

An Experiment on Teaching Communication Skills to Young People

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Abstract

Communication is essential in all fields, but it is especially important in the health sector. Because of their sensitive situation, treating patients and their loved ones requires extra restraint and kindness. Health science students who improve their communication skills are better able to communicate with patients. In addition, this study is expected to improve students' relationships with team members in the workplace as well as with other people in their social lives. Therefore, it is decided that andragogy-based communication skills training for young adults would be a useful roadmap for further research.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teaching communication skills to university students affects their emotional expression and empathic tendencies, which are important in the development of communication skills in young adults.

Method: *This study used an experimental approach. The before-after one-group test result model of this method is the basis of the research model. The study was conducted in the fall semester of the 2012-2013 academic years with 199 first-year university students. Students were given instruments to measure emotional expressiveness and empathic tendencies, and after one week they were given a 12-course communication course based on andragogy.*

15 days after the end of these sessions, they were administered again with identical weights. Findings: It was discovered that women with higher degrees of empathic tendencies also expressed their feelings more openly and were better able to build effective family relationships. Students' empathetic tendencies and degrees of expressing their feelings have been found to have a positive, moderately strong, and statistically significant association. Both the students' mean scores on the emotional expression scale and their mean scores on the empathic propensity scale showed a statistically significant rise after the schooling.

This study set out to ascertain if training university students communication skills would have an impact on their capacity for emotional expression and propensity for empathy—two elements that are essential for the development of communication skills in young adults.

Keywords: Adult education, communication, empathetic tendency, emotional expression, university students

Introduction

This inquiry used an experimental technique. The pre-post single-group test-result pattern utilised in this approach serves as the basis for the research model. 199 first-graders from a university took part in the study during the second half of the 2012–2013 academic years. Following a week, the students participated in a 12-session andragogy-based communication

skills course and performed assessments to determine their emotional expressiveness and propensity for empathy.

They used the same weights again 15 days after these sessions ended. Fifteen days after the end of the sessions, the identical scales were applied again. Such things as the rapidly developing world and environment, the technological and innovative structure, the penetration of information and communication technology into people's lives, the socio-cultural adjustment problems of adults who have to live in different cities for educational purposes or socio-political purposes. . problems and globalization raise the students' awareness of communication. University life is a colorful time when students interact and develop themselves in terms of knowledge, culture and communication, not an environment where students constantly attend classes. A key skill that helps a young adult deal with some of the responsibilities they face. Living with many peoples from different countries environments and cultures and the differences that they face with in their university lives in terms of social and personal aspects, is the communication skill. Littlewood (1981) has emphasized that the development of their communication skill could be possible only when they have sufficient motivation and opportunities for expressing their identities and establishing communication with the people in environment. For this reason, the learning atmosphere providing the student with sense of confidence and giving value to the individual is important. Even if the teacher offers various stimulators, he/she has no direct control on students. The role of teacher should be to coordinate the activities in the way giving better communication skills to students (Littlewood, 1981).

It will be possible to better design educational activities that are crucial from an individual and societal perspective, as well as the communications to be formed in those educational activities, by taking into account adults as a whole. Understanding adult psychology, physical characteristics, and social-status perceptions are all part of this. In this context, it is recognised that effective communication skills are important for people to have and that it is one of the core subjects that adult education closely relates to. Nonetheless, adult education and "communication in adult education" examples have been neglected in our country, and adult education-focused events still retain pedagogical qualities, according to literature study.

In recent years, research on the importance of communication skills has been conducted more frequently. Communication is a versatile concept in many fields of interest. Communication in any profession is also of great importance in the health sector. The services provided in hospitals are aimed at people. Efficiency and quality of care are related to effective communication skills. All these reasons require proper communication. Healthcare professionals spent most of their time interacting with patients and their families. Communication with patients and loved ones requires more moderation and friendliness due to their sensitive situation. Therefore, it is assumed that the communication skills of healthcare professionals are effective. Communication skills are not just a personal touch; they play a big role in incorporating the techniques taught. Developing the communication skills of health science students to enable them to communicate effectively with patients is essential. In addition, it is believed that with this study the relationships of students with both professional team members and other people in social life will be strengthened.

Research Design

Method

The experimental method has been used in this research. The single group pretest-posttest pattern of this method constitutes the model of the research. In single group pretest-posttest model, independent variable is applied to a group, and analyses are done before and after the application. If there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the group from pretest and posttest from assessment tools of the model, then it is accepted that the application is effective (Balci, 2004; Karasar, 2002).

Research Sample

The study group of this research has been constituted from 214 first-grader health college students of a university in autumn semester of 2012-2013 educational year. But, because the ones not regularly attending the sessions and the lacking surveys have been excluded, 199 students have been involved in this research. Empathetic tendency and emotional expression scales have been applied to the students, then an andragogy-based planned communication skills education constituting of 12 sessions has been given to them after a week, and then the same scales have been re-applied to them after 15 days from the completion of those educations, and the difference has been statistically analyzed.

Before initiating the sessions, the students have been divided into 4 groups in order to execute interactive education. In sessions, the presentation of structured information about the communication skills, role playing based on the scenario and life about the skill, and giving homework about the skill have been involved. In first session, information about the communication skill education program, the progress of group, and attendance to the sessions has been shared, and the empathetic tendency and emotional expression scales have been applied to the students. In further sessions, the activities such as introduction in communication, greeting, being able to deliver the acceptance and respect, being able to use the language, being able to use the effective listening skill, being able to express the positive and negative feelings via “I” language, being able to realize the language of space and colors, being able to use the body language effectively and accurately in interpersonal relationships, to be able to empathize with others and empathetically response in “you” step, being able to control the anger, being able to realize the obstacles on communication, being able to have a constructive and cooperation-based attitude, being able to realize the main feelings in communication process and being able to express his/her own feelings accurately have been involved. In final session, the feelings about the group life have been shared, and the assessment of program has been executed together with students.

Research Instrument and Procedure

In this research, personal information form, which consists of 10 questions and examines socio-demographic characteristics and intra-family relationships,

Empathetic Tendency Scale consisting of 20 questions, and Emotional Expression Scale consisting of 15 questions have been utilized.

Empathetic Tendency Scale has been developed by Dokmen (1988) in order to measure the individuals’ potential to develop empathy in their daily lives. Dokmen (1988) has developed empathetic tendency scale from the theoretical foundation of his “Hierarchic Empathy Order Model”. A Likert-type scale has been prepared, and almost half of empathetic tendency scale questions consisting of 20 items have been written in negative form in order to balance the tendency to say “yes”. In scale, there are degrees from 1 to 5 next to every item. Individuals

express to what extent they agree with that item by marking one of the numbers from 1 to 5.

Emotional Expression Scale has been developed by King and Emmons (1990) and adapted into Turkish by researcher. It is utilized in order to measure the general emotional expressions. The items of scale consisting of 16 items and being based on Likert-type rating are about the tendency to express the emotions involving positive, negative and closeness. The scale provides information about emotional expressions in interpersonal relationships and those independent from interpersonal relationships. The scale has been rationally structured in the way based on real expression behaviors. The items have been written in the way containing both of positive and negative emotions. The items are answered between 1 and 7. 1 indicates that the person does not agree with the item at all, while 7 indicates that the person completely agrees with the item. High scores in Emotional Expression Scale indicate that our emotional expression tendency is high.

Validity and Reliability

Empathetic Tendency Scale has been applied to the group of 70 university students twice with 3 weeks interval, and the correlation between the scores obtained from both of them, test's repetition reliability coefficient, has been found to be .82. The correlation between the scores obtained from odd- and even-number items of the scale has been found to be .86. By Dokmen, the "Sub-Scale of Understanding the Emotions" of Edwards Personal Preference Scale and the Empathetic Tendency Scale have been applied to a group of 24 persons, and the correlation between the scale scores has been found to be .68 (Dokmen, 1988).

The lowest correlation between the items of original Emotional Expression Scale has been found to be .06, while the mean correlation has been found to be .18. The highest one has been calculated to be .59. Mean value of the scale scores has been found to be 4.6 (in 7-point Likert), the standard deviation to be .76, and alpha reliability coefficient to be .78.

Data Analysis

The data analysis has been carried out via IBM SPSS 21.0 package software. Before the statistical analyses, the competence of the scores obtained from empathetic tendency and emotional expression scales to normal distribution has been determined via Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests. As a result of performed analyses, it has been seen that the scores had normal distribution. For this

reason, parametric tests have been used in statistical analyses. Student's t-test has been used for comparing the means of two samples and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been used to test differences between two or more means.

Results

89.9% of 199 students having mean age of 19.47 ± 1.66 are female. Academic average of the students is 2.61 ± 1.16 . When the educational status of their families is examined, it is seen that majority of parents were graduated from elementary school (69.3% of mothers and 55.3% of fathers). Of the students, 84.4% have stated that they had nuclear family, and 84.9% have stated that his/her opinion is asked when a decision is being made within the family. In Table 1, it is represented if the scores of students from empathetic tendency and emotional expression scales

vary depending on certain variables.

Table 1.

Assessment of Students' Scores from Empathetic Tendency and Emotional Expression Scales by Gender and Family Relations

Scales	N	$\bar{x} \pm S$	d.f	t	P
Empathetic Tendency Scale					
Gender					
Female	173	72,96±8,70	197	4,711	,000
Male	26	67,38±9,49			
Is your opinion asked when a decision is made within the family?					
Yes	169	72,84±8,85	197	2,27	,024
No	30	68,83±9,10			
Can you discuss your problems with your family members?					
Yes	181	72,66±8,93	197	2,172	,031
No	18	67,88±8,60			
How is your relationship with people in generally?					
Good	181	72,79±8,79	197	3,539	,001
Bad	12	63,58±7,64			
Emotional Expression Scale					
Gender					
Female	173	74,73±12,78	197	3,011	,003
Male	26	61,84±14,47			
Is your opinion asked when a decision is made within the family?					
Yes	169	74,22±12,47	197	2,91	,004
No	30	66,46±18,03			
Can you discuss your problems with your family members?					
Yes	181	73,66±12,97	197	2,019	,045
No	18	66,88±18,87			
How is your relationship with people in generally?					
Good	181	73,82±12,85	197	3,197	,002
Bad	12	61,08±20,56			

The students' empathetic tendency and level of emotional expression vary between the genders significantly [t(197)=4.71, p<.01; t(197)=3.01, p<.01]. Both of women's empathetic tendency and emotional expression levels are more positive than those of men. The students' empathetic tendency and level of emotional expression significantly vary depending on if their opinion is asked when a decision is made within the family [t(197)=2.27, p<.05; t(197)=2.91, p<.01]. Both of the empathetic tendency and the emotional expression levels of students stating that their opinion is asked when a decision is made within the family have been found to be higher. A statistically significant difference has been found between the empathetic tendency and emotional expression levels of students and their opportunity to discuss with their families about the problems of students [t(197)=2.17, p<.05; t(197)=2.02, p<.05]. Both of the empathetic tendency and the emotional expression levels of students stating that they can discuss their problems with their families have been found to be more positive. A statistically significant difference has been found between the empathetic tendency and emotional expression levels of students and general goodness

of interpersonal relationships [$t(197)=3.54, p<.01$; $t(197)=3.20, p<.01$]. Both of the empathetic tendency and the emotional expression levels of students stating that their relationship with people is generally good has been found to be higher.

The representation of students' emotional expression levels by the region they live in is given in Table 2.

Table 2.

Assessment of Students' Emotional Expression Levels by Regions

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	4906,651	6	817,775	4,876	,000
Within Groups	32201,740	192	167,717		
Total	37108,392	198			

Analysis results indicate that there is a significant difference between the regions in terms of the students' emotional expression levels [$F(6-192)=4.88, p<.01$]. According to the results of LSD test performed in order to determine between which groups the interregional differences are; it has been determined that the emotional expression levels of students living in Marmara ($\bar{X}=79.60$), Aegean ($\bar{X}=74.21$), Mediterranean ($\bar{X}=73.07$), Black Sea ($\bar{X}=72.61$) and Central Anatolia ($\bar{X}=74.18$) regions were more positive than that of students living in Eastern Anatolia ($\bar{X}=60.40$) and Southeastern Anatolia ($\bar{X}=65.52$).

The analysis printout of the calculation of relationship between Emotional Expression Scale and Empathetic Tendency Scale is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Correlation between Emotional Expression and Empathetic Tendency Scales

	Emotional Expression Scale	Emphatic Tendency Scale
Emotional Expression Scale	1	.391
Emphatic Tendency Scale		.000
N	199	199

In Table 3, it can be seen that there is a medium-level, positive and significant relationship between the students' emotional expression levels and empathetic tendency levels ($r=0.391, p<.01$). Accordingly, it can be stated that the more emotional expression skill the students have, the more empathetic tendency they have.

The results of t-test performed in order to determine the significance of the difference between pretest and posttest mean scores of Empathetic Tendency Scale and Emotional Expression Scale are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

t-test Results of Mean Scores of Empathetic Tendency Scale and Emotional Expression Scale

Emphatic Tendency Scale	N	$\bar{x} \pm S$	d.f.	t	P
	199	72,23±8,9	198	9,470	,000

Pretest	8
Posttest	199 78,68±6,7 9
<hr/>	
Emotional Expression Scale	
Pretest	199 73,05±13,198 9,804,000 69
Posttest	199 82,47±7,1 9

The mean score of students from Empathetic Tendency Scale before the education increased from 72.23±8.98 to 78.68±6.79 after it [t(198)=-9,470, p<0.001]. The mean score of Emotional Expression Scale increased from 73.05±13.69 to 82.47±7.19 [t(198)=-9,804, p<0.001]. This result indicates that the education given was effective. Moreover, of the students, 91% have stated that the education given has contributed to their interpersonal relations positively, and 94% have stated that they have carried the concepts such as body language, empathy, and I language into effect in their daily lives.

Discussion and Conclusion

Gender is about to live the emotions. In our study, it has been observed that both of empathetic tendency and emotional expression levels of women are more positive than men. Researches have shown that there are differences between the genders in terms of limiting the emotions, and that men limit their emotions more than women (King & Emmons, 1990; Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kilmartin, Forsmann-Falck, & Kliwer 1998). Women are more successful in self-expression, establishing communication, and recognizing various stimulators, and this fact shows itself from the babyhood. Girls start to speak earlier than boys. Moreover, it has been shown in researches that

girls learn how to read and write in school earlier than boys, and girls are more successful in learning foreign language. Moreover, in a study on empathy, the photographs showing different moods such as happiness, sadness, loathing, and being scared have been shown to women and men, and the subjects have been asked to state the emotion that has been represented in photo. While every subject has accurately identify the expressions in photos, it has been observed in functional magnetic resonance imaging that limbic regions of men, which is the emotion center of the brain, were not active while identifying the emotion, and that the women have felt a little sadness and their limbic regions were active while stating that the expression in photo is sadness, therefore they could establish direct empathy with the person in photo (Karaismailoglu, 2015). Emotional expressions may be a function of the gender roles that are culturally expected.

Empathy has become a concept, of which importance is gradually increasing nowadays. Empathy is the ability to be sensitive to and communicate understanding feelings of people (Arnolds & Boggs, 2015). Rogers (1970) has defined the empathy as the process of putting oneself into the place of other and seeing the events from his/her eyes, feeling and understanding the emotions and opinions of other person accurately and reporting that situation to him/her. The foundation of empathy, which makes people feel that they are understood and given importance within the society, is laid firstly in family environment (Eisenberg, 1982). Also in our study, it has been found that the empathetic tendency levels of the students stating that their opinions are asked when a decision is made within the family and that they can easily discuss their problem with their family were higher. Moreover, the quality of communication of adolescents, who developed close relations with their parents and gained recognition, significantly affects their relations that they establish in their social lives (Updegraff, Madden-Dertrich, Estrada, Sales, &

Leonard, 2002).

In our study, the emotional expression levels of students having good intra-family relations were found to be higher. In performed studies, it has been determined that sharing the emotions are effective on arranging the social interactions (Keltner & Haidt, 1999) and development and continuance of close relationship by increasing the recognition of the person by others (Collins & Miller, 1994). Individuals who can feel valued and communicate effectively in the family they can be happier. In addition, it is taught to these individuals can get more satisfaction from doing something and realize themselves and expressing their feelings more comfortable.

In Turkey seems to be different family structures due to economic, social, cultural and regional differences. Due to these differences in family structure, there are also noteworthy differences that family relationships and child rearing attitudes. In a country-wide research carried out by Family Investigation Institution (1995), it has been determined that as the number of children increased, and the educational status of mother decreased, and in underdeveloped regions, the perspective that the child should not be given the right to speak and being strict is necessary for children discipline strengthens. In other studies carried out in our country, it has been observed that children in Eastern and Southeastern areas had less voice than children in other areas (Family Investigation Institution, 1995), that the children in lower socio-economic levels think they are loved by their parents less and punished by

them more (Guneysu, 1982), and, as the educational status of mother decreases, they apply more pressure on their children and exhibit stricter attitude in intra-family relations (Sendogdu, 2000). In our study, the emotional expression levels of students living in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia have been found to be lower than that of students living in other regions. This situation can be explained with that socio-cultural factors are closely related with low educational status and life-style of the society, and child-raising perspective and methods.

Blatt and Carolyn (1993) have examined how the students recognize the communication skills that teachers utilize. At the end of research, the empathy level teachers respecting the students and their level of supporting students have been found to be higher. In that research, it has been stated that empathy constitutes the foundation of interpersonal relations. In our study, it can be seen that there is a medium-level, positive and significant relationship between students' emotional expression levels and empathetic tendency levels. Accordingly, it can be said that, as the emotional expression skill increases, then the empathetic tendency establishment skill also increases. In an experimental study of Nerdrum (1997) carried out in order to determine the long-term efficiency of communication skill educations, it has been revealed that the empathetic skills of the group receiving communication education were better and getting much better as the time passes. In another research, a group of medical school students have been given communication education, while control group has not been given any communication education. At the end of research, it has been found that the communication skills of the individuals that have received communication skill education were higher than individuals that have not (Barry, Robb, & Graham, 1992). Researchers have asserted that interpersonal skills could be part of the entire health training programs (Alofisan, Al-Alaiyan, Al-Abdulsalam, Siddiqui, Hussain, & Al-Qahtani, 2016). In our study, it has been determined that the communication skill education given had positive effects on interpersonal communication levels of the students.

Adulthood is generally accepted as maturity period. According to Allport (1970), one of the qualifications of the mature character is to be able to establish warm connections in both of close

and general relationships with others. At the end of study, it can be concluded that the communication skill education given to students in order for them to be able to adapt successfully to the necessities and obligations of the live ad to be able to cope up with them effectively has increased the functional communication skills of the young adults. In parallel with the findings obtained from the research, some suggestions can be offered. University is an environment that is suitable for individuals to culturally and socially develop themselves. Students getting into the university will have to establish social relations with other individuals regardless of their department or future branch. In order to ensure the healthier beginning of professional lives of these individuals after the university, communication skill programs can be prepared in universities for personal development purpose. In order to assess the education program developed by the researcher, comparative researches can be carried out on students studying in deferent department or on young adults that are not attending the university education. The long-term effects of positive improvement observed in students participating into the education can be examined. While selecting the optional courses in universities, the courses providing communication skills can be included.

The communication skill levels of instructors, who should be a model for university student from all aspects, can be analyzed. The individuals, who can establish successful communications and hence have healthy interpersonal relationships and who have gained problem-solving skill, are thought to be better parents. In order to meet this condition of a healthy society, conferences on communication skills can be organized for public, and social support can be received from the media.

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