

## The Communication Skills of Healthcare Professionals as Opposed to Those Working Outside The Healthcare Sector

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<b>ABSTRACT</b>	
<p><b>Corresponding Author</b> Çiğdem KESKİN</p> <p><b>DOI</b> <a href="https://10.48121/jihsam.1565325">https://10.48121/jihsam.1565325</a></p> <p><b>Received</b> 11.10.2024</p> <p><b>Accepted</b> 26.10.2024</p> <p><b>Published Online</b> 31.10.2024</p> <p><b>Key Words</b> Communication, Communication skill, Healthcare workers, Secretary</p> <p><i>This study was presented as an abstract at the 7th International Health Sciences and Management Conference Istanbul, Turkey on 16-19 June 2022</i></p>	<p><i>Communication is an inevitable method of interaction that exists wherever humans are present. Communication skills are not innate abilities; rather, they are skills that can be learned and developed. Healthcare workers use mutual communication more frequently compared to employees in other sectors. Therefore, this study was conducted to compare the communication skills of secretaries working in the healthcare sector with those working outside of the healthcare sector in Kayseri. The data collection tools used in the study were a demographic information form and the Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS), developed by Korkut (1996a, 1997). Data were collected from 375 secretaries who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The data were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 program. While no significant differences related to demographic characteristics were found, significant differences were detected in communication skill scores. It is anticipated that this study will raise awareness in the existing literature and that conducting similar studies in different institutions and sectors will help to address communication deficiencies at an institutional level by assessing the results separately.</i></p>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is among the elements that enable people to adapt to the environment. Relationships between people occur through communication. Different definitions of communication have been made from the past to the present. Communication is a multi-channel process that provides understanding through sharing feelings, thoughts, and information between people. Communication is not a personal skill but a series of techniques that can be learned. Communication is inevitable and critical at every moment of our lives. It is possible to talk about four primary functions of communication, which can be expressed as verbal or non-verbal information transfer. These are information, motivation, control, and excitement (Ateş et al ., 2018). All definitions of communication agree that it is an event carried out by people. Communication aims to create a commonality of information exchange, thought, feeling and attitude (Yüksel Şahin, 1999, p.13).

In addition to establishing good relationships between people through communication, effective communication is an effective tool for healthcare professionals in providing high-quality care. Effective communication is of immense importance in patients' decision-making processes. It is also possible to say that poor communication will increase patients' anxiety, make them feel more uncertain, and have adverse effects on satisfaction with care (Erişen, 2024, p.352).

The concept of communication is an inseparable part of our lives and is an inevitable action in every area where people are present. Communication is a vital action for social and personal relationships. When communication is not adequate, problems may occur in the established relationships. People who communicate with each other need to have communication skills. It is possible to define communication skills as using non-verbal communication effectively, reflecting emotions, and using empathy effectively. Communicating feelings and thoughts effectively using body language refers to communication skills (Yüksel Şahin, 1999, p.14).

To ensure healthy communication, listening and responding effectively is necessary. Communication skills include listening, being understandable and clear while speaking, establishing eye contact, and using body language appropriately (Omolulu, 1984). Communication is a result of people living together, and it is necessary. People cannot live together without communicating. When people communicate, they aim to understand themselves, express themselves to others, and know and influence them.

People are the most vital resource of institutions, and employees' high level of communication skills enables institutions to provide higher quality services. This is particularly significant in sectors where one-to-one communication is prevalent, such as healthcare. The

unique challenges of the health sector, where traumatic situations are everyday, make effective communication even more critical. This research aims to not only shed light on the communication skills of those working in the health sector but also to underscore its practical importance and the need for further development.

Another purpose of communication is to ask for help from other people for needs that cannot be met alone, problems that cannot be solved, or behavior that cannot be performed (Tengilimoğlu & Öztürk, 2004). The purpose mentioned here is the best example of communication to be established in health institutions. Successes in communication skills affect institutions as well as individual gains. The employment of employees with successful and effective communication skills is of significant importance in the health sector.

Effective communication facilitates both human and professional relationships. High communication skills are also expected in sectors where people are frequently in contact. The health sector is at the forefront of these sectors. It is indisputable that communication is more important for employees working in the health sector, where traumatic situations are experienced more frequently.

For healthcare professionals, the communication concept covers the entire process from the moment patients apply to a healthcare institution until the end of the treatment process (Tabak, 1999). Every action, behaviour, and verbal or non-verbal attitude of healthcare professionals has a positive or negative effect on patients. Therefore, it is more important for healthcare professionals to have communication skills (Özcan, 2012).

Practical communication skills have a facilitating effect on communication established in every professional group, as well as communication established between people. As in every field, the health sector is also affected by today's developing and changing conditions and competitive environment. The health sector aims to increase the quality of the services it offers to keep up with the changes experienced and, therefore, attaches importance to the communication skills of its employees. Being a profession that involves closer communication with people shows that health workers should have high communication skills (Kumcağız et al., 2011, p.50). When communication skills are evaluated from the healthcare professionals' perspective, effective communication positively affects patient care. Healthcare providers should develop communication skills in problem-solving and helping (Gaskar & Özyazıcıoğlu, 2014, p.21).

In every area of life, we interact by shaping our behavior to be compatible with the environment and accepted by society. People have always lived in large groups by establishing solid and lasting relationships. Communication skills can be expressed as sensitivity to verbal or non-verbal messages, listening effectively and responding effectively. Gibson and Mitchell (1995)

insist on the definition of being sensitive and listening effectively to non-verbal messages. Just as communication skills are affected by many distinctive characteristics, cultures also affect skills and can change relationship patterns when desired. Although communication skills are thought to be innate, they can be learned and developed (Erozkan, 2005, p.135).

Secretaries are essential in the health sector, and those working in health services act as a bridge between patients, their relatives, and doctors. This study aims to contribute to health institutions by drawing attention to the importance of communication and communication skills among secretaries in the health sector because the people receiving health services need more attention and help. Although hospitals accept the whole society as their target audience, they are primarily interested in patients and their relatives. The fact that patients and their relatives are more prone to conflict and are stressed due to the traumatic situations they experience requires secretaries working in hospitals to work more carefully and devotedly. Since university hospitals, in particular, have more intense working conditions, employees providing secretarial services provide more tiring service delivery. The subject of secretaries working in hospitals is health. Health institutions that constantly receive feedback from patients who have received health services and evaluate this feedback are advantageous in achieving efficiency, effectiveness, and quality. With this understanding, secretaries systematically collect and evaluate this data to direct hospital work using patients' suggestions, complaints and thanks. Here, the communication skills of secretaries are essential.

This research aims to compare the communication skills of secretaries working in the health sector and those working outside the health sector and to determine whether there are differences between the sectors. The study aims to emphasize the difference between working as a secretary in the health sector and working as a secretary in institutions that do not provide health services, to find ways to cope with the difficulty and to improve the successful communication skills of the secretaries who do not work in the health sector applicable to those who work in the health sector. It is thought that this success can be achieved with in-service training with the necessary experts on what can be done for this and that the study will also contribute to the scientific studies to be carried out later.

The study evaluated the communication skills of different sectors, determined whether communication skills differ according to socio-cultural characteristics, and compared the changes in location and place among the same professional groups. People are among the most critical resources in the health sector, and their communication skills affect the institution's quality. It is thought that the study's results will contribute to the service provided in the field if considered by the institutions.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study, which used quantitative research methods, has a cross-sectional nature. Data were collected by applying a survey to 175 people working in the health sector (secretaries working in Erciyes University Health Application and Research Center Directorate) between 05.04.2019 and 24.04.2019 and 200 people working outside the health sector (secretaries working in Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality, Melikgazi and Kocasinan Municipalities) between 19.03.2019 and 19.04.2019. Secretaries were preferred because they are the professionals in most contact with patients and their relatives in hospitals, especially university hospitals, which are third-level health institutions.

### Data Collection Tool

As data collection tools, a short "Personal Information Form" created to collect information about employees such as age, gender, profession, educational status, etc. and the Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CASS) developed by Korkut (1996a, 1997) were used. The questionnaire consists of 35 questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals and the Communication Skills Assessment (Communication Skills Inventory) Scale (CSA) is a 5-point Likert-type scale developed by Korkut (1996a, 1997) to understand how individuals evaluate their communication skills. The scale consists of 25 (twenty-five) statements. The 5-point Likert-type scale is scored as 5-Always, 4-Frequently, 3-Sometimes, 2-Rarely, 1-Never. The validity and reliability of the scale were determined by Korkut (1996), and according to the results of the variance analysis, it was seen that the scale was one-dimensional. As a result of the reliability study, the reliability coefficient of the scale was obtained as 0.76 ( $p < .001$ ). The alpha value as the internal consistency coefficient was 0.80 ( $p < .001$ ). These validity and reliability studies conducted on the Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS) have shown that the scale can be used to collect data to determine the level of perception of individuals' communication skills (Korkut, 1996).

The ranges in which the alpha coefficient can be found and, accordingly, the reliability status of the scale is given below:

If  $0.00 \leq \alpha < 0.40$ , the scale is not reliable,

If  $0.40 \leq \alpha < 0.60$ , the scale has low reliability,

If  $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$ , the scale is quite reliable,

$0.80 \leq \alpha < 1, 00$ , the scale is highly reliable (Akgül & Çevik, 2003; pp. 435-436).

The Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS) was highly reliable in this study's sample group, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 91.3%.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive data are expressed in numbers and percentages. The histogram graph and QQ plot curve provide the condition of the quantitative data being

suitable for normal distribution. Therefore, the t-test and one-way ANOVA tests were performed in independent groups to analyze the scale score averages' differences.  $P < 0.05$  was accepted as statistically significant.

### 3. RESULTS

When the demographic characteristics of the 375 individuals who participated in the study were examined, the average age was 35.9 %. 59.7 % of the participants were women.

**Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the study group**

Feature	n	Municipality employees		ERU employees	
		Number	%	Number	%
<b>Age group</b>					
18-24	18	14	77.8	4	22.3
25-34	160	84	52.2	76	47.5
35-44	135	55	40.4	80	59.3
45 and above	62	54	87.1	8	12.9
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	151	108	71.5	43	28.5
Woman	224	99	44.2	125	55.8
<b>Marital status</b>					
Married	284	157	55.3	127	44.7
Single	80	45	56.3	35	43.8
Separated from spouse/deceased	11	5	45.5	6	54.5
<b>The school graduated from</b>					
Middle school	6	5	83.3	1	16.7
High school and equivalent	74	59	79.7	15	20.3
High school	295	143	48.5	152	51.5
<b>The situation of choosing the same profession</b>					
Yes	175	129	73.7	46	26.3
No	200	78	39.0	122	61.0
<b>The idea of doing business differently</b>					
Yes	108	54	50.0	54	50.0
No	267	153	57.3	114	42.7
<b>Year of work</b>					
0-4 years	53	36	67.9	17	32.1
5-9 years	76	49	64.5	27	35.5
10-14 years	108	37	34.3	71	65.7
15-19 years	72	31	43.1	41	56.9
20-24 years	30	23	76.7	7	23.3
25 years and above	36	31	86.1	5	13.9
<b>Total years of service</b>					
0-4 years	56	42	75.0	14	25.0
5-9 years	75	49	65.3	26	34.7
10-14 years	113	38	33.6	75	66.4
15-19 years	68	28	41.2	40	58.8
20-24 years	25	18	72.0	7	28.0
25 years and above	38	32	84.2	6	15.8
<b>Years of service in office</b>					
0-4 years	118	86	72.9	32	27.1
5-9 years	90	60	66.7	30	33.3
10-14 years	90	20	22.2	70	77.8
15-19 years	44	16	36.4	28	63.6
20-24 years	11	7	63.6	4	36.4

25 years and above	22	18	81.8	4	18.2
<b>Total</b>	375	207	55.2	168	44.8

When the participants' marital status is evaluated, most are married. In terms of education, the participants are mostly college graduates. Most participants answered no when asked about their thoughts on doing a different job.

The communication skills inventory scale score average of the individuals participating in the study was  $101.7 \pm 10.4$ , and Tables 2 and 3 compare the mean scores according to their descriptive characteristics.

**Table 2. Comparison of communication skills inventory scale mean scores according to the descriptive characteristics of the research group**

Feature	n	Mean $\pm$ SD	t	p
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	151	100.7 $\pm$ 11.8	1.36	0.175
Woman	224	102.3 $\pm$ 9.4		
<b>Institution</b>				
Council	207	102.2 $\pm$ 10.4	1.17	0.243
Erciyes University	168	100.9 $\pm$ 10.4		
<b>The situation of choosing the same profession</b>				
Yes	175	103.1 $\pm$ 10.3	2.69	<b>0.010</b>
No	200	100.4 $\pm$ 10.3		
<b>The idea of doing business differently</b>				
Yes	108	98.9 $\pm$ 10.5	3.20	<b>0.001</b>
No	267	102.7 $\pm$ 10.2		
<b>Total</b>	375	101.7 $\pm$ 10.4	-	-

Although communication skills scores were higher among female employees in the research group, no significant difference was found in communication skills score averages according to gender ( $p: 0.175$ ).

According to institutions, no significant difference was found between the mean scores of communication skills of secretaries working in the health sector and secretaries working in the municipality, which was the central question of the research ( $p: 0.243$ ).

A significant difference was found in the mean communication skills scores between those who said yes and those who said no to the question "If you had the chance to choose a profession again, would you choose the same profession again?" ( $p:0.010$ ). The

communication skills scores of those who wanted to choose the same profession were significantly higher than those who did not.

A significant difference was found in the communication skills mean scores between those who said yes and no to the question "Do you have any thoughts of leaving your current job and doing a different job?" ( $p:0.001$ ). The communication skills scores of those without thoughts of doing a different job are significantly higher than those who want to do it.

**Table 3. Comparison of mean scores of communication skills inventory scale among municipality and university employees by gender**

Organization	Gender	n	Mean $\pm$ SD	t	p
Council	Male	108	101.5 $\pm$ 11.2	1.03	0.302
	Woman	99	103.0 $\pm$ 9.6		
University	Male	43	98.8 $\pm$ 13.1	1.36	0.180
	Woman	125	101.7 $\pm$ 9.3		
<b>Total</b>		375	101.7 $\pm$ 10.4		

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the communication skills inventory scale among

municipality employees according to gender ( $p:0.302$ ), and there is no significant difference in the mean scores

among university employees according to gender (p:0.111).

**Table 4. Comparison of communication skills inventory scale mean scores among municipality and university employees according to whether they choose the same profession.**

Organization	Choosing the same profession	n	Mean ± SD	t	p
Council	Yes	129	103.7± 9.9	2.62	<b>0.009</b>
	No	78	99.8± 10.9		
University	Yes	46	101.6 ± 11.5	0.48	0.635
	No	121	100.8 ± 10.0		
<b>Total</b>		375	101.7 ± 10.4		

Among municipality employees who had the chance to choose a profession again, the mean scores for communication skills were significantly higher for those who stated that they would choose the same profession than those who stated that they would not (p:0.009). However, among university employees,

there was no significant difference in mean scores for communication skills between those who stated that they would choose the same profession and those who did not (p:0.635).

**Table 5. Comparison of the mean scores of the communication skills inventory scale among municipality and university employees according to their different job preferences.**

Organization	The idea of doing business differently	n	Mean ± SD	t	p
Council	Yes	54	98.8 ± 12.1	2.88	<b>0.004</b>
	No	152	103.4 ± 9.5		
University	Yes	54	99.2 ± 8.8	1.56	0.122
	No	113	101.9 ± 11.1		
<b>Total</b>		375	101.7 ± 10.4		

Among municipality employees, the mean scores for communication skills were significantly higher in those with a different job idea than those without (p:0.004). However, among university employees, there was no significant difference in mean scores in communication skills between those who had a different job idea and those who did not (p:0.122).

**Table 6. Comparison of communication skills inventory scale mean scores according to the descriptive characteristics of the research group**

Feature	n	Mean ± SD	F	p
<b>Age group</b>				
18-24	18	101.7 ± 9.3	0.83	0.480
25-34	160	100.7± 10.7		
35-44	135	102.3± 10.5		
45 and above	62	102.7± 9.6		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	284	102.1± 10.7	1.05	0.352
Single	80	100.4± 9.6		
Separated spouse/deceased	11	100.7 ± 9.8		
<b>The school graduated from</b>				
Middle school	6	102.0 ± 11.6	0.88	0.417

High school and equivalent	74	102.4 ± 10.9		
High school	297	101.0 ± 11.6		
<b>Years of work</b>				
0-9 years	129	101.5 ± 11.2	0.92	0.398
10-19 years	180	101.2 ± 10.0		
20 years and above	66	103.2 ± 9.9		
<b>Total years of service</b>				
0-9 years	131	101.8 ± 11.2	0.69	0.504
10-19 years	181	101.1 ± 10.0		
20 years and above	63	102.9 ± 9.9		
<b>Years of service in office</b>				
0-9 years	208	101.9 ± 10.2	0.94	0.393
10-19 years	134	100.8 ± 10.8		
20 years and above	33	103.2 ± 10.2		
<b>Total</b>	375	101.7 ± 10.4	-	-

When the communication skills scores were compared in the research group, no significant difference was found according to age, marital status, school graduated from, years of work, years of service and years of service in this position (p: 0.480, p: 0.352, p: 0.417, p: 0.398, p: 0.504 and p: 0.393, respectively).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings obtained, although female employees had higher communication skills scores, there was no statistically significant difference in communication skills score averages by gender. A review of the literature reveals similar findings consistent with our study results (Atasayı and Yıldız, 2018; Gencer Çelik, 2021; Duran and Albayrak, 2020). When communication skills scores were compared by age, marital status, school attended, years of work experience, years of service, and years in the current position, no significant differences were found. A review of the literature shows that some studies do not align with our findings, though years of work experience produced similar results (Karadağ et al., 2015; Duran and Albayrak, 2020). Atasayı and Yıldız (2018) similarly found no significant differences between age, marital status, total years of work experience, duration in the current position, and the total and sub-dimensions of the communication skills inventory, aligning with the results of our study. The primary research question found no significant difference in communication skills scores between secretaries working in the healthcare sector and those employed by municipalities, based on institutional score averages. Communication skills scores of those who wish to pursue the same profession were significantly higher than those who do not. Additionally, individuals with no intention of changing their occupation had significantly higher communication skills scores than those considering a different line of work. This finding can be explained by the fact that individuals who perform their work

willingly and with enjoyment tend to place greater importance on the demands of the job.

As a result of the study conducted by Gencer Çelik (2021), it was observed that healthcare workers have low communication skills. At the same time, differences in communication skills were detected according to demographic characteristics. Considering the importance of communication in the healthcare sector, importance should be given to its development. In the study, although the communication skills scores of female employees in the research group were higher, no significant difference was detected in the mean communication skills scores based on gender.

In a study conducted by Karadağ et al. (2015) involving physicians and nurses, it was found that academic title, total duration of employment within the institution, and overall job satisfaction had a significant effect on the communication skills of physicians, while educational level was a significant factor for nurses. Additionally, age and total years in the profession were significant factors for both groups. In contrast, our study found no significant difference in communication skills based on age, school attended, years of service, total years of service, or years of service in the current position.

Kumcağız et al. (2011) conducted a study examining communication skills in nurses. As a result, they emphasized that communication skills should be given more importance and underlined that they should be developed in healthcare professionals. Duran and Albayrak (2020) determined that healthcare professionals' communication skills were moderate. They also emphasized that they could be improved with training. Considering previous studies, the study aimed to compare communication skills between healthcare professionals and other sector employees. There are many studies on healthcare professionals and healthcare students, and it was observed that students receiving healthcare education had a high awareness of communication skills (Erigüç & Eriş, 2013; Elkin et al., 2016). According to the institutions, the study's main question was whether there was a significant difference

between the communication skills scores of secretaries working in the health sector and those working in the municipality. Conducting the study more comprehensively in the health sector will contribute to the literature due to the importance that should be given to communication.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Municipalities are among the institutions that are intertwined with the public. Secretaries working in municipalities are essential in terms of communication. They ensure effective and efficient functioning in internal and external relations. Secretaries need to have developed communication skills for the flow of information, relations with citizens, coordination, and a professional image. Similarly, secretaries working in the health sector directly contact patients and their relatives. Healthcare workers also need to have high communication skills and provide effective communication. As a result, it was found in this study that there was no difference in the communication skills of secretaries working in the health sector and secretaries working in other (municipalities). In addition, it was determined that there were similarities and differences in the demographic or professional characteristics of the secretaries working in both institutions. In this research group, no significant difference was found regarding communication skills scores according to gender in both institutions. In the research group, the communication skill scores of those who stated that they would choose the same profession were significantly higher than those who stated that they would not. However, when evaluated in terms of institutions, this difference was only present in municipality employees, while there was no significant difference in university hospital employees. Considering that the working conditions of the health sector are a challenging factor, it is necessary to support the motivation of employees, provide appropriate

conditions to prevent possible trauma situations, and give more importance to communication.

In the research group, there is a significant difference in communication skill scores among those who do not have a different idea of doing business and among those who do not have this idea. However, this difference is only in municipality employees, not university hospital employees. Different results in different sectors show that it affects people's thoughts. It is possible that the fact that health workers continue to work under challenging conditions does not negatively affect their thoughts.

No significant difference was found in the research group regarding communication scores according to age, marital status, educational status, working years, and total service years. As a result, it would be beneficial to continue this study among different institutions and evaluate the results separately for each institution to eliminate the communication problems on an institutional basis.

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## Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Ethics committee approval has been received for the study.

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