

Interpersonal communication competency among undergraduate nursing students

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Abstract: Effective interpersonal communication is a core skill for all healthcare professionals and nursing staff in particular, as nurses spend more time with patients and their relatives than any other healthcare professional. Interpersonal communication skill is the essence of building a trusting relationship between the nurse and patient along with significant others. Therefore this study aims to assess the interpersonal communication competency among undergraduate nursing students and to find the correlation between the interpersonal communication competencies with their selected demographic variables. This cross-sectional study was conducted in 2017 among all the undergraduate nursing students studying either the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) or the Registered Nurse Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN BSN bridge) program at a nursing College. Using convenience sampling technique 201 participants gave consent to participate in the study. They were administered the Spitzberg&Cupach's interpersonal communication competency questionnaire. The results of analysis showed that interpersonal communication competence was good among working nurses (RN BSN) and it was noted that in BSN program interpersonal communication competence improved over the study period. Further the study showed that there was a significant correlation between interpersonal communication competence and their selected demographic variables ($p < 0.01$).

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I. Introduction

Communication is a vital element in nursing in all spheres of nursing care, including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, education and health promotion¹. Nurses play a pivotal role in communicating well with patients and families, also liaise with physicians, and other healthcare teams to provide holistic care. When there is a gap in this process of building trust leads to ineffectiveness of nurses' and other healthcare teams' potentials². A study carried out among nursing students demonstrated that most of them required improvement in their communication skills in both clinical communication behavior and treatment communication ability³. Hence, early identification of this lacuna can help in empowering the skill of interpersonal communication.

According to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health care organizations, (JCAHO) effective communication is a priority for patient safety since 2006. Hence, recognition of nursing students' strengths and weaknesses in this regard is a priority for planning and modification in future⁴. With this purview, the researchers explored the interpersonal communication competence among undergraduate nursing students and their impact of demographic variables on components of skills in communication competence.

II. Material & Method

This survey was conducted at college of nursing Ras Al Khaimah.

Study design: cross-sectional descriptive survey design

Study location: RAK College of Nursing is one of the constituent college under RAK Medical & Health Sciences University enrolling BSN (4 year program), RN BSN (2 year program), MSN (2 year program)

Study duration: February to March 2018

Sample size: 201 undergraduate nursing students

Sample size calculation: single proportion design was used to estimate the sample size. The target population consisted of 248 elements. The researchers set the confidence interval at 10% and level of confidence as 95%. The calculated sample size actually obtained for the study was 69. The researchers included 201 undergraduate students from the population had a drop rate of 19%.

Subject & selection method: population was selected using convenience sampling technique. All undergraduate students undergoing BSN & RN BSN at RAKCON, RAKMHSU were included for the study

Inclusion criteria: all students of BSN & RN BSN

Exclusion criteria: Students who were not willing to participate in the study

Methodology: after obtaining RAKMHSU ethical committee, respective class coordinators were approached for assembling the students for data collection. Each level of nursing students were contacted as a class separately. Participants were explained the purpose of the study, following which the students were given the choice to be part of the study. Willing participants filled the consent form maintaining confidentiality. After obtaining the consent, students were given demographic performa and the Spitzberg&Cupach’s Interpersonal communication competency tool, to be filled with 15 minutes.

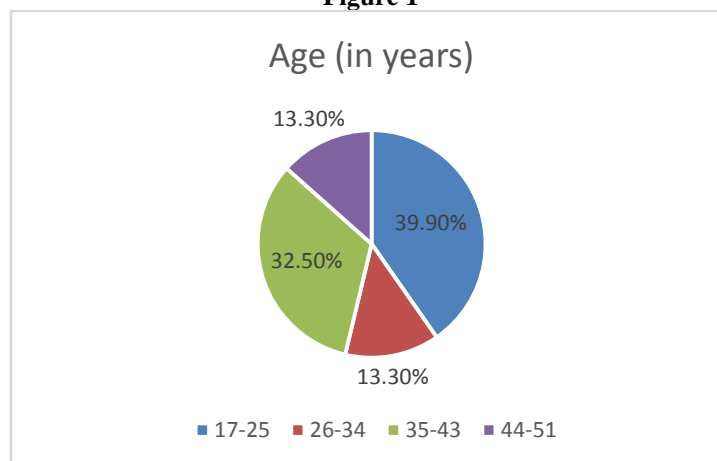
Statistical analysis: the data obtained were entered into SPSS version 20, for analysis. Interpersonal communication competency skill was assessed using descriptive statistics. The relationship between Interpersonal communication competency skill and demographic variable was commuted using Pearson correlation coefficient. The cut off value of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

III. Result

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants (N=201)

Characteristics	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Nationality		
GCC	64	31.84
Other countries	137	68.15
Year of study		
BSN Year I	20	9.9
BSN Year II	18	8.9
BSN Year III	22	10.8
BSN Year IV	21	10.3
RNBSN Year I	59	29.1
RNBSN Year II	61	30
Employment Status		
Working	116	57.71
Not working	85	42.28
Scores		
Communication competence	Mean	SD
	78.77	10.1

Figure 1



Maximum (39.9%) number of students belongs to the age group 17-25 Majority (68.15%) of the nurses were from countries other than the GCC. Among the study participants, 59.1% were registered nurses studying RN BSN while 57.7% were employed.

Table2:Level of interpersonal communication competence (n= 201)

Level	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Excellent	103	50.7
Good	61	30.0
Fair	23	11.3
Poor	14	6.9

Excellent level of interpersonal communication competence was, noted among 50.7% undergraduate nursing students, while 30% were having good communication competence.

Table 3: Interpersonal communication competence level based on criteria (n=201)

Level	F		F		F		F		F		F	
	Adaptability	%	involvement	%	Empathy	%	Conversation management	%	effectiveness	%	Appropriateness	%
High	176	86.7	193	95.1	190	93.6	184	90.6	177	87.2	189	93.1
Medium	21	10.3	8	3.9	8	3.9	16	7.9	22	10.8	12	5.9
Low	4	2	0	0	3	1.5	1	.5	2	1	0	0

Majority (86.7%) of the nurses scored high in adaptability, involvement, empathy, conversation management, effectiveness and appropriateness essential in maintaining interpersonal communication competence.

Table 4: Correlation between the components of interpersonal communication competence (n=201)

Components	Correlation	P-value	motivation	Knowledge	Skill
Motivation	Correlation coefficient		1	0.431*	0.469*
	P - value			<0.01	<0.01
Knowledge	Correlation coefficient		0.431*	1	0.609*
	P - value		<0.01		<0.01
Skill	Correlation coefficient		0.469*	0.609*	1
	P - value		<0.01	<0.01	

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

The results of Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant correlation between the components of interpersonal communication competence such as motivation, knowledge and skill ($r=0.431, 0.469$ & 0.609 respectively)

Table 5: Correlation between communication competences of nursing students with their selected variables

	BSN	RN BSN	Employment	Overall communication competence score
Knowledge	.225*	.596**	.350**	.701**
Motivation	.041	.210*	.116	.658**
Skill	.020	.464**	.284**	.754**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) , *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to find the relation between communication competence and selected variables. Analysis showed that there is a positive correlation between communication competence (knowledge, motivation and skill) with their selected variables (nursing program, employment status and overall communication competence score)

Table 6: Correlation between communication competence criteria with selected variables

	motivati on final	skill	employed	grading	adaptability	Involvement	managemen t	empathy	effectiveness	Appropriateness
BSN	.787**	.041	.020	.070	.032	-.097	-.033	-.087	-.044	-.071
RN BSN	.464**	.210*	.679**	.447**	.124	.122	.232*	.115	.148	.122
Employed	.679**	.116	.284**	.167*	.286**	.218**	-.020	.213**	.134	.194**
Knowledge score	.658**	.754**	.286**	1	.464**	.419**	.479**	.488**	.548**	.530**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows that there is a positive correlation between the selected variables and the communication competence criteria among the study population.

IV. Discussion

Majority (39.9%) of the participants belonged to the age group 17 – 25 years (table 1). This could probably be due to the criteria for enrollment in Bachelors of nursing following the completion of high school studies. The enrollment of RNBSN Program requires three years of diploma with two years of work experience. About 57.71% of the participants were working nurses. This may be because of the promising employment opportunities worldwide. In the health care sector nurses are the most sort-after professionals¹.

Nurses as health team members need to be proficient in their communication skill to bring effective patient outcomes. Wood and Bandura suggested that self - efficacy influences one's motivation, efforts, goal setting, and persistence. Nurses require the self – efficacy as an important component in displaying effective

communication skills in health care settings because individuals believe in their behavioral abilities². The current study revealed that overall interpersonal communication competence, among 50.7 % nurses was excellent. A study done by Esmail et al among 73 nurses during the pretest were noted to have the communication skill scores as 80.96 (2.93 mean) among control group and 79.47 (11.19 mean) among the experimental group³. This indicates that nurses working in the hospital have good communication skill, which could probably be due to the imposed curricular requirement during their student period enabling them to practice through patient interaction. Further, in a study conducted by Dube L, Curationis BM showed that teaching soft skills in classroom had a positive impact on the services provided to the clients⁴. Majority (86.7%) of the nurses scored high in the communication competence criterias namely adaptability, involvement, empathy, conversation management, effectiveness and appropriateness essential in maintaining interpersonal communication. This finding is similar to a study conducted by Dalaya et al. (2015), who identified that soft skills is essential for nursing profession as it enhances confidence, professionalism, coordination, friendliness and optimism⁵. Reports of similar findings among nursing students in Iran was noted where social communication ability of students such as flexibility and having appropriate behaviors with different people had an effect on their communication competence⁶. In yet another study by Szubzda & Jarosz (2012), it was noted that working nurses lacked in areas such as knowledge of the role of active listening (47.6%); tolerance with respect to patients and their significant others (71.4%); communication knowledge (57.1%); and communication skills (52.4%)⁷. They also found that poor efficacy of shaping communication competences among nurses was dependent on courses like general psychology and general interpersonal communication. They emphasized that communication competences requires training during undergraduate nursing education, and felt that these skills are subject to regression during their work period which is contrary to the present study findings. This study finding suggests that nurses with adequate knowledge had higher levels of motivation and communication skills and it illustrated a significant correlation ($r=0.431, 0.469$ & 0.609 respectively) between the components of interpersonal communication competence such as motivation, knowledge and skill. Employed nursing students had more knowledge (excellent-50.7 %, good-30.0%) regarding interpersonal communication reflecting on their higher motivation and greater skill when compared to the BSN students. When communication competence criterias were compared with their selected variables, it was revealed that students nurses who had more exposure in the clinical area with good knowledge regarding communication had its competence criteria such as adaptability, involvement, management, empathy, effectiveness and appropriateness fulfilled. There was a significant correlation between the communication competence criteria and variables like knowledge scores, employment and educational status ($r= .658, .754$ & $.286$) Similar findings were reported by Shafakhah, Zarshenas, Sharif & Sarvestani (2015) where a significant correlation was observed between the students' educational semester and their clinical communication behavior scores ($r=0.21$) and treatment communication ability scores ($r=0.132$). These findings reiterate the fact that nurses grow and progress in their clinical experience and tend to develop more skill and competence in communication. It may also be noted that with increase in study years and work exposure the communication competence also increases, irrespective of their nationality or language known to them, when the student had specific courses harnessing their communication skills.

V. Conclusion

Nurses require adequate knowledge regarding interpersonal communication taught to them during their training program and practice adequately which enhances their skill to provide comprehensive care to the clients.

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