

# Development and Validation of a Communication Skills Training Package Based on Phubbing

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to develop and validate a communication skills training package based on phubbing. The identified research community consisted of 50 books and articles related to communication skills and phubbing, sourced from reputable domestic and international scientific websites. According to the inclusion criteria, 15 articles and books related to the research variables were selected as the research sample. To identify the training modules, a three-phase coding method by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was used. The proposed training package was designed in 8 sessions with the following topics: "Definition of Phubbing and its Impact on Interpersonal Relationships, Eye Contact Training in Interactions, Verbal Communication, Non-verbal Communication, Empathy and Mutual Understanding Training, Communication Boundaries, Coping Strategies, Practice and Feedback." The content and face validity of the proposed training package was evaluated by 9 experts from the University of Azad, Birjand, using the Lawshe method, resulting in values of 0.78 and 0.89, respectively. The reliability of the proposed training package was examined with two independent coders and found to be 86%. Based on these findings, the package demonstrated adequate validity and reliability.

**Keywords:** Training Package, Phubbing, Communication Skills.

## 1. Introduction

The term "phubbing" is derived from the combination of the words snubbing and phone and describes the excessive use of smartphones. Similarly, being "phubbed" refers to the act of ignoring another person when this behavior occurs during an interaction (Aljasir, 2022). In other words, phubbing behavior is defined as ignoring the other party and focusing on one's smartphone in social environments (Yam, 2023). It is noteworthy that in research, phubbing is often replaced with smartphone addiction; moreover, phubbing is a form of social exclusion and interpersonal neglect that can negatively affect individuals' social lives in terms of the quality of interpersonal relationships (Santos et al., 2023). This behavior is considered a significant issue in interpersonal relationships (Zhang et al., 2023). In essence, a person uses their mobile phone during conversations or interactions with others, avoiding interpersonal communication. This behavior can significantly harm social interactions (Rahman et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024), as time spent checking one's mobile phone leads to neglecting interpersonal communication (Davey et al., 2018). Sun and Miller (2023) consider phubbing a set of various virtual addictions, representing a multidimensional and complex structure that includes addiction to mobile phones, the internet, text messaging, social media, and gaming (Sun & Miller, 2023). Studies have shown that phubbing behavior negatively affects communication skills (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023) because it results in neglecting interpersonal communication (Ayar & Gürkan, 2022).

Research findings have shown that communication is one of the most crucial factors for the survival, stability, and growth of families (Haris & Kumar, 2018). This ability is one of the most important tools in modern society and a critical factor in human development and well-being. Communication can be defined as the transmission of information from the sender to the receiver in such a way that it is comprehensible and clear to both. If any of these elements (sender, receiver, or message) is absent, no communication takes place (Mukhiddinova et al., 2021). In other words, communication skills refer to the behaviors through which an individual can interact with others in a way that leads to positive responses and avoids negative ones (Samfira, 2020). These skills include expressing opinions, desires, needs, and fears. The ability to establish and maintain friendly relationships has a significant impact on individual and social mental health. Communication skills

not only involve the ability to speak, understand language, and converse but also include the ability to send and receive messages through non-verbal means (Fahmi & Ali, 2022). Communication skills significantly increase life satisfaction and reduce conflicts (Jafari et al., 2021). Individuals with effective communication skills express their desires more effectively, resolve conflicts, share thoughts and feelings more easily, and feel greater intimacy with each other (Zare Baghbidi & Etemadifard, 2020). These skills lead to positive behaviors and help avoid negative reactions from the other party (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Pinar et al., 2018), including speaking, listening, and non-verbal communication. The "speaking" skill includes the ability to express emotions, articulate needs and desires, and provide constructive criticism and complaints. The "listening" skill teaches the principles of empathetic listening to others' feelings, needs, and criticisms. The "non-verbal" skill involves the appropriate bodily feedback during interpersonal communication (Hiew et al., 2016).

Internet addiction negatively impacts communication skills by 0.27% (Özer et al., 2023). The results of Hosseini and Niknam's (2020) research showed that with increased social media addiction, communication skills decrease. Phubbing also negatively affects relationships (Ebrahimzadeh et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024) and particularly weakens the quality of friendship relationships (Abeele et al., 2019), and it also leads to conflicts between couples, reduces their positive feelings toward each other, and harms their relationships (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). On the other hand, teaching communication skills has been effective in reducing aggression and improving individuals' attachment quality (Ebrahimzadeh et al., 2023). In Iran, there is a lack of theoretical background and research on phubbing and its impact on face-to-face communication skills. The suggestion to design a training package with these features could fill this gap. Furthermore, designing such a training package tailored to the increasing impact of information technology in interpersonal relationships could address the emerging void.

## 2. Methods and Materials

One of the key characteristics that distinguish scientific writings from other types of writing is their reliance on methodology and scientific research methods. Selecting the appropriate research method is one of the most important principles in research. In this study, the researcher aimed to develop a proposed communication skills training package

based on phubbing, and to achieve this goal, a mixed-methods research design with a sequential exploratory strategy was employed. In the sequential exploratory strategy, qualitative data is first collected and analyzed, and then, in the second phase, which is based on the results of the first phase, the validation of the training package is conducted using a quantitative approach (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Clark, 2007). Therefore, this research is applied in its purpose and utilizes a mixed-methods methodology (qualitative-quantitative). The aim of collecting qualitative data was to discover themes related to communication skills based on phubbing. In the quantitative phase of the study, the proposed educational program was validated using the Lawshe method. The research population consisted of all books and articles related to communication skills and phubbing, sourced from reputable domestic and international scientific websites. A total of 50 articles and books were selected as the research population. To select the research sample, keywords such as "communication skills," "interpersonal communication," "phubbing," "nomophobia," and "phub" were searched in reputable domestic scientific websites (Ilmnet, Magiran, Noormagz, SID) and international databases (Google Scholar). The search process continued until theoretical saturation was reached,

which occurred when no new concepts emerged from the research. Once saturation was achieved, the process of searching for articles and books was stopped. Ultimately, 15 articles and books were selected as the research sample. For the analysis of articles and books, grounded theory methodology was employed. To design the components and topics of the proposed training package, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-phase coding method was used. After the proposed communication skills training package based on phubbing was developed, it was presented to 9 experts in the field of psychology at the University of Azad, Birjand, for evaluation to determine its face and content validity.

### 3. Findings and Results

In this study, the selected articles included 13 foreign articles and 2 Iranian articles. Additionally, 4 articles examined the relationship between phubbing and communication skills qualitatively, while 11 articles analyzed this relationship quantitatively. The articles were studied line by line. The initial concepts (codes) related to phubbing and communication skills were identified, and the codes were noted. In this phase, the identified concepts were presented as open codes in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

*Open Codes Identified from Articles*

Open Code	Source
Disregard for individuals, ignoring individuals, increased interpersonal conflict, feelings of anger in relationships	Robert & David (2017)
Distractibility in interpersonal relationships, interruptions in face-to-face interactions, poor mood, reduced romantic relationship quality	Thomas et al. (2022)
Phubbing, phubber, individuals repeat phubbing behavior	Agard (2020)
Increased jealousy between couples, weakening of bonds between individuals, reduced relationship satisfaction, increased depression, decreased interpersonal trust, poor conversation quality	Alsagaf & O'Donnell (2019)
Decreased sense of belonging, reduced perceived communication quality, reduced emotional connections	Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2018)
Reduced eye contact, lack of body language, absence of empathy for others	Blout & Nazir (2019)
Self-control prevents phubbing, setting boundaries, girls are more engaged in phubbing, girls suffer more from being phubbed, young people are more engaged in phubbing	Karadag et al. (2015)
Phubbing as a factor in reducing self-esteem	Ferris et al. (2015)
Increased jealousy	Drwin et al. (2014)
Feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, jealousy, reduced intimacy, interpersonal closeness, and trust development	Przeblinski & Weinstein (2013)
Lack of eye contact, eye contact	Nazir & Pishkin (2016)
Appropriate communication is a factor in building bonds, speaking, positive attitudes toward face-to-face interactions	Hieu et al. (2016)
Reduced communication skills (body language, active listening, empathy), decreased positive emotions	Kilicarslan & Parmaksiz (2023)
Reduced marital intimacy	Saeidi et al. (2024)
Exchange of emotions	Beshirian et al. (2024)

Based on [Table 1](#), 34 open codes were identified from 15 Iranian and foreign articles. Axial coding is the second stage of qualitative coding, focusing on creating relationships

between lower-level codes (open codes) and developing broader, more abstract concepts. The goal of axial coding is to organize and find patterns and main themes in the data. In

this stage, the researcher examines the extracted codes and groups them based on similarities, differences, and connections. This method helps identify relationships between different concepts and contributes to the

development of theories and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The axial codes are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Axial Codes Identified*

Axial Code	Open Codes
Concept and Features of Phubbing	Phubbing, phubber, addiction to mobile phones, girls are more engaged in phubbing, girls suffer more from phubbing, young people are more engaged in phubbing, individuals repeat phubbing behavior, disregard for individuals, ignoring individuals
Non-Verbal Communication Skills	Exchange of emotions, appropriate communication as a bond-building factor, lack of eye contact, absence of empathy for others
Verbal Communication	Speaking, active listening, empathy, positive attitude toward face-to-face interactions
Communication Boundaries	Respect-based communication, self-control in interpersonal closeness, trust development, setting boundaries
Impact of Phubbing on Communication Skills	Reduced marital intimacy, decreased communication skills (body language), decreased positive emotions, feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, reduced intimacy, increased jealousy, reduced self-esteem, reduced eye contact, lack of body language, decreased sense of belonging, reduced perceived communication quality, reduced emotional connections, anger in relationships, weakened bonds between individuals, decreased relationship satisfaction, increased depression, reduced interpersonal trust and conversation quality, increased interpersonal conflict, distractibility in interpersonal relationships, interruptions in face-to-face interactions, poor mood, reduced romantic relationship quality, increased jealousy between couples, phubbing as a factor in reducing self-esteem
Coping Strategies	Self-control prevents phubbing, interpreting non-verbal cues, eye contact, interpersonal closeness, trust development

According to Table 2, six axial codes were identified: "Concept and Features of Phubbing," "Non-Verbal Communication Skills," "Verbal Communication," "Communication Boundaries," "Impact of Phubbing on Communication Skills," and "Coping Strategies."

To design the training package, these axial codes were considered as determining factors for the content of the training sessions. Table 3 outlines the proposed sessions for the communication skills training package based on phubbing.

**Table 3**

*Sessions of the Proposed Communication Skills Training Package Based on Phubbing*

Session	Objective	Session Summary
1	Define phubbing and its impact on interpersonal relationships	Explanation of the phubbing phenomenon and its negative consequences in interpersonal relationships; administration of pre-test
2	Teach eye contact in interactions	Importance of eye contact and body language; teaching a positive attitude toward face-to-face interactions
3	Verbal Communication	Active listening; avoiding judgment and blame; selecting respectful and positive words
4	Non-Verbal Communication	Using facial expressions and gestures to convey messages; interpreting non-verbal cues for better understanding of others
5	Teaching empathy and mutual understanding	Demonstrating empathy; teaching respect for others
6	Communication Boundaries	Setting boundaries for phone use and other behaviors that lead to disrespect; clearly expressing expectations and needs in interpersonal relationships
7	Coping Strategies	Practicing self-control to prevent phubbing; creating distraction techniques to reduce temptation to phub
8	Practice and Feedback	Role-playing in face-to-face communication; feedback and discussion on learned techniques; summary of sessions and administration of post-test

In the first phase of validation, experts from the field of psychology at the University of Azad, Birjand, were invited in 2024 to assess the validity and reliability of the proposed training package. To determine the content validity of the training package, it was provided to 9 professors from the University of Azad, Birjand. After reviewing the face

validity of the program, they provided their comprehensive written feedback on the proposed training package. To assess the content validity quantitatively, the package was given to the same professors, who were asked to evaluate each session to obtain the Content Validity Index (CVI) and Content Validity Ratio (CVR). Since this study involved 9

experts to evaluate the content validity of the proposed training package based on phubbing, the CVR score should not be less than 0.78. The results showed that all sessions of the training package scored between 0.78 and 1, indicating appropriate content validity. The overall content validity score was 0.78, confirming that the package has adequate validity. Furthermore, considering that 9 experts were used for evaluating the CVI index, if the item score was below 0.79, that session would need to be removed. In this phase, the researcher averaged the opinions of the professors who rated each session on a scale from 1 to 4, and the resulting score was calculated using the specified formula, yielding a CVI of 0.89, indicating good content validity for the intervention package designed by the researcher.

To assess the reliability of the qualitative part, two coders were used independently. After the coding process was completed, the results were compared, and Holsti's (1969) coefficient was applied to evaluate the reliability of the coding.

According to Holsti, if the percentage exceeds 70%, it indicates appropriate coding reliability. The reliability coefficient obtained through two rounds of coding with a one-month interval was 86%. In this study, the number of agreed codes in both phases of coding was 31, with 34 coded units in the first phase and 38 coded units in the second phase.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to design and validate an educational package on communication skills based on phubbing. The proposed educational package consists of eight sessions with the following topics: "Definition of Phubbing and Its Impact on Interpersonal Relationships," "Teaching Eye Contact in Interactions," "Verbal Communication," "Non-verbal Communication," "Teaching Empathy and Mutual Understanding," "Communication Boundaries," "Coping Strategies," and "Practice and Feedback." The content and face validity of the proposed educational package were assessed using the Lavelle method by nine experts from Azad University, Birjand, resulting in values of 0.78 and 0.89, respectively. The reliability of the proposed educational package was assessed with two independent coders, yielding a reliability rate of 86%. Based on these findings, the package demonstrated both appropriate content and reliability.

Digital technologies in human interactions hold significant importance in today's world. Phubbing can affect

various aspects of communication, including the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication, negative emotions such as anger, depression, and jealousy, and the overall quality of interpersonal relationships. This study utilized the three-stage coding method of Strauss and Corbin (1998) to identify and analyze these effects.

In this research, qualitative coding (open and axial coding), which is a suitable approach for analyzing complex data and identifying underlying concepts and patterns in research texts, was used. Open and axial coding helps researchers discover relationships between concepts and extract key ideas. This process successfully led to the identification of six axial codes: "Concept and Characteristics of Phubbing," "Non-verbal Communication Skills," "Verbal Communication," "Communication Boundaries," "Impact of Phubbing on Communication Skills," and "Coping Strategies." After identifying the axial codes, the educational package was designed based on these codes, and the topics and sessions were determined. This educational package specifically focuses on teaching communication skills and strategies for coping with phubbing, making it an effective tool for imparting these skills.

In the results of the qualitative research, the relationship between phubbing (addiction to mobile phones and neglecting individuals during social interactions) and individuals' communication skills was identified. Codes extracted from the articles, such as "reduced intimacy," "increased jealousy," "reduced interpersonal trust," and "increased conflict," clearly indicate the negative effects of phubbing on the quality of interpersonal relationships. These results align with studies by Alsagaf and O'Donnell (2019), which found that phubbing can decrease the quality of conversations and lead to negative emotions such as depression and loneliness (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019). Theoretically, the concept of phubbing has recently gained attention as a new social and psychological phenomenon. The findings effectively place this phenomenon within the framework of communication skills, as previously discussed in studies. For example, Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018) demonstrated that phubbing reduces emotional communication and the quality of relationships (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Our results confirm these theories and suggest that, in the modern world, phubbing affects not only family and marital relationships but also communication skills across all social levels.

Based on the findings, the impact of phubbing on communication skills such as "body language," "active



listening," "empathy," and "verbal communication" was emphasized. These results are similar to previous theories that suggest phubbing weakens these skills, especially non-verbal communication skills like eye contact and body language, which are crucial in many social relationships. Thomas et al. (2022) also demonstrated that phubbing reduces the quality of face-to-face interactions and weakens social interactions (Thomas et al., 2022), which is consistent with our findings.

According to the results, coping strategies to reduce the effects of phubbing were identified, including self-control techniques, setting communication boundaries, and interpreting non-verbal cues. Karadag et al. (2015) also highlighted the importance of teaching self-control to cope with phubbing, which our results confirm (Karadağ et al., 2015)s. This part of the research could be presented as a practical solution for mitigating the negative effects of phubbing on interpersonal relationships.

In open coding, 34 codes were identified, reflecting the diversity and complexity of the results obtained from the articles. This stage of coding allows for the identification of conceptual codes based on primary data without bias. Open coding effectively clarifies all dimensions of phubbing and communication skills, extracting them from various sources. In axial coding, six main axial codes were identified, each relating to specific aspects of phubbing and its impact on communication skills. These six codes included "Concept and Characteristics of Phubbing," "Non-verbal Communication Skills," "Verbal Communication," "Communication Boundaries," "Impact of Phubbing on Communication Skills," and "Coping Strategies." These classifications were cohesively and appropriately made, in line with previous studies. Notably, the study by Blount and Nazir (2019), which refers to reduced eye contact and body language as negative effects of phubbing, aligns with the codes found in the current research under "Non-verbal Communication Skills."

Following the qualitative research, an educational package was designed to address the phubbing phenomenon. This educational package, consisting of eight sessions focused on communication skills, was specifically designed to reduce the effects of phubbing. It has been evaluated as a practical intervention for improving communication skills in the context of phubbing, reflecting the progress of our research in transforming findings into actionable solutions. Similar educational packages have been seen in previous studies, such as the research by Hiew et al. (2016), which

focused on teaching communication skills in personal relationships (Hiew et al., 2016).

Based on the content validity evaluation, using the CVR and CVI indices, the proposed educational package demonstrated high content validity. The CVR value for all sessions ranged from 0.78 to 1, indicating a high degree of alignment with content validity criteria. These results suggest that the content of the designed educational package is approved by experts and professionals in psychology. Therefore, it can be concluded that the educational package effectively organizes and scientifically structures its content, making it suitable for intervention in improving communication skills.

The reliability of the coding was also evaluated using Holsti's coefficient, with a reliability rate of 86%. This high level of agreement indicates strong concordance between coders and confirms the quality of the coding process. In fact, this reliability level aligns with similar studies in qualitative data coding and demonstrates that our findings are accurate and trustworthy.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size for expert validation was relatively small, with only nine specialists involved, which may limit the generalizability of the content and face validity results. Additionally, the study focused on a specific geographical area (Birjand), which may not fully represent the broader population's experiences with phubbing and communication skills. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data for the identification of communication issues related to phubbing, which may be subject to bias or inaccurate perceptions. Finally, the study did not assess the long-term effects of the educational package, so the sustainability of its impact on communication skills remains unclear.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of educational interventions aimed at mitigating phubbing, assessing how well the skills acquired through such programs are maintained over time. Additionally, it would be valuable to conduct studies across diverse cultural contexts to explore the universality of phubbing's impact on communication skills and interpersonal relationships. Future studies could also use a larger, more diverse sample to improve the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, experimental research could examine the direct effects of various coping strategies for phubbing, comparing the efficacy of different intervention techniques across different demographic groups.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational and psychological interventions aimed at

improving communication skills in the context of digital technology use. Educators and mental health professionals can integrate phubbing awareness and communication skills training into their curricula or therapy programs to help individuals strengthen their interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the results suggest that promoting self-control and setting boundaries for digital device use can play a crucial role in enhancing communication quality, particularly in family and workplace settings. Policymakers may also consider these findings when creating campaigns to raise awareness about the negative effects of phubbing on relationships.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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