RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ANALYSIS OF NURSING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Introduction: The present study was planned to assess communication skills of nursing students. **Method:** The study is a descriptive study. Sample for the study included 202 nursing students attending Artvin Çoruh University Health Academy. "Socio-demographic characteristics form" and "Communication Skills Assessment Scale" were used as data collection tools. **Findings:** Communication skills mean scores of the students demonstrated differences based on the age group. Mean score for females was 99.797 ± 1.108 and it was 96.405 ± 1.651 for males, and the difference between females and males was not significant. Although communication skills mean scores for the students increased with their seniority, the differences were not statistically significant. More than half of the students (55.5%) graduated from regular high schools, while the rest (46.5%) graduated from other high schools, and there were no significant differences between the groups based on mean communication skills scores. A large portion of the sample lived in city centers (46.5%) and had higher mean communication skills scores compared to those lived in smaller settlements, however the difference was not significant. Although mean communication scores of students that belong to nuclear families were higher than the students who belong to extended families, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of these groups. Majority of the families of the students had middle or high level income (85.6%), while 14.4% had low level income, but communication skills did not differ based on income level. Parents' educational status was primary, middle school, and college, respectively, however communication skills of the students did not differ based on their parents' educational background. **Result:** It was determined that students' communication skills did not differ based on age, gender, level of the class attended, domicile, high school graduated, type of family, family income level, and parents' educational background.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of communication, etymology of which goes back to Latin "communicatio," which means "sharing," is the process of production, conveyance, and perception of knowledge. Communication is transmitting messages into the environment via the speech, silence, or posture of an individual, and is the source of business and social relationships, and a necessity for humans, who are social beings. The main objective of communication is to send comprehensible messages and change the attitude and behavior of the correspondent (Tabak, 1996; Tutar and Yılmaz, 2010). To initiate and maintain satisfactory and reliable relationships with other individuals is dependent on the quality of the communication skills utilized. Because, communications change many things.

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The analysis of "many things" in this statement would reveal that communications have both facilitating, beneficial, as well as trouble-causing and unconducive aspects (Üstün, 2005). There are several people who help people and communicate with others all the time due to their occupations. For instance; teachers, social workers, representatives, physicians, nurses, etc. Healthcare workers are considered in professional helper category. Those who aim to be successful in helping others should form good relationships with individuals (Öztürk and Çetinkaya, 2008). Communications inevitably gained significance in the field of healthcare with the improvements in that field throughout the history. The subject of healthcare is no longer the healthcare workers, but the individual or the society. The real source of health is not medicine, but human behavior. Thus, the communications of healthcare workers with the society, communities and individuals should be different than before (Hacıalioğlu, 2013). One of the most difficult accomplishments of individuals is to direct knowledge into action and to create alterations in behavior. This is true for all

healthcare professions as well. Especially nurses should be able to transfer their knowledge into individuals and create a change in behavior through their knowledge in communication techniques and its use (Öztürk and Çetinkaya, 2008; Hacıalioğlu, 2013).

When the communication techniques utilized incorrectly, an efficient relationship could not be initiated with the patient, the individual could not express his or her needs, and the situation causes additional problems for the individual. However, when communication techniques are used efficiently, problem solving and satisfactory relations could be established. One of the professions that is dependent on individual-to-individual relations, nursing is completely dependent on communication skills. The main function of nursing is defined as assistance (Üstün, 2005). Members of this profession that requires close relationship and continuous communications with individuals should achieve these skills during their training and perform these all through their lives. However, as Üstün (2005) cited, patients are generally annoyed and experienced various problems with the communication styles of nurses. Hence, this study was planned to assess the communication skills of nurses and to conduct necessary interventions before they start their professional lives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Type of the study: This is a descriptive study.

Study Timeframe: This study was conducted between January, 2015 and June 2015.

Universe and Sample: The universe of the study included healthcare academy nursing department students. All students available were included in the study. Since there were students who did not want to participate in the study or who did not fill the questionnaires completely, the sample of the study contained 202 students.

Data Collection: The data was collected via interviews with the subjects conducted by the researchers during 2014 – 2015 academic year spring semester.

Data Collection Tools: Data collection for the present study was conducted with socio-demographic characteristics questionnaire and communication skills assessment scale.

Socio-demographic Characteristics Questionnaire: This form was developed by the researchers to determine demographical characteristics of the students.

Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS): Developed by Korkut (1996a) to determine how the individuals evaluated their communication skills, CSAS is a 5-item Likert-type measurement tool. During the initial studies, the scale was scored between 0 and 4 (Korkut, 1996b), recently started to be scored between "1-never" and "5-always" (Korkut, 1997). There are no negative statements in the scale and higher scores means that the individuals considered their communication skills as positive. Same author conducted validity and

reliability studies for the scale and alpha internal consistency coefficient was found as .80 (Korkut, 1996a).

Data Analysis: Analyses of the data was conducted by SPSS 17.0 software and using counts, percentages and averages, as well as using ANOVA, t-test, Mann-Whitney U-test, and Kruskal Wallis test tools.

Ethical Concerns: Ethical committee approval was obtained from Artvin Çoruh University, informed written consents were obtained from the related institutions and the participants.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Certain Personal Characteristics and the Differences Between Mean Communication Skills Scores Based on These Characteristics

Variable	Sub-variable	n	%	Mean	Standard Error	Significance
Age	20.49 and below	106	52.5	97.726	1.408	t:-.934
	20.49 and over	96	47.5	99.469	1.194	p>0.05
Gender	Male	74	36.6	96.405	1.651	t:-1.763
	Female	128	63.4	99.797	1.108	p>0.05
Grade	Freshman	58	28.7	96.500	2.130	F:0.673
	Sophomore	51	25.2	99.261	1.591	p>0.05
	Junior	46	22.8	99.469	1.568	
	Senior	47	23.3	99.787	1.661	
High School Graduated	Regular	108	53.5	97.917	1.969	t:-.733
	Other	94	46.5	99.287	1.476	p>0.05
Domicile	Village	49	24.3	98.245	2.432	F:1.721
	Town	59	29.2	96.169	1.612	
	City	94	46.5	100.213	1.162	p>0.05

Students' mean age was 20.49 and mean communication skills scores did not differ significantly based on the age group (p > 0.05). Mean communication skills score was 99.797 ± 1.108 for female students, and 96.405 ± 1.651 for male students and the difference between these scores was not significant (p > 0.05). Communication skill scores based on the grade levels of the students could be ordered as the freshmen with 96.500 ± 2.130, sophomores with 99.261 ± 1591, juniors with 99.469 ± 1.568, and seniors with 99.787 ± 1.661 points, and there was no significant difference between these groups (p > 0.05). More than half of the students (55.5%) were regular high school graduates and the remaining were the graduates of other high schools (46.5%) and mean communication skills scores for regular high school graduates (97.917 ± 1.961) were lower than the graduates of other high schools (99.287 ± 1.476), however there were no significant differences between the communication skills scores of these groups (p > 0.05). A large proportion of the sample (46.5%) lived in the cities and had higher mean communication skills scores than those who lived in villages or towns, but there was no significant difference between the groups (p > 0.05).

81% of the students had a nuclear family, while 19% had an extended family. Although the mean communication skills score of students with a nuclear family (98.251 ± 1.018) was higher than that of students with an extended family (98.805 ± 1.921), there was no significant difference between the scores of these two groups (p > 0.05).

Table 2. Certain Familial Characteristics and Differences in Mean Communication Skills Scores Based on These Characteristics

Variable	Sub-variable	n	%	Mean	Standard Error	Significance
Family Type	Nuclear Family	175	81	98.251	1.018	t:-.241
	Extended Family	41	19	98.805	1.921	p>0.05
Family Income	Low	31	14.4	94.419	3.473	MW U:2610
	Middle / High	185	85.6	99.016	0.871	p>0.05
Father's Educational Background	Primary	113	52.3	98.195	1.160	KW:1.410
	Middle	76	35.2	99.645	1.429	
	College	27	12.5	95.407	3.497	p>0.05
Mother's Educational Background	Primary	167	77.3	99.204	0.884	KW:1.270
	Middle	39	18.1	95.795	2.520	
	College	10	4.6	94.200	8.178	p>0.05

Majority of the students' families (85.6%) had middle or high income and 14.4% had low income and the mean communication skills scores for these groups were 99.016 ± 0.871 and 94.419 ± 3.473, respectively, but the difference was not significant (p>0.05). An analysis of students' communication skills based on their parents' educational background demonstrated that 2.3% of the fathers were primary education graduates (98.195 ± 1.160), while 35.2% were secondary (99.645 ± 1.429) and 12.5% were college graduates (95.407 ± 3.497). Mean communication skills scores for students whose father graduated from primary or secondary education were higher than the students whose fathers were college graduates; however, the difference was not statistically significant (p>0.05). Vast majority of students' mothers (77.3%) were primary education, a small portion (4.6%) were college graduates. Mean communication skills score for students whose mother was primary education graduate was 99.204 ± 0.884, for students whose mother was middle education graduate was 95.795 ± 2.520, and for students whose mother was college graduate was 94.200 ± 8.178. Mean communication skills score of the students decreased as their mothers' education level increased, however this difference was not statistically significant (p>0.05).

DISCUSSION

Nursing profession is one of the vocations that require high level utilization of communication skills. Nursing is an occupation that integrates factors such as empathy, use of body language, active listening and creative drama with communication skills (Arslan *et al.*, 2010). It was considered that the professional communications courses that are a part of the curriculum of nursing departments were effective in the high mean communication skills scores of students.

In the present study, mean communication skills scores of nursing students were compared based on various variables. No statistically significant differences were observed between mean communication skills scores of students based on their age, gender, class level, high schools and domiciles. However, females had higher communication skills scores than males; seniors than other classes; other high school graduates than regular high school graduates; and city-dwellers than those who lived in villages and towns (Table 1). Similar study results demonstrated that while communication skills of female and

male children were affected by several factors such as age, intelligence and psychosocial maturity, gender was not an effective factor (Razı *et al.*, 2009; Gülbahçe, 2010). In a study by Kılcıgil *et al.* (2009) conducted in two different universities, mean communication skills score of female students were higher in one university, while in the other university there was no difference. There are studies that support the findings of the present study on the differences in mean communication skills scores based on domicile and high schools graduated (Kılcıgil *et al.*, 2009; Tepeköylü *et al.*, 2009).

In this study, students with extended families had higher mean communication skills score than students with nuclear families; students with fathers who were secondary education graduates than students with fathers who were primary and higher education graduates; and students with mothers who were primary education graduates than students with mothers who were secondary and higher education graduates. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of these groups (Table 2). The findings of other studies supported the results of this study on parents' educational background and family income (Köker *et al.*, 2005; Tepeköylü *et al.*, 2009; Kılcıgil *et al.*, 2009). Literature review revealed no studies that support or contradict the findings of this study related to family type characteristic.

RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Findings of the study pointed at the following results:

- It was concluded that vommunication skills of the students did not differ based on variables such as age, gender, class level, domicile, high school graduated, family type, family income, parents' educational background.

Thus, it could be advised that;

- New studies could be conducted to analyze the factors that affect students' communication skills,
- Communications courses could be given during the whole training period of the students and could be followed up efficiently,
- Similar studies could be conducted with different student groups.

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