



Communication Skills of Generation Z Nursing Students in Establishing Nurse-Patient Relationships

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ABSTRACT: Now Gen Z is entering the nursing programs. It is known that communication is essential in the nursing profession, and it is the foundation of the relationship between the nurse and patient. The study aimed to determine the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students in establishing nurse-patient relationships. The study used a descriptive, cross-sectional research design. The participants of the study were five hundred seventy (N = 570) Gen Z nursing students from HEIs in the province of Batangas, Philippines, and one hundred twenty-eight (N = 128) clinical instructors directly supervising them during their RLEs. A two-part researcher-structured questionnaire was the tool for data collection. The tool consisted of 10 critical indicators for determining the communication skills of nursing students, such as active listening, compassion, cultural awareness, nonverbal communication, patient education, personal connection, presentation skills, trust, verbal communication, and written communication skills, and four standards of nurse-patient relationships, indicated in the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2020). Mean and independent t-test were used for data analysis. Results revealed that Gen Z excels at navigating digital technology, accepts individual differences, and has a sense of independence. Gen Z are respectful, transparent, diverse, and collaborative future healthcare practitioners. Gen Z nursing students asserted possessing very effective communication skills, whereas their clinical instructors rated them as only effective in establishing nurse-patient relationships. There were discernible variations in the assessments of communication skills and the effectiveness of establishing nurse-patient relationships between Gen Z nursing students and their clinical instructors. The study recommended that nursing programs should capitalize on Gen Z strengths by integrating technology-enhanced tools and platforms, optimize the achievement of learning outcomes by aligning clinical teaching strategies with the distinct learning styles of Gen Z nursing students, and incorporate training programs focused on improving advocacy skills, recognizing boundaries, and terminating nurse-patient relationships.

KEYWORDS: Communication skills, Generation Z (GenZ), Nursing, Nursing students, Nurse-Patient Relationships

INTRODUCTION

They have the ability to swipe before they can speak. Social media is a big part of their lives that they feel at ease interacting with and expressing themselves through it. Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, includes anyone born from 1997–2012¹⁻⁷. Gen Z has grown up with the internet and digital technology, which has a significant impact on their social communication skills⁸⁻⁹. Chicca & Shellenbarger¹⁰ examined several literatures and identified characteristics of Gen Z such as: high consumers of technology and cravers of the digital world; pragmatic, underdeveloped social and relationship skills; cautious and concerned with emotional, physical, and financial safety; individualistic; increased risk for isolation, anxiety, insecurity, and depression; lack of attention span; desiring convenience and immediacy; open-minded, diverse, comfortable with diversity; and sedentary activism.

Now Gen Z is entering the nursing programs. It is known that communication is essential in the nursing profession. According to Monteiro¹¹, communication with patients, doctors, and other healthcare professionals takes up a large portion of a nurse's working days. For healthcare providers to provide precise and compassionate patient care, strong communication skills are a necessity. Nursing communication skills involve the ability of nurses to write and talk clearly and convincingly when engaging with patients, families, doctors, and clinic personnel. Communication skills are required for nurses to work in teams and provide effective medical treatment. They provide information to patients about diagnosis, treatments, prevention, prognosis, and rehabilitation.



In healthcare, patients express their worries and concerns to help the nurse make an accurate diagnosis. Thus, the benefits of nurses having communication skills are essential. Sater-Wee¹², Smith¹³, and University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences¹⁴ agreed that when communicating with patients and other healthcare workers, nurses use a variety of communication methods, such as active listening, compassion, cultural awareness, nonverbal communication, patient education, personal connection, presentation skills, trust, verbal communication, and written communication skills. Lee et al.¹⁵ specified that generation Z finds it difficult to communicate with patients or medical staff face-to-face because they are accustomed to using mobile devices and social networking sites. Sherman¹⁶ confirmed that communication is incredibly challenging for generation Z nurses, while Serafin et al.¹⁷ agreed that communication skills are one of the most needed competencies of newly graduated generation Z nurses. Furthermore, the communication style of Generation Z is brief, casual, and preferably in text format. However, this does not entirely describe Generation Z's communication habits. Growing up in a digitally dominated society has developed a desire for human and in-person relationships among this generation. As a result, while texting is Gen Z's favorite digital mode of communication, in-person and face-to-face conversations are their preferred modes of communication¹⁸.

Communication is the foundation of the relationship between the nurse and patient. Patient-centered communication in the nurse-patient relationship is therapeutic. It promotes care methods that take into account the needs, concerns, and preferences of both patients and caregivers by enabling trust and mutual respect in the care process¹⁹. The nurse-patient relationship is vital to the delivery of care, and strengthening it to ensure trust and respect helps patients receive the best possible care²⁰. The nurse's role in the patient relationship is tailored to the patient's needs. Therefore, the nurse-patient relationship will be strengthened and the quality of treatment will increase if the patients' demands in clinical settings are defined and clarified adequately²¹.

The Nurse-Patient Relationship (NPR), according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing²², is an intentional, patient-centered, and goal-directed connection between a nurse and a patient. The goal of this relationship is to always meet the patient's health care needs. A nurse-patient relationship, regardless of the setting or length of the engagement, respects the patient's dignity, autonomy, and privacy while also allowing for the building of trust and respect. Allande-Cussó et al.²³ concluded in their study that to ensure that the relationship is established on equality and intimacy, bioethical norms and confidentiality must be present. To provide more specific direction to nurses regarding the establishment, limits, maintenance, and termination of the nurse-patient relationship, standards were articulated. There are four standards to the nurse-patient relationship namely: client-centered care, maintaining boundaries, therapeutic communication and protection from harm. A standard's principal aim is to specify the degree of performance required of nurses in their practice. The nurse collaborates with the client to ensure that all professional behaviors and activities meet the needs of the client. In nurse-client contact, the nurse is accountable and responsible for establishing and maintaining limits. The nurse builds, maintains, and terminates the nurse-client relationship using a variety of interpersonal skills and communication approaches. Additionally, the nurse ensures that abuse is avoided, stopped, and reported in order to protect the client from harm²⁴.

Although there are literatures regarding communication skills as well as nurse patient relationship, there is less information about communication skills of generation Z nursing students and nurses and how they interact with patients. By 2027, Gen Z will account for one third of the global workforce²⁵. The reliance on technology among Gen Z nurses may provide interpersonal competence issues²⁶. Given the difficult post-pandemic circumstances and the varying communication styles of generations as stated by Bacon²⁵, identifying generations Z's communication skills in the establishment of NPR may help educators successfully engage and mentor students and nurses.

Based on the aforementioned contexts, the study determined the communication skills of the Gen Z nursing students in establishing nurse-patient relationships. It generated answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the identified communication skills of Gen Z nursing students?
2. How effective are the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students in establishing nurse-patient relationships?
3. Is there a significant difference between the identified communication skills of Gen Z nursing students and the effectiveness of these skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships as assessed by the students and their clinical instructors?

METHODS

The study used a descriptive, cross-sectional research design. This design is considered most appropriate to answer the research questions about determining the communication skills and effectiveness of these skills in establishing nurse-patient



relationships. The researchers included all colleges and universities offering the Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) program in the province of Batangas, Philippines. This consisted of one (1) public and six (6) private Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

The participants of the study were five hundred seventy (N = 570) Gen Z students from these HEIs who are currently enrolled in the BSN program and one hundred twenty-eight (N = 128) clinical instructors directly supervising them during their Related Learning Experiences (RLEs). For these two groups of participants, the sample size was calculated based on the approximate number in each college of nursing through a stratified technique and was recruited using convenience sampling. Furthermore, the researchers identified the participants in the study using the following inclusion criteria:

For the students: (1) they are nursing students born in the years 1997 to 2012; (2) they are enrolled in the BSN program during the academic year 2023-2024 in the HEIs in Batangas province; (3) they are 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year nursing students who had RLEs for at least 3 months; (4) they have been assigned to provide direct care to patients and supervised by a clinical instructor during their RLEs; and (5) they have experience in communicating patient care to members of the health team such as doctors, nurses, and other health professionals. For the clinical instructors: (1) they are full-time and part-time clinical instructors at the college of nursing of the HEIs in Batangas province; and (2) they directly supervise Gen Z nursing students in RLEs. Participants not meeting all of these criteria are excluded from the study.

A two-part structured questionnaire was the tool for data collection. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers into two sets intended for Gen Z nursing students and clinical instructors. The first part of the questionnaire assessed the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students. It was developed based on most of the literature on the effective communication skills of nurses. These studies provided a conceptual framework that incorporates 10 critical indicators for determining the communication skills of nursing students, such as active listening, compassion, cultural awareness, nonverbal communication, patient education, personal connection, presentation skills, trust, verbal communication, and written communication skills. For this part of the questionnaire, which was composed of twelve (12) items, the Gen Z nursing students and the clinical instructors were asked to assess their communication skills using a four-point Likert scale of 4-always, 3-often, 2-sometimes, and 1-never. On the other hand, the second part of the questionnaire was composed of twenty (20) items based on the standards of nurse-patient relationships. The standards, as mentioned in the Nurses Association of New Brunswick ²⁴, covered four components: standard #1—client-centered care; standard #2—maintaining boundaries; standard #3—therapeutic communication; and standard #4—protection from harm. Five skills from each standard were carefully chosen to ensure the appropriateness of the items for students. Both Gen Z nursing students and clinical instructors were asked to determine whether the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students are effective in establishing NPR. A four-point Likert scale was used by the participants to answer this part, indicating 4 as very effective, 3 as effective, 2 as somewhat effective, and 1 as not effective. For the student's questionnaire, a profile indicating their sex at birth and year level were included.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire in collecting the data, content validation and a pilot test were performed. To confirm validity, the questionnaire was submitted to three (3) experts: a dean of a college of nursing and two senior clinical instructors directly supervising Gen Z nursing students in RLEs. They were asked to review if the items indicated in the questionnaire covered the key areas to ascertain the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students. The expert validators provided the researchers with their suggestions and approval of the questionnaire through a signed evaluation tool. Modifications based on their suggestions were made before the official pilot test. In terms of reliability, a test-retest method was applied to a pilot sample of fifteen (15) Gen Z nursing students and five (5) clinical instructors who are comparable to those who met the inclusion criteria on two separate occasions, with an interval of two weeks before actual data collection. The estimated Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.755 (acceptable) for the communication skills of generation Z nursing students' questionnaire and 0.929 (excellent) for the questionnaire on the effectiveness of Gen Z nursing students' communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationship. The questionnaire was made available electronically through a link and distributed in paper form to ensure complete retrieval of the data. For the students, a total of two hundred twelve (N = 212) answered electronically, and three hundred fifty-eight (N = 358) answered the paper form while for clinical instructors, fifty-seven (N = 57) and seventy-one (N = 71) respectively. The purpose of the study was stated and explicitly explained. Data collection was conducted from November 2023 to March 2024.

The data was tabulated, presented, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 software. Also, the researchers consulted with a statistician to verify the analysis of the results. Frequency and percentage distribution were utilized to determine the profile variables, while the mean was employed to measure the communication skills of



Gen Z nursing students and their effectiveness in establishing nurse-patient relationships. An independent t-test was used to compare the differences in responses between the identified communication skills of Gen Z nursing students and the effectiveness of the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students in establishing nurse-patient relationships as assessed by the two groups of participants. The findings of the study were presented and analyzed to generate the conclusions and implications of the study for nursing education and practice.

The researchers obtained an ethical approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) of the Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas with a reference number of RERC Code: A1-2023-383 dated October 2, 2023. A certificate of approval was also secured from the universities and colleges before proceeding with data collection. Enclosed in the letter submitted to these HEIs were the IRB approval certificate, the cover letter for the participants, and the informed consent. The cover letter and informed consent were likewise presented to the student participants and clinical instructors. They were asked to sign these documents to confirm their willingness to take part in the study. The researchers assigned numbers to the responses to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant's identity.

RESULTS

A total of five hundred seventy (N = 570) Gen Z nursing students participated in the study.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of the Profile of Gen Z Nursing Students (N = 570)

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	114	20.0
Female	456	80.0
Year Level		
2 nd year	333	58.4
3 rd year	175	30.7
4 th year	62	10.9

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of the profile of Gen Z nursing students in terms of sex and year-levels. Based on the sample of 570, the majority of the students are female (N = 456, 80%). On the other hand, the distribution of the students across different year levels shows that the majority are in their 2nd year (N = 333, 58.4%).

Table 2. Communication Skills of Generation Z Nursing Students as Assessed by the Students

Items	Mean	Std.	Verbal Interpretation
1. I prefer to face my patient directly during conversation and maintain eye contact.	3.51	0.524	Always
2. I can't avoid using Gen z lingo or slang in giving patient care instructions	2.33	0.807	Sometimes
3. I am as honest as possible with my patients and readily admit my mistakes and miscommunications.	3.62	0.590	Always
4. I can't pay attention and respond appropriately to my patients.	1.70	0.905	Sometimes
5. I can help ease patients' anxiety by ensuring the privacy of their care and the confidentiality of their information.	3.56	0.709	Always
6. I can appropriately offer advice to patients from different cultural backgrounds.	3.12	0.692	Often
7. I can't seem to connect easily with my patients.	1.89	0.843	Sometimes
8. I can't avoid using Gen z lingo or slang in communicating with doctors and co-nurses about treatments.	2.06	0.862	Sometimes
9. I can't seem to accept help from my colleagues during care.	1.73	0.879	Sometimes



10. I use videos, animations, and other forms of media to educate my patients and their families about disease processes, medications, and self-care techniques.	2.56	0.969	Often
11. I have difficulty in adjusting my patient care presentations specially among the old age group.	2.44	0.734	Sometimes
12. I use emails and messaging apps like Messenger to immediately coordinate patient care with team members (e.g., clinical instructors, groupmates).	3.14	0.822	Often
Composite Mean	2.64	0.363	Often

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never

Table 2 presents the communication skills of Generation Z nursing students. The composite mean ($M = 2.64 \pm 0.363$) suggests that, in general, these students assessed themselves as often performing the communication skills indicated. Among the items cited, nursing students highly claimed that they are as honest as possible with their patients and readily admit their mistakes and miscommunications ($M = 3.62 \pm 0.590$), they can help ease patients' anxiety by ensuring the privacy of their care and the confidentiality of their information ($M = 3.56 \pm 0.709$) and they prefer to face their patients directly during conversation and maintain eye contact ($M = 3.51 \pm 0.524$).

Conversely, the table also shows that at least, Gen Z nursing students can't seem to connect easily with their patients ($M = 1.89 \pm 0.843$), can't seem to accept help from their colleagues during care ($M = 1.73 \pm 0.879$) and can't pay attention and respond appropriately to their patients ($M = 1.70 \pm 0.905$).

Table 3. Communication Skills of Generation Z Nursing Students as Assessed by Clinical Instructors

Items	Mean	Std.	Verbal Interpretation
The Gen Z nursing student			
1. Prefer to face patient directly during conversation and maintain eye contact.	3.48	0.699	Often
2. Can't avoid using Gen z lingo or slang in giving patient care instructions.	2.27	0.789	Sometimes
3. Is as honest as possible with patients and readily admit mistakes and miscommunications.	3.04	0.645	Often
4. Can't pay attention and respond appropriately to patients.	1.78	0.963	Sometimes
5. Can help ease patients' anxiety by ensuring the privacy of care and the confidentiality of information.	3.11	0.592	Often
6. Can appropriately offer advice to patients from different cultural backgrounds.	2.98	0.681	Often
7. Can't seem to connect easily with patients.	1.75	0.860	Sometimes
8. Can't avoid using Gen z lingo or slang in communicating with doctors and co-nurses about treatments.	2.57	0.820	Often
9. Can't seem to accept help from my colleagues during care.	1.69	0.885	Sometimes
10. Use videos, animations, and other forms of media to educate patients and their families about disease processes, medications, and self-care techniques.	2.05	1.082	Sometimes
11. Have difficulty in adjusting patient care presentations specially among the old age group.	2.15	0.616	Sometimes
12. Use emails and messaging apps like Messenger to immediately coordinate patient care with team members (e.g., clinical instructors, groupmates).	3.43	0.885	Often
Composite Mean	2.52	0.378	Often

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Always; 2.50 – 3.49 = Often; 1.50 – 2.49 = Sometimes; 1.00 – 1.49 = Never



Table 3 displays the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students as assessed by the clinical instructors. The composite mean ($M = 2.52 \pm 0.378$) revealed that the clinical instructors perceived the Gen Z nursing students to often use the identified communication skills. Specifically, the clinical instructors suggested that Gen Z nursing students often face patients directly during conversation and maintain eye contact ($M = 3.48 \pm 0.699$); use emails and messaging apps like Messenger to immediately coordinate patient care with team members (e.g., clinical instructors, groupmates) ($M = 3.43 \pm 0.885$); and can help ease patients' anxiety by ensuring the privacy of care and the confidentiality of information ($M = 3.11 \pm 0.592$).

As to the least identified communication skills, the clinical instructors reported that Gen Z nursing students sometimes can't pay attention and respond appropriately to patients ($M = 1.78 \pm 0.963$); they can't seem to connect easily with patients ($M = 1.75 \pm 0.860$); and they can't seem to accept help from my colleagues during care ($M = 1.69 \pm 0.885$).

Table 4 shows the effectiveness of Gen Z nursing students' communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships, as assessed by the students. The composite mean score of 3.59 ± 0.396 suggests that Gen Z nursing students have very effective communication skills. The findings revealed that the Gen Z nursing students assessed their communication skills as very effective in actively including the client as a partner in care ($M = 3.74 \pm 0.492$); in giving the client time, opportunity, and ability to explain themselves, and listens to the client with the intent to understand them, without diminishing their feelings or without immediately giving advice ($M = 3.70 \pm 0.477$); in refraining from discrimination on the basis of a person's characteristics (e.g., gender, race, beliefs, status) ($M = 3.70 \pm 0.534$); and in refraining from physical, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect and/or are perceived as abusive ($M = 3.69 \pm 0.536$).

On the other hand, the Gen Z nursing students assessed their communication skills as least effective in advocating on the client's behalf and encouraging the patient to advocate on their own behalf ($M = 3.51 \pm 0.554$); in refraining from interfering with the client's personal relationships, unless such relationships negatively impact the client's health and well-being ($M = 3.42 \pm 0.685$); and in planning for the termination of the nurse-client relationship with the client throughout the episode of care ($M = 3.32 \pm 0.710$).

Table 4. Effectiveness of Gen Z Nursing Students' Communication Skills in Establishing Nurse-Patient relationships as Assessed by the Students

Items*	Mean	Std.	Verbal Interpretation
1. Actively include the client as partner in care.	3.74	0.492	Very Effective
2. Establish with the client mutual roles in achieving identified health goals.	3.64	0.515	Very Effective
3. Gain understanding of the client's abilities, limitations and needs related to their health conditions.	3.57	0.529	Very Effective
4. Demonstrate sensitivity and respect for the client's choices, which originate from the client's individual values and beliefs, including cultural and /or religious beliefs.	3.62	0.510	Very Effective
5. Engage the client in evaluating the nursing care they are receiving.	3.62	0.527	Very Effective
6. Clarify my role as a student nurse within the nurse-client relationship.	3.68	0.494	Very Effective
7. Help the client understand when requests are beyond the limits of the nurse-client relationship.	3.55	0.552	Very Effective
8. Refrain from interfering with the client's personal relationships, unless such relationships negatively impact the client's health and well-being.	3.42	0.685	Effective
9. Determine whether a particular activity or behavior is appropriate within the context of a nurse-client relationship.	3.57	0.543	Very Effective
10. Consult with the health-care team for any situation in which it is unclear whether a behavior may cross a boundary of the nurse-client relationship.	3.67	0.495	Very Effective
11. Give the client time, opportunity, and ability to explain themselves, and listens to the client with the intent to understand them, without diminishing their feelings or without immediately giving advice.	3.70	0.477	Very Effective



12. Adapt communication (verbal and non-verbal) style, as necessary, to meet the needs of the client (e.g., to accommodate a different language, literacy level, developmental stage, or cognitive status).	3.58	0.528	Very Effective
13. Advocate on client’s behalf and encourages patient to advocate on their own behalf.	3.51	0.554	Very Effective
14. Refrain from self-disclosure unless it meets a specific, identified client need.	3.51	0.591	Very Effective
15. Plan for the termination of the nurse-client relationship with the client, throughout the episode of care.	3.32	0.710	Effective
16. Determine whether touching the client is appropriate, supportive and within the therapeutic boundaries.	3.62	0.543	Very Effective
17. Refrain from discrimination on the basis of a person’s characteristics (e.g., gender, race, beliefs, status).	3.70	0.534	Very Effective
18. Refrain from any personal relationship with a client.	3.55	0.612	Very Effective
19. Refrain from physical, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect and/or are perceived as abusive.	3.69	0.536	Very Effective
20. Intervene and reports verbal and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect for the client.	3.59	0.604	Very Effective
Composite Mean	3.59	0.396	Very Effective

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Very Effective; 2.50 – 3.49 = Effective; 1.50 – 2.49 = Somewhat Effective; 1.00 – 1.49 = Not Effective

* Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2020)

Table 5 presents the effectiveness of Gen Z nursing students’ communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships, as assessed by clinical instructors. The composite mean score of 3.25 ± 0.4266 indicates that Gen Z nursing students have effective communication skills. The findings indicated that the Gen Z nursing students’ communication skills were very effective in refraining from discrimination on the basis of a person’s characteristics (e.g., gender, race, beliefs, status) ($M = 3.69 \pm 0.543$); in refraining from physical, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect and/or are perceived as abusive ($M = 3.62 \pm 0.563$); and in consulting with the health-care team for any situation in which it is unclear whether a behavior may cross a boundary of the nurse-client relationship ($M = 3.59 \pm 0.645$).

Table 5. Effectiveness of Gen Z Nursing Students’ Communication Skills in Establishing Nurse-Patient relationships as Assessed by Clinical Instructors

Items*	Mean	Std.	Verbal Interpretation
1. Actively include the client as partner in care.	3.18	0.607	Effective
2. Establish with the client mutual roles in achieving identified health goals.	3.09	0.575	Effective
3. Gain understanding of the client’s abilities, limitations and needs related to their health conditions.	3.05	0.593	Effective
4. Demonstrate sensitivity and respect for the client’s choices, which originate from the client’s individual values and beliefs, including cultural and /or religious beliefs.	3.18	0.669	Effective
5. Engage the client in evaluating the nursing care they are receiving.	3.13	0.594	Effective
6. Clarify his/her role within the nurse-client relationship.	3.48	0.687	Effective
7. Help the client understand when requests are beyond the limits of the nurse-client relationship.	2.72	0.851	Effective
8. Refrain from interfering with the client’s personal relationships, unless such relationships negatively impact the client’s health and well-being.	2.70	0.738	Effective
9. Determine whether a particular activity or behavior is appropriate within the context of a nurse-client relationship.	2.66	0.844	Effective



10. Consult with the health-care team for any situation in which it is unclear whether a behavior may cross a boundary of the nurse-client relationship.	3.59	0.645	Very Effective
11. Give the client time, opportunity, and ability to explain themselves, and listens to the client with the intent to understand them, without diminishing their feelings or without immediately giving advice.	3.19	0.558	Effective
12. Adapt communication (verbal and non-verbal) style, as necessary, to meet the needs of the client (e.g., to accommodate a different language, literacy level, developmental stage, or cognitive status).	3.51	0.710	Very Effective
13. Advocate on client's behalf and encourages them to advocate on their own behalf.	3.41	0.682	Effective
14. Refrain from self-disclosure unless it meets a specific, identified client need.	3.10	0.545	Effective
15. Plan for the termination of the nurse-client relationship with the client, throughout the episode of care.	3.03	0.639	Effective
16. Determine whether touching the client is appropriate, supportive and within the therapeutic boundaries.	3.48	0.710	Effective
17. Refrain from discrimination on the basis of a person's characteristics (e.g., gender, race, beliefs, status).	3.69	0.543	Very Effective
18. Refrain from any personal relationship with a client.	3.55	0.626	Very Effective
19. Refrain from physical, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect and/or are perceived as abusive.	3.62	0.563	Very Effective
20. Intervene and reports verbal and non-verbal behaviors toward a client that demonstrate disrespect for the client.	3.55	0.674	Very Effective
Composite Mean	3.25	0.426	Effective

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Very Effective; 2.50 – 3.49 = Effective; 1.50 – 2.49 = Somewhat Effective; 1.00 – 1.49 = Not Effective

* Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2020)

Conversely, the clinical instructors reported that the communication skills of the Gen Z nursing students are least effective in helping the client understand when requests are beyond the limits of the nurse-client relationship ($M = 2.72 \pm 0.851$); in refraining from interfering with the client's personal relationships unless such relationships negatively impact the client's health and well-being ($M = 2.70 \pm 0.738$); and in determining whether a particular activity or behavior is appropriate within the context of a nurse-client relationship ($M = 2.66 \pm 0.844$).

Table 6. Difference of Responses between the identified communication skills of Gen Z nursing students and the effectiveness of the communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships as assessed by themselves and their clinical instructors

Items	Group	N	Mean	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Communication skills	students	570	2.64	3.176	0.002	Significant
	instructors	128	2.52			
Effectiveness of communication skills in establishing NPR	students	570	3.59	8.850	0.000	Highly Significant
	instructors	128	3.25			

Legend: Significant at p -value < 0.05

Table 6 presents the comparison of responses between the identified communication skills of Gen Z nursing students and the effectiveness of the use of these skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships as assessed by themselves and their clinical instructors. It was observed that there was a significant difference in communication skills ($p = 0.002$) and a highly significant difference in the effectiveness of communication skills ($p = 0.000$) between the two groups. The findings showed that the students had a better assessment of the communication skills they possessed and the effectiveness of their communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships.



DISCUSSION

Gen Z nursing students assessed themselves as often performing the communication skills indicated in Table 2. Generation Z individuals have grown up in a highly connected and information-rich environment. In this digital era, Gen Z tends to have access to a vast amount of information, making them more comfortable seeking and finding answers to their questions. This results in them communicating openly, honestly, and confidently with their patients. For this reason, they can easily correct misconceptions or even mistakes. Furthermore, there has been a general cultural shift towards transparency and authenticity, particularly among the younger generations. Gen Z individuals become more honest in various aspects of their lives. Honesty and transparency among Gen Z were attested to by most of the literature²⁷⁻³⁰. In a study on Gen Z nursing graduates, Maravilla³¹ affirmed that these graduates value honesty and integrity the most. Even Jha³² posited that more than 80% of Gen Z accepts failure, enabling them to innovate and grow. Moreover, the majority of the student participants are in their second year of nursing, which could likely suggest that they are more selective and deliberate with patients' conversations. When faced with miscommunications, Gen Z nursing students readily seek assistance from their clinical instructor to address any issues that may arise.

In addition, Gen Z individuals are typically proficient in navigating digital platforms and technologies. This proficiency results in heightened awareness of the importance of safeguarding sensitive information. This implies that Gen Z nursing students are capable of handling electronic health records and other digital systems when providing care, thereby easing their patients' anxiety towards the confidentiality of shared information. Alić and Sopić³³ found out that for Gen Z, privacy protection is important, and they are more concerned about the collection of personal data. Their concern can be classified as high in terms of organizational practices such as the extent of data collection, lack of control over data, targeted advertising, and trust in privacy policies.

Likewise, direct, face-to-face communication is a powerful way to establish rapport and trust with patients. Raslie³⁴ and Bredbenner³⁵ indicated that Gen Z prefers face-to-face communication. In fact, 40% of Gen Z might feel that there is something wrong if interactions are not done face-to-face³². This could mean that Gen Z nursing students understand the value of what therapeutic nurse-patient interaction could bring to facilitate patients' engagement in care. Maintaining eye contact during interaction can establish a more genuine approach, which leads to gaining cooperation and enhancing patients' compliance with treatment. Colón³⁶ stated that Gen Z recognizes the importance of in-person interactions for certain types of work, particularly those that involve brainstorming, on-the-job learning, and team-based projects. They understand that, despite the many digital tools available, sometimes the best way to hash out an idea, learn a new concept, or work through a challenging problem is by collaborating face-to-face.

On the other hand, the Gen Z nursing students seem to disagree that they are incapable of connecting easily with their patients and collaborating with their colleagues. Several prior studies have associated Gen Z individuals with poor connections due to shorter attention spans^{37, 10, 38}. These studies highlighted that because Gen Z individuals are digitally dependent and have a strong preference for instant gratification, they lack the ability to establish meaningful conversations with others. Hence, in particular for Gen Z nursing students, they have difficulty establishing nurse-patient relationships. To add to that, Gen Z individuals often value autonomy and independence. Although beneficial in some aspects, this was seen as a challenge for this group in adhering to team-based approaches, which are particularly essential in nursing care. However, it is worth noting that the student participants assessed themselves negatively in these aspects. Overall, with appropriate nursing training and enhancements in effective communication, Gen Z nursing students can become respectful, genuine, transparent, and collaborative healthcare practitioners.

In addition, it can be analyzed from the results (Table 3) that the observations of the clinical instructors on the communication skills and the assessment of the nursing students as depicted in Table 2 were nearly identical except for one notable item, *"use of emails and messaging apps to immediately coordinate patient care."* This finding suggests that the clinical instructors recognize the special skills of this group in using communication technology. This acknowledgement and understanding of Gen Z nursing students' proficiency in leveraging technology for communication will not only facilitate coordination within healthcare teams but also help nurture these specialized skills. Several studies also acknowledge that Gen Z prefers electronic methods of communication, with texting, mobile messaging apps, and social media being used most often³⁹⁻⁴⁰. On the other hand, from a different perspective, the finding may also suggest that though Gen Z students demonstrate competence in information technology, there remains a necessity for guidance and mentorship for other relevant nursing interventions that extend beyond this technological skill.



Regarding the effectiveness of Gen Z's communication skills in establishing nurse-patient relationships, it can be inferred that Gen Z nursing students see themselves as respectful individuals. Cozett⁴¹ stated that the most prominent beliefs of Gen Z are the idea that respect is not demanded; it is earned through kindness and strength. Furthermore, they value patients' freedom of choice and give high regard to individual preferences as well as diversity in cultural norms and beliefs. Gen Z individuals have been exposed to a diverse and interconnected world. This exposure most likely fosters respect and empathy, which allows them to understand the importance of autonomy. In addition, their ability to access information made them more informed and aware of various cultural norms and beliefs. Because of the influence of information technology, they can actively seek out knowledge about different cultures and religions, enhancing their appreciation for diversity in nursing care and healthcare practices. Hampton⁴² claimed that Gen Z is more diverse than any other generation; they are open-minded about ethnic diversity, as exemplified by their social acquaintances being from diverse races and ethnic groups.

It can be concluded from the findings that Gen Z nursing students may benefit from further honing their communication skills. It appears that the students think that they are still in the process of grasping the complexities involved in advocating for patients effectively, which usually comes from experience. Advocacy often requires understanding healthcare systems, ethical principles, and patients' rights, which comes with time and exposure to real-life nursing scenarios. On the other hand, because they are more eager to learn about their patients, they feel that sometimes they can overstep within the boundaries of their patients' personal lives. Chicca & Shellenbarger¹⁰ reported that Gen Z is highly accustomed to interacting, sometimes solely, in the digital world. Because of their frequent use of technology, they have underdeveloped social and relationship skills. Moreover, given that the students are in their second year, the ability to terminate the nurse-patient relationship could be as challenging as establishing rapport in the initial part of the patient interaction. Overall, these skills may take time to develop, especially among younger generations who are still building their professional identities.

On the other hand, the clinical instructors affirmed that Gen Z nursing students respect their patients' differences and characteristics, as both of them identified similar communication skills (Table 4) that affect the nurse-patient relationships. In addition, the clinical instructors observed the Gen Z nursing students' potential to be collaborative members of the healthcare team. This finding was also pointed out in Table 2. Hence, this study can claim that Gen Z nursing students can establish an effective nurse-patient relationship by being respectful, diverse, and collaborative healthcare practitioners. Based on these results, the clinical instructors have observed the lack of proficiency of Gen Z nursing students in discerning certain limitations in their use of communication skills. Moreover, the clinical instructors indicated that the appropriateness of actions and behaviors is essential during patient interactions. It is likely that the clinical instructors have a high regard for professionalism, as conduct and manners are important foundations of nursing practice. Professionalism as an important foundation of nursing was also identified by some studies⁴³⁻⁴⁴. These identified weaknesses of Gen Z nursing students may potentially impact the nurse-patient relationship, presenting additional challenges to the clinical instructors. Evidently, these findings highlight the need for targeted training programs, especially tailored for Gen Z nursing students.

As expected, Gen Z nursing students might have a more favorable assessment of their communication skills and their ability to use these skills to establish nurse-patient relationships compared to their clinical instructors. Gen Z individuals may potentially overestimate their communication abilities due to their proficiency in the use of digital communication methods. They may feel more confident in their abilities, like, for instance, in texting, use of social media, and video conferencing, leading them to believe that they are more proficient than they usually are during patient interactions. This confidence bias is often observed in self-assessments. The majority of previous studies attested to this finding⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷. Furthermore, Gen Z individuals are known to place significant value on peer feedback and validation. Positive feedback from their classmates, clinical instructors, and hospital personnel influences their perception of their communication skills. In addition, because they are independent, they are more inclined toward their own judgments and assessments, claiming their effectiveness in nurse-patient relationships and nursing care.

On the part of the clinical instructors, the expected lower mean assessment scores on the communication skills of Gen Z nursing students and their effectiveness in establishing nurse-patient relationships may be due to several reasons. The clinical instructors might have higher expectations or stricter criteria for evaluating the communication skills of Gen Z students compared to their students' self-assessment. Objectively, the clinical instructors might have used particular course rubrics or professional standards to assess the nursing students. Moreover, the two groups may have different viewpoints, like, for example, the use of non-verbal cues or the appropriateness of voice tone in communication. In addition, disparities in the years of experience and level of



education of the clinical instructors can also be factors. The clinical instructors might have based their level of assessment on these perspectives.

IMPLICATION AND LIMITATIONS

The study has clear and significant implications for nursing education and practice. Given Gen Z nursing students' proficiency in digital technology, nursing programs should capitalize on this strength by integrating technology-enhanced tools and platforms. Nurse educators should consider tailoring clinical teaching strategies to align with the distinct learning styles of Gen Z nursing students. By bridging the gaps between the clinical instructors' teaching methodologies and the students' learning styles, the clinical instructors can optimize the achievement of learning outcomes and enhance overall educational effectiveness. Likewise, the implementation of interprofessional initiatives aimed at enhancing the collaborative and cultural competence of Gen Z nursing students is paramount. Mentorship and coaching strategies may play a pivotal role in this development. Moreover, it is crucial to incorporate training programs focused on improving advocacy skills, recognizing boundaries, and terminating nurse-patient relationships.

The study acknowledges certain limitations that could be addressed through future research endeavors. Given the study's exclusive focus on universities and colleges within a specific region in the southern part of the Philippines, it's important to refrain from generalizing the findings to other Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of their investigations of Gen Z nursing students and employ more robust research designs to enhance the validity and applicability of their findings across a broader range of nursing settings and patient populations.

CONCLUSION

Gen Z nursing students exhibit certain communication skills that are effective in establishing nurse-patient relationships. They excel at navigating digital technology, accept individual differences, and have a sense of independence. Gen Z nursing students are respectful, transparent, diverse, and collaborative future healthcare practitioners. However, though proficiency in certain communication skills has been noted, there are identifiable skills requiring improvement, such as advocating for patients' rights, recognizing boundaries, and enhancing terminating skills in nurse-patient relationships. Gen Z nursing students asserted possessing very effective communication skills, whereas their clinical instructors rated them as only effective in establishing nurse-patient relationships. Furthermore, there were discernible variations in the assessments of communication skills and the effectiveness of establishing nurse-patient relationships between Gen Z nursing students and their clinical instructors.

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