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Article

Evaluating Communication Skills of Saudi Arabian Mathematics Teachers

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Abstract

The effectiveness of school education heavily relies on the communication competencies of teachers, which are essential for success in the teaching profession. This study evaluates the communication skills of mathematics teachers in Saudi Arabia and explores how these skills vary based on demographic factors such as gender, school type, school level, and teaching experience. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was adopted, and data were collected from 323 teachers using a structured survey questionnaire. Participants were selected through a multistage probability sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 23.0, employing t-tests, Tukey post hoc tests, and one-way ANOVA. The results revealed no significant differences in language proficiency or overall communication skills between male and female teachers. However, significant differences were observed based on school type, with teachers in private schools demonstrating higher communication skills than their counterparts in public schools. One-way ANOVA indicated notable differences in communication skills across school levels; Tukey's post hoc analysis revealed that primary school teachers exhibited higher communication skills than secondary school teachers. Additionally, communication skills were found to be significantly influenced by teaching experience, with expert teachers outperforming novice teachers in this area. This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature by providing evidence of how teachers' demographic factors relate to their communication competencies. Recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research are provided to further enhance understanding and application in this area.

Keywords

Communication Skills, Mathematics, Teachers, Demographic Information.

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Communication skills has been defined as ‘message transmission that involves the shared understanding between the contexts where communication takes place (Abdikarimova, Tashieva, & Abdullaeva, 2021). In addition, teacher communication skills are important for a teacher in the delivery of education to students (Sutiyatno, 2018). Communication skills involve language, listening, clarity, empathy, and non-verbal language. For effective teaching, a teacher needs to be highly skilled in all these areas. Teachers with good communication always make things easier and more understandable (Khan et al., 2017). Effective communication skills are really important for a teacher in transmitting education, classroom management and interaction with students in the class. The teacher has to teach the students to have different thinking approaches (Fuentes et al., 2017). To teach in accordance with the ability and capability of the students a teacher needs to adopt such skills of communication which motivate the students toward their learning process (Simsek & Erdem, 2020). Good communication skills teachers are the basic need for academics’ success of students, and professional success of life (Ibrahim et al., 2019). To ensure optimal management within the classroom environment, it is crucial to cultivate strong channels of communication, not only between students but also between students and teachers (Khasawneh, 2021). This involves several key facets in which teachers can enhance communication effectiveness with their students (Khasawneh, 2021).

These strategies involve the avoidance of negative messages that may adversely impact students, keeping awareness of students' emotional well-being, refraining from the use of nicknames or labels, establishing a culture of consistent acknowledgement and praise for their students for any positive behaviours shown, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among them, and encouraging the use of first-person expressions to express their emotions (Khasawneh, 2021). Teachers’ ought to actively listen to students, strive to understand their perspectives, improve their confidence by demonstrating empathy, and approach interactions without any biases. Teacher's perceptions and attitudes towards students as communicative partners would immensely shape the efficacy of communication. Teachers should tailor their messages to engage the various sensory modalities of their students simultaneously (Khasawneh, 2021). The model of communication skills in this research involves five fundamental communication skills: Language, Listening, Clarity, Empathy, and Language. Among these, language stands out as a pivotal tool for self-expression, exerting a constructive influence on interpersonal dynamics. By emphasizing adequacy over deficiency in communication interactions, individuals can address and rectify any perceived shortcomings without having to feel inadequacy in their counterparts (Khasawneh, 2021). Moreover, effective communication transcends mere dissemination of information; it encompasses the capacity to articulate ideas comprehensibly, hence facilitating meaningful communication exchanges. The second skill is called "active-participative listening." It is all about being present in the moment, paying close attention, and being motivated to understand what the other person is communicating about.

When we listen actively, we are not just sitting there quietly, but rather we are doing things in our minds to make sense of the conversation. When we talk about how well we listen, how we listen actively, and especially the attitudes we show when we communicate with students, we often forget to think about them (Sasidharan, 2021). Theories about listening behaviour tell us that listening is not just about sitting quietly, but it is also an active process. It means not only listening to what someone says but also understanding their needs and feelings. Active listening involves several steps: being ready to listen, focusing on what the speaker is saying, and thinking about the message. It also means trying to predict what the speaker will say next and understanding why you are interested in the topic. The listener should pay attention to the main points and any evidence the speaker provides. Also, think about the words the speaker uses and how they might affect your feelings. It is important to be aware of your own biases and try to understand the speaker's perspective. If the speaker says something that may bother you, try not to judge too quickly. Instead, try to understand where they are coming from. Stay open-minded and be willing to change your opinions. Finally, give the speaker feedback so they know you understand what they are saying and how it makes you feel. The third skill would be clarity, which involves self-awareness, establishing coherent links between thoughts and emotions, and a willingness to express oneself openly. Expressive ability, as outlined in academic resources on speech, rhetoric, and communication, includes a spectrum of abilities ranging from structuring ideas to effectively conveying messages.

Numerous academic texts and materials focusing on speech, rhetoric, and communication explore the facets of clarity. They emphasise the significance of employing precise language, highlighting key points, organising content logically, assessing the audience, and more. Effective formal communication entails employing diverse strategies, including structuring presentations, articulating a concise thesis, furnishing specific

details, presenting logical arguments, providing illustrative examples, drawing comparisons, and utilising analogies, and distinctions. Specific techniques include choosing between detailed and general statements, selecting appropriate details, ensuring a coherent presentation, organising ideas logically, selecting suitable words, understanding the subtle meanings of words, using literary devices like allusions and similes, and adopting an appropriate style (formal, informal, or colloquial). The fourth skill, empathy holds significant importance, especially within the educational literature, and is considered the most emphasised fundamental skill (Kataoka et al., 2019). While often recognised as crucial for guiding students and parents and facilitating accessible knowledge, the role of empathy in directing students' cognitive processes and assessments is frequently underestimated. Empathy entails comprehending others' unique perspectives and effectively reflecting their emotions, thoughts, and expectations (Ratka, 2018). Merely instructing without engaging students in dialogue can diminish their motivation, potentially making them feel overlooked in this one-sided communication approach. How teachers interact with their students is important, with interactive teaching methods being instrumental in achieving immediate results (Vogel, Meyer, & Harendza, 2018).

Additionally, the emotional demeanour of teachers plays a crucial role in creating a conducive classroom environment for students' learning capabilities (D'souza et al., 2020). Empathy involves various definitions, ranging from caring for others and aiding understanding their thoughts and emotions. The most important skill outlined in the framework is non-verbal communication, which entails conveying the impact of speech indirectly. Non-verbal cues, often subtler yet more powerful than verbal expressions, have a greater capacity to convey meaning (Yavuz & Güzel, 2020). Essentially, non-verbal communication involves conveying messages without words, utilising gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues to engage the audience or convey information (Maisarah et al., 2023). It is frequently employed to articulate thoughts and enhance the appeal and interest of messages. Non-verbal communication plays a significant role in shaping social interactions and the broader communication process (Wahyuni, 2018). There are four principal functions of non-verbal communication: complementing, regulating, substituting, and accentuating verbal messages. In addition to these functions, various forms of non-verbal communication exist, encompassing body language, facial expressions, eye contact, clothing, personal space, touch, time management, scent, and manners. The norms governing non-verbal communication may vary depending on the context, with each situation possessing its own set of conventions. Individuals demonstrate distinct patterns of non-verbal behaviour.

Literature Review

The literature review has shown several studies investigating teachers' communication skills in in different contexts using different variables. Özgök and Çiftçi (2020) For example, has investigated the classroom teachers' communication skills in turkey, he found generally significant differences based on experience and gender. On the other hand, no significant differences were found based on workplace. Similarly, Durukan and Maden (2010) conducted a study in turkey to investigate teachers' communication skills, they found no significant differences in terms of graduation variables, professional seniority, and gender. On a contrary study, Aküzüm and Özdemir Gültekin (2017) found that teachers' communication skills vary significantly based on gender. Thus, regarding communication skills, females are more competent than male teachers; Also, significant differences were found in the variables class size, age, and professional seniority. Also, it is believed that the significant correlation may be attributed to the courses and training workshops the teachers took at the private schools. Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour (2017) explored the significance of non-verbal communication skills in teaching. Their study highlighted a substantial correlation between how teachers utilise non-verbal communication, both in terms of its quality, quantity, and methods, as well as the effectiveness of their teaching, and the academic achievements of their students.

The study underscored the benefits of employing various non-verbal communication strategies, such as displaying emotions, fostering teamwork, providing support, encouraging creativity, setting clear objectives, and using diverse visual aids. Additionally, the review stressed the importance of teachers being observant of students' non-verbal cues and adapting lesson plans, accordingly, considering factors like their mood and readiness to learn. Yavuz and Güzel (2020) undertook an investigation to examine teachers' perspectives on effective communication skills within the classroom, taking into consideration potential gender variations. The study includes a sample of 381 teachers. Data collection relied on the utilisation of the Classroom Effective Communication Skills Scale, comprising 23 items categorised into four dimensions and rated on a five-point Likert scale. The results then revealed that both

male and female teachers demonstrated strong proficiency in effective communication skills, with no distinct differences observed between genders. Nevertheless, the findings hinted at a slight trend where female teachers tended to have slightly higher scores compared to male teachers. Poletaeva et al. (2020) investigated how implementing empathy-focused communicative exercises, simulation games, and videos, both general and tailored to specific professions would affect language learning environments. The components of empathy include various skills and techniques aimed at its development, such as the capacity to comprehend and interpret others' emotions, engage in empathetic listening during conversations, and convey empathy through verbal and non-verbal cues.

The results indicate that utilizing simulation games and video resources enhances both empathetic skills and communication proficiency. This enhancement results in a more proactive classroom atmosphere, increased motivation for learning, increased tolerance and sociability, enhanced interest in acquiring knowledge, and the application of empathetic skills in practical tasks relevant to the profession. Ata (2015) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and teacher-child communication skills of 304 preschool teachers using the Preschool Teachers' Self Efficacy Beliefs Scale and Teacher-Child Communication Scale to determine the teacher-child communication skills of preschool teachers. The results revealed that there was a strong and positive relationship between teacher-child communication skills and self-efficacy beliefs. Akudo (2020) aimed to determine how teachers' effective communication related to students' motivation in learning of 6,342 teachers. He found that the relationship between teachers' effective communication in the classroom and students' motivation in learning is high and positive in secondary schools. Bakic-Tomic, Dvorski and Kirinic (2015) explored primary school teachers communication competence from different aspects. They concluded that teachers are not relating burnout at work with classroom communication due to adequate communication skills and lack of communication knowledge). They have non-sufficient skills of negotiation skills and managing conflicts. Teachers also, lack skills of leadership and group communication. Khan et al. (2017) sought to assess the perception of students regarding the role of teacher communication skills in their academic success of 418 teachers. They concluded that teacher communication skills have a significant role in the academic achievement of the students.

Study Aims

1- Identify the communication skills of Saudi Arabian mathematic teachers.
2- Investigate the relationship between communication skills and demographic information of Saudi Arabian mathematic teachers.

Methodology

The current study employed a fully quantitative research design. Quantitative research aids in generalizing the findings among a bigger population. 323 school teachers from the Al-Ahsa region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Teachers were sampled using a multistage probability sampling technique. Upon reviewing the literature, none of the existing scales was accurately appropriate for the research model. Thus, a questionnaire survey was developed and validated by the researchers to collect the data. The study employed a cross-sectional design involving mathematics teachers. Following by the standard scale development process advocated in literature such as The Teacher-Child Communication Scale (TCCS), The Teacher Communication Behavior Questionnaire (TCBQ) and "Interpersonal Communication Skills of Primary School Administrators". A five-point scale was used. 7 professors validated the content of the survey, and the results of Cronbach Alpha were 0.79 and 0.74. The survey included the five components of the teachers' communication skills which are: Language: These variable measures the ability of the teacher to ask open-ended questions, use positive language, see off each student individually at their arrival and departure times, use accurate grammar and call every student by their names. Listening: This variable measures the ability of the teacher to listen actively rather than passively. Clarity: This variable measures the ability of the teacher to deliver a clear message to students. Empathy: This variable measures the ability of the teacher to express their emotions and their ability to deal with the emotions of students. No-verbal language: This variable measures the ability of the teachers to communicate without words encompassing body language and other behaviours such as facial expressions and eye contact. The relationship between demographic information "gender, school type, school level, and experience" and communication skills was tested using t-test and One-way ANOVA. SPSS 23.0 was used to analyse the data.

Findings

Communication Skills and Gender

The results showed significant differences between male and female teachers in terms of listening and clarity for males, empathy and non-verbal for female's skills as the *p*-values were (0.001, 0.01, 0.05, 0.001) respectively. On the other hand, no significant difference was found in language skills between males and females (0.41) and in overall and communication skills (0.018).

Table 1: *T-Test Analysis of Teachers' Communication Skills based on Gender.*

Sub-Scale	Gender	N	M	SD	T value	*P*-value
Language	Male	170	3.9	2.23	0.82	0.41
	Female	153	4.1	2.14		
Listening	Male	170	4.6	2.23	3.68	0.001***
	Female	153	3.7	2.15		
Empathy	Male	170	3.8	2.23	2.01	.05*
	Female	153	4.3	2.24		
Clarity	Male	170	4.2	2.23	2.58	.01**
	Female	153	3.6	1.90		
Non-verbal	Male	170	4.4	1.27	3.87	.001***
	Female	153	3.7	1.94		
Over-all	Male	170	4.18	1.98	1.35	.018
	Female	153	3.88	2.01		

Significance Level = P<0.001*** Significance Level = P<0.01** Significance Level = P<0.05*

Communication Skills and School-Type

The independent t-test analysis showed a significant difference between teachers in terms of language, listening, non-verbal and overall skills for those working at private schools as the p-values were (0.001, 0.001, 0.05, 0.05) respectively while no significant difference was found in terms of empathy and clarity skill with p-values of 0.36 and 0.24 respectively.

Table 2: *T-test Analysis of Mathematic Teachers' Communication Skills based on type of School (Public vs Private).*

Sub-Scale	School Type	N	M	SD	T Value	*P*-Value
Language	Public	197	3.4	1.22	3.32	.001***
	Private	126	4.0	2.03		
Listing	Public	197	3.6	1.09	3.73	.001***
	Private	126	4.2	1.80		
Empathy	Public	197	3.9	1.90	0.90	0.36
	Private	126	4.1	2.02		
Clarity	Public	197	3.5	2.21	1.17	0.24
	Private	126	3.8	2.30		
Non-Verbal	Public	197	3.2	1.90	2.26	.05**
	Private	126	3.7	2.00		
Over-All	Public	197	3.52	1.65	2.13	.05**
	Private	126	4	2.03		

Significance level = P<0.001*** Significance level = P<0.05**

Communication Skills and School-Level

A one-way ANOVA shows significant differences in listening, empathy, non-verbal and Overall communication skills between teachers based on the school levels they teach. To determine these differences, post-hoc comparisons (Tukey tests) are performed to examine all possible pair-wise comparisons. The Tukey test revealed that the *Listening* skills of the mathematics intermediate school teachers (*M* = 4.1, *SD* = 1.8) were significantly higher than the secondary school teachers (*M = 3.6, SD = .88*). On the other hand, the empathy skills of the mathematics primary school teachers (*M* = 4.3, *SD* = 1.9) was significantly higher than the secondary school teachers (*M = 3.5, SD = .89*). Moreover, empathy skills of the mathematics intermediate school teachers (*M* = 4.0, *SD* = 1.07) was significantly higher than the secondary school teachers (*M = 3.5, SD = .89*).

Non-verbal skills of the mathematics Primary school teachers (*M* = 4.3, *SD* = .97) was significantly higher than the intermediate school teachers (*M = 3.9, SD = 1.07*). Finally, The Tukey test shows that the Overall skills of the mathematics Primary school teachers (*M* = 4.1, *SD* = .99) were significantly higher than the secondary school teachers (*M = 3.7, SD = .89*).

Table 3: *One-Way Analysis of Teachers' Communication Skills based on the School Level.*

Sub-Scale	School Levels	N	M	SD	F	P-Value
Language	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	4.1 3.9 3.7	0.90 0.99 1.90	2.56	.07*
Listing	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	3.8 4.1 3.6	1.02 1.80 0.88	3.99	.01***
Empathy	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	4.3 4.0 3.5	1.90 1.07 0.89	9.19	.01***
clarity	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	4.0 4.1 3.8	1.04 1.11 1.07	2.13	.12
Non-verbal	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	4.3 3.9 4.0	0.97 1.07 0.96	5.01	.01***
Over-all	Primary Intermediate Secondary	120 112 90	4.1 4.0 3.7	0.99 1.03 0.98	4.63	.01***

Significance Level = P<0.01*** Significance Level = P<0.05** Significance Level = P<0.010*

Communication Skills and Experience

Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey tests) were performed to examine all possible pair-wise comparisons. The Tukey test revealed that the *Language* skills of the expert teachers (*M* = 4.1, *SD* = 1.11) were significantly higher than the novice teachers (*M = 3.6, SD = .9*). It also showed that the Listening skills of the competent teachers (*M* = 4.5, *SD* = 1.7) was significantly higher than the Novice teachers (*M = 3.8, SD = 1.61*), and the Listening skills of the expert teachers (*M* = 4.5, *SD* = 1.18) was significantly higher than the novice teachers (*M = 3.8, SD = 1.61*) On the other hand, the Tukey test revealed that the empathy skills of the expert teachers (*M* = 4.4, *SD* = 1.15) was significantly higher than both of the competent teachers (*M = 3.9, SD = .89*) and the novice teachers (*M = 3.3, SD = 1.02*). Also, the empathy skills of the competent teachers (*M* = 3.9, *SD* = .89) were significantly higher than the novice teachers (*M = 3.3, SD = 1.02*). Moreover, The Tukey test revealed that the *Non-verbal* skills of the expert teachers (*M* = 4.3, *SD* = 1.15) were significantly higher than the novice teachers (*M = 3.9, SD = 1.05*). Finally, c

Table 4: *ANOVA Results of Teachers' Communication Skills based on their Experience.*

Sub-Scale	Experience	N	M	SD	F	P-Value
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.6	0.90		
Language	Competent (11-20Y)	130	3.9	1.04	5.95	.01***
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.1	1.11		
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.8	1.61		
Listing	Competent (11-20Y)	130	4.3	1.70	5.42	.01***
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.5	1.18		
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.3	1.02		
Empathy	Competent (11-20Y)	130	3.9	0.89	28.72	.01***
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.4	1.15		
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.8	1.13		
Clarity	Competent (11-20Y)	130	4.0	1.09	1.99	0.13
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.1	0.97		
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.9	1.05		
Non-Verbal	Competent (11-20Y)	130	4.1	1.20	2.94	0.05**
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.3	1.15		
	Novice (0-10Y)	105	3.7	1.14		
Over-All	Competent (11-20Y)	130	4.0	1.15	6.65	.001***
	Expert (above 20Y)	87	4.3	1.11		

*Significance Level = P<0.01*** Significance Level = P<0.05** Significance Level = P<0.010**

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine the communication skills of mathematics teachers in the Al-Ahsa region of Saudi Arabia with respect to their professional experience, gender, school type, and school level. The discussion of the obtained findings is based on the reviewed literature. The investigation conducted to ascertain the communication skills revealed that teachers typically exhibit high and recognized levels of

communication skills as none of the evaluated mathematics teachers lacked excellent communication skills. This study showed that effective teaching is related to the technique, style, and demographics of teacher communication skills in addition to the teacher's knowledge base. It is believed that this study's findings might be attributed to the ministry's training, teacher's length of service, and their experience working with talented students. Teachers have excellent communication skills, teachers and school administrators have medium-level communication skills rather than poor; the outcome of this study corroborated with these literature reports. However, a study on Turkish teachers' communication skills by Durukan and Maden (2010) found that these teachers possess low communication skills, which is contrary to the outcome of this study.

The gender variable has no obvious effect on teachers' effective communication skills, according to the gender-based analysis. A review of the literature reveals that certain research has documented the substantial impact of gender on teachers' ability to communicate effectively. When researchers investigated how pre-service teachers' communication skills affected their academic performance, they discovered a strong link between the gender variable and communication skills. However, another contradicted the current findings when studying teachers' opinions on communication skills in connection to their gender; they found a substantial relationship between teachers' communication skills and their gender. Furthermore, many prior studies indicate that instructors' communication skills differ greatly by gender, favoring female teachers. A study that looked at the communication skills of primary and middle school teachers found no significant difference between male and female teachers, which is consistent with the current study's findings. According to numerous research, gender has no significant impact on communication skills.

Regarding school type, the available literature suggested no significant difference between teachers at private schools in terms of empathy and clarity abilities, but there was a significant difference in language, listening, non-verbal, and general skills. Research has indicated a noteworthy correlation between the type of school and the proficiency of instructors in effective communication. It is noted through an in-line study that primary and preschool instructors are more adept at communicating than teachers in other areas. However, most of the research examining whether mathematics teachers' communication skills differ considerably based on the kind of school found that the teachers' communication skills are not a function of the school type as a variable. It is believed that the extensive training both public and private schools give their teachers may be the reason that the type of school has no bearing on their communication abilities. According to prior literature, teachers' communication skills are not significantly impacted by the type of school. Another study on the relationship between teachers' communication abilities and school type likewise concluded that there is no variation in communication skills based on the school type.

Considering professional experience as a variable, studies of the communication skills of mathematics teachers based on the professional experience variable found a considerable impact of the experience variable on the teachers' communication skills. It is believed that these teachers' extensive professional experience and extensive time spent working with exceptional students may be the reason for the observed correlations. In a study to find out how the professional experience variable affected primary teachers' communication skills, Aküzüm and Özdemir Gültekin (2017) found that teachers with more professional experience thought of themselves as having excellent communication skills. Regarding communication skills, a prior study found a significant difference in communication skills between the professional experience groups; teachers with less professional experience have also been found to exhibit better and more effective communication skills than those with more professional experience.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine, using demographic data, the communication skills of Saudi Arabian teachers. While one-way ANOVA reveals significant differences in overall communication skills based on school levels, the results did not show any significant differences in communication skills overall or among teachers employed by private schools; also, there was no significant difference in communication skills among teachers based on gender. Additionally, the Tukey test revealed that primary school teachers' overall skill levels were much higher than secondary school teachers', and expert teachers' overall skill levels were significantly higher than novice teachers'. The study employed a quantitative research approach, and teachers' communication skills were assessed in relation to various demographic variables such as gender, professional experience, school level,

and school type. Nevertheless, despite the thorough analyses, there are several limitations that affect the findings. For instance, qualitative research techniques and other variables, such as monthly salary, area of residence, in-service training, and age, can be employed for more in-depth studies on their impact on Saudi Arabian teachers' effective communication skills; this is important considering the strong relationship found in this study between demographic data and teachers' communication skills. For this set of teachers, in-service training programs that incorporate social activities can be created to help them become better communicators. Although only teachers from Al-Ahsa were sampled in this study, future research could engage a larger sample size.

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