



EVALUATING COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING FOR NEWLY GRADUATED NURSING TECHNICIANS IN SAUDI ARABIAN HOSPITALS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Effective communication is vital for newly graduated nursing technicians to deliver quality care, yet preparation gaps exist. This cross-sectional study evaluated perspectives on prior communication skills training among 175 new Saudi nursing technicians. Surveys assessed training quantity, topics, modalities, perceived effectiveness, and recommendations. Results showed limited training with deficits in simulation practice, culture competency, and empathy development. Significant positive correlations emerged between training satisfaction and communication self-efficacy. Participants emphasized needs for expanded curricula, experiential modalities, and ongoing reinforcement. Ensuring comprehensive communication content, competency-building modalities, and continuity in training programs is imperative to strengthen nursing communication capabilities.

Introduction

Effective communication and interpersonal skills are critically important competencies for nurses and nursing technicians to deliver high quality, patient-centered care (ANA, 2022; Virdun et al., 2021). Communication enables clear information exchange, development of therapeutic relationships, patient education, and collaboration between healthcare professionals (Hamilton et al., 2021). Evidence consistently links nurses' communication abilities to improved patient satisfaction, safety outcomes, and work effectiveness (Virdun et al., 2021).

However, newly graduated nurses and nursing technicians often lack sufficient communication skills due to gaps in undergraduate education and on-the-job training programs (Hamilton et al., 2021; Almadani et al., 2018). Common deficits include cultural competency, conflict management, empathy, nonverbal skills, and responding to emotions (Virdun et al., 2021), resulting in negative impacts on care. Targeted workplace-based communication skills training has proven effective internationally to address gaps, but minimal study of such initiatives exists in Saudi Arabia (Alduais et al., 2019).



Understanding new Saudi nursing graduates' perspectives on their prior communication training is imperative to identify strengths and weaknesses in current educational curricula and onboarding programs. This can inform evidence-based approaches to better equip this workforce with essential communication abilities. This study aimed to evaluate new nursing technicians' training experiences, knowledge and skills gained, perceived effectiveness, and recommendations to optimize communication competencies.

Background

Communication in Healthcare

Effective communication forms a cornerstone of safe, high quality healthcare delivery (Virdun et al., 2021). Core elements include clear verbal expression, active listening, nonverbal cues, written documentation, and collaborative interpersonal relationships (Hamilton et al., 2021). These skills enable critical functions such as patient education, feedback exchange, empathetic responses, conflict management, and team coordination (ANA, 2022).

Robust communication has been linked to higher patient satisfaction, engagement in care, and knowledge retention, along with reduced errors, readmissions, and complaints (Virdun et al., 2021). For healthcare professionals, enhanced communication abilities are associated with improved job performance, teamwork, and career advancement (Hamilton et al., 2021). This demonstrates the far-reaching impacts of this essential competency.

Nursing Communication Training

To develop effective communication abilities, training is recommended through both undergraduate nursing curricula and postgraduate onboarding programs (Virdun et al., 2021). Best practices encompass varied teaching approaches including didactic lectures on principles, role playing, simulations, self-reflection, and facilitator feedback to build experiential competency (Alduais et al., 2019). Tailoring training to different workplace demands is also advised (Hamilton et al., 2021).

However, research indicates nursing communication education remains insufficient, creating readiness gaps for new graduates (Virdun et al., 2021; Almadani et al., 2018). Saudi nurse training in particular provides limited chances to practice and improve communication skills (Alduais et al., 2019). Strategies to strengthen capacity in this essential domain are needed.

Theoretical Framework

Kirkpatrick's four-level training evaluation model guided this study's design and outcomes (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). This evidence-based framework recognizes that training effectiveness comprises multiple elements:

- Reaction: Participant satisfaction with the training
- Learning: Knowledge and principles gained

- Behavior: On-the-job application and performance change
- Results: Impacts on organizational or patient outcomes

Assessing new nursing graduates' reactions, learning, and recommendations related to communication training provides valuable insights to guide curricular improvements targeting higher-level behavior change and patient results.

Study Aims and Objectives

This study aimed to:

1. Assess newly graduated Saudi nursing technicians' perspectives on the quantity and content of prior communication skills training in undergraduate nursing programs and hospital onboarding activities.
2. Identify nursing technicians' views on the effectiveness of previous communication training approaches.
3. Determine any correlations between perceptions of training quality and communication self-efficacy.
4. Obtain recommendations from new nursing technicians to enhance communication training and optimally develop this critical competency.

Methods

Study Design

A non-experimental quantitative cross-sectional survey design was utilized for this study.

Settings and Participants

The study took place at three large Ministry of Health hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Participants included nursing technicians who had graduated from nursing diploma or bachelor's degree programs in the past three months and were currently undertaking onboarding training at those hospitals. This targeted sample possessed recent experiences with undergraduate and onboarding communication skills training on which they could provide valuable perspectives.

Inclusion Criteria

- Graduated from a nursing diploma or degree program in past 3 months
- Currently completing onboarding training at participating hospitals

Sample Size

The target sample was 175 nursing technician participants across the three hospitals. This was estimated to provide 80% power with a 5% margin of error based on the study population.

Sampling and Recruitment

Convenience sampling was used. Potential participants were identified by training departments, and invited to take part through emails and informational flyers. The first respondents meeting inclusion criteria were included until the target sample was reached.

Data Collection

After providing informed written consent, participants completed an anonymous paper-based survey requiring approximately 15 minutes. Surveys were distributed and collected during participants' onboarding training sessions.

Survey Instrument

The survey was developed by researchers based on literature review and study objectives. It contained four sections:

A. Demographic Information: Age, gender, nursing education background

B. Communication Skills Training Experiences: Participants indicated the estimated hours devoted to communication training in their nursing degree programs and onboarding activities. Closed-ended questions assessed training topics included, teaching modalities used, and satisfaction with training sufficiency using 5-point Likert scales. Open-ended questions gathered perspectives on most and least beneficial aspects of training and recommendations for improvement.

C. Communication Self-Efficacy: The Communication Skills Self-Efficacy Scale was administered to gauge participants' confidence in their abilities to communicate effectively with patients, families, and colleagues (Parle et al., 1997). This validated 13-item tool uses 5-point Likert scales generating a summed score between 13-65, with higher scores indicating greater self-efficacy.

D: Overall Training Recommendations: Two open-ended questions elicited suggestions to enhance communication training for optimal skills development.

The survey was piloted with 15 nursing technicians and refined prior to full administration to ensure clarity.

Quantitative Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations summarized sample and training characteristics. Pearson correlation coefficients examined relationships between training satisfaction ratings and self-efficacy scores. Qualitative data were reviewed to identify key recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

Approvals were obtained from the institutional review boards at participating hospitals. Participation was fully voluntary with informed written consent. Anonymity was maintained.

Results

Sample Demographics

The sample included 175 nursing technicians. Their mean age was 22 years, and 60% were female. Most (85%) had completed a nursing diploma program. Demographics are further summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Demographic	n (%)
Age	
20-25 years	156 (89%)
26-30 years	19 (11%)
Gender	
Male	70 (40%)
Female	105 (60%)
Nursing Education	
Diploma	149 (85%)
Bachelor's degree	26 (15%)

Communication Skills Training Experiences

Most participants (62%) reported receiving 8 or fewer hours of communication skills training in their nursing degree programs. The most frequently addressed topics included interpersonal communication, patient education, and documentation skills. The predominant training modalities were lectures (68% of respondents) and written assignments (61%), with minimal opportunities for simulation or role play. Most respondents (81%) felt the training duration was insufficient.

Onboarding communication training hours varied, with 54% indicating they had received 1-4 hours to date. Training satisfaction was moderately higher for onboarding (mean 3.4 on 5-point scale) versus nursing degree programs (mean 2.8).

Communication Self-Efficacy

The mean communication self-efficacy score was 49.2 out of 65, indicating moderate perceived efficacy overall. No differences emerged based on respondent demographics.

Training Perceptions and Self-Efficacy Correlations

Statistically significant moderate positive correlations ($p < .01$) emerged between satisfaction with previous communication training and current self-efficacy scores ($r = .46$).

Qualitative Feedback on Training

The most common recommendations to improve communication training were:

- More simulation practice and role playing with feedback
- Expanded training duration and continuity beyond fundamentals
- Enhanced content on cultural awareness, empathy, family communication
- Smaller class sizes to facilitate participatory learning
- Regular skills refreshers and reinforcement post-graduation

Discussion

Study findings provide valuable insights into newly graduated Saudi nursing technicians' experiences with communication skills training during their education and onboarding. The limited training duration reported, predominantly theoretical instruction models, and desire for expanded content and modalities align with literature indicating communication training gaps in nursing degree programs regionally and globally (Alduais et al., 2019; Virdun et al., 2021).

The significant positive correlations found between satisfaction with previous training and current communication self-efficacy levels further underscore the need to strengthen instructional approaches to bolster competency and confidence. Recommendations emphasized integrating more experiential learning through simulation, role play and participatory activities. This evidence reinforces suggestions to implement targeted, competency-based communication training during onboarding to address skills gaps for new graduates (Hamilton et al., 2021; Virdun et al., 2021).

As a non-experimental survey study, results should be interpreted considering the self-reported data limitations and single country perspective. Nonetheless, findings clearly demonstrate room to improve communication competencies through expanded, modal training programs, with continuity across the education trajectory.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights from the perspective of newly graduated nursing technicians on existing gaps in communication skills training during undergraduate and onboarding education in Saudi Arabia. The limited training duration, need for enhanced modalities and content, and correlations between training satisfaction and efficacy underscore that focused efforts are warranted to strengthen communication capacity among this vital workforce. Major recommendations centered on increasing experiential learning approaches, expanding curricula, and sustaining skills reinforcement over time. Implementing these evidence-based strategies can help ensure nursing technicians develop expert communication abilities to provide high quality patient care and team collaboration.

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