	Normal	Normal	Normal	Stress
m	48	20 years	Careless, no complaints	Industrial	No	No	No	No	Normal	Normal	Normal	Stress
m	53	18 years	Without knowledge, but careful	Pastor	No	Avoid cold food and gargle with water	No	Yes, intense demand for voice, especially on the weekend, when it exceeds the reading aloud and communicates more directly with voters	Intense demand	Tired voice	hoarseness	Stress
m	47	15 years	Without knowledge, but careful	Industrial	No	Avoid cold foods and speak loud	No	No	Tired voice	Vocal abuso and tiredness!	hoarseness	Stress
m	49	11 years	Careless with complaints	Business man	No	No	No	No	Normal voice, but gestures and facial expressions precarious	Normal	Complaint of voice wear	Stress
m	47	16 years	Careless with complaints	Engineer	No	No	No	Yes, difficult in delivering voice and nervousness	Normal	Complain vocal in situations with tension and difficulty in expressing	Normal	Stress and insomnia
m	45	14 years	Careless with complaints	Business man	No	No	No	No	Normal	Normal	Normal	Nagate stress
m	38	10 years	Supposedly correct	Jornalist	Yes, in radio course	Delivering voice and naturally seek expressiveness	No	Don't understand. Perhaps due to non contact with a Speech-language Pathologist.	Intense use of the voice allied to gesture with hands, body and face.	Speak more, but I do not see change	No complaints naturally reduces the use of voice	Stress. Sleeps only 4h/night.
m	40	22 years	Careless with complaints	Lawyer	No	No	No	Hoarse	Hoarse	Hoarse	Complain of hoarseness	Stress and insomnia
f	41	10 years	Theoretically oriented, but negligent	Lawyer	Yes, with journalist in a radio course.	Speak slowly	No	Strident voice	Normal	intentional use of voice with strong intensity	Without complain due to natural reduction on the use of the voice	Stress

## Discussion

Most politicians who participated in this survey were unaware of the vocal techniques for professional use and also reported that after the election period had a hoarse or worn voice. The literature is insufficient in terms of politicians vocal care, however, the literature contains information about other professions that uses the voice professionally, such as call centre operator, broadcaster, teacher and lawyers, who are also unaware of the basic vocal care and the consequent benefits of speech-language pathology<sup>15-19</sup>.

Based on the classification “Categorization of the vocal professionals according to the vocal use” suggested in a previous study<sup>20</sup>, the politician is in the category of “Leader / Seller”, which is the

one that usually has a voice with speaking demand with short uninterrupted periods, uses the voice to influence people and uses with increased intensity.

The complaint of hoarseness and voice fatigue perceived by the current sample at the end of election campaign takes place in several professionals categories<sup>20</sup>. The politicians of the current study do not invest in vocal care, even in periods of peak demand, such election campaigns. On the other hand, in their advisory and marketing teams, there is an appreciation of the natural posture during verbal and non-verbal communication, but their guidelines list, the voice item is not included and there is not a concern about referring to a speech-language pathologist, except in emergency situations<sup>2</sup>.

From this perspective, there is a gap that can be filled from the inclusion of the speech-language





pathologist in the health team and marketing strategy, including, therefore, the treatment of the voice and communication skills. There is absence of these professional in the teams, perhaps by lack of resources and guidelines on the resources it can offer, when demanded, by the clinical and behavioural difficulties or in situations such as public speaking, for example.

In this study, the sample reported complaints, mainly on increased demand for the use of the voice, in the election campaign period, such as the use of strong vocal intensity, hoarseness, vocal worn out and stress.

The literature shows the existence of distinct vocal options used by each profession which becomes vocal markers that are not always synonymous with a healthy option and can configure vocal health risks<sup>21</sup> and the quality of life-related to the voice<sup>7</sup>. The speech-language pathologist, together with experienced voice professionals, can identify and analyze the vocal options to develop or enhance expressiveness, through educating the vocal health of politicians.

The parliamentarians preferred vocal traits in general, and the risk occurred, when appropriate, according to the literature are; severe vocal frequency, high intensity, with the lengthening of vowels, depending on the intention of the speech and clear articulation, with breaks and set markers. The vocal psychodynamics is perceived by the listener with energy, credibility, and reliability. The degree of vocal risk, for these authors, is mild to moderate in times of electoral campaign. Moreover, in the current study, politicians are unaware of any self-care strategies for their voice and, therefore, the risks within these ways of expressivity.

This present research shows in the samples, limitations like tension and stress, rectifying a previous study that analyses how 700 different professionals, from different categories, perceives they speaking in public. Although the respondents self-analyse themselves positively, these situations are considered challenging, with the possibility of occurring deviations in expressiveness, and nervousness symptoms and anxiety manifestations<sup>20</sup>. The literature adds<sup>3,22</sup> that the use of voice in the context of communication with the public creates emotional stress, anxiety, fears, competition, physical, mental and vocal fatigue in politicians, especially during a campaign period. During this period, there is a

greater request for speech therapy as a result of reduced vocal power, dysphonia or even aphonia, which differs from our sample that showed that the politicians did not seek treatment and help.

By analyzing the vocal and gestural resources of the senators, the literature reveals that there is no way to standardize them. There are those who have intensity increase, make too many gestures and continuous movements not related to speech; others increase or low intonation at the end of the endpoint, few gestures related directly to speech; and those who make use of rising intonation, or down at the end of the endpoint, contextualized and varied gestures related to speech<sup>1</sup>. In the current study, only two politicians made reference to the use of gestures as a resource, one for not knowing how to exploit them properly and the other for excessive use of this additional resource.

The human voice is considered a personal identity that reveals the personality, what and who we are, what we think and what we feel, and parliamentarians often have an awareness of the power of their voice as an influential element to the listener. A verbal and non-verbal communication is a resource utilized to control the effect of the message on the listener and thus, dominate a speech<sup>23</sup>. In this way, the arsenal of theoretical knowledge and specific techniques of speech-language pathology treatment may help the political recognition of its strengths, empowering them to identify the characteristics that need to be trained, developed or improved, in order to master the art of expressiveness persuasion.

The interviewees in this present research uses the voice in a professional manner in; meetings contexts, debates, hustings, interviews on television, radio and social networks so that their projects are heard and valued. This context shows the need for this group, as recommended by other researchers, to master techniques for the voice, body, facial and gestural expressiveness for the transmission of thoughts, intentions, and political projects<sup>3,24</sup>.

It is observed, in the current study, the difficulties of respondents in taking care of their vocal health and communication, in addition to ignorance of the consequences of misuse and vocal abuse. These results proved similar to those found by a marketing consultancy that described three types of politicians in the issue of training, “those who strive to follow the guidelines,” and among them, “some who leave the suggested care,” and “those

who not identify its importance or simply disqualify it “, justifying that their experience can do without expert. These results cited above refer respectively to the current research and the stereotypes it identified, namely: “supposedly correct”, “theoretically oriented, but neglectful,” and “careless”.

Only two respondents in this study received some form of vocal guidance and communication in radio courses, but used the guidelines for a short period of time (supposedly correct stereotype) or do not use them (stereotype theoretically oriented, but negligent). These behaviours are also observed in practice in a marketing advisory team which states that even those who are instructed do not value the vocal aspects, due for being pressured by the dispute for the vote and concern for power. It is inferred that, in the current research, this pattern of behaviour can be influenced also by intense daily appointments, trips, meetings and official activities with the political party and the constant communication with the electorate, advisers and press and the use of more than one phone, especially during the electoral campaign period.

In the sample of the present study there is no concern about vocal health care and, therefore, no one seeks vocal expert help and probably would only use it in emergency situations. Most parliamentarians presented a poor performance on the use and lack of care for their voices, though part of them (n = 4) uses, based on common sense, the use of resources before their lines, as for example, gargling and drinking water. However, the literature shows that the speech-language pathology develops vocal health promotion activities more complex which prevents voice disorders, including encouraging healthy habits (hydration, sleep, eating habits), vocal techniques and understanding of vocal psychodynamics and its impact on the listener and the speaker's quality of life<sup>25,26</sup>. These assumptions reaffirm the need for a customized vocal and expressiveness program in the period before, during and after the election campaign.

The objective of speech-language pathology treatment is for the professional parliamentarians to know and master their voice, have greater security, to domain orderly their content, to have credibility and attention to the responses from the public, to have domain of the field of oral and gestural communication, to active adhere to preventive actions to prevent vocal alterations, heating and cooling

downs and, when necessary, the specific treatment for dysphonia<sup>3</sup>.

## Conclusion

It is evident that there is a lack of speech-language pathologist support to parliamentarians with regard to the prevention of vocal disorders and the promotion and education of vocal health care. In this study, it was noted that only two politicians had basic knowledge of the care required for vocal education. The study acknowledged the existence of four stereotypes (careless - with or without complaints, without knowledge, but careful, supposedly correct, theoretically oriented, but negligent). There is still the need for greater link between Speech-Language Pathologists, marketing assessors, and politicians.

The limitations of this study circumscribed two main aspects: a small sample size, even in the case of a qualitative research, considering the number of parliamentarians who agreed to respond to it, and few articles that look into the issue of the politicians and use of their vocals, consequently it does not favour a discussion.

Furthermore, the results entail further studies which may have a longitudinal drawing, alongside an electoral campaign; or same experimental studies with a control group. The findings also reveal that there is a big gap on the subject, given that foster awareness and demands on these politicians seeking guidance on vocal care expert.

This study, therefore, contributes to a reflection on the selection of speech-language pathology approaches against the stereotypes described herein and the understanding of contexts, dynamic, adhesion and vocal needs and expressiveness of this population researched. In this perspective, to hear the perceptions of politicians will contribute to the reflection of speech-language pathology, in the selection of treatments consistent with the specific needs of each phase of an election campaign.

It is noteworthy, therefore, the importance of the education awareness about speech-language pathology treatment to parliamentarians who use voice and expressiveness as a working investment.

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