

Original article

UDK 378.14.015.62

DOI: 10.25688/2076-9121.2024.18.2.13

ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS
OF FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS¹*Ekaterina I. Krasheninnikova*¹ ✉, *Oleg D. Nikitin*²,
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Abstract. The article presents a study on the problem of developing communication skills among first- and second-year medical students. Communicative competence is an integral component of the general professional competence of every physician. Communication and interpersonal skills of doctors ensure their ability to collect relevant information from patients, make a correct diagnosis, draw up a therapeutic plan and establish proper mutual understanding between a patient and a physician. When developing communicative competence, it is necessary to take into account the interdisciplinary approach, continuity and sequence in the curriculum, and to simulate real situations starting from first year of study. Under present-day conditions the level of development of communication skills of future students is not taken into account when entering medical departments. Moreover, the disciplines studied during the first and second years and aimed at developing communicative competence are mainly theoretical. The purpose of this study was to identify the communicative inclinations of the first- and second-year medical students of Ulyanovsk State University. We used the adapted test questionnaire Communicative and Organizational Abilities by V. V. Sinyavsky and B. A. Fedorishin. Students were asked to anonymously answer 20 questions to determine their level of communication skills. The analysis of the data obtained shows that almost half of the respondents demonstrated medium, low and very low levels of communicative abilities. This fact indicates the need to train medical students interpersonal communication skills in order to develop their readiness for professional interaction.

Keywords: communicative competence, communicative inclinations, medical students, level of communicative inclinations, doctor-patient relationship.

¹ Статья публикуется в авторской редакции.

Научно-исследовательская статья

УДК 378.14.015.62

DOI: 10.25688/2076-9121.2024.18.2.13

ОЦЕНКА КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ НАВЫКОВ СТУДЕНТОВ 1–2-ГО КУРСОВ МЕДИЦИНСКОГО ФАКУЛЬТЕТА

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Аннотация. В статье представлено исследование по проблеме сформированности коммуникативной компетенции у студентов 1–2-го курсов медицинского факультета. Коммуникативная компетенция является неотъемлемой составляющей общей профессиональной компетентности каждого врача. Коммуникативные и межличностные навыки врачей обеспечивают способность собирать правильную информацию от пациентов, помогать им в постановке диагноза, составлении терапевтического плана и установлении надлежащего взаимопонимания между пациентом и врачом. При формировании коммуникативной компетенции необходимо учитывать междисциплинарный подход, преемственность дисциплин учебного плана, необходимость моделирования реальных ситуаций, начиная с первых курсов обучения, поскольку при поступлении на медицинские специальности уровень сформированности коммуникативных навыков будущих студентов никак не учитывается. Дисциплины, изучаемые на 1–2-м курсах и направленные на формирование коммуникативной компетенции, носят в основном теоретический характер. Целью нашего исследования было выявление коммуникативных склонностей студентов 1–2-го курсов медицинского факультета Ульяновского государственного университета. Мы использовали адаптированный тест-опросник «Коммуникативные и организаторские склонности (КОС-2)» авторов В. В. Синявского, Б. А. Федоришина. Студентам для определения уровня коммуникативных склонностей предлагалось анонимно ответить на 20 вопросов. Анализ полученных данных показывает, что почти половина опрошенных студентов проявили коммуникативные склонности на уровне среднего и ниже, что свидетельствует о необходимости тщательной организации подготовки навыков межличностного общения с целью формирования готовности студентов-медиков к профессиональному взаимодействию.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная компетенция, коммуникативные склонности, студенты-медики, уровень коммуникативной склонности, взаимоотношения «врач – пациент»

For citation: Krasheninnikova, E. I., Nikitin, O. D., & Minekeeva, T. S. (2024). Assessment of communication skills of first- and second-year medical students. *MCU Journal of Pedagogy and Psychology*, 18(2), 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.25688/2076-9121.2024.18.2.13>

Для цитирования: Крашенинникова, Е. И., Никитин, О. Д., и Минекеева, Т. С. (2024). Оценка коммуникативных навыков студентов 1–2-го курсов медицинского факультета. *Вестник МГПУ. Серия «Педагогика и психология»*, 18(2), 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.25688/2076-9121.2024.18.2.13>

Introduction

The healthcare system is currently undergoing major changes. A patient-centered approach gradually becomes more and more popular among physicians. Thus, it is required to design a new model of a medical student. The Federal State Educational Standard for Higher Education (FSES HE), specialty 31.05.01 General Medicine, assigns requirements for the results of mastering the specialty program and establishes 10 groups of universal competencies that a graduate must possess. Communication and intercultural interaction hold a special place. FSES HE² outlines the following transferable competences (TC) as TC-4 *Ability to apply modern communication technologies, including in a foreign language(s), for academic and professional interaction* and TC-5 *Ability to analyze and take into account the diversity of cultures in the process of intercultural interaction* (FSES HE, 2020).

The majority of researchers pay much attention to the professional competences and their development (Zhukova, & Lyapina, 2023). Still, it is known that the profession of a physician belongs to a human-human type. Professions of this type demand such employee qualities as the ability to establish and maintain contacts with people, understand people, influence others, and so on. Representatives of such professions should be empathetic, patient, delicate, tactful, and polite. Moreover, it is necessary for them to become proficient in the art of communication. Therefore, a modern doctor needs to master soft skills, which may include communication, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and creativity. It should be noted that in our country the problem of developing the above-mentioned competencies in doctors was raised only several years ago. Thus, in 2023, the Russian Research Institute of Health released a manual devoted to population health literacy assessment. The Research Institute of the Ministry of Health gave doctors various recommendations on communicating with patients. These recommendations were aimed at improving the medical literacy of the population in our country. The authors of the manual highlighted the doctor's ability to speak with patients in a clear language without using any medical jargon. The doctors should be ready to explain in detail all problems that arise in the course of treatment, answer all the patient's questions and make sure that complete mutual understanding has been achieved during the appointment (Shlegova et al., 2023).

Obviously, to achieve these goals, the doctor needs to have well-developed communication skills. It is desirable for a medical professional to know at least

² See: https://fgosvo.ru/uploadfiles/FGOS%20VO%203++/Spec/310501_C_3_01092020.pdf

one foreign language besides Russian. Preferably, they should speak English as it is the language of medicine of the 21st century as Latin and Greek were in ancient times. Besides, English remains the language of intercultural communication and its knowledge will enable doctors to communicate with foreign patients whose number in our country is constantly increasing.

Communicative competence can be defined in various ways. According to V. N. Kunitsina, it is the possession of complex communication skills and abilities; formation of adequate skills in new social structures; knowledge of cultural norms and restrictions in communication; knowledge of customs, traditions, and etiquette in the field of communication; decency and good manners; knowledge of communicative means peculiar to the national or class mentality and expressed within the framework of a certain profession (Kunitsina, Kazarinova, & Pogol'sha, 2001). E. A. Bystrova states that communicative competence is the ability and real readiness to communicate in strict accordance to the goals and areas of communication, readiness for verbal interaction and mutual understanding (Litvinko, 2009).

A. N. Leontyev understands communicative competence as a set of communicative skills, namely: social perception, understanding others, effective composing of speech from the psychological point of view, verbal and non-verbal contact with other people (Zakharova et al., 2015).

In the medical field, communication skills cover both verbal and non-verbal methods of communication in certain treatment settings: doctor-patient, doctor-patient's relative, doctor-medical staff, etc. All these patterns constitute professional medical communication.

When entering the medical department, most universities require the Unified State Exam in Chemistry, Biology and the Russian language. Obviously, these exams are aimed at testing the cognitive skills of future applicants, but do not in any way assess their communication skills.

However, as it has already been mentioned communications skills are crucial for any physician. Studies show a direct relationship between a doctor's communication skills and patient satisfaction (Biglu et al., 2017). Physicians' communication and interpersonal skills ensure the ability to gather correct information from patients and assist them in making a diagnosis, provide appropriate counseling, provide a clear therapeutic plan, and establish proper patient-physician rapport (Ha, & Longnecker, 2010).

Materials and Methods

The purpose of our study was to identify the communicative inclinations of the first- and second-year students at the Department of Medicine, Ulyanovsk State University. We used the adapted test-questionnaire *Communicative and Organizational Inclinations* by V. V. Sinyavsky, B. A. Fedorishin (Sinyavskiy, & Fedorishin, 1985). Students were asked to answer 20 questions to determine their level of communication skills. Questions determining the level of organizational inclinations were excluded from the questionnaire test. The test was anonymous.

A total of 155 students aged 17 to 30 years took part in the survey (67 first-year students and 88 second-year students). The survey was conducted in November and December 2023. The age range was preconditioned by the fact that among first- and second-year medical students there are graduates of medical college, i. e. students with secondary vocational education, who enter the medical department every year.

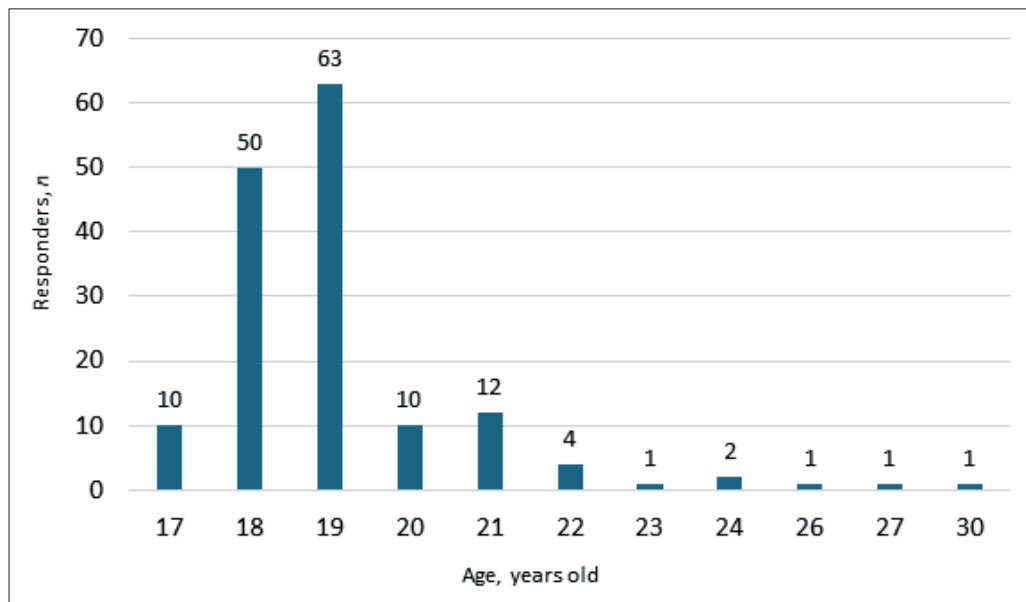


Fig. 1. Age range of the respondents (survey participants)

Рис. 1. Возрастной диапазон респондентов (участников опроса)

To analyze the data obtained we used methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis of results.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data obtained showed the following results: 13 students demonstrated a very low level of manifestation of communicative inclinations, 24 respondents showed low level of communication skills. Such people do not strive to communicate, they have difficulties while establishing contacts with people, and avoid making independent decisions.

The medium level of manifestation of communicative inclinations was noted in 47 respondents. However, according to the keys for processing data (*Communicative and Organizational Inclinations* methodology), the inclination potential of the respondents with the medium level is not stable. Thus, significant further work is required to form communication competence in this group of students.

It is gratifying to note that 43 students demonstrated a high level of manifestation of communicative inclinations, which indicates the desire of this group of students

to help relatives and friends, and show initiative in communication. The representatives of this group are able to make decisions in difficult, abnormal or unusual situations. The highest level of communicative inclinations was found in 28 respondents. Representatives of this group quickly navigate difficult and unpredictable situations, they are at ease in a new team, they are ready to take initiative and make independent decisions. Moreover, they defend their opinions and are confident in the decision-making process.

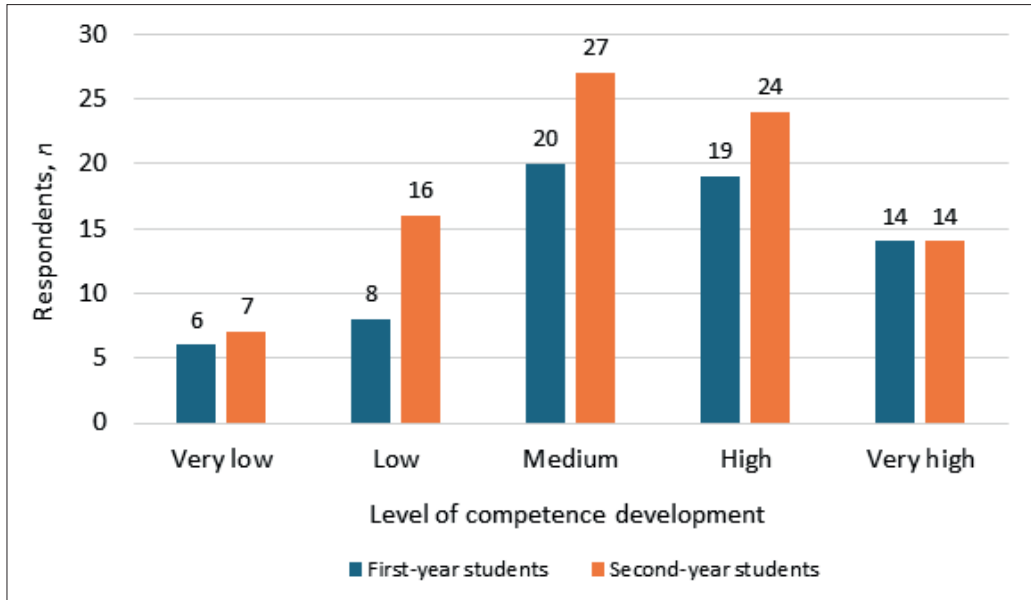


Fig. 2. Level of competence development among respondents

Рис. 2. Уровень развития компетенций у респондентов

Analysis of the data obtained shows that communicative inclinations of almost half of the first year students (50.9 %) who took part in the survey were at a medium, low or very low levels. Among second-year students, 56.9 % have similar indicators. The figures suggest that almost half of the medical students are not ready and are not eager to communicate. Still, communication is the main element of any physician's activity. Professional standards for doctors prescribe such work activities as history taking, including presenting complaints, past medical history, social history, family history, etc., providing a treatment plan and a patient-centered care. In this regard, many authors point out that the professionalism of a doctor directly depends on communication competencies (Madalieva, 2016; Chusovlyanova, 2009; Sakhno, 2021). The profession of a doctor has always been considered as one of the most noble, and the doctor's ability to show empathy for the patient has been an integral part of building trust-based relations between a doctor and a patient, which directly affects accurate diagnostics and successful treatment (Eby, 2018).

The curricula of the Medical Department of Ulyanovsk State University are built in accordance with the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Education. Academic program blocks are built logically, that ensure

consistent and continuous development of competencies, including communication ones. According to the curriculum, mastering of the communication skills should be carried out from the first year during such subjects as *Bioethics*, *Foreign languages*, *Nursing for therapeutic patients*, *Nursing for surgical patients*, *Junior medical staff assistant*. However, these disciplines provide mainly theoretical preparation for communication, rather than communication with real patients.

As we have already said, the profession of a doctor is of a human-human type, so it is associated with continuous communication. However, 91 students (58.7 %) responded that they found it more pleasant and easier to spend time with books or some other activity than with people. Another 78 respondents (50.3 %) noted that surrounding people irritate them, and they often want to be alone. Only 73 students (47.1 %) indicated that they liked to be in public all the time.

It should be noted that according to the data obtained, the age of the respondents does not affect their communication inclinations. Each age group included participants with both low and high levels of communication inclinations.

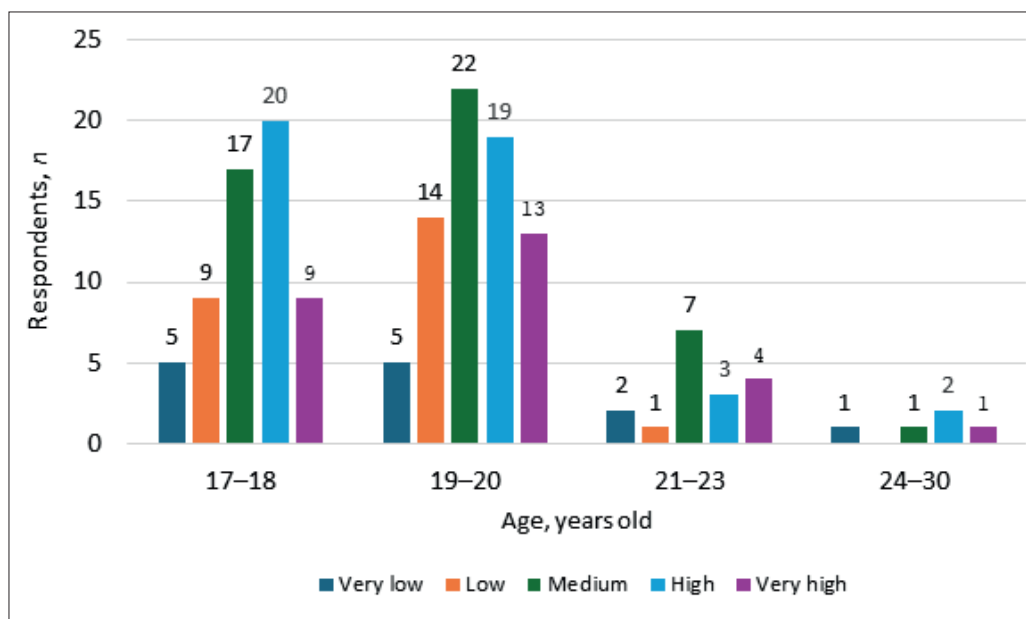


Fig. 3. Distribution of communicative inclinations by age

Рис. 3. Распределение коммуникативных склонностей по возрасту

Conclusion

The success of a doctor's professional activity is directly related to their communication competencies. However, just over half of the first- and second-year students at the Medical Department of Ulyanovsk State University demonstrate communicative abilities at the medium, low or very low levels. Consequently, ordinary

social experience is not enough for students to carry out successful communication. The university faces the task to organize the training of interpersonal communication skills in order to develop the readiness of a medical student for professional interaction.

Moreover, managers of medical institutions should regularly provide opportunities for their doctors to improve the communication skills.

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Статья поступила в редакцию: 21.12.2023; The article was submitted: 21.12.2023;
одобрена после рецензирования: 25.02.2024; approved after reviewing: 25.02.2024;
принята к публикации: 15.03.2024. accepted for publication: 15.03.2024.

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Вклад авторов: все авторы сделали эквивалентный вклад в подготовку публикации. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Contribution of the authors: all authors have made an equivalent contribution to the preparation of the publication. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.