



EMPATHY AND EFFICIENCY: EXPLORING THE DUAL IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING IN HEALTHCARE

Anas Alhur^{1*}, Afrah Alhur², Tahani alahmadi³, Awatif alhojori⁴, Badi Alahmadi⁵, Najood Almadi⁶, Reem alahmadi⁷, Amnah Gmash⁸, Waleed Sharifi⁹, Norah alkybariy¹⁰, Reem hajori¹¹, Jazi omiran¹², turkey Al enazi¹³, Saud alzaidi¹⁴, Melah Alarishi¹⁵, Abdulaziz AlRuwaili¹⁶, Amna Harmosh¹⁷, Maithem AL Lwayf¹⁸, Abdullah Alasmari¹⁹, Mohammad Alkwikbi²⁰, Zahra Al darweesh²¹, Ola Al shawkani²²

^{1*}College of Public Health and Health Informatics, University of Hail, KSA
Anas.ali.alhur@gmail.com

²University of Hail, Afrahalhur@gmail.com

³King Fahad hospital, Talahmadei@moh.gov.sa

⁴King fahad hospital/ kidney center, Aalhojori@moh.gov.sa

⁵King fahad hospital, Badiaa@moh.com

⁶Tayma General Hospital, naltaymani@moh.gov.sa

⁷Maternity and children hospital, realahmadi@moh.gov.sa

⁸Jazan Health Cluster, mooney1526@gmail.com

⁹Sharurah General Hospital, WSharifi@moh.gov.sa

¹⁰Jazan Health Cluster, norkib11@gmail.com

¹¹Jazan Health cluster, mrmajerd97@gmail.com

¹²East Jeddah Hospital, jomiran@moh.gov.sa

¹³Ministry of Health Specialized Dental Center in Qurayyat, trky1722@gmail.com

¹⁴taif diabetic center in taif cluster, salzaidi1@moh.gov.sa

¹⁵Jazan Health Cluster, M_looo@hotmail.com

¹⁶Qurayyat Mental Health Hospital, Abdulaziz1983r@gmail.com

¹⁷Madinah cardiac patient, Harmosh45@gmail.com

¹⁸Medical Dammam complex, maithem1401@gmail.com

¹⁹Imam Abdurhman Alfisal, abalalasmari@moh.gov.sa

²⁰Al Matar Medical Centre, maalkowikbi@moh.gov.sa

²¹Taiba dispensary, zaldrweesh@moh.gov.sa

²²Jazan Health Cluster, ola9900@hotmail.com

***Corresponding Author:** Anas Alhur

*College of Public Health and Health Informatics, University of Hail, KSA,
Anas.ali.alhur@gmail.com

Abstract:

This systematic literature review investigates the dual impact of communication skills training on empathy and efficiency within healthcare settings. The review synthesizes empirical studies and systematic reviews from databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Findings indicate that training healthcare providers in empathic communication significantly enhances patient satisfaction and care outcomes, whereas training in efficient communication

improves the quality and speed of healthcare delivery. Methodologically rigorous studies suggest that empathy is a critical component of patient-centered care and should be a focal point in healthcare professional development. Enhanced efficiency in communication protocols like SBAR is shown to optimize healthcare operations, emphasizing the need for integrated training in healthcare curricula. This review demonstrates the indispensability of communication skills training in healthcare, enhancing empathetic provider-patient interactions and improving service efficiency.

Keywords: Communication Skills Training, Empathy in Healthcare, Healthcare Efficiency, Patient-Centered Care, Systematic Literature Review, Healthcare Professional Development, Empathic Communication, SBAR Protocol, Healthcare Operations.

Introduction

Healthcare providers' communication skills greatly influence the effectiveness of healthcare delivery. In recent years, healthcare systems globally have increasingly focused on patient-centered care, prompting a significant shift toward improving the empathy and efficiency of healthcare professionals through specialized training [1]. This shift recognizes that effective communication involves exchanging information and establishing meaningful connections with patients, which can greatly impact clinical outcomes [2].

Empathy, a fundamental component of patient-centered care, is essential for understanding patients' experiences, concerns, and needs. Training programs that emphasize empathy aim to enhance the emotional and psychological support provided to patients and improve their overall satisfaction and care outcomes [3]. Conversely, efficient communication helps streamline healthcare operations, minimizing the likelihood of errors and boosting the effectiveness of care delivery.

This literature review explores the dual impact of communication skills training on empathy and efficiency within healthcare settings. It examines how these two critical aspects of communication affect patient outcomes and healthcare processes, and how they contribute to advancing medical practice. By analyzing various empirical studies and systematic reviews, this review highlights key trends, results, and potential areas for future research in empathic and efficient communication training.

Methodology

Study Design and Objectives:

This research adopts a systematic literature review methodology to explore the dual impact of communication skills training on empathy and efficiency in healthcare. The study aims to understand how communication training enhances healthcare providers' empathetic engagement with patients and simultaneously optimizes the operational efficiency of healthcare services.

Data Sources and Search Strategy:

A thorough search was conducted across several academic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar, to gather a broad spectrum of literature on communication skills training in healthcare. The search strategy included targeted keywords such as "communication skills training," "healthcare efficiency," "patient empathy," "healthcare outcomes," and "effective communication in healthcare." These terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search results and capture relevant studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies published in English that examine the effects of communication skills training in healthcare settings, particularly regarding empathy and efficiency. Exclusion criteria ruled out non-peer-reviewed articles, anecdotal evidence without empirical support, and studies that did not directly address communication training's impact on healthcare.

Data Extraction and Synthesis:

Data were meticulously extracted from each selected article, including details like authors, year of publication, study design, participant demographics, key findings, and conclusions. A thematic analysis was performed to identify and integrate common themes and patterns across the studies, especially those highlighting the benefits of communication skills training on improving empathy and efficiency in healthcare.

Quality Assessment:

The quality of the included studies was evaluated based on criteria such as methodological rigor, sample size, relevance to the research questions, and the impact factor of the journals where the studies were published. This evaluation helped identify potential biases and ensured the reliability and validity of the review findings.

Analysis:

A comparative analysis was conducted to assess consistencies and discrepancies among the study findings. This analysis took into account various contextual factors, including the type of healthcare settings, the specific disciplines involved, geographic locations, and the influence of external factors such as technological advancements or regulatory changes.

Ethical Considerations:

Although direct ethical approval was not necessary for a literature review, ethical standards concerning the responsible use of published data, respect for original works, and plagiarism prevention were rigorously maintained throughout the review process. This approach ensured integrity and respect for the intellectual property of the original authors while compiling and synthesizing the research findings.

Results and Discussion

Empathy Training and Patient Outcomes in Healthcare

Empathy training is increasingly recognized as a pivotal element in enhancing patient care. Research has consistently demonstrated that improving empathic communication among healthcare providers boosts patient satisfaction and substantially improves treatment outcomes as seen in (Table 1).

A study by Smith et al. (2020) examined the impact of empathic communication on patient health outcomes, revealing the effectiveness of training programs designed to bolster the empathy skills of healthcare practitioners. This research noted significant enhancements in patient-centered care outcomes [4]. Similarly, a systematic review by Patel et al. (2019) affirmed that curricula aimed at developing physician empathy and compassion positively affected at least one patient care outcome measure, highlighting the crucial role of empathy in medical education [5].

Further underscoring the importance of empathy in healthcare, a systematic review of randomized controlled trials by Kiosses et al. (2016) identified a strong correlation between the empathy levels of health professionals and various patient outcomes, indicating that empathy is a critical focus area in health professional training [6]. Howick et al. (2017) investigated the effects of altering practitioner empathy and patient expectations during consultations. Their findings showed significant improvements in patient outcomes when these elements were effectively managed, advocating for the integration of empathy training in clinical settings [7].

Moreover, Paulus and Meinken's 2022 meta-analysis provided additional support for the effectiveness of empathy training, demonstrating that such initiatives reliably enhance empathy among healthcare professionals, which in turn leads to better patient outcomes [8]. A study by Winter et al. (2022) reviewed both personal and patient experiences with empathy training, reinforcing the need for

ongoing empathy education as a foundational component of healthcare training, due to its substantial impact on improving the quality of patient care [9].

Efficiency in Healthcare Communication

Efficient communication in healthcare is fundamental to the quality of patient care. Recent research underscores the necessity of training healthcare providers in communication skills to augment both the quality and promptness of healthcare services.

Iversen et al. (2021) investigated how communication training might lead to more patient-focused and timely consultations. Their research indicated that comprehensive communication training programs could substantially improve the quality and efficacy of healthcare interactions, supporting the view that enhanced communication is key to more effective patient care [10].

Boissy et al. (2016) found that communication skills training not only boosts patient and provider satisfaction but also increases operational efficiency. Their findings spotlight the advantages of structured communication training in cultivating relationship-centered healthcare communication, thereby contributing to more effective and efficient patient care [11].

Daniels et al. (2017) examined the role of simulation training in labor and delivery settings in promoting efficient communication. They suggested that well-organized communication and dynamic visual tools could greatly improve the efficiency of care in such intense environments [12]. In a review, Buljac-Samardzic et al. (2020) identified a link between communication training and improved efficiency and safety within healthcare teams, highlighting the essential nature of effective communication for optimal healthcare team performance [13].

Aaronson et al. (2019) assessed a multidisciplinary training initiative for emergency department staff, emphasizing the value of communication training in enhancing care quality and delivery efficiency, especially in high-stakes environments where efficiency is critical [14]. Also, Weaver et al. (2014) explored the impact of team training on communication, coordination, and collaboration in healthcare, noting that effective training leads to more efficient clinical processes and better overall care [15].

Mauksch et al. (2008) formulated a clinical model based on the intersection of relationship, communication, and efficiency, positing that efficient communication is essential for optimal healthcare delivery and patient care enhancement [16]. Moreover, Vermeir, et al. (2015) provided a narrative review of communication in healthcare, offering practical advice for training initiatives. They confirmed the crucial role of efficient communication in healthcare and offered strategies for bolstering communication training across various settings [17].

Lastly, Benwell et al. (2016) assessed the impact of training on digital healthcare tools, particularly on digital record-keeping. Their results indicated that structured training in digital tools significantly improves healthcare delivery efficiency and quality [18].

Collectively, these studies reinforce the indispensable role of communication training in improving the efficiency of healthcare delivery, suggesting that well-structured training programs are key to optimizing patient outcomes and the operational efficiency of healthcare systems.

Combined Impact on Healthcare Systems

The integration of communication skills training in healthcare has demonstrated significant benefits not only at the individual level but also across entire healthcare systems. Studies indicate that such training can enhance the quality of care, improve patient outcomes, and lead to more efficient healthcare delivery.

Yao et al. (2021) undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis to scrutinize the influence of healthcare professionals' communication training on chronic disease management, such as diabetes and hypertension. The study evidenced enhanced clinical outcomes, signaling the systemic advantages of proficient communication training [19]. Additionally, Garzonis et al. (2015) evaluated the efficacy of training healthcare staff in psychological practice. The outcomes suggest that reinforcing communication abilities within taxed healthcare systems could ameliorate patient outcomes, notably in the realm of psychological health, underscoring the imperative of adept communication in intricate healthcare environments [20].

Selman et al. (2017) investigated the effectiveness of communication skills training for end-of-life care. Their systematic review disclosed that well-crafted communication training could refine clinician behavior and appreciably ameliorate patient-reported outcomes, thus providing fundamental benefits to the healthcare system [21].

Drossman et al. (2021) examined research findings to offer recommendations on improving patient-provider rapport through better communication skills. This aspect is fundamental to patient satisfaction and the efficacy of healthcare delivery, highlighting the vital role of trust-building communication within healthcare practices [22]. Ammentorp et al. (2021) explored the impact of widespread communication skills training across healthcare systems. Their study concluded that the broad application of such training could augment the overall caliber of healthcare delivery and patient contentment [23]. Furthermore, an additional investigation by Ammentorp and associates (2022) articulated the practical application of communication skills training. They emphasized the discrepancy between existing practices and the prospective enhancements systematic training could introduce, accentuating the need for persistent development in this sector [24].

Fukui et al. (2009) implemented a randomized study to determine the impact of communication training on nurses' capacity to discern patient distress post-cancer diagnosis. Although the training did not notably alter detection skills, it influenced the manner in which nurses communicated and managed patient distress, thereby affecting the quality of patient care [25].

Merckaert et al. (2008) probed whether communication training could improve physicians' detection of distress in cancer patients and their kin. Results were variable but indicated some improvement, which could lead to better patient management and advantages for the healthcare system at large [26].

Granholm et al. (2014) melded cognitive behavior therapy with social skills training, revealing advancements in functionality and the mitigation of negative symptoms among schizophrenia patients. This reflects the extensive impact of communication training in psychiatric settings, demonstrating its vast potential to refine therapeutic outcomes [27].

Many studies collectively illustrate that communication skills training in healthcare benefits individual patient-clinician interactions and enhances healthcare systems' overall functionality and effectiveness [28-38]. Implementing such training programs can substantially improve healthcare delivery and patient care across various medical disciplines.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Evidence on the Impact of Communication Skills Training in Healthcare

Study Reference	Main Finding
Smith et al. (2020) [4]	Training programs enhancing empathy skills lead to improved patient-centered care outcomes.
Patel et al. (2019) [5]	Empathy and compassion-focused curricula positively influence patient care outcome measures.

Kiosses et al. (2016) [6]	A significant correlation between health professionals' empathy levels and patient outcomes.
Howick et al. (2017) [7]	Modifying practitioner empathy and patient expectations during consultations results in better patient outcomes.
Paulus & Meinken (2022) [8]	Empathy training increases empathy among healthcare professionals, improving patient outcomes.
Winter et al. (2022) [9]	Empathy training is a foundational element of healthcare education that enhances patient care quality.
Iversen et al. (2021) [10]	Communication training programs improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare interactions.
Boissy et al. (2016) [11]	Communication skills training improves patient and provider satisfaction and operational efficiency.
Daniels et al. (2017) [12]	Simulation training in labor and delivery enhances communication efficiency.
Buljac-Samardzic et al. (2020) [13]	Communication training correlates with improved healthcare efficiency and safety.
Aaronson et al. (2019) [14]	Comprehensive communication training in emergency departments is crucial for care quality and efficiency.
Weaver et al. (2014) [15]	Team training in healthcare improves communication and leads to more efficient clinical processes.
Mauksch et al. (2008) [16]	A clinical model indicating efficient communication is vital for optimal healthcare delivery.
Vermeir et al. (2015) [17]	Efficient communication in healthcare is improved through structured training programs.
Benwell et al. (2016) [18]	Training in digital healthcare tools, especially in digital record-keeping, improves efficiency and quality.
Yao et al. (2021) [19]	Communication skills training in chronic disease management improves clinical outcomes.
Garzonis et al. (2015) [20]	Training healthcare staff in psychological skills enhances communication and patient outcomes in mental health.
Selman et al. (2017) [21]	EoLC communication skills training enhances clinician behaviors and patient-reported outcomes.
Drossman et al. (2021) [22]	Enhanced communication skills improve the patient-provider relationship and healthcare delivery.
Ammentorp et al. (2021) [23]	Large-scale communication skills training improves healthcare quality and patient satisfaction.
Fukui et al. (2009) [25]	Communication training affects how nurses manage patient distress after cancer diagnosis.
Merckaert et al. (2008) [26]	Communication training may improve detection of distress in cancer patients by physicians.
Granholtm et al. (2014) [27]	Cognitive behavior therapy combined with social skills training improves outcomes in schizophrenia.

Conclusion

The systematic literature review undertaken in this study provides a comprehensive examination of the dual impact of communication skills training in healthcare, focusing on enhancing empathy and improving efficiency. The findings from multiple peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies reveal that effective communication training not only strengthens the empathetic capabilities of healthcare providers but also streamlines operations, leading to better patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare delivery.

Empathy, an essential component of patient-centered care, is significantly improved through targeted communication skills training. Such training equips healthcare professionals with the necessary tools to understand better and respond to patient needs, fostering deeper patient-provider relationships. This enhanced empathy improves patient satisfaction and contributes to more accurate diagnoses and effective treatment plans.

On the efficiency front, the research indicates that communication skills training minimizes misunderstandings and reduces errors, thereby enhancing the operational aspects of healthcare

delivery. Efficient communication protocols like SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation) are shown to be effective in optimizing time management and resource use across healthcare settings, which is critical in high-stakes environments. Moreover, the thematic synthesis of the collected data underscores a consistent theme: integrating communication skills training into healthcare curricula and continuous professional development is crucial. It addresses the immediate needs of patient care and serves as a strategic approach to cope with the evolving challenges in healthcare systems, such as managing large patient loads, dealing with complex health issues, and navigating technological advancements.

In conclusion, this literature review confirms that communication skills training in healthcare is indispensable. It significantly enhances empathetic interactions between patients and healthcare providers while improving healthcare services' efficiency. The implications of these findings suggest that healthcare institutions should prioritize and continually support the development of communication skills to foster a more effective and compassionate healthcare system. Further research could explore innovative training methods and assess their long-term impact on both healthcare professionals and patient care. This would sustain the gains already observed and adapt to the dynamic nature of healthcare demands and patient expectations.

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