

## Original Article

### Comparison of the Self Esteem and Communication Skills at the 1st and Senior Year Nursing Students

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#### Abstract

**Background:** Education process of nursing profession is an important component of formation process of self-esteem. In this process the students absorb knowledge, attitudes, value and skills that are important elements for nursing profession in time. Within this process, it is expected that the students can have self-confidence at a high level, express themselves and communicate effectively and defend their decision.

**Objectives:** This study was carried out to determine relationship between self-esteem and communication skills and factors affecting self-esteem and communication skills of 1st and senior-year students at School of Nursing.

**Design:** This study is a cross-sectional and descriptive design.

**Settings:** This study took place at a Turkish university

**Participants:** Freshman and senior-year students studying at School of Nursing of Health Science Faculty in Turkey were included in the scope of this study. The sample included 217 students (137 freshman and 80 senior-year students) selected using convenience sampling.

**Methods:** The participants completed three survey forms: the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and a survey designed to identify their demographics. Before completing the forms, they signed informed consent forms and were informed about the objectives of the study. Each interview lasted 15 to 25 minutes.

**Results:** The results show that the students consider themselves to have good communication skills. More than half have high self-esteem. A positive correlation is evident between the students' perceptions of communication skills and self-esteem.

**Conclusions:** Training sessions should be organized to improve self-esteem and communication skills of nurses and nursing students and should cover coping skills, psycho-educational instruction on assertiveness training, scenarios based on communication problems, intergroup discussions, drama training, activities of student clubs, and regular social activities.

**Key words:** Nursing student, self-esteem, communication skills, curriculum

## Introduction

Universities do not only offer professional training, but also prepare students for life and help give them an identity. The objectives of undergraduate nursing schools involve teaching students how to become professional nurses and enabling them to learn nursing skills. Theoretical classes and clinical practice are expected not only to give nursing students higher self-confidence and self-esteem, but also to improve them professionally.

Nursing is the art of caring and helping, and its primary objective is to establish confidential communication and interaction with people being served to get to know them, to identify their care needs, and to enable them to cope with problems and meet their needs (Tutuk et al., 2002). Therefore, communication is an indispensable component of nursing.

Nurses who develop a positive self-concept can change lives for the better. A positive self-concept gives individuals the opportunity to increase self-confidence, to be successful and happy, and to overcome and eliminate disappointments (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009).

## Background

The period of youth is very important in terms of development of self-esteem. Therefore, the students' self-esteem should be developed in this period. Nursing education is a difficult and stressful process. In this process, while the students obtain important properties for nursing profession like knowledge, attitudes, value and skills, it is expected that they can have self-confidence at a high level, express themselves, communicate effectively and defend their decision, as well (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009; Kardağ et al., 2008). But personal and occupational identities may be affected some reasons and while the students get occupational identity, they may lose their identity. The students' self-esteem and development of occupational identity affect their communication with patients (Suikkala & Leino-Kilpi, 2001).

Choice of profession is a very important incident on human life. When he/she makes this selection, he/she selects a specific working environment and life style, as well. In this way, person goes towards area to bring satisfaction to himself with activities that person thinks to do the best. Nursing education is a planned education program aiming to bring nursing profession to

students (Çam, 1999). In addition to living in conflict as university students, nursing students encounter a number of problems that school and hospital environment cause. They may face problems like especially clinical practice, caring patients and people in the terminal stage and problems of communication with educators and health care professionals in the hospitals being intense stressful environments, in addition to problems about harbouring, work opportunities and lessons. Therefore, nursing education is very stressful. In this process, positive or negative new experiences that they may take a crack at with educators, their friends, patients and other personnels can cause changes in the young person's self-esteem (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009).

Borned individuals in between 1980-2000 years are expressed as Y generation. Millennials have more favorable conditions than other generations and are growing up in a world marked by more technological opportunities. They have different expectations, hopes, and preferences than those born during earlier times. Their technological environment provides them with a convenient life in many aspects. However, it also brings about self-centeredness, decreased loyalty, lack of empathy, and disrupted face-to-face communication. This is because Millennials mainly socialize using social networks (Bhana, 2014; Yüksekbilgili, 2013), which is a fact that should not be overlooked in educational policies and decisions.

Nursing requires therapeutic communication. Both nurses and nursing students need to use face-to-face communication techniques. High quality nursing care requires establishing good communication both with patients and their families and colleagues. On the other hand, poor communication harms health care institutions, patients, and their families. Reports show that such harm can be avoided thanks to training sessions and courses (Jack et al., 2013).

Positive interpersonal relationships with patients, whether they are healthy or unhealthy, afford nurses an important instrument of treatment, as well as having a profound effect on the course of a disease (Xie et al., 2013; Arifoğlu & Razi, 2011; Bingöl & Demir, 2011). Communication is a skill that can be learned and improved upon. Therefore, the nursing curriculum should include courses on effective communication. Recent research on Turkish undergraduate nursing students suggests that freshman students have

moderate communication scores, whereas their scores improve as they move to higher grade levels (Tutuk et al., 2002, Özyazıcıoğlu et al., 2009; Ay, 2006). Bingöl and Demir (2011) observed that students have high perceptions of their communication skills regardless of their grade levels. However, foreign studies demonstrate that students have better communication skills as they move to higher grade levels (Xie et al., 2013).

Nursing education is an important part of the process by which self-esteem is developed. Nursing students' personal and professional development, self-confidence, and self-esteem have an effect on their communication with patients. They need to develop a positive self-esteem and have a strong professional identity in order to establish meaningful therapeutic relationships with patients (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009; Andrews et al., 2011; Edwards et al., 2010). People with high self-esteem have lower levels of burnout and use better coping strategies. In addition, high self-esteem promotes achievement (Saadat et al., 2012). As potential members of the nursing profession, nursing students need to have effective communication skills and high self-esteem to be successful in their career (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009).

Research in the Turkish literature has demonstrated that self-esteem improves as students move to higher grade levels (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009; Kardağ et al., 2008; Serinkan et al., 2014; Karagözoğlu et al., 2008; Özkan & Özen 2008). However, nursing students who suffer from state anxiety have lower self-esteem (Suliman & Halab 2007).

There are no studies in the literature on the correlation between nursing students' self-esteem and their communication skills. This study was motivated by the idea that nursing students' communication skills and self-esteem should be examined to provide data on how educators' attitudes and approaches can be restructured. This study was carried out to determine relationship between self-esteem and communication skills and factors affecting self-esteem and communication skills of 1st and senior-year students at School of Nursing.

## Methods

### Design

This study is a cross-sectional and descriptive design.

### Setting and Sampling

All students attending their bachelors degree in nursing of Health Sciences Faculty, selected with a convenience sampling method. A total of 217 students attending the first (N=137) and fourth academic years (N=80), who had regularly attended the theoretical courses and the clinical placements, obtaining admission to the annual clinical competence examination held in January 2014, were considered eligible. The students were informed about the data collection instruments and the objectives of the study.

### Data Collection Instruments

The participants completed three survey forms. The first one was designed to identify their demographics and contained questions about age, gender, grade level, and income status as well as the number of siblings they had.

**Communication Skills Evaluation Scale:** The second instrument, CSES, was developed by Korkut (1996) to identify the extent to which one has the characteristics that can enhance communication in Turkey. Twenty-five items are measured on a five-point Likert scale, and respondents are asked, when responding, to consider their communication skills with others. Participants choose one of the five options for each item: always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and never (1). The maximum possible score is 125. Higher scores mean that respondents consider themselves to be good at communication (Korkut, 1996). For this study, the scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

**Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory:** The participants' self-esteem scores were measured using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI). The inventory was developed by Stanley Coopersmith and adapted to Turkish by Turan and Tufan (1987), who also tested the validity and reliability of the Turkish version. Turan and Tufan (1987), found the Cronbach's alpha 0.76. The inventory has 25 items, and respondents choose one of the two options: "like me" or "unlike me." The items are in the form of statements concerning respondents' views of life, family and social relationships, and endurance. Possible scores range from 0 to 100. Assessment depends on whether a self-esteem score is below or above average (standing for low and high self-esteem, respectively) (Turan & Tufan, 1987). For this study, the inventory had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

### Data collection

The participants signed informed consent forms and were informed about the objectives before they completed the survey forms. The interviews lasted for 15 to 20 minutes.

### Ethical Consideration

The study protocol was obtained approval from institution where the study was carried out. All the participants signed informed consent forms, and their opinions were respected. The nursing students were selected based on their willingness to commit time to the study and were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Names were not included in the presentation of the results.

### Data analysis

The data obtained from the survey forms were computerized and stored in serial order. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used on SPSS 17.0. The data analyses involved frequency distributions, the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, *t* test, the Mann-Whitney U test, and the Spearman correlation analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient were calculated. A  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

### Results

More than half of the nursing students (56.6%) were aged between 18 and 20, and 63.1% were freshman students. A majority of the students (90.3%) were female, and a similar percentage (89.9%) had more than one sibling. A considerable percentage (92.6%) had moderate income status (see Table 1).

The One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to verify whether the mean scores were normally distributed. The results showed that the mean scores of freshman and senior-level students on the CSES were normally distributed, whereas their mean scores on the CSEI were not. Thus, nonparametric tests were used for analyses involving the latter.

The nursing students' mean score on the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES) was  $X = 104.75 \pm 8.97$ , whereas their mean score on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) was  $X = 72.03 \pm 17.90$  (see Table 2).

The freshman students had a mean score of  $105.66 \pm 8.10$  on the CSES, while the senior-level students had a mean score of  $103.20 \pm 10.15$  on the scale. In addition, the former had a mean

score of  $73.54 \pm 18.04$  on the CSEI, whereas the latter had a mean score of  $69.75 \pm 17.46$  on the inventory. The results of the statistical analyses showed that the senior-level students had significantly lower self-esteem scores than the freshman students ( $p = 0.043$ ). However, there was no difference between the two groups of students in terms of their mean scores on the CSES (see Table 2).

The nursing students' mean scores on Students' Self-Esteem and Communication Skill Evaluation Scale were compared with gender, number of sibling and income status of their parents. The result of the statistical analyses showed that there was no difference.

The Spearman correlation analysis revealed that there was a positive correlation between the CSEI and the CSES ( $r = .207$ ,  $p = .002$ ). The students with higher self-esteem had better communication skills (see Table 3).

### Discussion

This study identified the nursing students' scores on the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSES =  $104.75 \pm 8.97$ , CSEI =  $72.03 \pm 17.90$ ). The scores suggest that the students had good communication skills and high self-esteem. It was found that CSEI scores were above the average (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009; Serinkan et al., 2014; Kahriman, 2005; Ünsar & İşsever, 2003) and CSES scores were good level (Tutuk et al., 2002; Arifoğlu & Razi, 2011; Razi et al., 2009) on the other studies carried out with nursing students in Turkey, as well. Our study's results resemble other studies.

When the nursing students' scores on Communication Skill Evaluation Scale were compared with their class levels in terms of perception of communication skill and self-esteem, there was no difference with regard to perception of communication skill. However it was found that senior-year students' self esteem was lower than freshman's. Effective communication skills are the foundation of a good nursing care. Thus, it is very important that effective communication skills can be developed in the nursing students. It is expected that their class levels increase together with their communication skills. However it was found that although there was no difference on this study, communication skills were decreased in the senior-year students.

**Table 1. Participants' demographic information**

Demographic characteristics	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-20 age	123	56.6
21-25 age	94	43.4
<b>Nursing Level</b>		
1st class	137	63.1
Seniors	80	36.9
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	196	90.3
Male	21	9.7
<b>Sibling Number</b>		
Single child	22	10.1
Non-single child	195	89.9
<b>Incomes</b>		
801-1200 ₺ ( <i>Poor</i> )	16	7.4
1201 ₺ - 3000 ₺ ( <i>Moderate</i> )	201	92.6
<b>Total</b>	217	100.0

**Table 2. Comparison of self-esteem and communication skills between 1st class students and senior students**

Class	Self Esteem Inventory Score	Test of between-group differences	Communication Skills Scale Score	Test of between-group differences
	<i>Mean SD</i>		<i>Mean SD</i>	
1st class Students	73.54±18.04	U= 4582.5 p=0.043	105.66±8.10	t=1.964
Senior Students	69.45±17.46		103.20±10.15	p= 0.051
Scores of scales for all students	72.03±17.90		104.75± 8.97	

t= t test, U= Mann Whitney U, \*p<0.05

**Table 3. Correlation between nursing students' self-esteem and communication skills**

	Correlation and p value	Communication skills	Self-esteem
<b>Communication skills</b>	Correlation coefficient	1	.207
	p		.002*
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Correlation coefficient	.207	1
	p	.002*	

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

This can be because increasing technological development like social networks and smart phones restrict face to face communication. Özkan and Özen (2008) report that nursing students demonstrate fewer submissive behaviors and have higher self-esteem as they move to higher grade levels. But other some studies showed that while the nursing students' self-esteem, who were at university in the third year, were the highest, senior-year students' self-esteem were the lowest. Also, it was found that senior-year students' imperishableness scores decreased and they felt themselves unhappy, depressive and anxious (Edwards et al., 2010; Begley & Glacken, 2004; Randle, 2003). It is known that stress is one of the most important factors designating self-esteem. Role changes that occur in students after a while they starting nursing education, their problems about their social life and clinical practice and that nursing education in Turkey is stressfull and oppressive can be affect self-esteem negatively. In addition, senior-year nursing students live intense stress for various reasons like inability to graduate, inability to find employment concerns or feeling inadequate themselves about professional competence (Ewans & Kelly, 2004).

In addition, Suliman and Halabi (2007) report a negative correlation between state anxiety and self-esteem, adding that higher state anxiety means lower self-esteem. Edwards et al. (2010) observed that nursing students who have just become senior-level students have the highest level of stress. In this study, the senior-level students' lower self-esteem might be caused by stress.

This study also examined the correlation between socio-demographics and the perceptions of communication skills and self-esteem. The students' socio-demographics did not lead to a difference in their communication skills. Whereas some studies in the literature report that the perceptions of communication skills and self-esteem are significantly correlated with income status, the number of siblings, and/or gender (Dinçer & Öztunç, 2009; Kardağ et al., 2008; Xie et al., 2013; Bingöl & Demir, 2011; Serinkan et al., 2014; Karagözoğlu et al., 2008), others argue that this is not the case (Bingöl & Demir, 2011; Karagözoğlu et al., 2008). This situation might arise from intercultural differences.

The correlation analysis showed that there was a positive correlation between the CSEI and the

CSES. It was determined that as the students' self-esteem increased, the communication skills increased. Karagözoğlu et al. (2008) discovered a positive correlation between self-esteem and assertiveness. According to their results, people who are assertive can communicate better. Özkan and Özen (2008) reported a negative correlation between suppressive behaviors and self-esteem. People who demonstrate suppressive behaviors are usually shy and cannot express themselves. In her study entitled Prediction of Five Factor Personality Dimensions through Self-Esteem in Turkish Late Adolescents, Aslan (2012) determined a positive correlation between extroversion and self-esteem. If people are extroverted, they are open to communication. In this respect, the results of this study are supported by those in the literature.

### Limitations

The study was carried out on the basis of voluntariness. It is limited to freshman and senior-year students studying at School of Nursing of Health Science Faculty in Türkiye. Also, that people prone to give appropriate response to the expectations in such survey studies could affect these research results.

### Conclusion

This study revealed that the students considered themselves to be good at communication. More than half of them had high self-esteem, and there was a positive correlation between the perceptions of communication skills and self-esteem.

Besides that senior-year students' self-esteem gradually decreased, shows that the nursing curriculum should be revised again. It might be suggest that various education and activities increasing self-esteem and improving communication skills are organized. For example, psycho-educational lectures involving dealing ways with stress and assertiveness training and school clubs can be created, scenarios about communication problems can be written, intergroup discussions drama training can be performed or social activities can be often organized.

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