

**In a world of screens, make your words count- Exploring the association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. C. Chrishantha Joybell, M.D.S, Reader & Head, Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, Rajas Dental College and Hospital, Tamil Nadu Dr. M.G. R Medical University.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. A.V. Abirami, B.D.S, Lecturer, Department of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, Rajas Dental College and Hospital, Tamil Nadu Dr.M.G. R Medical University.

**Corresponding Author:** Dr.C. Chrishantha Joybell, M.D.S, Reader & Head, Department of Pedodontics and Preventive dentistry, Rajas Dental College and Hospital, Tamil Nadu Dr.M.G. R Medical University.

**Citation of this Article:** Dr. C. Chrishantha Joybell, Dr. A.V. Abirami, “In a world of screens, make your words count- Exploring the association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students”, IJDSIR- September - 2023, Volume – 6, Issue - 5, P. No. 150 – 156.

**Copyright:** © 2023, Dr.C. Chrishantha Joybell, et al. This is an open access journal and article distributed under the terms of the creative common’s attribution non-commercial License. Which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given, and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

**Type of Publication:** Original Research Article

**Conflicts of Interest:** Nil

**Abstract**

Excessive mobile phone use can have negative implications on the interpersonal communication skills of dental students. Due to the nature of the dental profession, effective communication with patients and colleagues is essential for providing quality care. Over Reliance on digital communication can limit opportunities for dental students to practice face-to-face communication skills, which may impede their ability to build good rapport and establish trust with their patients. The present study aims to explore the association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students using a questionnaire survey by collecting details about the frequency of their mobile phone usage and also determining the ability of the dental students to

communicate effectively with their patients and colleagues.

In total, 76 dental college house surgeons of Rajas Dental college and hospital, Kavalkinaru, Tamil Nadu were evaluated using a self-structured questionnaire.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest a strong association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students. Dental students, who rely on their communication skills to interact with patients and colleagues, could be negatively affected by a decrease in their social skills with increasing mobile phone usage. Dental education needs to recognize this impact and develop strategies to enhance communication skills among dental students.

**Keywords:** Screen time, Face- to face interactions, Distractions.

## Introduction

Interpersonal skills are often referred to as people skills, social skills, or social intelligence. They involve reading the signals that others send and interpreting them accurately in order to form effective responses. In today's digital age, mobile phones have become an integral part of our daily lives. From communication to entertainment, these devices offer a plethora of benefits. However, with the increasing use of mobile phones, concerns have also been raised about their impact on interpersonal communication skills, especially among young adults.<sup>1,2</sup>

Excessive mobile phone use can have negative implications on the interpersonal communication skills of dental students. Due to the nature of their profession, effective communication with patients and colleagues is essential for providing quality care. Over Reliance on digital communication can limit opportunities for dental students to practice face-to-face communication skills, which may impede their ability to build rapport and establish trust with their patients. Furthermore, interruptions during in-person conversations due to mobile phone use can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications that could have serious implications for patient health. It is important for dental students to recognize the potential negative impact of excessive mobile phone use on their communication skills and take steps to limit their use in professional settings.

The aim of the study was to explore the association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students using a questionnaire method by collecting details about the frequency of their mobile phone usage and also the

ability of the students to communicate effectively with their patients and colleagues.

## Aim and objectives

The aim of the study was to explore the association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students using a questionnaire method by collecting details about the frequency of their mobile phone usage and also the ability of the students to communicate effectively with their patients and colleagues. The objective of the study is to identify potential areas for improvement in the communication sector in dental education and practice.

## Materials and methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted at Rajas Dental College and hospital over a period of 10 days. This questionnaire was formulated with the purpose to unveil the correlation between mobile screen time and interpersonal communication skills among house surgeons.

76 house surgeons from different cultural, demographic background in the age group between 22-24 years were included in the study. The students who were not willing to participate in the study were excluded. This single blinded questionnaire study was prepared in English which was the medium of instruction in the dental college. A total of 22 questions were included in the study. Initially, the survey evaluated the average screen time of the dental students over the past 10 days.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to assess the students' ability to interpret verbal and nonverbal cues, listen effectively, and manage conflicts through effective communication.

The questionnaire included the following set of questions, viz.

1. How often do you find yourself thinking about something else while someone is speaking to you?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
2. How often do you paraphrase what the other person has said to check for understanding?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
3. How often do you ask follow-up questions to clarify what the other person is saying?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
4. How often do you use appropriate nonverbal cues (such as nodding or maintaining eye contact) to show that you are listening?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
5. How comfortable do you feel engaging in active listening during conversations?  
a. Very uncomfortable      b. Somewhat uncomfortable      c. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable  
d. Somewhat comfortable      e. Very comfortable
6. How often do you feel comfortable expressing your thoughts and opinions in a group setting?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
6. How often do you find yourself struggling to articulate your thoughts clearly during a conversation?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
7. How often do you use appropriate language and tone during conversations based on the situation and the audience?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
8. How often do you feel confident in your ability to communicate your ideas effectively to others?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
9. How often do you express your opinions or make requests in a way that is clear and direct, but not aggressive or confrontational?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
10. How often do you find yourself avoiding expressing your opinions or needs altogether to avoid conflict?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
11. How often do you stand up for yourself and assert your own needs and opinions, even in the face of opposition from others?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
12. How comfortable do you feel when dealing with conflicts or disagreements with others?  
a. Very uncomfortable      b. Somewhat uncomfortable      c. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable      d. Somewhat comfortable  
e. Very comfortable
13. How often do you actively listen and understand the other person's perspective during a conflict or disagreement?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often
14. How often do you propose solutions that are satisfactory to all parties involved during a conflict or disagreement?  
a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often

15. How confident do you feel in your ability to effectively resolve conflicts and negotiate solutions that are satisfactory to all parties involved?

- a. Not confident at all      b. Somewhat confident      c. Moderately confident  
d. Very confident      e. Extremely confident

16. How often do you actively try to see things from another person's perspective to understand how someone else is feeling?

- a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often

17. How often do you listen to someone's experiences without judgment or interruption?

- a. Never      b. Rarely      c. Sometimes      d. Often

18. How confident do you feel in your ability to effectively use nonverbal cues (body language, facial expressions) to convey your message/ to show interest or engagement during a conversation?

- a. Not confident at all      b. Somewhat confident      c. Moderately confident  
d. Very confident      e. Extremely confident

19. How good you are in your ability to interpret nonverbal cues from others?

- a. Not confident at all      b. Somewhat confident      c. Moderately confident  
d. Very confident      e. Extremely confident

20. Have you encountered a situation where nonverbal cues were misinterpreted causing a communication breakdown?

- a. yes      b. no

22. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, how did you handle the situation?

- a. I clarified my nonverbal cues to avoid further misunderstanding.  
B.I asked the other person to explain what you meant  
c. I ignored the misunderstanding and continued the conversation      d. others.

## Results

Table 1

Sn.	Questions.	a	b	c	d	e
1.	How often do you find yourself thinking about something else while someone is speaking to you?	0	20	34	22	
2.	How often do you paraphrase what the other person has said to check for understanding?	2	20	42	12	
3.	How often do you ask follow-up questions to clarify what the other person is saying?	2	16	44	14	
4.	How often do you use appropriate nonverbal cues (such as nodding or maintaining eye contact) to show that you are listening?	0	6	16	54	
5.	How comfortable do you feel engaging in active listening during conversations?	0	18	12	44	2

Table 2

Sn.	Questions.	a	b	c	d	e
6.	How often do you feel comfortable expressing your thought and opinion in a group setting	0	18	44	14	
7.	How often do you find yourself struggling to articulate your thoughts and opinion in a group setting	4	14	24	34	
8.	How often do you use appropriate language and tone during conversations based on the situation and the audience	2	12	42	20	
9.	How often do you feel confident in your ability to communicate your ideas effectively to others	4	10	30	32	
10.	How often do you express your opinion or make requests in a way that is clear and direct, but not aggressive or confrontational	0	20	32	22	

Table 3

Sn.	Questions.	a	b	c	d	e
11.	How often do you find yourself avoiding expressing your opinion or needs altogether to avoid conflict	4	20	30	22	
12.	How often do you stand up for yourself and assert your own needs and opinions, even in the face of opposition from other	8	22	26	12	8
13.	How comfortable do you feel when dealing with conflicts or disagreements with others	2	10	36	28	
14.	How often do you actively listen and understand to the other person's perspective during a conflict or disagreement	4	12	54	6	
15.	How often do you propose solution s that are satisfactory to all parties involved during a conflict or disagreement	4	44	18	4	6

Table 4

Sn.	Questions.	a	b	c	d	e
16.	How confident do you feel in your ability to effectively resolve conflicts and negotiate solutions that are satisfactory to all parties involved	2	10	28	36	
17.	How often do you actively try to see things from another person's perspective to understand how someone else is feeling	2	12	32	30	
18.	How often do you listen to someone's experiences without judgement or interruption	4	30	30	6	6
19.	How confident do you feel in your ability to effectively use nonverbal cues to convey your message/to show interest or engagement during a conversation	6	38	18	6	8

20.	How good you are in your ability to interpret nonverbal cues from others	4	12	30	4	6
21.	Have you encountered a situation where nonverbal cues were misinterpreted causing a communication breakdown	36	40			
22.	If you answer yes to previous question, how did you handle the situation	14	12	8	6	

Table 5

Table showing the screen time of the dental students:

1.	<1hour	-
2.	1-2 hours	2%
3.	2-3 hours	25%
4.	3-4 hours	43%
5.	>4 hours	30%

## Discussion

Interpersonal skills are the skills we use every day when we communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. They include a wide range of skills, but particularly communication skills such as listening and effective speaking. They also include the ability to control and manage your emotions.

It is no exaggeration to say that interpersonal skills are the foundation for success in life. People with strong interpersonal skills tend to be able to work well with other people, including in teams or groups, formally and informally. They communicate effectively with others, whether family, friends, colleagues, customers or clients. They also have better relationships at home and at work. In our present study, 43% of the students had a screen time of 3- 4 hours per day and 30% had a screen time of more than 4 hours per day. About 44% of the students feel some discomfort while expressing their thoughts and opinions in a group setting and they also find it difficult while engaging in active listening during conversations.

Dental educators need to recognize the impact of mobile phone usage on interpersonal communication skills and

develop strategies to enhance communication skills among dental students. These strategies could include the use of simulated patient scenarios and communication skills workshops to help students develop effective communication skills.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

The negative association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills could be attributed to several factors-decreased social skills, miscommunications due to distraction, lack of attention in the conversation.<sup>6,7</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest a negative association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills among dental students. The negative association between mobile phone usage and interpersonal communication skills could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, excessive mobile phone use can result in decreased social skills, including the ability to read nonverbal cues, which are crucial in interpersonal communication. Dental students, who rely on their communication skills to interact with patients and colleagues, could be negatively affected by a decrease in their social skills. Dental education needs

to recognize this impact and develop strategies to enhance communication skills among dental students.

### Limitations

The limitations of this study include the use of self-reported data and a cross-sectional design.

### References

1. Prasad M, Patthi B, Singla A, Gupta R, Saha S, Kumar JK, Malhi R, Pandita V. Nomophobia: A Cross-sectional Study to Assess Mobile Phone Usage Among Dental Students. J Clin Diagn Res. 2017 Feb;11(2)
2. Khatoon, Binish & Hill, Kirsty & Walmsley, Anthony. (2014). Dental students' uptake of mobile technologies. British dental journal. 216. 669-73. 10.1038/sj.bdj.2014.523
3. Hottel TL, Hardigan PC. Improvement in the interpersonal communication skills of dental students. J Dent Educ. 2005 Feb; 69(2):281-4. PMID: 15689613.
4. Carey, JA & Madill, Anna & Manogue, Michael. (2010). Communications skills in dental education: A systematic research review. European journal of dental education : official journal of the Association for Dental Education in Europe. 14. 69-78. 10.1111/j.1600-0579.2009.00586.x.
5. Moore, Rod. "Maximizing Student Clinical Communication Skills in Dental Education—A Narrative Review." Dentistry Journal 10.4 (2022): 57.
6. Jin, Borae, and Namkee Park. "Mobile voice communication and loneliness: Cell phone use and the social skills deficit hypothesis." New Media & Society 15.7 (2013): 1094-1111.
7. Celikkalp, Ulfiye, et al. "The smart phone addiction levels and the association with communication skills

in nursing and medical school students." Journal of Nursing Research 28.3 (2020): e93.