

# The Relationship Between Emotional Literacy Levels and Communication Skills of Midwifery Students

Ebelik Öğrencilerinin Duygusal Okuryazarlık Düzeyleri ve İletişim Becerileri Arasındaki İlişki

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Geliş Tarihi / Received : 23.01.2018 Kabul Tarihi / Accepted : 05.03.2018

## Abstract

Objective	Emotional literacy is the ability of individuals to recognize, understand and respond to the feelings of their own and others' in a healthy way. It is important that midwives are professionals who recognize and manage their feelings, cope effectively with their problems, and have meaningful relationships with their environment so that they can be able to recognize and be sensitive to the emotional needs of the individual they provide care. This research was conducted to determine the relationship between emotional literacy levels and communication skills of midwifery students. ( <i>Sakarya Med J</i> 2016, 8(1):108-116 )
Materials and Methods	The universe of this descriptive study 744 students who have studied in the midwifery department of three universities which Sivas (%40.7), Malatya (%29.3) and Tokat (%30.9) created the population of this study. The sample of the study consisted of 646 students who accepted to participate in the study. The data were collected using the Personal Information Form, the Emotional Literacy Scale (ELS) and the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES). Percentage distribution, mean, standard deviation, one-way variance analysis and Pearson correlation analysis were used in the analysis of the data.
Results	The average age of the students was 20.4±1.65. At the end of the research, it was found that the average ELS score of the students was 122.8±25.98 (moderate) and total CSES score was 102.7±13.09 (high level). There was a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.532$ ; $p=0.000$ ) between the total scores of the ELS and the CSES.
Conclusion	Emotional literacy levels of students are moderate, their communication skills are high, and their communication skills increase as emotional literacy levels increase. The creation of programs to improve the emotional literacy of midwife candidates is important to educate midwives who can recognize and manage their own and others' feelings, who can empathize and have strong communicational skills in the future.
Key Words	Midwifery students; emotional literacy; communication skills

## Öz

Amaç	Duygusal okuryazarlık; bireyin kendisinin ve başkalarının duygularını sağlıklı bir şekilde tanıma, anlama ve bu duygulara karşılık verme yeteneğidir. Ebelerin bakım verdikleri bireyin duygusal gereksinimlerine duyarlı olması, fark edebilmesi ve uygun yaklaşımlarda bulunabilmesi için duy-gulanı tanıyan, yöneten, ilişkilerini kontrol edebilen, sorunlarıyla etkin baş edebilen, çevresi ile anlamlı ilişkiler kurabilen meslek profesyonelleri olmaları önemlidir. Araştırma ebelik öğrencilerinin duygusal okuryazarlık düzeyleri ve iletişim becerileri arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. ( <i>Sakarya Tıp Dergisi</i> 2018, 8(1):108-116 ).
Materyal ve Metod	Bu tanımlayıcı nitelikteki araştırmanın evrenini Sivas, Malatya ve Tokat bulunan üç üniversitenin ebelik bölümünde okuyan 744 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Araştırmanın örneklemini çalışmaya katılmayı kabul eden 646 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Veriler Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Duygusal Okuryazarlık Ölçeği (DOYÖ), İletişim Becerilerini Değerlendirme Ölçeği (İBDÖ) ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde yüzdelik dağılım, ortalama, standart sapma tek yönlü varyans analizi ve Pearson korelasyon analizi kullanılmıştır.
Bulgular	Öğrencilerin yaş ortalaması 20,4±1,65'tir. Araştırma sonucunda öğrencilerin toplam DOYÖ puan ortalamasının 122,8±25,98 (orta düzeyde), toplam İBDÖ puan ortalamasının 102,7±13,09 (yüksek düzeyde) olduğu bulunmuştur. Öğrencilerin toplam DOYÖ ve İBDÖ puanları arasında pozitif yönde anlamlı ilişki olduğu ( $r=0.532$ ; $p=0.000$ ) saptanmıştır.
Sonuç	Öğrencilerin duygusal okuryazarlık düzeyleri orta, iletişim becerileri yüksek düzeydedir ve duygusal okuryazarlık düzeyleri arttıkça iletişim becerileri de artmaktadır. Henüz öğrencilik yaşantısı içinde olan ebe adaylarının duygusal okuryazarlıklarını geliştirecek programların oluşturulması gelecekte kendisinin ve başkalarının duygularını tanıyıp yönetebilen, empati yapabilen, güçlü iletişim becerileri olan ebelerin yetişmesi açısından önem taşımaktadır.
Keywords	Ebelik öğrencileri; duygusal okuryazarlık; iletişim becerileri

## Introduction

Emotional literacy is defined as the ability of individuals to recognize, understand and respond to the feelings of their own and others in a healthy way, ie emotional interaction ability.<sup>1,2</sup> In other words, it is the skill of understanding the emotional situations of ourselves and others correctly and approaching the events with a certain knowledge and sufficiency.<sup>3</sup> When the literature is examined, it is seen that there is no clear distinction between the concepts of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence. Bochino (1999) identified emotional intelligence as a combination of innate potential, personality dynamics, and emotional literacy as a set of skills for perceiving and using subsequently developed affective processes and thus he clarified the distinction between emotional intelligence and emotional literacy.<sup>4</sup>

Kandemir and Dundar (2008) interpreted emotional intelligence as a prerequisite for emotional literacy, whereas emotional literacy as the expression of emotional intelligence. By exemplifying over the concept of empathy, they explained emotional intelligence as the innate empathy potential of individuals and emotional literacy as the ability of individuals to develop strategies for the development and use of this potential, and to use the empathy in human relations.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, emotional literacy is the whole of the perceptions, skills and strategies that can be seen in the earliest stages of an individual's life and keep developing until the end of his/her life.<sup>3,4</sup>

Emotional literacy is consisted of components such as empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills, emotional awareness, management of emotions, repairing emotional damage, and problem solving.<sup>3</sup> Steiner (2003) identified five basic skills in emotional literacy education. These skills are knowing your own feelings, having a heartfelt sense of empathy, learning to manage your emotions, repairing emotional damage and developing emotional interactivity. According to Steiner, if the individual gains the other four skills, s/he eventually develops the "emotional interactivity" ability. Individuals with emotional interaction ability can perceive the emotional states of the individuals around them and can manage/control emotions by knowing how to interact with them correctly.<sup>1</sup> In the realization of all these components, it is important to use communication skills effectively. It is necessary to have a good level of communication skills so that individuals can express their feelings, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes appropriately and reasonably, listen effectively to others, fully and correctly understand what they say verbally and nonverbally, and determine appropriate approaches to individuals.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Communication skills of health care professionals are very important in terms of correct perception of health-related messages such as coping with stress, problem solving, and preventing problems caused by communication.<sup>7,8</sup> Midwifery is one of the health professions that are in intensive communication with people and serve people directly. There are major responsibilities of midwives in the organization, execution and implementation of health services for community health in the context of primary health services in our country. Midwives offer healthcare, health education and counseling services to individuals in both clinical settings and in field to improve community health. It is important to train midwives who can recognize and manage their emotions, motivate themselves, cope effectively with their problems, create meaningful relationships with their environment and realize themselves. These are important for midwives because they should offer quality care, recognize and understand emotions of individuals they provide care and should set appropriate approaches for them.<sup>5,9</sup>

Midwives who graduated by increasing the potential of emotional intelligence will be able to ef-

fectively meet not only the physiological needs but also the emotional needs of the individuals they provide health services, and will contribute to increase the quality of midwifery care. For this reason, the evaluation and development of emotional literacy and communication skills of midwife candidates who are still students is important in terms of the training of future professional midwives. This research was conducted to determine the relationship between emotional literacy levels and communication skills of midwifery students.

## Materials and Methods

This research is descriptive and cross-sectional. The universe of research 744 students who have studied in the midwifery department of three universities which Sivas, Malatya and Tokat created the population of this study. The sample of this study consisted of 646 students who accepted to participate in the study between December 1, 2014 and December 30, 2014. In the research 86.8% of the students were reached. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows (14.0) package program was used for the statistical evaluation of the data. Percentage distribution, mean, standard deviation, one-way variance analysis and Pearson correlation analysis were used in the analysis of the data. The level of error was taken as  $p < 0.05$ .

## Ethics of Research

Before the research, written permission from the institution in which the study would be conducted and ethical approval from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (decision no. 2014-11/07) were taken. The purpose of study was explained to participants and verbal consents of the students who agreed to participate were taken. It was stated that the data obtained would only be used in the scope of the research, would stay hidden and that they would not be asked for their identity information.

## Collection of the Data

The data of the research were collected using the "Personal Information Form", the "Emotional Literacy Scale" (ELS) and the "Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES)".

**Personal Information Form:** The personal information form is a form created by the researchers to determine the characteristics of individuals such as age, gender, marital status, family type, residence place before university.

**Emotional Literacy Scale (ELS):** The scale was developed by Palancı et al. (2014).<sup>2</sup> Emotional literacy scale is a question form consisting of 34 items which were developed to evaluate emotional literacy. The question form consists of 3 sub-dimensions (self-regulation, emotional awareness, social skills). There are 13 questions in the scale's self-regulation dimension, 10 questions in the emotional awareness dimension, and 11 questions in the social skill dimension. In the question form, the items are scored between 1 and 5 points. The lowest score possible is 34, the highest score is 170. 34-79 points indicate low emotional literacy, 80-125 points moderate emotional literacy and over 125 points indicate high emotional literacy. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .90 for the first factor, .87 for the second factor, .86 for the third factor and .94 for the whole scale.

**Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES):** The scale was developed by Korkut (1996) to

understand how individuals evaluate their communication skills.<sup>10</sup> Reliability coefficient  $r=0.76$  ( $p<0.001$ ) was found in the reliability test of the scale with the retest. The five-point Likert type scale graded from “always” to “never” is composed of 25 expressions. In the first studies, the scale was scored 0-4 and in the last studies scored 1-5 (Korkut, 2005).<sup>11</sup> This study was scored between 1-5. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale with no reverse codes was 125 and the lowest score was 25. The high scores obtained from the scale means that individuals evaluate their communication skills positively.

## Results

The average age of the midwifery students in the study was  $20.4\pm1.6$ . 40.7% were students studying in Sivas, 30.0% in Tokat and 29.3% in Malatya. Of the students, 24.3% were in the first grade, 29.6% in the second grade, 23.7% in the third grade and 22.4% were in the fourth grade. 55.3% of students lived in the province center, 59.3% stayed in dormitory, 83.3% had small families and 56.8% of theirs monthly income was enough to get by. The sociodemographic characteristics of midwifery students are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of midwifery students (n:646)		
Characteristics	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
17-19	197	30.5
20-22	389	60.2
23 and above	60	9.3
<b>Grade</b>		
1. grade	157	24.3
2. grade	191	29.6
3. grade	153	23.7
4. grade	145	22.4
<b>Residence place before university</b>		
Province	357	55.3
County	179	27.7
Village/Town	110	17.0
<b>Current residence place</b>		
Dormitory	383	59.3
Home, with friends	116	18.0
With family	147	22.7
<b>Family type</b>		
Small	538	83.2
Big	96	14.9
Broken	12	1.9
<b>Monthly income</b>		
Adequate	175	27.1
Tolerable	367	56.8
Inadequate	104	16.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The average score of the students taken from the Communication Skills Evaluation Scale (CSES) was  $102.7\pm13.09$ . The average score of the students taken from the Emotional Literacy Scale

(ELS) was 122.8±25.98. It was found that 52.9% of the students had high level of emotional literacy, 40.4% had moderate level of emotional literacy, and 6.7% had low level of emotional literacy. The average scores of the students taken from the CSES and ELS are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Average scores of students from ELS and CSES		
ELS *	Min-Max	± S
Self-regulation	13-65 <sup>***</sup> (13-65) <sup>****</sup>	46.5±10.87
Emotional awareness	10-50 <sup>***</sup> (10-50) <sup>****</sup>	37.2±8.47
Social skill	11-55 <sup>***</sup> (11-55) <sup>****</sup>	39.1±9.58
Total	34-170 <sup>***</sup> (34-170) <sup>****</sup>	122.8±25.98
CSES <sup>**</sup>	25-125 <sup>***</sup> (25-125) <sup>****</sup>	102.7±13.09
<sup>*</sup> Emotional Literacy Scale <sup>**</sup> Communication Skills Evaluation Scale <sup>***</sup> Minimum and maximum scores students received from the scale <sup>****</sup> Minimum and maximum scores of the scale		

When the socio-demographic characteristics of the midwifery students are compared according to the average scores of ELS and CSES, there was no significant correlations between the scores obtained from ELS and CSES and age, grade, residence place before university, current residence place, monthly income ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of average scores of midwifery students from ELS and CSES with Sociodemographic Characteristics			
Characteristics	Number	ELS Mean ± SD	CSES Mean ± SD
Age			
17-19	197	121.89± 25.9	104.19±10.9
20-22	389	123.28± 25.6	102.02±13.7
23 and above	60	123.11± 28.4	102.96±14.9
		F=0.189; p=0.828	F=1.804; p=0.166
Grade			
grade	157	122.79± 25.7	103.48± 11.3
grade	191	122.62± 25.2	103.62± 12.2
grade	153	121.14± 26.6	100.71± 14.3
grade	145	124.98± 26.6	103.04± 14.4
		F=0.550; p=0.648	F=1.709; p=0.164
Residence place before university			
Province	357	123.23±26.9	102.81±13.9
County	179	120.48±25.5	101.56±12.3
Village/Town	110	125.43±23.2	104.60±11.0
		F=1.325; p=0.266	F=1.834; p=0.161
Current residence place			
Dormitory	383	121.93±25.6	102.59±13.2
Home, with friends	116	126.31±24.5	104.00±12.1
With family	147	122.48±27.9	102.26±13.5
		F=1.287; p=0.277	F=0.654; p=0.521
Monthly income			
Adequate	175	125.30	102.73
Tolerable	367	121.39	102.79
Inadequate	104	123.82	102.78
		F=1.434; p=0.239	F=0.001; p=0.999



When the relationship between emotional literacy and communication skills of midwifery students was evaluated, it was found that there was a significant positive correlation between total ELS and CSES scores ( $r=0.532$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Relationship between emotional literacy and communication skills of students**

ELS*	Self-regulation	Emotional aware- ness	Social skill	Total
CSES**	$r= 0.467$	$r=0.465$	$r=0.500$	$r= 0.532$
	$p=0.000^{***}$	$p=0.000^{***}$	$p=0.000^{***}$	$p=0.000^{***}$
*Emotional Literacy Scale **Communication Skills Evaluation Scale *** $p<0.01$				

## Discussion

In this study, the relationship between the emotional literacy and communication skills of midwifery students was examined. When the literature was examined, few studies were found on emotional literacy. Due to lack of studies on health workers or midwifery students, results of other studies on emotional intelligence and communication of students, midwives and nurses were used to evaluate this study's findings.

Communication skills are in fact the foundation of many other skills and require sensitivity to all verbal or nonverbal messages given by individuals, effective listening and replying. Employees in the profession, who are more involved with people, need to master communication skills.<sup>11</sup> Effective communication, especially in health services, has a distinctive importance. Success can be achieved only when effective communication and interaction are established in the protection and development of a biopsychosocial entity, the development and rehabilitation of the affected people. Midwifery profession provides one-to-one services to women, newborns, children, families and thus to the society. It is a profession group that can reach to all society by serving in the presentation of primary, secondary and tertiary health care services in the center and by providing primary health care services in the family health centers and health care homes in the periphery. For this reason, there is a need for studies for the evaluation and development of emotional literacy and communication skills in order to provide quality midwifery care by effectively meeting not only physiological needs but also emotional needs of individuals.

The enhancement of the quality of the practices related to the profession that offer assistance and care to people will be possible through effective communication between people who provide care and who are provided care.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Effective interpersonal relationships, aiding and counseling skills are the skills that a midwife needs to acquire and form the preconditions for good quality midwifery care.<sup>13</sup>

When the communication skills of the students studying in the midwifery and nursing departments are evaluated, it has been determined that their communication skills are good/high.<sup>14,15,16,17</sup> In our study, it was found that the communication skills of midwifery students were high in accordance with the literature. When the factors affecting communication skills are examined, the study of Erci et al., in which the communication skills of midwives and nurses working in the family health centers evaluated, found that the communication skills of those who are at <sup>18-23</sup> age group, sing-

le, working for 6-10 years, having bachelor's degree and midwives have higher communication skills.<sup>18</sup> In the study conducted by Tutuk et al (2002) on students, it was determined that the communication skills perceived by the students increased as the grade increased, but that there was no difference in terms of age, graduated high school, active participation to social activities.<sup>12</sup> In Bingöl and Demir's (2011) study, there was no significant relationship between grade, family structure, education level of parents and working level of mother and communication skills of students.<sup>15</sup> Similarly in this study, there was no significant relationship between communication skills of students and age, grade, residence place before university, current residence place, and monthly income.

Emotional intelligence is important in the development of professional relationships and different point of views in midwifery practice.<sup>13</sup> In some studies conducted on the nursing students, it was determined that the emotional intelligence levels of the students were above average.<sup>19,20</sup> In a study in which the emotional intelligence abilities of executive nurses were examined, it was found that scores of the nurses were above average and they received high scores from social responsibility, empathy and problem solving subscales.<sup>21</sup> In the study of Kuzu ve Eker's (2010) in which emotional intelligence and communication skills of nursing students and other university students were evaluated, communication skills and emotional intelligence average scores of nursing students were significantly higher than the average scores of the other university students.<sup>14</sup> In some studies conducted on nursing students, emotional intelligence average scores of the students were found to be at moderate level.<sup>22,23</sup> In another study on emotional intelligence levels, it was determined that 14.9% of students had a strong emotional intelligence level, 40.1% needed their emotional intelligence to improve, and 45% definitely needed improvement.<sup>24</sup> In our study, it was found that general average score of midwifery students taken from ELS was  $122.8 \pm 25.98$ , which was moderate. When scores from ELS were classified, it was determined that 52.9% of the students had high level of emotional literacy, 40.4% of them had moderate level of emotional literacy, and 6.7% had low level of emotional literacy. Nearly half of midwifery students (47.1%) appear to have a low or moderate level of emotional literacy. For this reason, it is thought that initiatives and programs to improve midwifery students' emotional literacy levels should be implemented. When the studies about the factors affecting the level of emotional intelligence were evaluated, Namdar et al. (2008) found in their study that there was no relation between emotional intelligence and age and education but it was related to economic status of the family.<sup>19</sup> In Avşar and Kaşıkçı's study (2010), the level of emotional intelligence was higher in the senior students than in the other students.<sup>23</sup> In Taşlıyan et al.'s study (2015), there was no significant difference between the age variable and emotional intelligence of the students who participated in the study.<sup>25</sup> It was found that emotional intelligence skills did not change according to the family type in the studies performed by Kuzu and Karakaş.<sup>14,26</sup> In a different study conducted on health high school students, there was no significant relationship between education level of the parents of students, residence place of where they studied, the socio-economic status and the emotional intelligence scale and its subgroups.<sup>27</sup> In our study, there was no significant relationship between age, grade, residence place before university, current residence place, monthly income according to the average scores of midwifery students taken from ELS (Table 3).

It is stated that emotional intelligence is important for effective communication with individuals, that people can improve their communication skills by understanding their own and others emotions, by controlling and adjusting their emotions.<sup>7</sup> For increase of midwives that can communicate

effectively with individuals by using emotional intelligence, it is necessary to improve the emotional literacy of midwife candidates from the training period. When studies on emotional intelligence and communication skills in midwifery students are examined in the literature, Cetinkaya and Alparslan (2011) found a positive significant relationship between emotional intelligence and communication skills dimensions.<sup>6</sup> In Kuzu and Eker's (2010) study of nursing students and other students in the comparison group, it was determined that there was a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence total score and all emotional intelligence subscales of nursing students and communication skills scale.<sup>14</sup> In the study of Taşlıyan et al.'s (2015), it was determined that emotional management, empathic sensitivity, positive emotional use dimensions of emotional intelligence have a statistically significant effect on communication skills.<sup>25</sup> In a study conducted on nurses working in psychiatry clinics, nurses with high emotional intelligence scores had also high average communication skills scores.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to the literature, in a study that assessed the emotional intelligence and communication skills of the midwifery students, there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and communication skills of the students<sup>7</sup>. In this study, similarly to the literature, there was a significant positive correlation between the emotional literacy and communication skills of the midwifery students ( $r=0.532$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) (Table 4).

As a result, emotional literacy levels of students are moderate, their communication skills are high and communication skills increase as emotional literacy levels increase.

Midwifery profession provides one-to-one services to women, newborns, children, families and thus to the society. It is a profession group that can reach to all society by serving in the presentation of primary, secondary and tertiary health care services in the center and by providing primary health care services in the family health centers and health care homes in the periphery. For this reason, there is a need for studies for the evaluation and development of emotional literacy and communication skills in order to provide quality midwifery care by effectively meeting not only physiological needs but also emotional needs of individuals.

Establishing initiatives and creating programs to improve the emotional literacy of midwife candidates who are still students is important for the raise of midwives who can recognize and manage their own and others emotions, who can empathize and who have strong communication skills.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.



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