

Effect of Communication Training Program on Nursing Students' Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract: Effective communication training is an integral part of nurse job qualities in order to update their knowledge and improve their skills in dealing with patients in health care settings. This study aimed to determine the effect of communication training program on the nursing students' interpersonal communication. A pre- experimental research design was used to carry out this study. Nursing students of the Faculty of nursing, Alexandria University, Matrouh branch were the study subjects. First year students in the previously mentioned setting who accepted to participate in the study were included. Their number amounted to 36 students. Two tools were used: Socio-demographic Structured Interview Schedule and Interpersonal Communication Inventory. Results showed that students' interpersonal communication improved significantly after the implementation of the training program. There is no significant relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students and their interpersonal communication. It can be concluded that the communication training program had a significant and positive effect on nursing students' interpersonal communication. Recommendation: communication programs training for all nursing students are important in order to update their knowledge and improve their interpersonal communication.

Key words: Effective Communication • Nursing Students • Program Training

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is the art of caring which is directed toward the patients or their families. In order to provide care, the nurse needs to share information, feelings and attitudes to either the patient or her/his family; which means to communicate effectively. Communication is an integral part of life; it doesn't be needed only to transmit information, feelings and knowledge to one another, but also to inter-relate as human beings with everyone [1, 2].

One of the most important roles of nurses is being a health educator [3]. Nurses need to have a perfect communication skills to facilitate their understanding of the patient's complaints and provide necessary information to the patients and their families. The development of communication skills not only promotes the nurses' potentials, but will also improve the quality of patients' care. Many studies reported that

communication skills would have positive impact on the quality of health care output [4, 5]. Also, another study emphasized that the proper use of communication in nursing work will improve nurses' job satisfaction, decrease work stress and problems [6]. It was reported that communication problems have been observed to cause distance between members and cause negative feelings that interfere with the relationship between the nursing team members and the quality of patients' care [2].

Needless to say that building therapeutic relationships with the patients, assessing their conditions, accepting and understanding their behaviors without being judgmental need to be communicated effectively; which in turn facilitate relationships and decrease conflict [7, 8]. Nurses should learn how to initiate and maintain the relation with the patient, how to listen, reply, respond, ask easily, use their body languages, show empathy and interact professionally [7].

Effective interpersonal communication skills between health care providers and patients are one of the most significant factors for improving patients' satisfaction, compliance and overall health outcome [8, 9]. The way the nurse used to communicate with her patients helps them to make impression of the nurses' behaviors and changing their attitudes toward nursing. These impressions nurses pass to patients will influence their satisfaction and hence their health care output [10-12]. Interpersonal communication skills help the nurse to deal with each patient and respect their individuality. In other words; such skills help the nurse to understand patients' cultures, needs and acts upon meeting these needs even the patient doesn't express it verbally [13, 14].

Being aware of others needs and understanding their messages require nurses to practice and be trained in communication skills and human relations aspects [15, 16]. Being an effective communicator seems to be based on five interpersonal components: (1) an adequate self concept, the single most important factor affecting people's communication with others; (2) the ability to be a good listener, a skill which has received little attention until recently; (3) the skill of expressing one's thoughts and ideas clearly which many people find difficult to do; (4) being able to cope with one's emotions, particularly angry feelings and expressing them in a constructive way; and (5) the willingness to disclose oneself to others truthfully and freely [17, 18].

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the significance of effective communication and interpersonal skills in nursing profession, it is not emphasized enough in clinical training. So, it is important for nurses to use communication skills effectively and to achieve this goal they are in need for assessment and training in interpersonal communication skills that does not only benefit patients but also benefits health care providers in the aspect of their job satisfaction and health. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of communication training program on nursing students' interpersonal communication.

Aim of the Study: The aim of this study was to determine the effect of communication training program on the nursing students' interpersonal communication.

Research Hypothesis: 1-The students' interpersonal communication will be improved after implementing communication training program.2. The students'

interpersonal communication will not be improved or being the same after implementing communication training program.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Materials

Design: A pre- experimental research design was used in this study. (A one-group pretest–posttest research design).

Setting: The study was carried out in the faculty of nursing, Alexandria University, Matrouh branch.

Subjects: First year students in the previously mentioned setting they were 50 students. Thirty six of them accepted to participate in the study.

Tools:

Tool I: Socio Demographic Structured Interview

Schedule: This tool was developed by the researchers based on relevant literatures and included the following items:

- Socio-demographic characteristics of the students such as age, sex and place of residence.
- Knowledge about communication skills and its importance and attendance of any previous training program.

Tool II: Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI):

The original interpersonal communication inventory was developed in 1971 by Bienvenn and Millard [19]. It consists of forty self-reporting items which identify the patterns and characteristics of interpersonal communication. Specifically, it measured eleven interpersonal communication dimensions which were deemed critical to successful communication [20, 21]. The items in the ICI are designed to sample the dimensions of self -concept, listening, clarity of expression, difficulties in coping with angry feelings, and self disclosure. The purpose of the Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI) is to measure general tendencies in interpersonal communication. It can be used as a counseling tool, as teaching device, or as a supplement to an interview by management, or for further research. Actual score is the sum of the values for the answers of the 40 items that ranging from 0-120. High scores indicate good interpersonal communication [21].

Method:

- Official letters were issued from the faculty of nursing, to the dean of the faculty of nursing Matrouh branch to carry out the study.
- The study tool I socio-demographic structured interview schedule was developed by the researchers and was tested for the content validity by five jury experts in psychiatric nursing in Alexandria university.
- An oral informed consent from all students included in the study was obtained after the explanation of the study purpose.
- A pilot study was carried out on five students; they were chosen randomly to test clarity of the tools and in order to determine the approximate time needed for each interview. The necessary modifications were done.
- Reliability of tool II was done on 5 nursing students by using Cronbach's alpha. The tool was proved to be reliable ($r=0.731$)
- Students were interviewed individually in their faculty to collect the data using tool I and tool II.
- Students were divided into three groups each group included twelve students.
- All groups were prepared in two sessions before starting the program sessions. During these sessions, the researchers explained the steps of the training program, discussed the date, time and place suitable for the conduction of the program sessions.
- The sessions included discussions of the topics were chosen by the researchers based on the literature and connecting the topic with students' experiences, their points of view and their attitude toward it. Audio-visual materials and role playing were used in each session.

The Proposed Structured Interpersonal Communication Training Program:

- The program training was developed by the researchers based on reviewing relevant literatures and the students' needs which were determined through assessing their knowledge.
- The training program was conducted from 22th February to 10th April 2017.
- The total number of program sessions was 12 sessions, two sessions per week.
- The duration of each session nearly three hours (an hour for theory and 2 for practice). The activities for each session were described as follow:

Session I: Communication Process: In this session, the researchers gave knowledge about the communication process, its purpose and factors affecting communication, types of communication and importance of interpersonal communication for nursing students. Video was used in this session to illustrate elements of communication process and its importance.

Session II: Communication Techniques: In this session, the researchers discussed with the students the principles and techniques of effective verbal and non-verbal communication. The researchers emphasized on the role of the nonverbal communication and its impact on interpersonal communication. The students were divided into subgroups, each subgroup wrote a scenario for the other subgroups and each subgroup acted it as a real situation after that the other groups discussed the utilized verbal and non-verbal techniques with them.

Session III: Communication Styles: This session included items related to importance of respecting the others communication styles and the skills needed to be able to communicate effectively with those styles. In this session, the researchers used to demonstrate some behaviors denoting each communication style.

Session IV: Interpersonal Relationships: In this session the researchers focused on the importance of relationships in our life also and types of relationships with emphasizing on the professional one. The researchers encouraged participation of the group in discussion. Also, video was used in this session to help students to understand the stages of the relationships and the problems arise in each stage.

Session V and VI: Active Listening and Empathy: In these sessions, the researchers demonstrated active listening skills and empathic attitude. Here the researchers told a student an event and asked him to tell another one the same event as he listened it, then each student assumed the same role till the last one in the group said what has been heard to the group. After that the characteristics of active listening, its barriers and how to be an active and reflective listener were discussed. Videos and demonstration and re-demonstration were used to illustrate empathic attitude.

Session VII and Session VIII: Self Awareness: This session included the concept of self-awareness, importance of being self-aware, factors affecting self-awareness and its common models. The researchers gave

examples of different levels of self awareness and showed how people may tend to hide themselves in stressful situations and showed how lacking of self-awareness hinders and affects negatively the efficacy of communication skills and relationships with others. Also, students were trained to apply self-awareness model on them in written form without signing their name and practice how to improve their self-awareness by using self reflection journaling method.

Session IX: Social Skills: In this session, the researchers discussed the importance of social skills, its types, classification and the social skills activities. Videos and Role play were used.

Session X and Session XI: Stress and Stress Management: These sessions included the theoretical base of stress and its impact on the person's physical and psychological health. Also, common strategies used to cope with life stressors were discussed and demonstrated by the researchers. Re-demonstration of the strategies was done by the students and under the researcher's supervision and guidance.

Session XII: Conflict and Conflict Resolution: In this session the students oriented with the meaning of conflict, its styles and conflict resolution modes. Discussion about the styles of conflict with the students and their point of view about each style were done. Role play of different styles of conflict resolution was practiced.

At the beginning of each session, the researcher revised what was discussed in the previous sessions and homework assignment was evaluated. At the end of each session, the researcher summarized the important key points discussed in the session and then time was given to questions and discussions.

The Role of the Researchers in the Training Sessions:

- Introduce the topic chosen for discussion.
- Give everyone the chance to give her/ his opinion.
- Direct the conversation and listening to everyone.
- Comment on student's point of view.
- Eliminate side talks and redirect the conversation toward the topic discussed.
- Appreciate students' participation and give them positive reinforcement.
- Give attention to every member in the group.
- Summarize the content of what was discussed.
- Act as role models in applying communication skills.

- Use learning strategies as role play, homework assignments and open discussion.

Ethical Considerations: Verbal informed consent was obtained from every student after explaining the purpose of the study. Privacy was maintained during the process of data collection. Confidentiality of the collected data and anonymity were guaranteed.

Statistical Analysis of the Data: The SPSS V 23.0 for the analysis of the data. Frequency tables and cross tabulations with percentages were used to illustrate the results of categorical data and tested by the Fisher's Exact Test. Quantitative data were summarized by the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. Comparison of means was done by Paired samples t-test.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Nursing

Students: The age of the studied subjects ranged from 17 to 24 years with a total mean age 18.79 ± 0.981 . It was noted that the majority of the studied subjects (91.7%) were in the age group 17 to less than 20 years, followed by 8.3% of the students were in the age group 20 to less than 24 years. Females constituted 52.8% of the total nursing students and males constituted 47.2%. Regarding the place of residence, nearly half of the studied subjects (47.2%) were living in Matrouh while 16.7% were living in Elbeheira and Elgharbia respectively.

Table 2 shows communication knowledge and skills of the nursing students.

The majority of the studied subjects (97.2%) have no previous knowledge about communication skills and they reported that it is important to know and practice. Concerning attendance of any previous communication training program, only 11.1% attended a training program and the rest did not. Regarding the time and the duration of the attended program, all of the students attended the training program since one year to less than three years and three quarters of them attended the program for three weeks and more.

Table 3 illustrates the effect of the interpersonal communication training program sessions on the interpersonal communication score of the nursing students. It was noted that more than half of the studied sample (55.6%) have an increase in their interpersonal communication while only 5.6% has no change in their interpersonal communication and more than one third (38.9) their interpersonal communication scores were decreased.

Table 1: Distribution of the studied nursing students according to their socio- demographic characteristics (n=36)

Demographic characteristics	No (36)	%
Age (years)		
17 -	33	91.7
20-24	3	8.3
Mean± SD	18.79±0.981	
Sex		
Male	17	47.2
Female	19	52.8
Place of residence		
Matrouh	17	47.2
Elbeheira	6	16.7
Elgharbia	6	16.7
Others	7	19.4

Table 2: Distribution of the studied nursing students according to their communication knowledge and skills (n=36)

Knowledge and skills	No (36)	%
Do you have knowledge about communication skills?		
Yes	1	2.8
No	35	97.2
Is it important to know and practice it?		
Yes	35	97.2
No	1	2.8
Did you attend previous training programs about communication skills?		
Yes	4	11.1
No	32	88.9
If yes, since when		
1-<3	4	100
3-5	0	00
Program duration		
1-2weeks	1	25
Three weeks and more	3	75

Table 3: The effect of communication training program sessions on the nursing students' interpersonal communication score

Interpersonal communication score after conducting the program	No	%
Increase	20	55.6
No change	2	5.5
Decrease	14	38.9
Total	36	100

χ^2 : Chi square test

MC: Monte Carlo

FE: Fisher Exact

p: p value for comparing between the studied categories

Table 4: Nursing students' interpersonal communication before and immediately after the conduction of communication training program

Interpersonal communication of nursing students	Before conduction of program sessions N=(36)	Immediately after program sessions N=(36)	Test of significant
Mean ± SD	71.50±8.133	75.92±9.290	T=2.391 P= 0.022*

Table 4 shows the nursing students' interpersonal communication before and immediately after conduction of communication training program. As it is noted in this table, the mean score of the nursing students' interpersonal communication was increased significantly immediately after the conduction of the communication training program (P = 0.022).

Table 5 explains the relationship between nursing students' interpersonal communication score change and their socio-demographic data. It was shown from the table that there were no significant relationships between the score change of nursing students' interpersonal communication and their socio-demographic data.

Table 5: The relationship between nursing students' interpersonal communication score change and their socio-demographic data

Socio- demographic data	Communication scale change						χ^2	P
	Increase (n = 20)		No change (n = 2)		Decrease (n = 14)			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Age								
17>20	19	57.6	2	6.1	12	36.4	1.457	$M_{cp}=0.624$
20-24	1	33.3	0	0.0	2	66.7		
Sex								
Male	8	47.1	2	11.8	7	41.2	2.339	$M_{cp}=0.323$
Female	12	63.2	0	0.0	7	36.8		
Place of residence								
Matrouh	9	52.9	1	5.9	7	41.2	3.867	$M_{cp}=0.782$
Elbeheira	3	50.0	0	0.0	3	50.0		
Elgharbia	3	50.0	0	0.0	3	50.0		
Others	5	71.4	1	14.3	1	14.3		
Did you attend previous training programs about com. skills?								
No	18	56.3	2	6.3	12	37.5	0.661	$M_{cp}=1.000$
Yes	2	50.0	0	0.0	2	50.0		
When	(n = 2)		(n = 0)		(n = 2)			
1>3years	2	50.0	-	-	2	50.0	-	-
Duration of the program	(n = 2)		(n = 0)		(n = 2)			
1Week	0	0.0	-	-	1	100.0	1.333	$F_{cp}=1.000$
Three weeks or more	2	66.7	-	-	1	33.3		
Do you have knowledge about com. skills?								
Yes	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.979	$M_{cp}=1.000$
No	19	54.3	2	57	14	40.0		
Is it important to study it?								
Yes	19	54.3	2	5.7	14	40.0	1.979	$M_{cp}=1.000$
No	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0		

DISCUSSION

Nursing is a broad scope that involves providing all types of care and assistance that starting from meeting the basic needs of patients to improve health and welfare of them. Nurses need effective communication skills to success in their profession, either verbal or nonverbal communication skills are required to facilitate their assessment and caring attitudes toward their patients [4, 22]. Communication is considered as a crucial component in nursing in all aspects of action such as, treatment, giving health education and also in rehabilitation services [23]. Communication and building relationship require skills, information and perceptiveness to observe what will be most helpful to the patient and families [24]. It was reported that nurses experienced lacking of effective communication skills utilized in patients and family members' interaction [25-27]. Developing effective communication skills among nurses is one way to enhance the quality of care and promote the clinical condition of the patients and increase nurses' sense of well-being [28]. Communication

training is needed for nursing personal to allow them to understand their patients' problems, complaints and intervene based on this understanding. Also, It was suggested that nursing students should be trained to develop and enhance their communication skills [29, 30]. So, the aim of this study was to determine the effect of communication training program on the nursing students' interpersonal communication. The findings of this study revealed that there is a significant improvement of the students' interpersonal communication after the conduction of the communication training program (Table 4). The present result is consistent with a study done by Shafakhah *et. al.* [31] on health care professionals who reported that there is a significant increase in the communication skills knowledge, self-efficacy and outcome expectancy of hospital health care workers after conduction of communication skills training. Moreover, a study done by Connolly *et al.* [32] who reported that there is a significant improvement in nurses' communication competencies after implementing a training program on communication skills competencies.

Increasing nursing students' communication skills have a great effect on the quality of care provided to the patient and nurses' job satisfaction [33-35]. Also, it increases the sense of self confidence, enhances the self-esteem and coping abilities of the student her/himself [24]. The studies done by Ferreira [34] and Heidari [29] conducted on nursing students reported that the majority of them are strongly agreed that clinical communication skills and interpersonal relationships are important in nursing care and meeting their patients' needs. Such result is confirmed with the present study finding as the majority of the nursing students' revealed significant increase in their interpersonal communication skills and they reported the significance of communication knowledge and application in nursing as a profession and for themselves as individuals.

Needless to say that being aware of one's' potentials, how to initiate and maintain relationships, cope with life stressors and applying social skills are great skills that are helpful for all people in general and for nurses in particular. So the contents of the program sessions covered topics and practices related to communication techniques, interpersonal relationships, self awareness, stress management and conflict management and social skills. All of these skills has a great role in changing the person thoughts and attitudes. Furthermore, the using of many learning strategies as role play, homework assignments and open discussion has a great influence in changing the students' behaviors [36]. The results of this study revealed that more than half (55.6 %) of the studied students have increment in interpersonal communication score. This is consistent with a study done by Ferreira [34] which revealed a significant increase in the students' communication skills after conduction of the training program.

On the other hand, the current study findings showed that more than one third (38.9%) of the students' score of interpersonal communication was decreased after the conduction of the program that's may be related to that some students start to be aware of the negative part of their personalities as they expressing it, also, it may be due to the fact that communication style is heavily ruled by cultural values and norms, as nearly half of the studied students in the current study findings were from Matrouh governorate which has a different culture that affects the students 'communication pattern as compared to the other students who were living in other governorates, as some students from Matrouh governorate expressed that they had a negative attitude toward the effectiveness of communication skills application in their cultures.

These results are supported by Trifkoviè *et al.* [37] who found that communication skills training has a limited impacts on nurses' skills, nurses' behaviors or patient outcomes after conduction of communication skills program relating it to culture-specific issues.

According to the present study findings, interpersonal communication skills were not significantly related to nursing students' socio-demographic data such as the students' age and sex. This is in the same direction of a study done by Moss [38] who found that student nurses' communication skills did not differ by gender, age or level of education of the novice psychiatric nurses.

Generally, the current study findings illuminated the importance of developing and promoting communication skills among nursing students in order to master their personal and professional competencies and improve their quality of care.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded from the present study findings that the implemented communication training program had a significant and positive effect on nursing students' interpersonal communication in Matrouh and there is no significant factors affecting the students' communication skills.

Recommendations: Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- In service training program for all nursing students regarding interpersonal communication skills should be done periodically. This will help them to update their knowledge and improve their practice while dealing with the patients and decreasing conflict with other people.
- Encourage nursing students to attend communication training programs and motivate them to apply the knowledge of communication skills into practice.
- Further studies should be done regarding communication skills application in different cultures as Bedouin or Rural cultures.
- Incorporating the training program as a practical part in communication, psychology and psychiatric nursing courses.

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