

Assessment of Nursing Students' Attitude toward Learning Communication Skills at King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Science - College of nursing Riyadh (CON-R)

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Abstract: Objectives: The aim of this study is to assess the attitudes of nursing students toward learning communication skills across the two years of nursing study. Also to identify factors that may influence attitudes toward learning communication skills, such as age, level of study, GPA, exposure/non- exposure to formal training in communication skills.

Methodology: A Descriptive Cross- Sectional design is utilized to assess the attitudes of nursing students towards learning communication skills. The participants of the study were all the students enrolled in the undergraduate bachelor course from the pre-professional (N 66) and professional program (120). On the other hand, the survey questionnaire consisted of 25- items skills attitude communication scale wherein each item is represented by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Likewise, included also were negative and positive statements wherein all negative items were reversely coded for analysis. Henceforth, all higher scores in the items indicated more positive attitudes toward learning communication skills.

Results: The study findings indicated that the mean scores of the participants were 21+ 1.507 and the mean scores of their GPA were 3.280+.5587. This data revealed that there was significant positive correlation between the level of study and their attitude toward learning communication skills ($r=.795$ $p=.000$). Moreover there was a significant positive correlation between GPA and their attitude ($r=.472$ $p=.000$). However, there was limited positive relationship between their age and their attitude toward learning communication skills ($.196$ $p=.015$). With regard to the total communication scores the findings revealed that the students enrolled in the pre-professional program got on 84.6+ 1.13 while the students enrolled in professional program had 86.91+ 1.13.

Conclusion: It can be deduced from the finding of the study that students in professional program have positive attitude toward learning communication skills than the students in the pre professional program.

Key words: Attitude- nursing students- learning- communication skills.

I. Introduction

Communication skills are vital in nursing profession. It is important in dealing with people of different personalities, advanced communication skills courses are being offered only in the second- two years of professional nursing education but never in the first-second year of pre professional program. Tantamount to this to further cite its importance, one of the learning outcome identified in the nursing program at King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for health science is that, "students should be able to effectively communicate with individuals, families, groups and communities". With this development, it is indeed significant to assess the attitude of nursing students towards learning communication skills in relation to their age, GPA and level of study. In another perspective, communication is essential in building trust and rapport to determine and recognize patient needs. Moreover, Fakhr, (2011) stated that the nursing process is a scientific model in the nursing practice which is achieved through endorsement, interpersonal environment and specific skills of verbal communication. In the hospital, nurses are considered coordinator because they act as the primary contacts person who serves as link between the patient and member of the health team. Likewise, the power of effective nursing care depends on good communication skills. In the light of the above, previous researches made by Cegala & Broz, (2002) as well as Humpris & Kaney (2001) supported the findings that good communication skills are helpful to the relationship between the patients and their health care providers as it links to effective health outcome. On the other hand, all employers preserve that graduates should practice in some topics as listening and speaking (Mayes, Weldey, & Icenogle, 1997). Furthermore, a lot of researches about communication skills in training suggested that effective communication skills improve the relationship between the nurse and the patient and are related to positive health outcomes.

In the same line, more effective health care organizations, effective health care delivery provider and patient satisfaction with lower incidents of malpractice have been attached to effective communication skills. Moreover, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) stated that the communication skills is one of nursing competencies that must be acquired over the course of nursing academic program, AACN (February 2007) and Kaufman (2001) provided evidences that the students' attitudes toward communication skills are affected by taking courses that emphasize communication skills in training. Moreover, Maria, et al (2012) reported in their study that the students who were exposed to in the newly developed training who take communication skills as a course exhibit an increase in their skills. Likewise, it was also showed that students who in the intervention group had a higher scores in the competencies which assess the self-following practicing than the other student who in the comparison group.

On the contrary, Communication skill education is extensively debated. As Kerby and Romine (2009) suggested inserting communication courses in the curriculum is required by the employers. Also Du-Babcock (2006) mentioned that applying communication skills in the future is dependent on learning communication application materials not just theory and models. Murranka and Lynch (1999) proved earlier that a communication course based on competency and concentrated on skills applications is highly beneficial in Nursing and Midwifery courses.

It is further stated that all nurses must demonstrate the competency of communication and interpersonal skills with other health care discipline to deliver patient centered care. Infact, the Saudi Commission of Health Specialties Nursing Scientific Board (2014) documented the Nursing Competencies for Bachelor Degree Graduate. One of the nursing competencies included is "interpersonal communication and collaboration for improving patient health outcomes by demonstrating effective communication techniques including negotiation, team work, collaborative strategies and conflict resolution to produce positive professional working environment".

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to assess the attitudes of nursing students toward learning communication skills. Also to identify factors that may influence attitudes toward learning communication skills, such as age, level of study, GPA exposure/non- exposure to formal training in communication skills.

II. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the current study were to:

- 1- Measure the nursing student's attitude toward learning communication skills.
- 2- Investigate the correlation between the socio demographic factors on the nursing students and their attitude toward learning communication skills.

Subjects and methods:

Research design: A Descriptive Cross- Sectional design was utilized to identify the attitudes of nursing students towards learning communication skills.

Setting: This study was carried out in the College Of Nursing Riyadh (CON-R) – King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS).

Subjects of the study: A non-probability convenience sample was used in the study. All the students enrolled are in the undergraduate bachelor of nursing program and are from the first level to the eighth level. The purposive sample was chosen so that the students enrolled in the first two years were not exposed to the communication courses. On the contrary, students in the last two years were taught communication as a lecture or as a subject over the two years. Thereby, we can measure the students' attitudes before and after taking this course. Corollary to their rights, students were informed that participation is voluntary, informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and assured that all their information's are kept anonymous as agreed in the informed consent signed by them.

Instruments of data collection: Data were collected using the:

- 1- Demographic information about age of the students, semester of study and GPA.
- 2- The communication skills attitude scale (CSAS) originally developed by Rees and colleagues (2002). The CSAS has been used in subsequent studies by Rees and other researchers Anvik T, et,al (2007) each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), All negative CSAS items were reverse coded for analysis, so that higher scores on all items indicated more positive attitudes toward communication skills training. A pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and applicability of the tool. The pilot study was carried out on fifteen subjects and the results of the pilot study were used in refining the questionnaire form. Relevant comments were obtained from the subjects, and on the basis of their comments, the following changes were made to the CSAS:

Modifications

- Item 2; Original - I can't see the point in learning communication skills.

- Modified - I don't see that I need to learn communication skills.
- Item 3; original - Nobody is going to fail their medical degree for having poor communication skills.
- Modified - Nobody is going to fail their nursing degree for having poor communication skills.
- Item 8; Original - I can't be bothered to turn up to sessions on communication skills.
- Modified - It's too much to attend classes on communication skills.
- Item 11; Omitted - Communication skills training states the obvious and then complicates it.
- Item 20; Original - I find it hard to admit to having some problems with my communication skills.
- Modified - My ability to pass exams will get me through nursing school rather than my ability to communicate.

Procedures

After obtaining the official approval to conduct the study, the questionnaire will be distributed to the students during regular class periods during the academic year 2014-2015. The students received written instructions that specified the purpose of the study and explain the procedure to be followed in responding to the items. Students were asked to return the survey to the class instructor who in turn returned it to the researchers. The questionnaire takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Ethical issues:

Informed written consent was obtained from the students who agreed to participate in the study. It was clearly stated that students' participation is voluntary and confidential and students were assured about their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

III. Results of study:

Findings of the current study are presented in three sections: demographic characteristics of the subjects, nursing student's attitude towards learning communication skills and finally the correlation between these demographic characteristics and their attitude toward learning communication skills

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
age in years	20.31	1.507
student GPA	3.280	.6421
Mean score	3.7533	.55874

This table shows the mean age of the subject is 20.31 years, the means GPA is 3.28

Table 2- Scores of communication skills attitude scale (range 1-5) No 186

	mean	Standard deviation
1. In order to be a good nurse I must have good communication skills	4.53	1.149
2. I don't see that I need to learn communication skills	1.72	1.135
3. Nobody is going to fail their nursing degree for having poor communication skills	2.70	1.221
4. Developing my communication skills is just as important as developing my knowledge of nursing.	3.96	1.212
5. Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect patients.	4.25	1.125
6. I haven't got time to learn communication skills	2.37	1.124
7. Learning communication skills is interesting	4.02	1.173
8. It's too much to attend classes on communication skills.	2.85	1.134
9. Learning communication skills has helped or will help facilitate my team working skills.	4.35	0.954
10. Learning communication skills has or will improve my ability to communicate with patients.	4.35	1.031
11. Learning communication skills is fun.	3.81	1.114
12. Learning communication skills is too easy	3.36	1.112
13. I find it difficult to trust information about communication skills given	2.89	1.239

to me by non-clinical lecturers		
14. Learning communication skills has helped or will help me recognize patients' rights regarding confidentiality and informed consent.	4.11	1.053
15. Communication skills teaching would have a better image if it sounded more like a science subject.	3.44	1.32
16. When applying for nursing, I thought it was a really good idea to learn communication skills.	3.97	1.192
17. I don't need good communication skills to be a nurse	1.97	1.29
18. I don't like to show that I have problems in communication skills.	2.89	1.189
19. I think it's really useful learning communication skills on the nursing degree.	4.09	1.185
20. My ability to pass exams will get me through nursing school rather than my ability to communicate	3.25	1.227
21. Learning communication skills is applicable to learning Nursing.	3.79	1.074
22. I find it difficult to take communication skills learning seriously.	2.60	1.127
23. Learning communication skills is important because my ability to communicate is a lifelong skill..	4.09	1.141
24. Communication skills learning should be left to psychology students, not nursing student.	2.08	1.377
25. Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect my colleagues	4.24	1.153

Table-2 shows that the items means scores for student's attitude towards learning communication skills, the highest mean scores range between (4.53) and (4.09) in relation to the items: In order to be a good nurse I must have good communication skills, Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect patients, Learning communication skills is interesting, Learning communication skills has helped or will help facilitate my team working skills, Learning communication skills has or will improve my ability to communicate with patients, . Learning communication skills has helped or will help me recognize patients' rights regarding confidentiality and informed consent, I think it's really useful learning communication skills on the nursing degree and finally , Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect my colleagues. They have moderately mean score ranged between (3.96) and (2.60) in relation to the items: Developing my communication skills is just as important as developing my knowledge of nursing, Nobody is going to fail their nursing degree for having poor communication skills, It's too much to attend classes on communication skills, Learning communication skills is fun, Learning communication skills is too easy, I find it difficult to trust information about communication skills given to me by non-clinical lecturers, Communication skills teaching would have a better image if it sounded more like a science subject, When applying for nursing, I thought it was a really good idea to learn communication skills, My ability to pass exams will get me through nursing school rather than my ability to communicate, Learning communication skills is applicable to learning Nursing and finally . I find it difficult to take communication skills learning seriously.as well as they have lowest means score which ranged between (1.72) and (1.97) which is relation to I don't see that I need to learn communication skills and . I don't need good communication skills to be a nurse.

Table3- Correlation between the demographic data and student`s attitude toward communication

	<i>Communication</i>	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Level of study	.795**	.000
Age	.196*	.015
GPA	.472**	.000

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Table 3 reveals that there is strong positive correlation between the level of study and their attitude towards learning communication skills and moderate correlation between the GPA and their attitude and finally there is mild correlation between the age and their attitude toward learning communication skills.

Table 4 - Compare of means between professional and paraprofessional regarding the attitude toward learning communication skills

<i>MEAN&SD</i>	<i>Professional (66)</i>	<i>Pre-professional (120)</i>	<i>All student (186)</i>
	<i>84.6 ±11.25</i>	<i>86.911 ±1.33</i>	<i>86.11 ±1.32</i>

Table -4 highlights that the students enrolled in the pre-professional program have low score than the students in the professional program.

IV. Data Analysis

Data were coded for entry and analysis using SPSS statistical software package version 18. Data were presented using descriptive statistics were used to identify the personal characteristics of the total sample students. The association of the dependent variables with the independent variables (GPA and year level) was determined. Correlation -test, means and Standard deviation were used with $p < 0.05$. SPSS version 18 was used for the statistical analysis.

Results:

The study findings indicated that the mean age of the participants was 21 ± 1.507 and the mean scores of their GPA was $3.280 \pm .5587$. The study revealed that the students enrolled in the professional program got high scores (86.91 ± 1.13) than the students enrolled in pre- professional program had (84.6 ± 1.13). Also there was a strong significant positive correlation between level of study and their attitude toward learning communication skills ($r = .795$ $p = .000$). Moreover there was a moderate significant positive correlation between GPA and their attitude ($r = .472$ $p = .000$) finally mild correlation between their age and their attitude toward learning ($r = .196$ $p = .015$) communication skills.

V. Discussion

This study aims to assess the attitudes of nursing students toward learning communication skills.

All the respondents are female .Majority of them are ranged between 19- 21 years of age with the GPA mean score of 3.28. Corollary to these respondents, 35.4% of them are enrolled in the pre-professional program and the remaining 64% in the professional program with the possible mean scores for each item that varies from 1 to 5. The study also revealed that highest means score which range between 5 to 4 and dominates some of the important items that has a relationship to nursing profession such as "In order to be a good nurse I must have good communication skills and Learning a communication skill has or will improve my ability to communicate with patients" I think it's really useful learning communication skills on the nursing degree. However, in the mindset of the researchers the results can be attributed to the significance of communication skills in relation to the nursing

Profession and gender in as much as all the respondents are female. Likewise, female loves to communicate and therefore, would like the subject communication. Along this vein, Faze.(2011) that cited that female students had more positive attitude toward communication skills training than male students.

On the contrary, the study further revealed that some items got moderate mean score which ranged between 3.96 to 2.70 such as follows" it's too much to attend classes on communication skills , I find it difficult to take communication skills learning seriously and the Communication skills learning should be left to psychology students, not nursing student.

Relative to these moderate scores negative findings to communication, the researcher found out that some respondents perceived that learning communication skills is a priority to the nursing profession but moderately convince about the importance of communication in nurse patient interaction. Henceforth, the researchers think that those students exposed to the communication as a subject but they did not practice.

Other findings revealed that some items had low mean scores that ranged between 1.72 to 2.08 such as follows as in survey "I don't need good communication skills to be a nurse". "I haven't got time to learn communication skills". "Communication skills learning should be left to psychology students, not nursing student". Henceforth, it can be gleaned from these results that most respondents were not convinced about the valuable contribution of communication in the delivery of quality patient care and not realized with the importance of communication to be a good nurse and they can learn and gain communicationskills by experience therefore they gave a low marks to such cited items. On another venue, the study revealed that some students enrolled in the first two years had low scores than the students enrolled in the last two years, this result could be attributed that these students in the first two years are not exposed to the clinical experience and therefore has no experience in dealing with patient and did not know the value of nurse patient interaction towards quality nursing care. In the light of these cited issue, Neupane ,M. S. (2012). He explained that the students in second year group had positive attitude toward communication skills more than first year attitude, that showed there were significant difference between the two group .Hence forth, the researcher believes that the students in the professional program should be more exposed to the clinical experience which offer opportunities to interact with the patients and health care providers so that they could be fully convinced about the importance and implications of learning good communication skills in relation to safe and quality patient care.. In the same line, Fazel,I. (2 011) said that the there are significant difference between students in basic science and pathophysiology course and the students in clinical sciences with regards to their attitudes toward learning communication skills which in contrary to Wright(2006) who reported that the attitude of fourth year students did not differ than first years in their attitudes toward communication skills, Also Marambe,K.N,(2012) who added that most Junior students had more positive attitudes than senior students. These former cited findings are inconsistent to Rees and Garrud (2001), who cited that older and advanced students have more positive attitude toward learning communication skills training.Finally, this study revealed that there is a mild correlation between the subject's age and their attitude toward learning communication the finding is supported by Rees and Sheard (2002) who cited that younger students have more positive attitudes toward communication skills learning. Likewise, Kevin et al (2006) emphasized that there is no difference between younger or older age of the students in their attitude toward communication skills learning.

VI. Conclusion / Recommendations:

The students in professional program perceived the importance of learning communication skills in relation to be a good nurse than the students in the pre professional program.

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