



Positive Outcomes and Improved Professional Experience Ensuing from Embedding Communication Skills as a subject at High Educational Institutions

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Abstract

In our ever-changing world, state-of-the art technologies have taken over all the possible aspects of human life. The field that has been affected the most by these sophisticated technologies is Medicine. It can be asserted that not only knowledge of Medicine, but also the presence of advanced technologies have saved millions of lives through accuracy of the operation and detail-orientedness. However, technologies and medical expertise would be inefficient and a patient would be doomed if doctors did not possess definite skills to successfully convey their knowledge and to efficiently facilitate different processes in a medical setting. Using and observing some body language patterns, building rapport, breaking bad news, resolving conflicts, etc. are skills that are fostered during the Communication Classes at university. Some of these skills turned out to also hold utmost significance for the people who major in Business Administration because for embarking on and succeeding in this career, communication surpasses a lot of subjects.

The following article, conducted at BAU International University and Batumi State Maritime Academy, explores the reasons and the consequences of using communication skills as a subject at High Educational Institutions and elaborates about the primary topics and techniques that the universities need to embed in their curriculums. The results and the conclusions are based on research and surveys conducted at both universities.

Keywords: communication; medicine; outcomes; technologies; skills

1. Introduction

In today's era of advanced technology, it's no longer unusual to see machines performing tasks that were once the sole responsibility of humans. As innovation progresses, the likelihood of machines handling complex functions independently increases, which raises concerns about their growing influence. While all industries have felt the impact of technology, the field of medical education and clinical practice has experienced some of the most significant transformations.

Harold Thimbleby (Thimbleby, 2013) highlights this in his research, explaining that technology serves to both automate and enhance processes previously done manually. For instance, prior to the invention of infusion pumps, nurses were required to administer injections manually at regular intervals. With the advent of these pumps, such tasks are now automated, allowing nurses to focus on other responsibilities. Furthermore, the integration of technology into the manufacturing process makes production more efficient and cost-effective. Technologies like plastic molding can mass-produce infusion pumps with ease, and once a pump's software is developed, duplicating it requires minimal effort. This cycle—where technology improves the creation of more technology—drives down costs, boosts market presence, and increases profitability, enabling companies to further invest in advanced production and delivery systems.

While Thimbleby emphasizes the benefits of technological advances in healthcare, it's important to also consider their potential drawbacks:

1. One of the predominant concerns that arises with the emergence of technologies is the potential violation of privacy. Unfortunately, our right to privacy and confidentiality can be severely compromised by even a minor error from a healthcare professional (HCP), potentially putting patients and their private information in the hands of the wrong people.
2. Given that modern technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), can store and process vast amounts of data, the possibility of machines making diagnoses has become increasingly realistic. While in some cases, these diagnoses may be accurate, AI lacks the capacity to reason, conduct physical examinations, or consider emotional and psychological factors, thereby increasing the risk of life-threatening health consequences.
3. Perhaps the most concerning issue for healthcare professionals is the fear that AI might eventually render human doctors obsolete.

As such, it becomes imperative that doctors, educational institutions, and hospitals explore ways to differentiate human capabilities from those of machines. They must strive to develop competencies that are irreplaceable—skills such as empathy, nuanced communication, and ethical decision-making—which are central to the human role in medicine.

2. Body of Paper

As Dilaverova (Dilaverova, 2020) claims in her research, “One of the core challenges that modern medical education faces is developing professionalism in future doctors. Professionalism is a complex term.” In today's context, the term “professionalism” has become more nuanced, as medical practitioners are now expected to possess not only technical and clinical knowledge but also interpersonal and reflective skills that ensure their continued relevance.

The research highlights that while robots can be programmed with many professional attributes such as resilience, attention to detail, adaptability, confidence, teamwork, and a strong work ethic, they lack the capacity to replicate inherently human qualities like empathy, communication, and leadership with the same effectiveness as people. This underscores the importance for modern medical practitioners to actively cultivate these interpersonal skills to ensure both professional competence and long-term stability in their roles.

A closer examination of prominent research by medical scholars highlights the increasing importance of communication skills in 21st-century healthcare. Today, these skills are regarded as fundamental to effective medical practice. Physicians who possess strong communication abilities are able to interpret both verbal and non-verbal cues to choose appropriate responses, express empathy, deliver difficult news with care, and manage emotionally distressed or anxious patients with greater ease.

Historically, communication skills were underemphasized in medical education due to limited understanding of human psychology. In the past, physicians rarely considered a patient's mental and emotional state. However, as psychological science advanced, researchers established clear links between mental health and physical well-being. This growing awareness underscored the importance of interpersonal and social competencies. Still, despite recognizing their value, communication skills were not formally integrated into the curricula of medical schools until the latter part of the 20th century. This delay was largely due to the assumption that effective communication was an innate ability rather than a teachable skill. As a result, patient outcomes often depended on whether or not a doctor naturally possessed such abilities. A patient treated by a physician with strong communication skills had a better chance of recovering more quickly.

As psychology gained prominence and both qualitative and quantitative research methods evolved, it became increasingly clear that communication should be a structured component of medical training. This recognition led to curriculum reforms—such as in the United Kingdom, where it was mandated that medical students be trained to communicate with patients in a clear, compassionate, and effective manner. Since then, medical schools worldwide have increasingly adopted communication training as a core part of their educational programs.

This shift in educational priorities reflects a broader transformation in medical practice. The traditional, paternalistic model—where doctors made decisions with minimal patient input—is gradually being replaced. As noted by Guillermo Ferreira-Padilla and colleagues (Ferreira-Padilla et al., 2015), modern physicians must be equipped to apply specialized medical knowledge in a way that recognizes the patient as a whole person, shaped by individual psychological, social, and environmental factors.

3. Methodology

BAU International University Batumi places a strong emphasis on enhancing curriculum design and student learning outcomes. As part of this commitment, particular importance has been given to the development and continuous refinement of course syllabi. Since its inception, the university has incorporated Communication Skills as a core subject, prompting ongoing observation and modification based on student performance and classroom experiences.

The rationale for this research stemmed from the institution's participation in international mobility programs, which introduced a diverse population of transfer students from varying educational backgrounds. It was noted that students entering during their fifth or sixth years from universities where Communication Skills had not been taught often struggled to

establish effective communication with peers, faculty members, and patients. These issues became especially apparent in role-play sessions conducted in language classrooms, where one of the co-authors—an instructor of both Communication Skills and a foreign language—observed that some students appeared either excessively assertive or socially withdrawn. Many of these students also demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the SPIKES protocol, placing them at a disadvantage during clinical simulations.

These preliminary observations were discussed with other language instructors and medical faculty, who reported similar patterns. To investigate the underlying causes, we reviewed the academic backgrounds of these students and found that approximately 80% had not previously studied Communication Skills. This discovery prompted the initiation of the research project, with the method of direct observation and surveys chosen as primary research approaches. These methods were selected due to their effectiveness in capturing both behavioral and perceptual data.

Faculty members—including language instructors, a Communication Skills lecturer, and clinical practitioners—independently observed two groups of students: those who had completed Communication Skills 1 and 2, and those who had not. In total, approximately 300 students were monitored, 90 of whom had not received prior instruction in Communication Skills at the outset of the study. Monthly meetings were held among the teaching staff to consolidate and compare observations, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of student progress.

As the 90 students gradually completed the Communication Skills modules, continued observation enabled instructors to track changes in their communicative competence. Additionally, student surveys were administered to collect feedback on their perceptions of the course's impact on their personal and professional development. These survey results are discussed in detail in the results section.

Throughout the study period, the faculty engaged in iterative revision of the Communication Skills 1 and 2 syllabi based on observational findings. The research thus played a critical role in identifying essential components that should remain integral to the teaching of this subject.

To broaden the scope of our study and contextualize its findings, we decided to observe some other fields and assess whether communication skills are as significant there as in Medicine. Based on our prior collaboration with the Business and Management Faculty of Batumi State Maritime Academy, we decided to involve both students and academic personnel from that institution. We conducted surveys to find out whether the students and the teachers were aware of the necessity of communication skills.

Some of the teachers claimed:

- Teacher 1: “Business Administration students need strong communication skills because these abilities are fundamental to almost every aspect of business operations and leadership.”
- Teacher 2: “Effective communication is a cornerstone of success in the business world. For our students, developing strong communication skills is not merely beneficial—it is essential. These skills play a critical role in facilitating collaboration, leadership, decision-making, and relationship management in professional environments.”
- Teacher 3: “Effective communication is vital for leadership and team management. Business administrators must often motivate teams, mediate conflicts, and foster a productive workplace culture.”

Despite teachers recognizing its importance, students appeared to underestimate it:

- Student 1: “As a Business Administration student, I believe that dedicating an entire subject to Communication Skills is not the most effective use of academic resources...”
- Student 2: “Honestly, I don’t see why we even need a whole subject just for communication...”
- Student 3: “Let’s be real, half of us are just sitting through those classes checking our phones...”

To address this gap in perception, we embedded elements of the Communication Skills syllabus into language classes. Teachers continued observing the students’ behavior and engagement.

4. Results

The analysis of observational and self-reported data yielded several significant findings:

1. Patient Rapport Difficulties: Approximately 90% of the 90 students who had not previously studied Communication Skills demonstrated noticeable difficulty in building rapport with patients.
2. Poor Role-Play Performance: Around 74% of these students underperformed in simulated clinical role-plays.
3. Progress After Instruction: Once enrolled in Communication Skills courses, these students gradually began to exhibit improved verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.
4. Student Reflections: Upon completion, 47 students completed self-evaluation forms, highlighting their initial lack of awareness and subsequent growth.

Selected reflections include:

- Student A: “...Communication isn’t just about talking—it’s about how you make your patients feel...”
- Student B: “...I now feel prepared. It changed the way I see patients—not as cases, but as people.”
- Student C: “...These aren’t things you can just "pick up" by watching others—they need to be practiced...”

Curricular Recommendations:

- Emphasize both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Include structured rapport-building techniques.
- Teach bad news delivery using protocols like SPIKES.
- Incorporate empathy and patient management strategies.
- Address legal and ethical communication standards.
- Integrate cultural competence modules.

For Business Administration students, role-play revealed significant weaknesses in non-verbal cues and cross-cultural awareness. After a Task-Based Learning activity (Tamila, 2023), students demonstrated a deeper appreciation for communication:

- Student 1: "...Good communication helps you avoid misunderstandings, build trust..."
- Student B: "...Effective communication isn't just about exchanging information—it's about clearly conveying ideas..."

5. Conclusion

Teaching communication skills as a core subject is vital in both medicine and business. It enhances interpersonal effectiveness, strengthens professional identity, and supports better outcomes. For doctors, it builds trust and differentiates them from automated systems. For students and institutions, it fosters competency and improves reputations.

In business, effective communication enables leadership, collaboration, and decision-making. It supports relationship-building with clients and teams. Ultimately, communication skills form the foundation for professional success across disciplines.

By recognizing and embedding these skills early in education, institutions can prepare students to meet the demands of modern, interconnected workplaces with confidence and compassion.

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