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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NURSING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTIONS

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the relationship between nursing students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions. The research with the analytical and cross-sectional design was conducted with 589 nursing students, Research data were collected by using the self-report method with an information form, the Attitude Scale towards Distance Learning, and the Perception of Nursing Profession Scale, which were sent electronically to students' e-mail addresses. Students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions were at a moderate level and there was a moderately significant positive relationship between the first- and fourth-grade students' attitudes towards distance learning and their perceptions of the nursing profession. In this research, it was concluded that distance learning is sufficient in giving theoretical education and ensuring students gain professional perception; however, there are shortcomings in skills education.

Keywords: Nursing, Professional Perception, Nursing Students, Attitudes, Distance Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were physically closed in order to protect the health of students and all humans. Therefore, various studies were carried out to ensure the continuity of learning in the world and in our country. The basis of these studies is distance learning [1, 2 and 3]. Distance learning is defined as "an education system in which students and teachers establish their learning-teaching relations at different times and places through communication technologies or mail" [4, 5, 6 and 7]. Nursing education is a planned education program based on the complementary theoretical and clinical background that aims to provide students with the nursing profession by using their knowledge, attitudes, and skills [7, 8, 9 and 10]. During the pandemic process, nursing education, was carried out distantly. However, nursing students have experienced some difficulties in this process since nursing education is quite comprehensive [6, 11 and 12]. On the other hand, the pandemic process has brought the concept of "care" to the fore and the importance of the nursing profession and nursing care has become a current issue. Moreover, the appreciation of health workers by the society and being declared as heroes, the respect of the entire world for nurses and self-sacrifice, and the World Health Organization's declaration of 2020 as the "year of nurses and midwives" have contributed to the positive perception of the profession [13 and 14]. For nursing students, perception of the profession is defined as students' feelings about themselves, their environment, nursing, and the appropriateness of nursing actions, their thoughts, and perception of

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nursing education [6 and 15]. Therefore, it is thought that the positive professional perception of students will improve their motivation, self-confidence, satisfaction in their professional lives as healthcare professionals, and the standard of the health care service they provide and contribute to their professional development. The basis of professional perception, which consists of professional qualifications and professional status, is formed during school life, continues throughout the professional life, and ensures the formation of professional philosophy [15, 16 and 17]. In line with this information, it is not appropriate to provide all nursing education with distance learning, but it is necessary to examine the related factors individually to ensure compliance with distance learning, which is compulsory due to the pandemic. For this reason, it is thought that examining the relationship between professional perception, which is considered one of these factors, and the concept of distance learning will contribute to the development of nursing education.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The crisis that emerged with the pandemic has required rapid changes in the teaching pattern in nursing schools. Due to the compulsory cancellation of face-to-face education, students have been facing many difficulties that they were not accustomed to [18]. Some studies on distance learning were found in the literature review Kızıltepe and Kurtgöz (2020) stated that various problems were experienced in distance learning, mostly infrastructure, during the pandemic process [2]. Afşar and Büyükdoğan (2020) stated that motivation might decrease due to the low interaction with the educator in distance learning and that the evaluation of student feedback increased the efficiency of education [19]. Wang et al. (2020) suggested that students had difficulties mostly due to infrastructure problems [12]. According to Sahu (2020), theoretical courses can, somehow, be taught through distance learning, but there may be problems with applied courses [20]. Kürtüncü and Kurt (2020) stated that providing applied courses through distance learning was not sufficient and that some have encountered difficulties in following courses due to limitations regarding internet access and computer [21]. As a matter of fact, perceptual awareness and sensitivity are known to be as important as scientific competence in nursing education. However, no study that examines the relationship between students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions was found in the literature. The study was conducted in an analytical and cross-sectional design to determine the relationship between nursing students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions.

Research questions;

- What are the attitudes of first- and fourth-grade nursing students towards distance learning?
- What are the professional perception levels of first- and fourth-grade nursing students?
- What is the relationship between first- and fourth-grade nursing students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study follows a cross-sectional research model. The research population consisted of 589 students studying at the Faculty of Nursing in the 2020-2021 academic year, 298 first-grade (N1) and 291 fourth-grade (N2) students. The minimum size of the sample to be reached in the study was calculated as 232 using the known sampling method (Z: 1.96,



π : 0.50, p - π : 0.05, N : 589) [22] and the study was completed with 511 students who agreed to participate. Students who withdrew from the undergraduate education program at the time of the study for any reason and who did not agree to participate in the study were not included in the study.

3.1. Data Collection Tools

The research data were collected using an information form regarding the descriptive characteristics of the students, the "Attitude Scale Towards Distance Learning (ASTDL)", and the "Perception of Nursing Profession Scale (PNPS)".

3.1.1. Information Form

The form was prepared by the researcher in line with the literature [1, 2, 3 and 5] and consists of 16 questions regarding students' socio-demographic characteristics and views on distance learning and nursing.

3.1.2. Attitude Scale Towards Distance Learning-ASTDL

The scale was developed by Ađır et al. (2008) to measure students' attitudes towards distance learning. ASTDL consists of two subscales and a total of 21 items and is scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from (1) (strongly disagree) to (5) (strongly agree). The measurement tool includes 7 negative items (items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19) which are scored reversely in data analysis. The minimum score obtainable from the scale is 21 and the maximum score is 105. The scale consists of two subscales. A minimum of 14 and a maximum of 70 points can be obtained from the subscale of "advantages of distance learning"; a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 35 points can be scored on the subscale of "limitations of distance learning". The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.83 [5]. In our study, the Cronbach Alpha value was found to be 0.79.

3.1.3. Perception of Nursing Profession Scale-PNPS

The validity and reliability of the scale was established by Eđer et al. (2006). The scale is ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale and consists of 22 items and two subscales: professional qualities (17 items) and professional statute (5 items). The items are ranked between 1 "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". The total score obtainable from the scale is between 22 and 110. High total scale scores indicate that the professional perception is positive. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was reported to be 0.83 [24]. In our study, the coefficient was found as 0.64.

3.2. Analysis and Evaluation of Data

The SPSS 22.0 package program was used to evaluate the data obtained from the research. The fitness of the data to normal distribution was tested with skewness-kurtosis values (-2, +2). The socio-demographic data of the students were given as numbers, percentages, and means. The t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the first- and fourth-grade students on ASTDL and PNPS. Pearson correlation test and Cronbach Alpha internal consistency analysis were used to determine the relationship between students' mean ASTDL and PNPS scores. In the study, a p -value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

4. FINDINGS

The mean age of the students who participated in the research was 20.64 ± 1.81 (18-30); 56.8% were first-graders; 77.1% were female; 64.2% had an income equal to expenses; 85.1% lived in a city for the longest



time; 33.9% in the Aegean region; 84.9% of them had a nuclear family (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of students (n=511)

| Demographic characteristics | | (n) | (%) |
|--|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Grade | First grade | 290 | 56.8 |
| | Fourth grade | 221 | 43.2 |
| Sex | Female | 394 | 77.1 |
| | Male | 117 | 22.9 |
| Income status | Income equal to expenses | 328 | 64.2 |
| | Income less than expenses | 130 | 25.4 |
| | Income more than expenses | 36 | 7.0 |
| Place of residence for the longest time | City | 435 | 85.1 |
| | Village | 65 | 12.7 |
| | District | 11 | 2.2 |
| Region of residence for the longest time | Aegean | 173 | 33.9 |
| | Mediterranean | 86 | 16.8 |
| | Eastern Anatolia | 76 | 14.9 |
| | Southeastern Anatolia | 68 | 13.3 |
| | Marmara | 39 | 7.6 |
| | Central Anatolia | 39 | 7.6 |
| | Black Sea | 30 | 5.9 |
| Family type | Nuclear | 434 | 84.9 |
| | Extended | 77 | 15.1 |

Table 2 shows students' views on nursing education. Of the students, 72.2% were regular high school graduates; 72.2% willingly preferred the nursing department; 47.9% preferred the nursing department since they thought it was a job-guaranteed profession; 46.2% that the distance learning process did not change their views on nursing; 93.7% stated that nursing education should be given face-to-face; 45.9% stated that they wanted to work as a nurse after graduation (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' views on nursing education (n=511)

| Demographic characteristics | | n | (%) |
|--|---|-----|------|
| High school | Regular high school | 369 | 72.2 |
| | Other | 102 | 20.0 |
| | Medical vocational high school | 40 | 7.8 |
| Willingly preference of the department | Yes | 369 | 72.2 |
| | No | 142 | 27.8 |
| Reason of preference | Job guarantee | 245 | 47.9 |
| | Because of loving the department | 173 | 33.9 |
| | Because of exam score | 59 | 11.5 |
| | Family preference | 34 | 6.7 |
| Change in views about nursing in the distance learning process | Unchanged | 236 | 46.2 |
| | Negative | 143 | 28.0 |
| | Positive | 132 | 25.8 |
| Views on the provision of nursing education | Face-to-face | 479 | 93.7 |
| | Distance | 32 | 6.3 |
| Views on continuing the profession after graduation | Working as a nurse | 235 | 45.9 |
| | Being an academic | 158 | 30.9 |
| | Becoming a nurse manager after postgraduate education | 90 | 17.6 |
| | Being a teacher at medical vocational high school | 6 | 1.2 |
| | Being a teacher at medical vocational high school | 22 | 4.4 |
| | Not practicing nursing | | |

Table 3 presents the mean scores of the first- and fourth-grade students on ASTDL and PNPS and their comparison. Information on the mean scores of the first- and fourth-grade nursing students on ASTDL and PNPS are given in Table 3. The mean score of the first-grade students participating in the study was found to be 72.03±4.99 on total ASTDL, 43.35±5.06 on the advantages of distance learning subscale, and 28.68±2.25 on the limitations of distance learning subscale. The mean score of the fourth-grade students participating in the study was found to be 73.00 ± 5.05 on total ASTDL, 44.54±5.55 on the advantages of



distance learning subscale, and 28.46±2.12 on the limitations of distance learning subscale. The mean score of the first-grade students was found to be 74.22±6.60 on total PNPS, 57.47±5.60 on the professional qualities subscale, and 16.75±3.01 on the professional statute subscale. On the other hand, the mean score of the fourth-grade students was found to be 73.92±7.35 on total PNPS, 56.37±6.13 on the professional qualities subscale, and 17.55±2.89 on the professional statute subscale. The attitudes of first- and fourth-grade students towards distance learning differed significantly according to their grades (t -2.178 P 0.030). There was no significant difference between the mean scores of the first- and fourth-grade nursing students on PNPS (t 0.476 P 0.635) (Table 3).

Table 3. First-and fourth-grade students' mean ASTDL and PNPS scores (n= 511)

| Scales | First-grade (n=290) (Mean±SD) | Fourth-grade (n=221) (Mean±SD) |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ASTDL | | |
| Advantages of DL | 43.35±5.06 | 44.54±5.55 |
| Limitations of DL | 28.68±2.25 | 28.46±2.12 |
| Total | 72.03±4.99 | 73.00±5.05 |
| t:-2.17 p:0.03 | | |
| PNPS | | |
| Professional Qualities | 57.47±5.60 | 56.37±6.13 |
| Professional Statute | 16.75±3.01 | 17.55±2.89 |
| Total | 74.22±6.60 | 73.92±7.35 |
| t:0.48 p:0.64 | | |

ASTDL: Attitude Scale Towards Distance Learning
PNPS: Perception of Nursing Profession Scale

Table 4 shows the comparison of mean scale scores of first- and fourth-grade students. A positive, moderately significant relationship (r=0.271, p= 0.000, r=0.229, p= 0.001) was found between the first- and fourth-grade students' mean PNPS and ASTDL scores. There was a positive significant relationship between the professional qualities subscale of PNPS and the advantages of distance learning subscale of ASTDL and a negative significant relationship between the professional qualities subscale of PNPS and the limitations of distance learning subscale of ASTDL.

Table 4. Comparison of mean scale scores of first- and fourth-grade students (n=511)

| Grade | Attitude Scale Towards Distance Learning | | Perception of Nursing Profession Scale | | |
|--------------|--|---|--|------------------------|---------|
| | | | Professional Statute | Professional Qualities | Total |
| First-grade | Advantages of DL | r | 0.111 | 0.326** | 0.327** |
| | | p | 0.059 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | Limitations of DL | r | -0.022 | -0.146* | -0.134* |
| | | p | 0.707 | 0.013 | 0.022 |
| | Total | r | 0.103 | 0.264** | 0.271** |
| | | p | 0.081 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Fourth-grade | Advantages of DL | r | 0.040 | 0.300** | 0.266** |
| | | p | 0.555 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | Limitations of DL | r | -0.143* | -0.116 | -0.153* |
| | | p | 0.033 | 0.087 | 0.023 |
| | Total | r | -0.016 | 0.282** | 0.229** |
| | | p | 0.813 | 0.000 | 0.001 |

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 DL:Distance Learning

5. DISCUSSION

This analytical and cross-sectional study was conducted to examine the relationship between nursing students' attitudes towards distance learning and their perceptions of the nursing profession. In the study, it was seen that fourth-grade students' attitudes towards distance learning were more positive than first-grade students; however, no significant difference was found between their scores regarding



perceptions of the nursing profession. Moreover, it was determined that there was a positive but weakly significant relationship between the first-and fourth-grade students' attitudes towards distance learning and their perceptions of the nursing profession. These results are important in terms of evidencing that students in both grades had a positive attitude towards distance learning, but the current nursing education does not have the desired effect on professional perception.

In the study, the students stated that they preferred the nursing department willingly because they thought it was a job guaranteed profession, and that they wanted to work as a nurse after graduation. In a study, likewise, most of the students stated that they wanted to work as a nurse in the hospital after graduation, that they liked the nursing profession, and that they preferred this department voluntarily [15]. Similarly, in the study conducted by Güven and Ünsal (2020), students stated that they willingly preferred the nursing department and that they liked their profession [25]. On the other hand, in the study conducted by Eşer et al (2008), students expressed that they did not choose the nursing profession willingly and that their families were influential in their choice of profession [26]. Although there are different results in the literature, studies, especially those conducted in recent years, showed that the choice of profession is made more consciously and that the students choose their professions willingly. This can be explained by the fact that information on the profession is provided in high school education and, as a result, the rate of students who choose the department they want increases.

In the study, the students stated that the distance learning process did not change their views on nursing, but that nursing education should be given face-to-face. Sahu (2020) stated that theoretical courses can be given through distance learning somehow, but there might be problems for applied courses [20]. These results suggest that a well-planned distance learning curriculum will be sufficient to meet the theoretical expectations of nursing students, but will be insufficient in terms of applied courses based on skills education.

It was seen that all students had positive attitudes towards distance learning and perceptions of the nursing profession. In a study, it was stated that students did not have positive attitudes towards distance learning in nursing education completely, that they had many infrastructure problems in the distance learning process, they had negative attitudes towards distance learning, and that they had difficulties in learning practice skills [2]. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Süt and Küçükaya (2016), students stated that face-to-face interaction is necessary for the most efficient education, but that they wanted to take some courses through distance learning, that they did not approve of distance learning, that it would cause shortcomings in laboratory and clinical applications, but that it was economical in reaching information [3]. Bayram et al. (2019), on the other hand, stated that the attitudes of nursing students towards the advantages of distance learning were significantly higher compared to those studying in other departments [23]. Nursing education consists of theoretical and practical courses that complement each other [7, 10 and 11]. The crisis that emerged with the pandemic has required rapid changes in the way of teaching in nursing schools. With the mandatory cancellation of face-to-face education, students faced many difficulties that they were not accustomed to. One of the most challenging effects was the cessation of clinical education [18]. In other words, giving the clinical content of nursing education online is a limitation and disadvantage of distance nursing education. Therefore, it was thought that the positive attitudes of the students in the study towards distance learning were due to the advantages of distance learning, on the other hand, the negative



attitudes were due to the fact that the clinical part based on skills education was given by distance learning. Moreover, one of the important findings of the research was that the attitudes of fourth-grade students towards distance learning were more positive compared to the first-grade students. This might be due to the fact that the fourth-grade nursing students have experienced different education methods by both face-to-face and distance learning, but the first-grade students have just started the department and have only received distance learning.

In the study, it was seen that all students had moderate levels of professional perceptions and that the professional perceptions of the first- and fourth-grade students were similar. Likewise, it was stated in the study conducted by Güven and Ünsal (2020) that the professional perception levels of nursing students were quite good [25]. On the other hand, Mollaoğlu and Yanmış (2019) reported that the perception levels of nursing students were moderate [27]. It is remarkable that the results of this study were similar to those in the literature although it was carried out during the pandemic period. These findings are important in terms of showing that the distance learning process does not have a negative effect on the level of professional perceptions. On the other hand, the similar levels of professional perceptions of the first- and fourth-grade students suggest that nursing education does not lead to the desired effect on professional perception.

In the study, a moderately significant positive correlation was found between the first- and fourth-grade students' attitudes towards distance learning and their perceptions of the nursing profession. It was found that there was a positive significant relationship between the professional qualities subscale of PNPS and the advantages subscale of ASTDL and a negative significant relationship between the professional qualities subscale of PNPS and the limitations subscale of ASTDL. These results are important in terms of showing that the advantages of distance learning have a positive effect and its limitations have a negative effect on understanding professional characteristics. In other words, distance learning has positive aspects such as economic access to information, continues education, and easy and repetitive education in any environment; however, it also has negative aspects such as the inadequacy of technological opportunities such as internet access and computer and the negativities that may be experienced in the educational environment. As a matter of fact, Kızıltepe and Kurtgöz (2020) stated that there were various problems, mostly related to infrastructure, in distance learning during the pandemic process [2]; Afşar and Büyükdoğan (2020) stated that there might be communication problems and motivation might decrease due to the low interaction with the educator in distance learning and that the evaluation of student feedback would increase the quality and efficiency of education [19]; Wang et al. (2020) reported that students had difficulties mostly due to infrastructure problems [12]; Sahu (2020) expressed that theoretical courses can be provided through distance learning somehow, but there may be problems for applied courses [20]; Kürtüncü and Kurt (2020) claimed that it was not enough to give practical courses through distance learning and that students had difficulty following the courses due to the limitations regarding internet and computer [21]. These results suggest that distance learning will be sufficient to meet the theoretical expectations of students and create a professional perception if it is well structured with content that is suitable for the nursing profession. However, applied courses involving psychomotor skills will remain insufficient in terms of teaching methods and skills education. The relationship between students' attitudes towards distance learning and their perceptions of the nursing profession is another important dimension of the subject. Because perceiving the profession during student years emerges as a



process that should be well evaluated in terms of fulfilling the optimal professional mission when it comes to working life. However, in the literature review, no study was found that examined the relationship between nursing students' attitudes towards distance learning and their professional perceptions. These results show that there is a need for well-planned studies to examine the relationship between distance learning in nursing and professional perception in different populations.

Conduct the surveys online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and not being able to interact with the participants were accepted as limitations. It was observed that the participants were negatively affected since the data of all studies conducted during the pandemic were collected online. Who filled in the questionnaires, placed importance on SB, may have affected the study results.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was seen that the attitudes of the fourth-grade nursing students towards distance learning were more positive compared to the first-grade students and that the perception of the nursing profession of both grades was positive.

It is necessary to receive student feedback during the distance learning process and eliminate shortcomings, evaluate their professional perceptions, and constantly update the information in order for students to be able to gladly practice their profession with satisfaction. Providing extra courses that will increase students' perception of the nursing profession and motivation, updating the course content, supporting participation in relevant scientific activities, involving students in organizing scientific activities, providing technical information on how to proceed with distance learning before courses, and determining solutions for possible technical problems will be effective in increasing active participation in the courses.

With the rapid development of technology, distance learning will be used more commonly today and in the future. For this reason, in order for distance learning to be effective in accessing information and perceiving the profession in professional education, it is necessary to eliminate shortcomings, create feedback mechanisms and solution steps for possible problems, and provide relevant information. It is thought that the applied courses should be given face-to-face in the clinic and laboratory or as distant with an infrastructure that will provide equal quality with face-to-face education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declared no conflict of interest.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

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ETHICAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Ethics committee approval was taken from the Non-Invasive Clinical Trials Ethics Committee prior to the collection of study data (No: 2021/242). Permission was received from the authors (Ağır and Eşer) of the scales used in the collection of research data via e-mail. Due to the ongoing pandemic in the world and in Turkey, "social isolation" has been implemented as a legal requirement to prevent the spread of infection. Therefore, the electronic questionnaire that was created was sent to the e-mail addresses of the students. The information about the purpose of the research and the statement that students' answers would not be used outside the research were provided in the form. Students

were able to answer the questions after reading the relevant information and choosing the "I agree to participate in the study" option. Data collection took approximately 15 minutes for each participant.

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