

The Effect of Communication Skills Training on the Job Performance of ICU Nurses: A Quasi-Experimental Study Considering the Role of Gender and Work Experience

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Abstract

Background: Nurses' job performance is a key factor in the quality of healthcare services. Communication skills, especially in intensive care units (ICUs), where effective interaction with critically ill patients and their families is crucial, play a significant role in enhancing professional performance. This study aimed to investigate the effect of communication skills training on ICU nurses' job performance and to analyze the differences in its impact based on gender and work experience.

Methods: This quasi-experimental study employed a pretest-posttest design with a control group. A total of 70 ICU nurses from Iran and Khatam Al-Anbia Hospitals in Iranshahr were selected through stratified random sampling based on gender (female/male) and work experience (1–5 years, 6–10 years, more than 10 years). Participants were assigned to either the intervention (n = 35) or control group (n = 35). The intervention group participated in a four-session communication skills training course (2 hours per session). Data were collected using the Nursing Job Performance Questionnaire and the Queendom Communication Skills Inventory. Data analysis was conducted using independent t-tests, paired t-tests, and one-way ANOVA via SPSS version 26.

Results: The findings revealed that communication skills training had a significant positive effect on improving ICU nurses' job performance ($P < 0.05$). Comparisons between male and female groups indicated that both genders showed significant improvement after the intervention ($P = 0.05$, $P = 0.04$), although no significant difference was observed between genders ($P = 0.045$). Additionally, the impact of training was significant across different levels of work experience ($P < 0.05$), with nurses having less than five years of experience showing the greatest improvement.

Conclusion: Communication skills training has a significant role in improving the job performance of ICU nurses. The findings of this study indicate that such training enhances nurses' performance regardless of gender and work experience. Therefore, the design and implementation of continuous communication skills training programs are recommended to help improve the quality of patient care in intensive care units.

Key words: Communication skills, Job performance, ICU nurses, Training, Gender, Work experience.

Introduction

Problem Statement:

Effective communication is considered one of the essential skills in the nursing profession, directly influencing the quality of patient care, patient

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satisfaction, and the reduction of nurses' occupational stress. In critical healthcare settings such as Intensive Care Units (ICUs), nurses encounter critically ill patients and anxious families, where establishing effective and appropriate communication becomes particularly vital. Therefore, the communication skills of ICU nurses must be specifically strengthened. Moreover, deficiencies in communication skills may lead to an increase in medical errors, a decline in the quality of care, and greater psychological stress among these nurses (1–4).

Communication skills are among the fundamental components for enhancing nurses' performance and improving the quality of patient care. Effective communication can reduce medical errors, improve teamwork, increase patient satisfaction, and decrease nurses' occupational stress. Research has shown that nurses with stronger communication skills generally demonstrate better professional performance and more professional responses in tense and complex clinical situations. Communication skills training can enhance nurses' job performance and lead to an improvement in healthcare service quality. Nurses with better communication abilities are more capable of understanding patients' needs and providing more accurate and safer care. A study conducted in Iranian hospitals indicated a significant relationship between the level of nurses' communication skills and patient satisfaction; nurses with higher communication skills were more successful in interacting with

physicians, fellow nurses, and other hospital staff. This success leads to enhanced team collaboration and a reduction in interpersonal conflicts. Additionally, a study conducted in the United Kingdom found that nurses with professional and clear communication were less likely to experience work-related misunderstandings and medical errors (5–7).

Research has shown that nurses with better communication skills are less likely to experience job burnout and stress resulting from working in high-pressure environments such as Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and emergency departments. A study conducted in teaching hospitals in Iran demonstrated that nurses who had participated in communication skills training courses exhibited better job performance in areas such as accuracy in report writing, crisis management, and communication with patients. Similarly, a study in Canada confirmed that nurses with strong communication skills had a greater ability to manage critical situations and reduce patients' stress levels (8–10).

Overall, communication skills not only serve as a significant factor influencing nurses' performance, but they also play a key role in enhancing teamwork interactions, reducing occupational stress, and improving patient safety. However, many studies have not sufficiently examined the effects of gender and work experience on the effectiveness of communication skills training. While some research suggests that nurses with less work experience require more training in communication skills, other

studies emphasize that nurses with greater experience may demonstrate better performance in communicating with patients and colleagues. Additionally, gender differences in communication styles and the impact of skills training are subjects that warrant further investigation. Some studies have indicated that female nurses tend to engage in more empathetic communication with patients, whereas male nurses are more focused on the technical and practical aspects of communication (3, 11).

Despite the well-recognized importance of communication skills training in intensive care units, the impact of such training on nurses with different genders and levels of work experience has not been thoroughly examined. Given the critical role of nurses' job performance in ICUs and its influence on the quality of patient care, conducting this study could contribute to the development of effective training programs for nurses, ultimately leading to improved job performance and increased patient satisfaction. Moreover, the findings of this research could serve as a foundation for designing and revising communication skills training programs in hospitals and nursing education centers. Applying the results of this study could also help reduce psychological stress among nurses and enhance team spirit within intensive care units.

Considering the importance of communication skills in providing nursing care and the lack of comprehensive studies in this area, the researcher decided to conduct this study to investigate the

impact of communication skills training on the job performance of ICU nurses, with a particular focus on the role of gender and work experience.

Methods:

This research was designed as a quasi-experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design involving control and intervention groups. The aim of this study was to examine the effect of communication skills training on the job performance of ICU nurses and to analyze the impact of the training based on gender and work experience. The study was conducted in 2023 on nurses working in the intensive care units of Iran Hospital and Khatam-al-Anbia Hospital in Iranshahr. The research process began after obtaining the necessary approvals from the Research Deputy of Zabol University of Medical Sciences and the approval of the Ethics Committee (Ethics Code: IR.ZUBMU.REC.1402.025). Additional permissions were also obtained from the Deputy of Treatment, the Research Deputy, and the hospital administrators.

Inclusion criteria included a willingness to participate in the study and not having participated in communication skills training courses within the past three months.

Among the nurses working in the ICU units of Iran Hospital and Khatam-al-Anbia Hospital in Iranshahr, those who met the inclusion criteria were selected after a thorough explanation of the study objectives during an introductory session. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants expressing their willingness to participate in the

study. Subsequently, the nurses completed the Communication Skills Questionnaire.

The sample size was calculated based on Amini's study using the formula for the difference between means, with a 95% confidence level, 80% statistical power, and accounting for a 10% attrition rate. Accordingly, 35 participants were assigned to each group (intervention and control). To ensure diversity and representativeness of the samples, stratified random sampling was employed based on gender (male and female) and work experience (1–5 years, 6–10 years, and more than 10 years).

Data collection instruments included the Nurses' Job Performance Questionnaire and the Queendom Communication Skills Questionnaire (12).

The Nurses' Job Performance Questionnaire consists of 30 items assessing various aspects of job performance, including communication with patients, collaboration with the healthcare team, adherence to ethical principles, and the quality of services provided. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Very Poor to 5 = Excellent). This tool has been previously validated in similar studies and has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity.

The Queendom Communication Skills Questionnaire comprises 34 items that evaluate nurses' communication skills using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). The validity and reliability of the Persian version of this questionnaire have been confirmed by Dizkohi and

colleagues (13, 14).

After completing the first phase of data collection, an educational needs assessment was conducted, and the nurses were divided into intervention and control groups. The educational content was developed by the research team, focusing on topics such as the definition of communication, different communication styles, verbal and non-verbal communication, body language, empathy skills, active listening, methods of establishing effective communication with patients and their families, active listening techniques, problem-solving strategies in interactions with colleagues, patients, and their families, and strategies for managing occupational stress.

The training for the intervention group was delivered in the form of a two-day workshop (four two-hour sessions) using participatory methods, group exercises, practical workshops with immediate feedback (scenario-based role-playing / Appendix 1), and interactive discussions. Meanwhile, the control group continued their routine activities without receiving any training. One month after the end of the training, both the intervention and control group nurses completed the Job Performance Questionnaire and the Communication Skills Questionnaire again.

To adhere to ethical principles, the educational content was also provided to the control group at the end of the study (14–16).

Data analysis was performed using independent t-tests, paired t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in SPSS version 26.

Findings:

Table 1: Job Performance Scores Before and After Communication Skills Training

P-value	Post-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)	Pre-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)
<0.05	41.7 ± 2.2	23.5 ± 5.3

According to the findings in Table 1, the mean performance score before and after the intervention showed a statistically significant difference (P-value < 0.05).

Table 2: Job Performance Scores by Gender

P-value	Post-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)	Pre-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)	Gender
0.04	41.8 ± 0.74	29.1 ± 1.2	Male
0.05	41.7 ± 0.70	23.5 ± 5.5	Female

According to the findings in Table 2, the mean performance scores before and after the intervention showed a significant difference in both males and females, with significance values reported as (P-value = 0.05 for females, P-value = 0.04 for males).

Table 3: Job Performance Scores by Work Experience

P-value	Post-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)	Pre-intervention Performance Score (Mean ± SD)	Work Experience
<0.05	45.7 ± 2.9	32.5 ± 3.5	1–5 years
<0.05	41.7 ± 2.9	28.5 ± 3.2	6–10 years
<0.05	33.3 ± 3.3	23.3 ± 3.3	>10 years

According to the findings in Table 3, the mean performance scores before and after the intervention showed a significant statistical difference based on work experience, with

significance values for all groups being P-value < 0.05.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of communication skills training on the job performance of ICU nurses, with a focus on the role of gender and work experience. The results indicated that communication skills training had a significant effect on nurses' job performance and could play a key role in improving patient care quality, reducing occupational stress, and enhancing interprofessional interactions. The findings revealed that the intervention group, who received the communication skills training, experienced significant changes in their job performance scores. Specifically, the nurses in the intervention group showed higher post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores, confirming the positive impact of communication skills training on improving their job performance.

These findings align with previous studies. For example, Ahmad et al. emphasized that nurses with higher communication skills are better able to understand patients' needs and provide better care (6). One of the most important effects of communication skills is increased patient satisfaction and reduced medical errors. A study by Smith et al. demonstrated that effective communication between nurses and patients can lead to improved patient adherence to treatment instructions, reduced anxiety, and increased trust in healthcare services. In this regard, Mohammadi et al. found that nurses who participated in

communication skills training performed better in areas such as report writing, conflict management, and interactions with the healthcare team. Additionally, a study in the United States by Harper et al. reported that communication skills training led to improved nurse interactions and reduced family anxiety in ICU settings. Furthermore, Sidik's study also emphasized that such training increased family satisfaction, improved nurses' performance, and consequently enhanced the quality of healthcare services (9, 17-19).

Korkuta and Papathanasiou, in their study, addressed the importance of communication in nursing, particularly in intensive care units, and found that communication skills training is effective in improving nurses' performance in these high-stress environments. Additionally, the results of other studies, including those by Williams A, Harris M, Clark N, Anderson B, and Thomas L, confirmed the relationship between communication skills training and its impact on the experience of patients and families in ICU settings (20-25).

Moreover, studies by Chan E, Curtis J, Mullan B, Rosenbaum M, Fallowfield L, Foronda C, Marshall S, and Vermeir P demonstrated that communication skills training for nurses, especially in critical care units, positively impacts their efficiency, enhances patient care quality, and leads to greater collaboration within healthcare teams (5, 26-32).

In this study, the impact of communication skills training on job performance was observed in both

male and female nurses. Although no statistically significant difference was found between gender groups, the similar effects of training on job performance in both genders indicate the importance of these skills for all nurses, regardless of gender. A similar outcome was reported in a study by Shrestha et al., which indicated that communication skills, regardless of gender, influence job satisfaction and nurse performance. The research showed that the impact of communication skills training on job performance was significant for both male and female nurses, highlighting that these skills are essential for all nurses, regardless of gender (33). A study by Khodadi et al. showed that communication skills training improved care quality, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction among nurses without gender differences (34). Additionally, Norgaard et al.'s study examined the impact of communication skills training on increasing self-efficacy in professional communication and found no significant gender differences (35). Chan et al.'s study examined the impact of communication skills training on nurses' daily interactions and did not report significant gender differences (5). The results of these studies suggest that communication skills training positively affects nurses' job performance, with no significant differences between genders, aligning with the findings of the present study.

There are studies that show conflicting results with the present study, indicating that female nurses generally perform better in communication skills such as empathy, active listening, and emotional

support. They tend to show more empathy and establish more effective verbal and non-verbal communication with patients. A study conducted in hospitals in Iran showed that female nurses scored higher than male nurses in terms of empathetic communication with patients (36).

On the other hand, male nurses typically perform better in conflict management, emotional control, and effective communication with other members of the healthcare team. Some studies have suggested that they tend to have more assertive and logical communication in high-stress environments such as emergency rooms or ICUs. However, they may face greater challenges than female nurses in establishing emotional connections and intimacy with patients (7).

A study involving 300 nurses in educational hospitals in Iran revealed that female nurses scored significantly higher in empathetic communication skills, whereas male nurses were stronger in conflict management and formal communication with the healthcare team (37). Similarly, a study in the United States reported similar findings, noting that female nurses communicate more through non-verbal means (such as eye contact, tone of voice, and body language), whereas male nurses tend to rely more on direct and authoritative communication (38).

In general, the results of studies that diverge from the present study suggest that there are gender differences in communication skills among nurses, but these differences are largely influenced by individual traits, work environment, and the

training received. Both genders can benefit from communication skills training to improve their weaknesses; male nurses can work on empathetic communication, while female nurses can enhance their conflict management skills and assertive communication.

Regarding work experience, the findings of this study indicated that communication skills training can effectively enhance nurses' job performance across all levels of work experience. The mean performance scores before and after the intervention showed a statistically significant difference based on years of experience, and the significance value became consistent across all groups.

Several studies in line with the present research have also demonstrated that communication skills training has a significant impact on the job performance of nurses with different levels of work experience. For example, a study conducted by Khodadadi et al. in hospitals in Tabriz showed that communication skills training led to improvements in the quality of care, enhanced self-efficacy, and increased job satisfaction among nurses. This study included nurses with diverse work experience, and positive outcomes were observed at all experience levels. Moreover, a study by Nørgaard et al. showed that communication skills training increased self-efficacy in interactions with patients and colleagues among healthcare staff, including nurses with varying levels of work experience, indicating that these skills are effective across all levels of experience (34, 35).

In a study conducted by Chan et al., the impact of communication skills training on improving nurses' interactions in clinical settings was examined, and it was found that such training had a significant effect on nurses with different levels of work experience. Findings from several studies have shown that individual differences such as age and gender can influence communication skills. Research by Johnson et al. and Hosseini et al. also demonstrated that communication skills training was effective among nurses with various levels of work experience. Moreover, nurses with greater age and more years of professional experience performed better in communication skills, highlighting the importance of professional experience in accepting changes and new training programs; however, the results of these studies were not consistent with the findings of the present study (5, 36, 38). Overall, although there are some conflicting results, the majority of scientific evidence emphasizes the effective role of communication skills training in improving the quality of interactions between nurses and patients, increasing patient satisfaction, and enhancing nurses' job performance. In general, this study highlights that communication skills training, as a key tool, can significantly contribute to improving nurses' job performance and, consequently, the quality of healthcare services.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that communication skills training be incorporated as an essential component of nursing education

programs at all educational and professional levels. Additionally, hospitals and healthcare centers should support the improvement of nurses' interactions with patients and the healthcare team by organizing communication skills workshops. Ultimately, incorporating communication skills into nurses' performance evaluations and establishing regular retraining programs could lead to an overall enhancement in the quality of nursing services.

Despite its rigorous design and efforts to control confounding factors, this study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the results. First, the study sample was limited to two specific healthcare centers, which warrants caution when attempting to generalize the findings to other settings. Furthermore, the use of self-reported tools for measuring job performance may have been influenced by response biases or social desirability tendencies among the participants. Additionally, individual differences among nurses, such as learning styles, motivation, and prior experience, were not fully controlled, potentially impacting the effectiveness of the training. Concurrent interventions in clinical settings, such as managerial changes or other educational programs, may also have influenced the results. Moreover, this study focused solely on the short-term effects of communication skills training and did not assess its long-term impact. Finally, although no significant differences were observed between male and female nurses or those with varying work experience, the possibility of hidden variables influencing the results should not

be overlooked.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that communication skills training has a significant impact on the job performance of nurses in intensive care units (ICU). The results showed that nurses who received communication skills training significantly improved their job performance. Furthermore, these effects were observed across nurses with different levels of work experience. These findings particularly indicate that communication skills training can be an effective tool for improving the quality of healthcare services in hospitals and specialized units.

Additionally, the study's results revealed that the impact of communication skills training on job performance was significant for both male and female nurses, suggesting that these skills are beneficial and essential for all nurses, regardless of gender. Based on these results, it is recommended that hospitals and healthcare centers place greater emphasis on communication skills in their training programs, as these skills can contribute to enhancing the quality of interactions between nurses and patients, increasing patient satisfaction, and improving nurses' job performance.

Conflict of Interest

In this study, there are no financial or personal conflicts of interest. The authors emphasize that all data and results presented in this research were obtained based on scientific principles and in an impartial manner. None of the members of the

research team had any financial or personal relationship with companies or commercial institutions that might influence the results of the study. All stages of the research were conducted following ethical principles and scientific transparency, and the results presented are fully aligned with valid and accurate data.

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Appendix 1. Training Scenarios

1. **Effective Communication with Family Members:**

Establishing empathetic and professional communication with concerned family members, ensuring the provision of clear, accurate, and comprehensible information.

2. **Clear Explanation of Patient's Condition and Treatment**

Process:

Providing a transparent and detailed explanation regarding the patient's clinical status and the anticipated course of treatment, tailored to the family's level of understanding.

3. **Family Involvement in Patient Care:**

Actively involving family members in appropriate aspects of the patient's care to promote collaboration, support patient recovery, and enhance overall care quality.

4. **Emotional and Psychological Support during Critical**

Situations:

Delivering emotional and psychological support to family members during crises, addressing their concerns, alleviating anxiety, and reinforcing coping mechanisms.