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A Turkish study of Nurses' Attitudes Towards Graduate Distance Education

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Abstract

The aim of the study to assess nurses' attitudes towards graduate distance education in nursing. This descriptive study was conducted in a medical center in July- October 2012 in Turkey. The study sample included total 238 nurses. A questionnaire that was developed by authors was used to collect data. The mean of the participants' age is 32.72±6.07 and the mean duration of working as a nurse was 11.59±6.64 years. Of them 37.4 % work in a internal medicine clinic, and 69.7 % of them work as a clinic nurse. 56.7 % of them stated that they follow developments related to distance education in nursing. More than fifty percent of participants think that distance education in nursing would be easier than current education and give an opportunity to take education independently, wherever they want. On the other hand, considerable amount of participant have some concerns about lack of a role model and feedback that may lead to poor and unqualified education. It is important that nursing differs from other disciplines in that it is practice-oriented; hence, distance education in nursing should be evaluated separately.

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1. Introduction

Delivering nursing courses by distance education in which the instructor and the learners are geographically separated has been attracting global interest due to the potential benefits regarding the implementation, costs, and effectiveness (Knebel 2001; Atack & Rankin 2001). The concept of distance learning in the developed countries is currently increasing, however, there are currently few programs using distance learning in graduate nursing education in Turkey. The first online nursing program in Turkey was launched for Registered Nurses (RN) who have two-year college degrees and be working as nurses in professional settings in 2010 (Karaman 2011). While the program has been administered for the increased demand for graduate distance education in nursing, distance education to gain a master degree was started in 2012. However, nursing education necessitates changes in line with developments in science and technology, there are some barriers to administere qualified education. Knebel (2001) stated that there are some barriers specific to the developing country settings such as a lack of resources needed for meaningful development and sustenance of technology-based learning. When considered from this point of view, this distance education brought with some concerns about the quality of courses in Turkey. Therefore, the aim of the study to assess nurses' attitudes towards graduate distance education in nursing.

1. Method

This descriptive study was conducted in a medical center in July- October 2012 in Turkey. The study was conducted following the approval of the institutional review board of the hospital. Requests for participation were solicited through visiting the nurses in the each department of the medical center. Nurses provided verbal consent after the aim and method of the study had been explained. Over a three month period, 238 convenient responses were accepted for inclusion in the study.

Data was collected using a questionnaire with 18 questions, a researcher-designed, and self-administered. The questionnaire included questions regarding socio-demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, educational level and the length of working life, position, the clinics worked in. The questionnaire also covered nurses' perceptions of graduate distance education in nursing. SPSS for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) software, version 15.00, was used for statistical analysis of the data. The distribution of the data is showed as

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counts and percentages, while the descriptive statistics are presented using the arithmetic means and standard deviations, minimums-maximums, frequencies and percentages.

2. Results

In this study, the mean age of nurses was 32.72 ± 6.07 years old and the length of working life was 11.59 ± 6.63 . Majority of them (62,2 %) have bachelor's degree in nursing, (37,4%) have been working in an internal medicine clinic and 69,7 % of nurses have been working as a clinic nurse. All of participants were also female nurses in the study.

Table 1 shows characteristics of the nurses regarding wishing/pursuing status and its motivations for graduate education in nursing. The most common (47,9 %) motivation for wishing / pursuing graduate education in nursing was to be able to pursue new developments in health and nursing science. Also, 17,6 % of nurses do not wish graduate education by reason of not being able to have the required English proficiency test score.

Table 1. Characteristics of nurses regarding wishing / pursuing status for graduate education in nursing and their motivations

	n	%
Wishing of nurses to pursue graduate education in nursing	n=162	
Wishing	95	58.6
Not wishing	67	41.4
Wishing of nurses to pursue graduate distance education in nursing	n=162	
Yes	119	73.5
No	43	26.5
The motivations for wishing / pursuing graduate education in nursing* n=171		
To improve professional knowledge and skills	112	47.1
To be able to follow new developments in health and nursing science.	114	47.9
To be able to have higher status and possibility of promotion	92	38.7
To be a lecturer / faculty	78	32.8
The motivations for not wishing graduate education in nursing* n=67		
Thinking of having no additional contribution	26	10.9
Having family responsibilities	13	5.5
Having work responsibilities	2	0.8
Not be able to have the required English proficiency	42	17.6

*Participants have marked more than one motivation.

In this study, 56.7 % of nurses stated that they have enough knowledge about offered graduate distance education and 62.2 % of them think that graduate distance education for nurses should be administered in Turkey (Table 2).

Table 2. The thoughts of nurses regarding distance graduate education in Turkey.

	n	%
Knowing status of nurses current developments regarding offered graduate distance education for nurses		
Have enough knowledge	135	56.7
Have limited knowledge	76	31.9
Do not know	27	11.3
Thoughts of nurses administration of distance graduate education		
It should be	148	62.2
It should not be	90	37.8
The thought of nurses regarding the percentage of being enough of graduate distance education for traditional education's requirements, if it is administered in Turkey.		
	57.21	+26.70

Table 3 shows the opinions of nurses on the consequences of distance graduate education in nursing, if it is administered in Turkey.

Table 3. The opinions of nurses on the consequences of distance graduate education in nursing, if it is administered in Turkey

Opinions of the nurses regarding graduate distance education in Turkey.	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%

It may cause incapacity in practical education	86	36.1	55	23.1	97	40.8
It may be easier than traditional education.	71	29.8	44	18.5	123	51.7
It may be an opportunity for those who can not pursue education due to different reasons.	61	25.6	27	11.3	150	63
It may be costlier than current education.	80	33.6	61	25.6	97	40.8
It may be more difficult for those with inability for using computer and internet.	92	38.7	66	27.7	80	33.6
It may cause a decrease in faculty student communications.	70	29.4	76	31.9	92	38.7
Due to the lack of immediate performance feedback to students, it may cause some troubles.	73	30.7	70	30.7	92	38.7
It may increase malpractice.	81	34	80	33.6	77	32.4
Due to the lack of a faculty who could a role model, to learn and consolidate may be more difficult.	82	34.5	72	30.3	84	35.3

3. Discussion

More than half of the nurses would like to pursue graduate education, especially through distance education. The nurses in the study have different motives for wishing/pursuing graduate education. Motives such as "to be able to follow the developments in health and nursing science and "to improve professional knowledge and skills". To continue education following graduation is an inevitable necessity in the context of rapidly changing health care systems (Atack & Rankin 2002). Nursing graduate programs offer nurses to specialise and to increase their knowledge and skills in a specific area. However, it is found that a few studies focus on factors that effect nurses' decisions to pursue graduate program. Natan & Becker (2009) have reported that interesting work, possibility of working in desired field, potential for promotion, travel opportunities are some reasons of choosing nursing career following graduation.

In this study, a few percentage of nurses stated that they are not willing to pursue graduate education due to family and work responsibilities. Contrary to this, Cathro (2011) stated that time constraints and geographical barriers, financial costs, work responsibilities, and family responsibilities are important reasons for not pursuing education after graduation. In this study, the most common reason for nurses who do not wish to have a graduate education is inability of having the required English proficiency to enroll a graduate program. In Turkey, there are few universities offering distance master's degree with or without thesis in a variety of nursing fields since 2012. Nurses do not have to provide language proficiency for admission, although some requirements should be provided by them (AÜ 2012). Therefore, it is thought that nurses are more motivated to pursue distance graduate education due to there is no need to know english language.

In this study, nurses think that graduate distance education may be enough for 57.21 % of traditional education requirements in Turkey, even though most of nurses would like to enroll a graduate distance education. Majority of nurses think that graduate distance education may be easier than traditional education and be an opportunity for those who could not pursue education due to the different reasons. The most common concerns are to cause incapacity in practical education and be costlier than current nursing education in the study. Considerable amount of participant have also some concerns about lack of a role model and feedback that may lead to poor and unqualified education. Puterbaugh (2010) reported that both faculty and nurses have some concerns regarding online education in nursing such as the requirement of face to face connection as it focuses on psychomotor skills and practice. Kenny (2000) reported that it has been debated whether distance education is a cheaper option to on traditional education, due to the fact that the initial cost of the establishment of programs via distance education and the ongoing costs. Similarly, in the literature, advantages and disadvantages of distance education are often studied (Kenny 2000, Knebel 2001, Atack & Rankin 2002, Chaffin & Maddux 2004, Bigony 2010).

Nursing schools should offer convenient educations to the increased demand for more graduates. However, distance education is a feasible alternative to meet this need, these concerns about the quality of education should take into consideration preparing and conducting this type of education in nursing. It is also important that nursing differs from other disciplines in respect to be practice-oriented; hence, it is important to evaluate distance education in nursing separately.

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