



The Most Important Educational Contents Classified in Communication Skills Interventions; a Systematic Review



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ABSTRACT

Aims Identifying the educational contents affecting couples' communication skills can help psychologists resolve important marital problems. This study was designed to focus on the most important educational contents classified in communication skills interventions.

Information & Methods This study reviewed the articles in the PubMed and Science Direct databases in February 2020. Articles screened in two databases were according to "titles and abstracts", "past ten years", "full-text", and "open access" filters. The present study was designed based on the York Protocol. Evaluation of the information in the articles of this study was reported based on Elo S' study. The CONSORT Checklist was used to report the clinical trials. This study was completed by incorporating 19 articles related to communication skills interventions.

Findings The educational contents of this study were divided into two categories individual and interpersonal educational content. Also, individual and interpersonal educational content was divided into the following four categories. These four consist of rational, practical, emotional, and motivational content. The intervention was completed via six articles, and all six could be accessed virtually. The educational content, such as problem-solving, emotional skills, listening skills, behavior change, and behavioral coping skills, were the most frequent educational content in the articles of this study.

Conclusion Problem-solving, listening skills, emotional skills, behavioral coping skills, and behavior change are the most frequent educational content in communication skills interventions.

Keywords Communication; Couples Therapy; Education; Systematic Review

CITATION LINKS

[1] Effectiveness of life skills training on marital satisfaction ... [2] Couples therapy: Effectiveness of treatment and ... [3] The effectiveness of group training in communication skills ... [4] Counseling and therapy ... [5] Marital conflict, allostatic load, and the development of children's ... [6] A review of the factors associated with ... [7] Effects of a couple communication program ... [8] Satisfaction and contributing factors in satisfying long-term ... [9] Protective processes underlying the s between marital ... [10] CRD's guidance for undertaking reviews in ... [11] The qualitative content analysis ... [12] A couple-based communication intervention for ... [13] The online OurRelationship program for relationally distressed ... [14] Pilot feasibility study of a telephone-based couples intervention for physical ... [15] A randomized pilot trial of a telephone-based couples intervention for physical ... [16] Maintenance of gains in relationship and individual ... [17] A randomized controlled trial of the ... [18] The effect of conflict resolution training on children's ... [19] The effect of self-disclosure skill training on communication ... [20] Evaluation of the relative efficacy of a ... [21] A randomized clinical trial of a supportive versus a skill-based ... [22] Randomized trial of a training program to ... [23] Efficacy of communication skills training ... [24] The effects of a couples-based health behavior ... [25] A randomized clinical trial of a brief, ... [26] Effects of the Oregon model of Parent ... [27] Investigation of a new couples intervention ... [28] A proximal change experiment testing two communication ... [29] The effects of marriage education for ... [30] The effect of behavioral couple therapy on ... [31] Efficacy of a communication skill training fostering ... [32] Relationship between communication skills ... [33] Relationship between communication skills ... [34] Violence in a finnish forensic ... [35] Interpersonal psychotherapy as a treatment ... [36] Using interpersonal therapy (IPT) with older ... [37] Health behavior and health education: theory ... [38] Virtual education: Benefits and ...

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Introduction

One of the fundamental aspects that contribute to the growth and stability of a family, especially in couples, is the establishment of healthy relationships that are based on mutual understanding and adjustment among family members [1]. Healthy family relationships have a significant impact on the community by fostering positive behaviors and interactions [2]. By creating and strengthening trust, support, and friendship among family members, Effective communication is vital in building strong connections between them [3].

One of the most common problems that couples report is communication problems, followed by marital conflict as a discordant relationship. The most common marital conflict is divorce [4]. Marital conflict is an important source of environmental stress for family members that can profoundly affect their minds and thoughts [5].

Identifying the factors affecting couples' communication skills and satisfaction can help psychologists and family counselors solve important marital issues and make the counselors more focused on the subject [6]. There is a high correlation between communication skills, marital adjustment, conflict resolution, and divorce rates [7].

Among the best ways to strengthen your spousal relationship is to learn basic communication skills to help resolve conflict between couples. Various studies have shown that communication skills training reduces marital conflicts and increases marital satisfaction [7]. Interventions for couples can lead to the couples' happiness, reducing the number of divorces in the community and enhancing the satisfaction of the existing relationships between couples [8, 9].

In conclusion, healthy relationships based on understanding and adjustment are crucial to the growth of families, particularly in couples. By improving communication skills between couples, we can achieve the goal of promoting healthy relationships. Also, various techniques are available to improve communication in personal and intimate relationships.

According to the role of communication skills in enhancing coping power, promoting mental health, preventing marital conflicts, and affecting marital satisfaction, and also, by surveying and classifying the most important educational content used in communication skills training, it is possible to design effective interventions for couples. The extracted most important educational content can be used as a suitable pattern for future interventions in couples' problems. Therefore, seems necessary to design a systematic review study in educational contents of couple's problems, specifically in nursing and midwifery. Therefore, this study was designed and implemented to the most important skills educational content classified in communication skills training.

Information and Methods

Based on the York Protocol according to the four steps during 2020 [10], this study was conducted by reviewing articles in the PubMed and Science Direct databases.

The search at PubMed was done in February 2020 for the past ten years of studies with "communication skills", "life skills", "marital satisfaction", "marital conflicts", "communication skills training," "marital relationship", "interpersonal conflict", "marital interactions", "marital adjustment", "marital functioning", "relationship distress", "couples", "couples", "army couples", "married couples", "couples-oriented intervention", "couples' intervention", "distressed couples", "couples' interactions", "couples therapy", "intervention", "intervention study" and "clinical trial" keywords.

First, 358 articles were found, of which 121 were full-text articles, and 121 articles were added to the EndNote software. Two separate researchers reviewed the titles and abstracts of these articles, and finally, 15 related articles were selected.

The search on the Science Direct database was done in February 2020 with "Communication skills", "Marital satisfaction", "Life skills", "Communication skills training", "Marital relationship", "Couple", "Couples therapy" and "Army couples", "Intervention" and "Clinical trial" keywords. The selected articles in the Science Direct database have been from ten years ago. 43 articles were selected by reviewing the titles and abstracts of these articles and then were added to the EndNote software; 33 articles had full text. Two separate researchers reviewed the titles and abstracts of these articles, and finally, four related articles were selected (Figure 1).

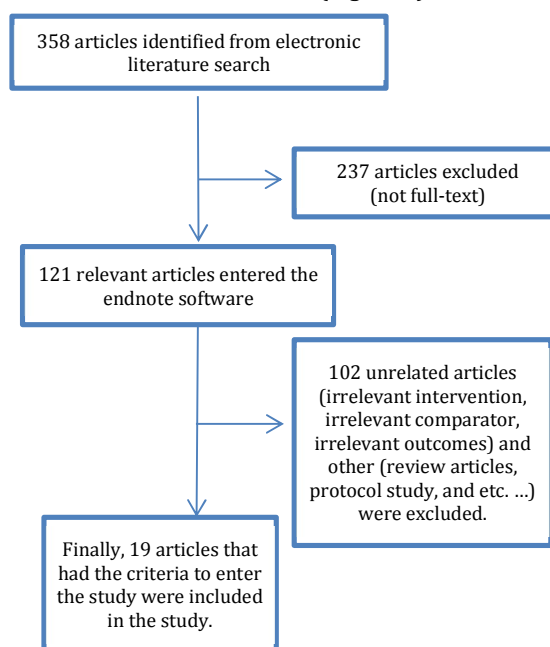


Figure 1. The PRISMA flowchart

The authors' names, year of publication, country, quality of study, educational intervention, subjects, educational methods, and evaluation results were reviewed and compared [11]. The CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) checklist was used to report the clinical trials. Each article gets a specific score from the CONSORT checklist.

The main themes of the selected articles were

extracted and coded, and similar codes were merged and reduced with the help of a statistical expert. More exact categories of the main classes were identified, named, and reported. Study biases were evaluated by two PhD reviewers in health education and the CONSORT checklist.

Findings

19 articles were included in this study (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation and report of the articles' information

Author/Year/Country	Design	Participants	Intervention	Educational content	Tools	CONSORT
Langer <i>et al.</i> [12]/2018 United States	Quasi-experimental	Single group (27 couples)	Five sessions (45-60min); Sessions 2 to 5 by phone	Reflective listening; Problem-solving strategy; Advice-giving; Non-verbal behaviors	In-session ratings of communication	28
Nowlan <i>et al.</i> [13]/2017 United States	RCT	Intervention group (46 persons)/ Control group (44 persons)	A fully web-based relationship intervention (4-6h)	Promoting emotional acceptance; Positive behavior change	GAD-7; CES-D 10; WHOQOL-BREF	27
Barsky Reese <i>et al.</i> [14]/2012 United States	Telephone-Based Couples Intervention	Single group (9 couples)	four 50min phone-based sessions teaching behavioral skills for coping with sexual challenges	Impact of colorectal cancer on sex and intimacy; Effective communication; Cognitive restructuring exercises to enhance intimacy; General sex therapy technique	Sexual satisfaction index; Female sexual function index; Dyadic sexual communication scale; Miller social intimacy scale; 4-item dyadic adjustment scale	26
Barsky Reese <i>et al.</i> [15]/2014 United States	Randomized pilot trial	Intervention group (10 couples)/ Waitlist (8 couples)	Four sessions (50min)	Skills for coping with sexual concerns and improving intimacy	Sexual satisfaction index; Dyadic sexual communication scale; Miller social intimacy scale; Female sexual function index; Sexual function questionnaire	30
Doss <i>et al.</i> [16] 2019 United States	Randomized to a waitlist control group	Intervention group (151 couples)/ Control group (149 couples)	Seven hours of online materials comprised three phases	Strengths and weaknesses; Natural differences; Hidden emotions; External stress; Communication patterns	CSI-16; PNRQ; CES-D10; GAD-7; Single item from the quality of life brief	24
Doss <i>et al.</i> [17] 2017 United States	RCT	Intervention group (151 couples)/Control group (149 couples)	Eight-hour online program (in-person couples therapy)	Integrative behavioral couple's therapy; Promote emotional acceptance; Behavior change	Couple satisfaction Index; Positive and negative relationship quality; Confidence two items; Individual functioning measures; Depression scale; GAD-7; Client evaluation of Services Questionnaire	33
Soleimani <i>et al.</i> [18]/2014 Iran	RCT	Intervention group (25 couples)/Control group (31 couples)	Ten sessions (15h) of communication skills training	Skills in healthy communication; Active listening; Assertiveness; Anger management; Conflict resolution	Conflict resolution questionnaire; Child behavior problem checklist	26
Zarei <i>et al.</i> [19] 2014 Iran	Intervention	Experiment: 13 couples The control: 13 couples	Six sessions (540min)	self-disclosure training, right reciprocal, self-disclosure, talking training in terms of disclosure, empathic listening	Demographic and communication patterns questionnaires	25
Ussher <i>et al.</i> [20]/2017 Australia	RCT	83 couples (28 couples/30 one-to-one/25 waitlist control)	four sessions (90min) in five months	Behavioral coping skills; Relational context of premenstrual distress; Assertiveness training techniques, concerns or needs	Premenstrual Symptoms Screening Tool, Subjective Evaluation of PMDs questionnaire, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Silencing the Self Scale	34
Manne [21], 2016 United States	RCT	302 couples	Eight (90-minute) sessions enhanced couple-focused group intervention or a focused coping, cognitive restructuring couples' support group.	Constructive communication, supportive needs, Stress management, sexual intimacy, Problem-solving, Emotion- focused coping, cognitive restructuring practice	Mental Health Inventory-38, the Impact of Events Scale, Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Perceived Partner unsupportive behaviors, Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group, the Cancer Rehabilitation Evaluation System, A 21-item version of Borkovec and Nau's	34
West <i>et al.</i> [22] 2018 United States	Randomized Trial	intervention group: 29-person control group: 34 persons	Fourteen home visiting programs (20-30 min).	Basic communication, listening skills, stages of change, motivational interviewing techniques.	self-administered surveys, using the video-recorded "mock visits" with trained actresses serving as standardized mothers	31
Fahami <i>et al.</i> [23]/2015 Iran	A clinical pre-test-post-test study with a control group.	Study: 16 couples Control: 16 Couples	five 3-h Sessions. Sequentially held with 1-week intervals.	communication skills, health communications, speaking skills, personality dimensions, emotional skills, chatting, official listening, hegemonic speaking, reactive listening, openly speaking, explorative listening, frankly speaking, conflict-solving process, conflict-solving planning.	Female Sexual Function Index scale, individual fertility questionnaire	28
Gorden <i>et al.</i> [24]/2019 United States	RCT	348 Latino couples	approximately 2 hours, with communication skills training comprising 30 minutes.	Models of cognitive-behavioral couple's therapy, teaching dyadic coping, communication skills training, emotional expressiveness skills, problem-solving.	The 7-item constructive communication subscale of the communication patterns questionnaire, a 4-item couples satisfaction index	25
Cohen [25] 2010 United States	RCT	intervention group: 18 couples control group: 17 couples	the 5-week intervention (n=18), a waitlist control group (n=17), followed up 1 and 3 months.	symptomatology, course, etiology, treatment of depression, coping, and communication Strategies.	Beck, Hamilton, family distress scale, illness-related behaviors, attitudes scale, dyadic adjustment scale	29
Bullard <i>et al.</i> [26]/2010 United States	A Randomized Trial	intervention group: 67 couples control group: 43 couples	13 sessions (rationales, procedures, role play, modeling exercises).	Effects of PMTO on marital Relationship processes and marital satisfaction.	The family and peer process code, the child behavior checklist, the teacher report form, and the Dyadic adjustment scale.	24
Backhaus <i>et al.</i> [27]/2018 India	Randomized waitlist-controlled trial	intervention group: 11 couples control group: 11 couples	The intervention is a 16-week, 2-hour	Empathy Psych education; affect recognition, empathy training, cognitive-behavioral and dialectical-behavioral strategies, communication skills training, Gottman's theoretical framework.	The dyadic adjustment scale, quality of marriage index, the four horsemen of the apocalypse communication questionnaire	36
Babcock <i>et al.</i> [28]/2011 United States	RCT	100 couples	Three sessions (9 Hours). Play-by-Play Interview, conflict discussions interrupted, listened to Dave Mathews' Band	"Removing the negativity" in your immediate response, manage the finances, plus a 30-second Pause for articulation, feedback skills, dialogue skills, communication skills, influencing skills training, sitting back and relaxing, and relapsing into Verbal aggression.	Conflicts tactics scale-2, dyadic adjustment scale about The discussion questionnaire, modified largely by problem-solving inventory	25

Continue of Table 1 from the last page

Allen <i>et al.</i> [29] 2012 United States	Intervention intervention group: 343 couples control group: 319 couples	group: 14.4 intervention. program based on healthy marriages	hours' PREP management skills, insights into relationship dynamics, principles of commitment, fun and friendship, forgiveness, sensuality and sexuality, expectations, core beliefs, and deployment/reintegration issues.	communication, problem solving, affect management skills, insights into the Communication Skills test	The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, 30
Ahmadi <i>et al.</i> RCT [30]/2018 Iran	experimental: 12 couples control: 12 couples	Ten sessions of 90 min duration in two months.	Behavioral relation-based treatment, marital conflict, listening skills, marital attribution, nonverbal and verbal behaviors, and Problem-solving skills.	GHQ-28 KMCS	24

The study participants ranged from a minimum of 9 couples to a maximum of 662 couples. The total number of participants in all of the articles was 5061 persons. 13 articles were from the United States, four were from Iran, and Australia and India contributed one article each; also, all of these articles came from the past decade. Among the 19 articles in this study, six had performed the intervention virtually or by phone [12-17], and the remaining 13 had performed direct intervention [18-30]. In 7 studies related to communication skills, the results of the studies showed that using educational content such as summarizing what the speaker said without reassuring, problem-solving, giving advice, nonverbal behaviors, reflective listening, giving feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship, how natural differences, hidden emotions, external stress, the promotion of emotional acceptance and the resulting behavior change, emotional expressiveness, couples therapy for depression, coping and communication strategies, affect recognition, empathy training, insights into the relationship dynamics, forgiveness, sensuality and sexuality researchers were able to

improve marital satisfaction [12, 16, 17, 24, 25, 27, 29].

The results of two studies related to communication skills showed that by using educational content such as healthy communication skills, assertiveness, anger management, conflict resolution, listening skills, marital attribution, and nonverbal and verbal behaviors, researchers could reduce marital conflicts [18, 30]. In 5 studies related to communication skills, the results of the studies showed that by using educational contents such as relaxation training, behavior change, observing, understanding, and response training, teaching dyadic coping, communication skills training, emotional expressiveness, marital relationship processes, and marital satisfaction, problem-solving, insights into the relationship dynamics, forgiveness, sensuality, and sexuality and expectations" researchers were able to improve marital relationships [17, 20, 24, 26, 29].

By surveying the educational contents mentioned in these studies, this educational content was divided into Individual and interpersonal. Also, the educational contents of the two mentioned categories were divided into the following four classes; rational, practical, emotional, and motivational (Table 2).

Table 2. Categories of educational content

Educational content	
Individual	
Rational	Problem-solving strategy [12, 21, 24, 29, 30]; Advice giving [12]; Right needs [19]; Affect recognition [27]; Affect management skills [29]; Core beliefs and deployment/ reintegration issues [29]
Practical	Behavioral coping skills include relaxation training, taking time out for self-care, dieting, and exercising [20]; Utilizing psych education [27]; Positive behavior change [13, 15, 17]
Emotional	Promoting emotional acceptance [13, 15, 17]; Hidden emotions [16]; Emotion-focused coping [21]; Getting familiar with personality dimensions and emotional skills [23]
Motivational	Motivational interviewing techniques [15]; Assertiveness [18, 20]; Symptomatology, course, etiology, and treatment of depression [25]; Manage the finances [28]; Fun [29]; Sensuality and sexuality [29]; Stress management [21]; Coping with sexual concerns [15]; Anger management [18]
Interpersonal	
Rational	What natural differences, external stress, and Patterns of communication [16]; Conflict-solving process and conflict-solving planning [18, 23]; Importance of reciprocal [19]; Marital attribution [30]; Behavioral relation-based treatment [30]; Expectations [29]; Principles of commitment [29]; Insights into the relationship dynamics [29]; Cognitive-behavioral and dialectical-behavioral strategies [27]; Emphasized coping and communication strategies [25]; Gottman's theoretical framework [27]
Practical	Active listening [12, 18, 22, 23, 30]; Nonverbal and verbal behaviors [12, 30]; Summarize what the speaker said without reassuring [12]; Communication skills training [14, 21, 15, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29]; Cognitive restructuring exercises designed to enhance intimacy and the general sex therapy technique of Sensate focus [14]; Feedback about strengths and weaknesses in their relationship [16]; Training of empathic listening and training of perseverance and generation of skills [19]; Talking training in terms of disclosure [19]; The partner-assisted cognitive restructuring practice [21]; Sitting back and relaxing and relapsing into verbal aggression [28]; Plus a 30-second pause for articulation [28]; Feedback skills [28]; Dialogue skills [28]; Removing the negativity" in your immediate response [28]; Parent management training [26]; Teaching dyadic coping [24]; Speaking skills [23]; Chatting [23]; Official listening [24]; Hegemonic speaking [24]; Openly speaking [24]; Explorative listening [24]; Frankly speaking [24]; Empathy training [28]
Emotional	Supportive needs [21]; Friendship [30]; Forgiveness [30]; Emotional expressiveness skills [25]
Motivational	Sexual intimacy [14, 21, 15]; Self-disclosure and the partner's role in the process [19]

Discussion

This study aimed to survey the educational contents of communication skills of the studies that were used in couples.

Individual educational content means that these contents are related to the individual characteristics of Persons with an individual essence. In 13 studies, individual educational content was used to influence communication skills. Also, in 3 studies, only individual educational content was used to influence couples' communication skills. In explaining the results of the studies that used individual content, this content was based on the characteristics and issues related to the psychological dimension of individuals. Various psychological characteristics such as cognition, feelings, desires, stress, and depression have been considered. These studies show that by influencing the psychological characteristics of individuals, couples' communication skills can be improved. Similar studies have shown that affecting the psychological dimension of persons can improve communication skills. If communication skills are not improved, people are susceptible to complications such as breaking trust, anger, damaged self-esteem, depression, and emotional problems in the future [31-33].

Interpersonal educational content means that these contents have the essence of more than one person, and when the person is in contact with her partner, these contents become meaningful. In 16 studies, interpersonal educational content was used to influence communication skills. Also, in 7 studies, only interpersonal educational content was used to influence couples' communication skills. The large number of studies on interpersonal content indicates that in communication skills interventions, more emphasis should be on the interpersonal dimension than the individual dimension, and educational content should be adjusted more based on interpersonal characteristics. The following Interpersonal components are mostly mentioned in the articles of this study: The types of verbal and non-verbal behaviors, types of listening, resolving marital conflicts, and intimacy.

Interpersonal therapies generally pay attention to the individual's current relationships, and the focus of interpersonal therapies is on improving relationships and communication skills. These interventions aim to change incompatible beliefs that lead to interpersonal differences. As a result, interventions with interpersonal content ultimately affect the individual and psychological dimensions of the person. In interpersonal methods in therapy sessions, interpersonal problems and differences are first evaluated, and the factors that play a role in their strength are identified. Therapeutic techniques such as rational assertion, social problem-solving, role-playing, role modeling, self-learning, positive self-

talk, relaxation, increased self-confidence, active listening, and new interpersonal relationships replace past damaged relationships. This process continues in the treatment sessions so that the participants can establish more appropriate interpersonal relationships [33, 34].

The results of studies have shown that interpersonal training reduces the symptoms of depression, increases happiness, life expectancy, and psychological well-being, and reduces feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness [35]. Working on the interpersonal problems of couples has many effects on improving the couple's relationship, increasing respect and support, having a positive outlook on life, and ultimately achieving self-actualization [36].

According to the Ecological Model, six factors affect behavior. 6 factors include the following: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, environment, policy [37]. This study found that two individual and interpersonal factors have been used as educational content in promoting communication skills in couples. It is suggested to use another four factors of ecological models (organizational, community, environment, and policy) to provide educational content to more effective couples' communication skills interventions in the future.

- In this study, six articles performed the intervention virtually or by phone. Various studies have mentioned the benefits of virtual learning, including the following: 1) Economic benefits: reduced travel and equipment production costs. 2) Educational benefits: Attention to the audience's needs, ease of access to various resources, the possibility of recording activities, and continuous pursuit of academic achievement 3) Cultural benefits: the universality of virtual learning and the possibility of building groups in cyberspace. Time benefits: Update High-speed information and availability of virtual training 24 hours a day. Considering the mentioned benefits, comprehensive virtual education in most fields of study seems necessary [38].

This article, like any other review article, has its limitations. The full text of some articles was not available. It is recommended that future interventions in couples' communication skills be established using interpersonal educational content. Nurses and midwives should consider the issue of interpersonal communication when educating couples. Most couples' communication skills interventions should be performed virtually or by phone.

Conclusion

Problem-solving, listening skills, emotional skills, behavioral coping skills, and behavior change are the most frequent educational content in communication skills interventions.

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