

## Assessment Of Dental Student's Knowledge & Attitude In The Practice Of Communication Skills During Clinical Years

### Abstract

**Introduction:** This study investigated the knowledge and the attitude levels of dental College students in Malaysia pertaining to proper communication skills during clinical years.

**Materials and Methods:** The population for this study was the dental students of a dental college in Malaysia and a sample of 80 respondents were used for this study. The respondents were given questionnaires which gauged their knowledge and attitude towards proper clinical communication. The questionnaires were collected and the data analysed using the SPSS statistical software.

**Results:** It was found that the sample had both satisfactory levels of knowledge (93.6%) and attitude (93.6%). It was also found that there existed a significant relationship between knowledge and attitude level, ( $r = 0.541$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). T-test findings indicated that there was no significant difference of knowledge and attitude levels between level 5 and level 4, ( $t = 0.156$ ).

**Conclusion:** Overall dental students were found to have satisfactory knowledge and attitude of proper communication skills and level of knowledge correlated significantly with attitude levels. Future researches should seek to find the relationship between knowledge and awareness of communication skills and patient satisfaction

**Keywords:** communication skills; dental students; knowledge; attitude level

### Introduction

Dentistry being a part of health care profession bears the responsibility of creating and nurturing good dentist-patient relationships. Studies have found that effective communication skills practiced by health care professionals enhance patient satisfaction, increase patients' likelihood of following provider recommendations, decrease patient anxiety and patient complaints, and reduce malpractice claims. Therefore, prior to graduation and entering private practice, it is key for dental students to acquire adequate levels of communication self-efficacy with patients.[1]

For many years, the communication model of the relationship between physician and patient has focused on the physician's role. However, the patient's role and needs are important. Dentists encourage active participation by patients during the interview process to enable patients to express any emotional or psychological needs. Changing the physician-based model to a patient-based model plays an important role in increasing the patient's satisfaction with treatment.[2]

In the interest of this matter, this study was done to determine the dental student's knowledge level pertaining to the practice of proper communication skills and their awareness during clinical years. It also evaluated the relationship between the dental student's

**<sup>1</sup>AITHILINGAM, B., <sup>2</sup>LOGANATHAN, K., <sup>3</sup>CHAWLA, R., <sup>4</sup>BRUYNS, B. A., <sup>5</sup>XHUAN, E. S. Y., <sup>6</sup>BINTI MOHD ZULKAFLEE, N. H. N.**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Prosthodontics Penang International Dental College, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Penang International Dental College, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Orthodontics, International Faculty of Dental Medicine of Rabat, International University of Rabat, Morocco

<sup>4,5,6</sup>penang International Dental College, Malaysia

**Address for Corresponding :** Dr. Riddhi Chawla BDS, MDS ORTHODONTICS, M ORTH RCS ED (U.K), M ORTH RCPS GLASGOW, MFDS RCS ENGLAND, FPFA Assistant professor, Department of Orthodontics, International Faculty of Dental medicine of Rabat, International University of Rabat, Morocco  
Email : riddhichawla@yahoo.co.in

**Received :** 20 Feb. 2021, **Published :** 30 April 2021

**How to cite this article:** Vaithilingam, B., Loganathan, K., Chawla, R., Bruyns, B. A., XHUAN, E. S. Y., & Binti Mohd Zulkaflee, N. H. N. (2021). Assessment of Dental Student's Knowledge & Attitude in The Practice of Communication Skills During Clinical Years. UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF DENTAL SCIENCES, 7(1). 62-66

Access this article online	
<b>Website:</b> www.ujds.in	<b>Quick Response Code</b> 
<b>DOI:</b> https://doi.org/10.21276/ujds.2021.7.1.12	

knowledge and attitude concerning communication skills during clinical years.

**Materials And Methods:**

This cross sectional study was carried out among 4th and 5th year students of a dental college in Malaysia. The sample population of 80 students was chosen based on random sampling.

A survey questionnaire adapted from Communication skills Attitude Scale (CSAS) was employed to determine the students' knowledge and attitude towards communication skills practice during clinical years. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions and has two sections. The first section (section A) consist of 3 items, was designed to obtain students' background information such as age, gender and year of study. The second section (Section B) consists of 10 items designed to assess students' attitudes and knowledge pertaining to the practice of communication skills during clinical years. Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' were used to gauge responses. A total of 10 items will be completed in the survey which include 5 items for knowledge and 5 items for attitude. Informed consent was obtained. Their privacy and confidentiality were maintained

The questionnaire were pre-tested with 10 random students. Their data are not included in the final analysis. By doing pilot test, it is possible to determine whether students can understand the language and content of the questionnaire and whether the questions are relevant to students and their clinical perspectives prior to the actual survey. Ethics approval for the study has been obtained from Internal Review Board of the institution.

The 10 items of communication skill attitude scale (CSAS) will be responded using a five-point Likert scale with the score ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The range of total scores are from 10 to 50. The highest mean or median score would indicate stronger positive results. The least mean or median score would indicate stronger negative results. Data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data will be presented using Mean Standard Deviation and frequency. The mean communication skill will be compared between 4th and 5th year students using t-test.

**Result:**

A pilot study was carried out in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument and the questionnaire. The questionnaires from the pilot study was later tested using the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient to get the value of 0.6 or more. The improved questionnaires were used and made to undergo another reliability and validity test.

Table 1: Instrument Reliability Analysis

Section	Items	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha (n=30)
B	Students level of knowledge of the importance of communication skills in the clinic	5	0.417
C	Students attitude towards proper communication skills in the clinic	5	0.746
<b>B and C</b>	The whole instrument	<b>10</b>	<b>0.726</b>

Table 1 shows the results of the Pilot Test carried out earlier. The Cronbach Alpha for Section B which measured the student's knowledge pertaining to good communication skills in the clinic was 0.417; while the alpha value for Section C which measured the students' attitude towards good communication skills was 0.746. In totality, the questionnaire had a reliability of 0.726. Both of the individual sections and the questionnaire as a whole indicated very strong reliability levels as displayed in the table above. Therefore, the questionnaire was adopted for the study.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Respondent's Profile		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	26	32.5
	Female	54	67.5
	Total	80	100.00
Age (Years)	23	34	42.5
	24	38	47.5
	25	5	6.3
	26	1	1.3
	27	2	2.5
	Total	80	100.00
Year of Study	Year 4	40	50.00
	Year 5	40	50.00
	Total	80	100.00

Table 2 displays the summary of the demographic profile of the respondents of the study. Out of 80 respondents, 54 of them were females while there were 26 males with a percentage of 67.5% and 32.5% respectively. Based on the table, the majority of the respondents were aged 24 (47.5%), followed by 23 (42.5%), 25 (6.3%), 27 (2.5%), and 26 (1.3%).

Table 3. Dental student's knowledge of the importance of communication skills

Undergraduates' knowledge level of good communication (n=80)	Sample Mean	Maximum Mean	Minimum Mean	Mean rating of sample
Items: 1 – 5	23.4	25	5	93.6

Table 3 showed that maximum mean possible for this section was 25 whereas the sample mean was 23.4. This meant that the sample had a rating of 93.6% against the maximum mean. Thus, it can be concluded that overall the students do have adequate knowledge

about the importance of proper communication during clinical work. Table 4. Scores for dental students' knowledge levels of good communication in the clinic

No.	Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1	Communication skills are important in dentistry.	4.86	5	5	0.347
2	Development of communication skills helps to enhance confidence level between patients and students.	4.80	5	5	0.403
3	Appropriate communication skills among batch mates is important.	4.50	5	5	0.574
4	Good communication skills help to increase student's confidence level to communicate with lecturers.	4.53	5	5	0.636
5	Good communication skills can convince patient to follow the dental treatment as advised.	4.68	5	5	0.546

Table 4 shows the mean of the individual items pertaining to students' knowledge levels pertaining to importance of good communication in the clinic. As can be seen the mean for the individual items were all above 3, where 3 is the mid-point. Thus, overall the dental undergraduates were found to have good knowledge levels pertaining to proper communication skills in the clinic.

Table 5. The dental student's attitude pertaining to proper communication skills.

Undergraduates' attitude towards of good communicationskills (n=80)	Sample Mean	Maximum Mean	Minimum Mean	Mean rating of sample
Items: 1 – 5	23.4	25	5	93.6

Table 5 shows that the maximum mean possible for this section was 25 whereas the sample mean was 23.4. This sample obtained a mean rating of 93.6%, the rating can be considered satisfactory although there is plenty room for improvement. Thus, it can be concluded that overall the students do have adequate attitude pertaining to the practice of proper communication during clinical work.

Table 6. Scores for dental students' attitude pertaining to proper communication in the clinic.

No.	Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1	Developing communication skills is as important as developing knowledge of dentistry.	4.43	5	5	0.652
2	Communication is a key factor in making one a successful and reliable dentist.	4.39	4	4	0.562
3	Learning communication skills will facilitate my team-working skills.	4.35	4	4	0.597
4	It is necessary to let the patients to understand the dental procedures	4.76	5	5	0.484
5	Learning communication skill is interesting.	3.88	4	4	0.891

Table 6 shows the mean of the individual items pertaining to students' awareness levels pertaining to importance of good communication in the clinic. As can be seen the mean for the individual items were all above 3, where 3 is the mid-point. Thus, it

can be concluded that overall the dental undergraduates have good attitude pertaining to proper communication skills in the clinic.

Table 7. Relationship between Knowledge and Attitude towards good communication skills

Knowledge	Attitude		
Knowledge		Pearson	
1	.541**		
Correlation		Sig. (1-tailed)	
	0.00		
	80		N
	80		
Attitude		Pearson	
.541**	1		
		Correlation	
		Sig. (1-tailed)	0.00
			N
	80		80

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level ( 1-tailed)

Table 7 showed a strong correlation between the knowledge and attitude towards good communication skills in the clinic, (r = .541, p < 0.00, α=0.01). This meant that knowledge had a strong and positive relationship with attitude towards good communication skills. Higher knowledge corresponds with higher attitude score and vice versa. Clearly the higher the knowledge level the better the respondents attitude towards good communication skills in the clinic.

Table 8. Means of knowledge and attitude scores of the year 4 and year 5

Levels (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
4	40	45.1	3.92
5	40	45.2	3.19

Table 8 shows the mean of the composite knowledge and attitude scores of the level 4 was 45.1. Whereas the mean for those in level 5 was 45.2. The two means were subjected to a t-Test to find out if there existed any significant difference between them.

Table 9. t-Test of knowledge and attitude scores of the year 4 and year 5

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	α=0.05
.156	78	.876	α =0.05

Table 9 was used to indicate the existence of any significant difference between the knowledge and attitude scores of the year 4 and 5. The t-Test showed that there is no significant difference between the knowledge and attitude score of the two levels.

### Discussion:

This study concluded that overall dental undergraduates have good knowledge levels pertaining to proper communication skills during clinical years. Majority of the students agreed that communication skills are important in dentistry. Furthermore, development of communication skills helps to enhance confidence level between patients and students and good communication skills can convince patient to follow the dental treatment as advised. An effective communication provides benefits for both patients and dentists. Benefits for patients are mainly patient satisfaction and compliance. Dentists who spend time communicating effectively with their patients and colleagues are likely to have better interpersonal relationships and a more satisfying working life. This, in turn, is likely to make consultations more efficient and improve patient outcome.[3]

This study also concluded that overall dental undergraduates have good attitudes levels pertaining to proper communication skills. The attitude of dental students toward communication skills practices may be important indicators of the importance they place on them, and they may eventually influence communication behaviours in clinical settings. Kurtz in 2002 said that there is increasing evidence that good communication skills had a positive influence on positive health outcomes such as patient satisfaction with healthcare, compliance with medication, correct diagnosis, and reduction in malpractice claims.[4]

Exploring the attitudes of the dental students becomes the need of the hour as that may help dental educators to construct effective plans to orient students toward learning communication skills and make proactive efforts to improve their skills.

The results of the present study showed that knowledge and attitude towards good communication skills are relatable. Students who have more knowledge about communication skills, were display better attitude pertaining to good communication skills. Students will communicate with patients more politely and gently, thus patients' satisfaction will be increased. There is more or less equal level of knowledge and attitude among Year 4 & Year 5 students pertaining to communication skills practices. Hence, there was no significant difference of the knowledge and attitude levels between senior and junior . Both Year 4 & 5 students showed good attitude and knowledge towards good communication skills in clinic.

A time has come when apart from teaching technical skills we should equally impart soft skills in dental education. An ability to communicate well with the patient, to be able to ask relevant questions, to be able to listen patiently, to be able to answer queries in understandable manner, to develop rapport building, negotiating skills, break bad news, to develop counselling skills, empathy, verbal and nonverbal communication, body language, negotiating etc., should be taught to the students during their course.[5]

Ilmeideh et al. reported that the attitudes towards communication skills among university students are high.<sup>6</sup> This means that it is easier for universities to develop their communication skills through appropriate activities. Positive environments for communication provide opportunities for students to practise their communication skills and participate in active learning. Learning activities such as group discussion or role play can be carried out to provide opportunity for students to practice and hone their communication skills.

According to Brian Tracy, communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life. Good communication skills are very important in the education of dental students to prepare them for the demanding and competitive job market. Besides raising awareness about the importance of communication skills among students at any level of education and encouraging them to improve their skills, it would be recommended to place greater importance on communication skills at the beginning of university education, as well as to provide more opportunities for students to learn and practice them.<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion:

Thus, student's knowledge and attitude in the practice of communication skills during clinical years is satisfactory in this study. There is plenty of room for improvement and the management should ensure the knowledge and attitude level is raised among students.

First and foremost, the college management should conduct communication skill courses for the students to enhance their learning in communication skills. This can be done preferably among third year student before they are exposed to take up cases in clinics as they will be dealing with patients. <sup>8</sup>

In addition, lecturers should by example portray good communication skills in the clinic so that students can inculcate these characteristics among them. By observing the way their educators communicate with patient, this may indirectly help the students to learn and improve their skills.

### **Acknowledgement**

We would like to express our deep and sincere gratitude to Mr. Gopala Krishnan, our academic writing lecturer, for his guidance in regards to our research.