

A Study on Factors Affecting Communication Ability of Korean Nursing Students

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: This study was attempted to identify factors affecting the communication ability of nursing students. The study subjects were 210 nursing students.

Method/Statistical Analysis: This study was statistically processed using SPSS. 19 program and correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis were used to confirm the relationship between the main variables.

Findings: As a result, the communication ability of nursing students showed a positive correlation with self-awareness, empathy, self-esteem. Regression analysis was found to have a significant effect on self-awareness, empathy, and self-esteem. Among them, empathy was the most influential and the explanatory power of the main variables was 53.4%. That is, the higher the empathy ability, the higher self-awareness, and the higher self-esteem of nursing college students, the higher the communication ability ($F = 80.871$, $p < .000$). That is, the higher the empathy ability, the higher self-awareness, and the higher self-esteem of nursing college students, the higher the communication ability.

Improvements/Applications: Therefore, universities should provide continuous education to improve empathy, self-esteem, and self-awareness in order to improve communication skills of student nurses, and develop specific education method and operational strategies through follow-up studies.

Keywords: *Self-awareness, empathy, self-esteem, communication ability, nursing students.*

Introduction

Nurses need to fulfill the roles of communicating and cooperating continuously with professional manpower in other areas with the aim of solving practical or potential problems of patients in the hospital environment^[1]. The effective communication ability necessary to perform such a professional and dynamic nursing job efficiently is required as an important qualification to be a nurse^[2]. Nurses' therapeutic communication ability in clinical

practice contributes to patients' relief in symptoms, improvement in physiological functions, and emotional stability^[3]. Nurses need to form a therapeutic relationship with patients and explore and solve their health problems positively through a diversity of verbal and nonverbal communication skills. For this reason, therapeutic communication skills are emphasized as one of the core competences essential to nurses and have been used effectively within the therapeutic relationships in clinical practice^[2]. In South Korea, nursing education institutions are aware of the importance of communication training and presents it as important learning outcome of education^[3]. Colleges develop education programs to help students improve their communicative competence in curriculums, build structural and systematic education systems, taking stages, association, and integration into account, and provide various types of education^[4].

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While the educational contents include conceptual learning related to knowledge about communication and clinical training performance evaluation, they may reportedly have limitations in allowing students to develop communication skills fully^[3-4].

It is reported, also, that even nurses getting relevant education can have their therapeutic communicative competence easily affected by diverse variables, including unpredictable emergencies and their own stress at busy clinical sites, and have difficulty in sustaining consistent communication^[1]. For nursing education, therefore, it is necessary to cultivate nursing equipped with consistent and sustainable communication ability against a diversity of situational variables in clinical practice and to help develop communication skills by covering the internal factors involved in communication, instead of delivering knowledge simply.

The literature review regarding nurses in South Korea found that nurses who were more confident in their job, were more responsible, had better self-esteem, and were more autonomous were more self-assertive and better at coping with the conflicts in interpersonal relationships^[5]. As can be seen in the finding that self-assertive communication was effective in coping actively with stressors in a clinical situation^[6], education related to individuals' internal factors involved in communication is more effective in developing communication ability than education simply based on knowledge acquisition.

The literature review regarding the factors for communication ability of nursing students in South Korea found that self-awareness and self-esteem were

repetitively covered as important variables^[3,7]. Greater emphasis is placed on the variable of self-awareness, which is to understand and pay attention to one's own inner world, improve the understanding of others and empathy, and, ultimately, contribute to effective communication ability^[1,3]. In other words, knowledge education and practical training simply based on concepts have limitations in improving practical communication ability and it is possible to develop sustainable communication ability only by changing inner contributors of human beings that take the fundamental lead in communication.

From this perspective, attention should be paid to the associations among the variables of self-awareness, self-esteem, and empathy in the literature review regarding

communication ability. Self-awareness is to pay attention to one's own inner thinking or emotions and nurses' self-awareness capabilities are concerned with the efforts to understand and empathize with patients as they are and serve as crucial resources in forming relationships with them^[8]. Self-esteem means a type of attitude by which individuals respect and regard themselves as desirable and valuable; it was reported that people with higher self-esteem were better at interpersonal relationships^[9] and had better communicative competence^[7].

While a few studies on the effects on communication ability of nursing students were identified by variables, no integrative research has been conducted on which of self-awareness, empathy, and self-esteem is more influential and it was difficult to determine the relative impact of these variables. However, it is important to determine which of these variables makes greater contributions to the improvement in communication ability if the ground for effective nursing education is secured, taking the efficiency of the educational contents into account.

On the basis of the literature review regarding communication ability of nursing students in South Korea, this study aimed to analyze the associations among self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, and communication ability and determine the contribution of the influential variables.

Method

Data collection was performed among 210 graduates-to-be as nursing students in South Korea. It was performed using structured questionnaires from November to December 2017. It was performed among those students who were given explanation by the researcher and gave their consent; the notice was given that all the data related to the research were anonymous and that the refusal to participate in the research might cause no disadvantage.

For the purpose of exploring the factors affecting communication ability in nursing students, an SPSS.19 program was used to determine the effects of self-awareness, empathy, and self-esteem on communication ability. To determine the findings suitable to the goal of the research, such statistical techniques as frequency analysis, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis were used.

1. Survey Tools: Self-awareness of nursing students

was measured using the self-awareness inventory which had been developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss^[10] and adapted by Eun^[11]. This tool is in the five-point scale with a total of 20 items in such sub-areas as private self-awareness, public self-awareness, and social anxiety. The scores ranged from 1 *totally disagree* to 5 *totally agree*, with a higher score meaning better self-awareness. For its reliability, Cronbach $\alpha = .74$ in Eun^[11] and Cronbach $\alpha = .65$ in this study.

Empathy of the nursing students was measured using the tool which had been developed by Davis^[12] and Bryant^[13] and applied by Kim et al.^[14]. This tool is in the five-point scale with a total of 30 items whose scores ranged from 1 *totally disagree* to 5 *totally agree*, with a higher score meaning a higher level of empathy. For its reliability, Cronbach $\alpha = .85$ in Kim et al. ^[14] and Cronbach $\alpha = .86$ in this study.

Self-esteem was measured using the tool which had been developed by Rosenberg^[15] and translated by Jeon^[16]. It has total of 10 items; the higher score, the higher level of self-esteem. For its reliability, Cronbach $\alpha = .82$ in this study.

Communication ability was measured using the communication ability inventory developed by Lee et al.^[17]. This tool is in the five-point likert scale with a total of 49 items whose scores ranged from 1 *very rarely* to 5 *very often*, with a higher score meaning a higher level of communication ability. It is composed of five elements of competence—interpretation, role performance, self-presentation, goal-setting, and message transition—and 13 negative items for preventing any bias in responses were recoded. For its reliability, Cronbach $\alpha = .70$ at the time of its development by Lee et al.^[17] and Cronbach $\alpha = .90$ in this study.

Result

1. General characteristics of subject: The general characteristics of the participants are as presented in [Table 1]. Among the 210 participants, there were more female students (190; 90.5%) than male ones (20; 9.5%). As for academic achievement, 1 student (0.5%) was *very satisfied*, 53 (25.2%) were *satisfied*, and 113 (53.8%) were at the *average* level. More than 50% of the students were satisfied with their major: 9 students (4.3%) were *very satisfied*, 98 (46.7%)

were *satisfied*, and 87 (41.4%) were at the *average* level. As for peer relationships, 19 students (9.0%) were *very satisfied*, 137 (65.2%) were *satisfied*, and 48 (22.9%) were at the *average* level. As for communication ability, 4 students (1.9%) were *very satisfied*, 86 (41.0%) were *satisfied*, and 99 (47.1%) were at the *average* level; thus, more than 50% of the students were at the *average* or higher levels of satisfaction with the peer relationships, major, academic achievement, and communication ability.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristics	Categories	n(%)	M±SD
Gender	male	20(9.5)	23.10±.29
	female	190(90.5)	
Academic achievement	very satisfied	1(0.5)	3.03±.75
	satisfied	53(25.2)	
	moderate	113(53.8)	
	unsatisfied	37(17.6)	
	very unsatisfied	6(2.9)	
Satisfaction in major	very satisfied	9(4.3)	3.47±.72
	satisfied	98(46.7)	
	moderate	87(41.4)	
	unsatisfied	14(6.7)	
	very unsatisfied	2(1.0)	
Satisfaction in friendship	very satisfied	19(9.0)	3.80±.66
	satisfied	137(65.2)	
	moderate	48(22.9)	
	unsatisfied	4(1.9)	
	very unsatisfied	2(1.0)	
Satisfaction in communication ability	very satisfied	4(1.9)	3.33±.72
	satisfied	86(41.0)	
	moderate	99(47.1)	
	unsatisfied	18(8.6)	
	very unsatisfied	3(1.4)	

2. Participants’ self-awareness, empathy, self-esteem, and communication ability: The principal variables, such as self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, and communication ability, were analyzed as shown in [Table 2]. They scored an average of 3.32 out of 5 for self-awareness, 2.83 out of 10 for self-esteem, 3.51 out of 5 for empathy, and 3.47 out of 5 for communication ability self-esteem, empathy, and communication ability.

Table 2. The Degree of General Characteristic, Self-awareness, Self-esteem, Empathy, Communication ability

Variable	Item	Item	Total
		M±SD	M±SD
Self-awareness	20	3.32±.29	66.5±5.89
Self-esteem	10	2.83±.40	28.39±4.02
Empathy	30	3.51±.35	105.37±10.69
Communication ability	49	3.47±.32	170.07±15.92

3. Correlation analysis among self-awareness: The correlation analysis found that there were significant correlations among the principal variables, such as self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, and communication ability, as presented in [Table 3].

Table 3. Correlations between Communication ability and major variables

Variables	Pearson Correlation (p)			
	a)	b)	c)	d)
a) Self-awareness	1			
b) Self-esteem	.346 (<.000)	1		
c) Empathy	.551 (<.000)	.182 (.004)	1	
d) Communication ability	.640 (<.000)	.345 (<.000)	.633 (<.000)	1

4. Effects of self-awareness, self-esteem, and empathy on communication ability: The regression analysis found that self-awareness ($\beta = .368$), self-esteem ($\beta = .144$), and empathy ($\beta = .404$) had a significant impact on communication ability ($F = 80.871, p < .000$) and that the impact was very likely to account for communication ability (53.4%). Among the principal variables, empathy had the strongest impact, followed by self-awareness and self-esteem. That is, the better empathy, the better self-awareness, and the higher self-esteem, the higher level of communication ability in nursing students [Table 4].

Table 4. Influencing factors on Communication ability

Independent Variables	Model				
	B	SE	β	t (p)	VIF
Constant	24.28	9.48		2.560(.011)	
Self-awareness	.995	.160	.368	6.206(<.000)	1.577
Empathy	.602	.084	.404	7.141(<.000)	1.436
Self-esteem	.570	.199	.144	2.864(.005)	1.136
Statistic results	$R^2 = .541, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .534, F = 80.871, p < .000, \text{Durbin-Watson} = 1.892$				

Discussion

On the basis of the literature review regarding communication ability in nursing students, this study aimed to analyze the associations among such principal variables as self-awareness, self-esteem, empathy, and communication ability and determine the relative impact of the relevant variables on communication ability.

For self-awareness, they scored higher than 2.82 ± 0.74 in Kang^[18] and slightly lower than 3.40 ± 0.32 in Oh et al.^[2]. They scored similar to 3.31 for secondary school students in Eun^[11]; self-awareness was generally at the similar level to the findings from literature review.

For self-esteem, the nursing students scored 2.83, which was lower than 2.94 in Lee et al.^[7] applying the same tool; however, there was no significant gap but similarity between the two studies. For empathy, the nursing students scored an average of 3.51, which was lower than 3.54 in Jeong^[1], 3.58 in Kim et al.^[14], and 3.67 in Kang^[18]. This is because of the variation in grade and personal factors among the respondents by study design although each of them was conducted in nursing students. For communication ability, they scored 3.47, which was similar to 3.43 in Oh^[2] applying the same tool. The correlation analysis found that such principal variables as self-awareness, self-esteem, and empathy were all positively correlated with communication ability in nursing students. Self-awareness and empathy had a high level of positive correlation with communication ability; self-esteem had a medium level of positive correlation with communication ability, as shown in literature review^[1,7,18].

On the basis of the correlation analysis, all of such independent variables as self-awareness, self-esteem, and empathy significantly affected communication ability, with the total explanatory power estimated at 53.4%. As for the relative impact of the independent variables, empathy, followed by self-awareness and self-esteem, had the strongest impact on communication ability. The literature review found that empathy was strongly correlated with self-awareness^[14]; therefore, it was included in this study as a predictor and its relevance was confirmed in the results. In other words, it was statistically confirmed that empathy was a factor significantly affecting communication ability of nursing students. Empathy refers to an emotional bond by which individuals feel the other's feeling and thinking as their own. People convey their heart through empathy and the empathetic responses between a patient and a nurse

can promote therapeutic relationships, increase trust, induce changes in the patient's health, and improve the therapeutic effects. On the basis of this result, it has been confirmed that very empathetic nursing students are very sensitive to patients' emotions, use their own emotions to empathize, express the emotions both verbally and nonverbally, and improve their communication ability.

In conclusion, all of such factors as empathy, self-awareness, and self-esteem affected communication ability in nursing students and the impact of these variables had great explanatory power; therefore, it is necessary to provide education that can help nursing students improve their empathy, self-awareness, and self-esteem in pursuit of better communication ability. The education stimulating the internal factors of students is expected to overcome the limitations in the effectiveness of the conventional education for acquiring simple knowledge about communication and contribute to the development of communication ability that can be sustained consistently even in an unpredictable nursing situation. Such areas as empathy, self-esteem, and self-awareness are nursing students' internal factors that can be improved through steady educational stimuli and individual students' efforts rather than through fragmentary stimuli; therefore, further research should be conducted to develop specific method and teaching strategies to improve them

Conclusion

In conclusion, nursing education institutions in South Korea need to be aware of the need to combine sustainable educational stimuli for empathy, self-esteem, and self-awareness with the curriculums to improve communication ability; further research should be conducted to develop specific teaching method and management strategies with the aim of developing effective teaching strategies.

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