

Examining the Clinical Competence of Intern Students: A Study in the Southwest of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Finding out the level of clinical competence of nursing students can identify the weaknesses of nursing students and the existing gaps at the bedside, then the educational protocols of the universities, by changing the education process, seek to eliminate the existing gaps, so as to improve the quality of nursing education. , forces should be trained who have the best skills and capabilities in managing work and patient care, and of course, the possible economic costs on the patient and the health system will be reduced. Therefore, this study aims to determine the level of clinical competence of students in the faculty of Nursing and Midwifery of Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences Ahvaz, which was carried out in 2022.

Methods: This research is a descriptive-analytical study that was conducted in 2022 on the 8th and 7th-semester students of Jundishapur Ahvaz College of Nursing and Midwifery. Sampling was easily accessible. Data collection tools included a demographic Information Questionnaire and a Clinical Competency Questionnaire. Data were analyzed with SPSS version 21 software.

Results: Out of 245 nursing students participating in the study, most of the participants were female (60%) and 40% of them were male. In the study of clinical competence of nursing students, the results were generally that 8.96% of students evaluated their competence as very low, 18.7% as low, 35.2% as average, 28.45% as high, and 9.22% as very high.

Conclusion: In the examination of clinical competence, in general, students have evaluated their clinical competence slightly above the average.

Keywords: Clinical Competence, Student, Iran.

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Introduction

Today, one of the most prominent components of the success of organizations is the role that human resources can play, so that organizations without motivated and spirited human resources will turn into sick and non-dynamic organizations. The

most important and vital asset of any organization is its human resources.¹ Paying attention to this issue is of double importance in service organizations such as the health and treatment sector. This sector is considered one of the most

important areas of development in human societies due to its direct relationship with human health.²

The main part of the workforce of the health care system is made up of nurses. Also, this group of health care workforce plays an important role in direct patient care. Therefore, nurses are considered one of the pillars of any healthcare system.³ As the largest group of technical staff of health care facilities around the world, the nursing force forms the basis of the health care system, and if there is no plan and program for manpower management, the organization will not reach its set goals, which is the health of the society.⁴ The important task of this group of treatment group in preserving and promoting the health of the people of the society in addition to the increasing challenges of multiculturalism, rapid changes in medical technology, and extensive social changes, causes nurses to face It has become a huge number of legal and ethical professional challenges. Therefore, the existing nursing education is focused on the training and education of independent, responsible, and patient-oriented nurses, who should be able to respond and reflect on their work, and have practical skills that match the needs of the day, and be equipped for critical thinking.⁵

In the field of nursing, education includes practical and theoretical exercises that prepare nurses for their duties as nursing care specialists.⁶ This education should be in a way that connects and converges between the theoretical and clinical fields so that nurses can be trained who are able to provide timely and correct nursing services based on the current scientific advances.⁷ During the 4-year period of their education, in addition to theoretical units, nursing students are required to pass a large number of practical units in the form of clinical training in a real environment in order to prepare them for working in this environment. to earn The clinical internship course is the basic part of practical skills training, and the quality of this course plays an important role in students acquiring the necessary skills to fulfill their future job responsibilities. that during this period, the education officials cannot create the expected abilities They have failed to fulfill their duties.⁵

Despite all the efforts made in the field of improving the quality of clinical education of nursing students, the report of nursing directors and the results of evaluation studies show that knowledge The students of this field do not have the necessary practical and functional skills in real work environments and in performing their duties They face problems in employment.⁸ Nursing education has been implemented with the aim of improving the quality of nursing education providing clinical services and providing a comprehensive background and socialization in nursing. They lacked the ability to complete some of the clinical course units independently. Without the direct presence of a trainer, they enter the hospital's wards and pass through.⁵ Internship in the field is a part of the nursing education program, which aims to create suitable situations in order to increase the skills of students in the application of nursing knowledge in the field and to enhance the power of initiative and comprehensive independence by observing the important principle of supervision in community-oriented education and maintaining the safety of the client and family. It has been implemented so that the student can apply the necessary nursing measures to promote and ensure the health of the client, family, and society.⁷

The duty of the teachers in these courses, in addition to the positive educational activity, is to create a sense of independence and decision-making and to increase the power of innovation in the students in different fields, and the students should also perform their duties in this direction. In spite of this issue, various studies show that Arsa internship has not been able to improve the professional empowerment of students to the desired level and the existence of many problems has prevented the achievement of the goals of this course. And it has caused the student, despite passing this course, from do not have sufficient clinical competence.⁹ In the meantime, problems such as lack of description of specific duties for students and instructors, lack of correlation and coordination between the received requirements and its application in the clinic, lack of educational opportunities and welfare, drop in the level of science. Students, learning unscientific and wrong methods pointed out.¹⁰ This is at a time when the

adequacy of qualified nurses is a necessary component in a professional nursing environment.¹¹

It should be noted that the goal of nursing education as a practical discipline is to achieve a high level of clinical competence in nursing care for students, and in this regard, evaluating the clinical competence of nurses is very important to understand their professional and educational needs.¹²⁻⁷ For clinical competence, considering the number and type of clinical role of nurses and the complex clinical nature of this profession, several definitions of this concept have been presented. For example, the World Health Organization has interpreted clinical competence as a level of performance that represents the application of effective knowledge, skills, and judgment.¹²⁻¹³ In a general definition, clinical competence is the prudent and constant application of technical and communication skills, knowledge, clinical reasoning, emotions, and values in clinical environments.¹⁴ In fact, qualification as the final result of any educational system includes different areas of learning.¹⁵ For example, in Australia, the competency standards approved by the council are the basis of the evaluation tool for students' clinical performance, and Australian nursing educators are required to evaluate students based on the competency standards defined by the Australian Nursing Council. Currently, the tool is designed around three competency categories: interpersonal communication, clinical decision-making, and professional development; the dimensions of its competence for graduate nurses include: "professional performance, critical thinking and analysis, provision and coordination of care and cooperative and therapeutic performance".¹⁶

According to these definitions, it is clear that, firstly, qualification is defined in a general and vague way, and based on these definitions, it is not possible to determine what kind of knowledge, or what level of skills and psychomotor behaviors a qualified nurse should have in order to They can be evaluated. Secondly, the definition and dimensions of competence can be different in different roles and different places. In fact, it can be said that qualifications are measurable and are

expressed in the form of behavioral terms, and regardless of basic professional preparation, the qualifications required for one workplace are different from another. In order to decide what qualifications are most important for students to start working, how these qualifications should be taught, what qualifications students should demonstrate in practice, and what qualifications they have not achieved at the end of their training course. Evaluation should be done.¹⁷ Student evaluation ensures that students have achieved all clinical learning goals or not.¹⁸

In general, three basic approaches have been described to evaluate the dimensions and concept of competence. The first approach (behavioural approach) is a task-oriented approach that depends on direct observation of performance. This approach has been criticized for not considering the role of professional judgment in mental performance and not allowing the development of critical thinking and problem-solving. The second approach (general approach) identifies general traits that are critical to effective performance and focuses on transferable attitudes such as knowledge and critical thinking. This approach has been criticized as there is limited evidence of the transferability of general skills across different settings. The third approach (holistic approach) refers to bringing together a range of attributes including knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills to meet the needs of different clinical situations. This approach is more important in the nursing profession. According to the above cases, competence in nursing can be considered as the ability to perform nursing duties, and the ability to effectively integrate cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skills while performing nursing care.¹⁹ With this detail, a nursing student has high clinical competence, if he can perform the skills related to all three areas, he has sufficient expertise. Therefore, knowing the contribution of each part of knowledge, attitude, and performance skills in the clinical competence of nursing students seems essential and helps to improve the quality of nursing education. Some studies conducted in Iran have reported that nursing students' achievement of clinical qualification is moderate and weak. At the same time, the novice nurse, who was educated

yesterday, must have cognitive, emotional, and psycho-motor competence at a favorable level when entering the hospital, because otherwise, they have an adverse effect on the quality of nursing services.^{20,18}

In general, according to the current modern society, today factors such as raising the awareness of people in the community about health-related issues and of course the expectation of receiving high-quality care services and the willingness of organizations providing care services to employ skilled labor and close communication Clinical competence and quality of care have caused clinical competence to have a unique position in the nursing profession and to be one of the controversial topics in the field of health care, and because today's students are tomorrow's nurses, so examining the level of competence in the clinical field and recognizing the problems It is especially important at this stage of education. Therefore, this research was conducted with the aim of determining the level of clinical competence of students in the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery of Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in Ahvaz in 2022, so that changes in the education program can be made based on it if necessary.

Material and Methods

This research is a descriptive-analytical study that was conducted in 2022 with the aim of determining the clinical competence of students (in three cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor areas) in the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery of Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences Ahvaz. Sampling was done in an easily accessible way among the seventh and eighth-semester nursing students. The participation of the samples in the research will be voluntary and with informed consent. After receiving the permission of the ethics committee of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, the researcher goes to the mentioned nursing faculty with the letter of introduction of the university and receives the necessary permissions. After that, the researcher, while introducing himself, explains the objectives of the research to the participants, and in case of agreement, receives informed consent from them to participate in the research. Completing the

questionnaires is a self-assessment method, and the students are requested to complete all the questionnaires in their free time and carefully deliver them to the researcher. In addition, the researcher was present to answer the possible questions of the students. The tools used in this study include a questionnaire consisting of two demographic information sections and a clinical competency questionnaire as follows:

- A. Demographic Information Questionnaire: This tool included questions about demographic characteristics such as gender, age, place of residence, and marital status.
- B. Clinical Competence Questionnaire: The perspective of this research regarding clinical competence is based on the third approach, which is the holistic approach, and clinical competence was examined in three domains: cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor. The cognitive field refers to the skills related to the identification, evaluation, combination, and analysis of nursing measures. The emotional field refers to the skills related to helping and paying attention to the patient and cooperating with the treatment and care team in order to perform nursing care, and the psychomotor field refers to the implementation of the main nursing skills and functions (2419). The clinical competency evaluation questionnaire has 31 items and is in three areas cognitive, emotional, and psychological movement in line with the stages of the nursing process. The score of the questions is based on a 5-point Likert scale. Students evaluated their skills by choosing the options of very little, little, medium, much, and very much. The students' answers were graded in such a way that a grade of one was given to a very low skill level and a grade of five was given to a very high skill level. The cognitive domain had 12 items, the emotional domain had 10 items, and the psychomotor domain had 9 items. The validity of this questionnaire in Hakimzadehet al.'s study has been determined through content validity and

reliability of this tool by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient, 0.94(19).

Data analysis was done using descriptive tests and t-tests with SPSS21 software. A significance level of less than 0.05 was considered.

Results

Out of 245 nursing students participating in the study, most of the participants were female (60%) and 40% of them were male. Also, 79.59% of them were married. The age range of Dashjoyans varied from 18 to 30 years. Also, 168 students were non-native (Table 1).

Gender	Frequency	Percentage of Frequency
Male	145	60
Female	95	40
Marital Status		
Single	195	79.59
Married	50	20.41
lodging		
Domestic	168	68.57
Dormitory	77	31.43

Table 1: Absolute and relative frequency distribution of demographic variables of nurses.

The clinical competency scores in some domain items are displayed as percentages along with the average of each item. The results show that in

general, 11.5% of students evaluated their skills as very low, 18.5% as low, 38.9% as average, 4.25% as high, and 5.7% as very high (Table 2).

Item	Average item from 1 to 5	Very little	Low	Middle	Very	Too much
Identifying possible problems and carrying out nursing measures on time	2.9	6.8	31.0	41.1	15.5	9.8
Identifying and prioritizing the patient's basic needs in the nurse care plan	4	5.7	19.2	44.4	28.7	4.4
Anticipating the patient's needs at the time of discharge	2.9	16.9	18.7	34.4	22.2	11.0
Matching the data collected from the patient with scientific sources to make the right decision	2.8	8.8	32.2	38.9	17.9	5.5
Using research evidence in nursing care	2.7	13.3	32.2	30.0	12.2	6.5
Use of up-to-date information technology care information	2.8	14.4	40.0	36.5	17.6	5.5

Table 2. Distribution of relative frequency and average level of clinical competence of students in cognitive field.

The scores of clinical competence in some items of the emotional domain are shown in the form of percentage along with the mean of each item in Table 2. In general, the results in this area show

that 7.9% of students evaluated their skills as very low, 15.4% as low, 32.3% as average, 32.6% as high, and 11.9% as very high (Table 3).

Item	Average item from 1 to 5	Very little	Low	Middle	Very	Too much
Helping the patient to meet his emotional needs (providing meeting ...conditions and	3.5	14.4	13.3	32.2	24.4	20.0
Establishing effective communication with colleagues in the field of patient care	3.5	5.5	19.9	35.5	33.3	10.0
Actively involving the patient and his family in relation to decision-making in treatment and care	2.9	10.0	26.5	55.5	15.5	6.5
Creating trust in the patient towards the nurse	3.6	5.7	15.5	27.7	37.8	17.7
Accepting and using constructive criticism during nursing care	3.3	6.9	10.0	37.9	35.9	10.0
Feeling confident in nursing care	3.8	3.3	7.9	40.0	36.8	14.4

Table 3. Distribution of relative frequency and average level of clinical competence of students in the emotional field.

Table 4 shows the clinical competence scores in some items of the psychomotor area in the form of percentage and average of each item. In all, the results in this area are that 6.8% of students

evaluated their skills as very low, 17.8% as low, 34.4% as average, 27.6% as high, and 13.4% as very high.

Item	Average item from 1 to 5	Very little	Low	Middle	Very	Too much
Using examination and recognition skills (physical examination, patient interview, observation, etc.)	4.0	6.8	23.3	42.2	30	11
Examining the physical, psychosocial and progress level of the patient in self-care programs	3.8	12.2	33.3	40.0	18.7	9.3
Examining absorption and excretion of fluids in order to receive sufficient fluids	3.4	9.4	23.3	43.3	30.0	6.9
Proper implementation of nursing care according to priority despite the	3.4	6.8	22.2	36.9	25.5	12.2

increase in the number of patients in the ward						
Using time management skills in nursing care of patients	3.9	12.2	22.2	40.0	25.5	4.4
Implementation of nursing care with the least harm to the patient	3.9	3.3	12.2	25.5	36.7	28.6

Table 4. Distribution of relative frequency and average level of clinical competence of students in psychomotor field.

t-test was also used to compare students' assessment of their competency level with the average of the society. The results of this test along with the averages and standard deviations

are reported in Table 5. According to the mean scores in emotional and psychomotor areas, students evaluated their abilities significantly above the average ($P>0.001$).

Area	Mean	Standard deviation	t
Cognitive	3.08	0.76	0.708
Emotional	3.36	0.88	3.816
Psychomotor	3.36	0.74	3.185
Total	3.63	0.68	4.278

Table5. Sample t-test for clinical competency areas.

In the cognitive domain, the results show that the difference between the mean of this domain and the community value is not significant. This result means that the students have evaluated their competence in this field at an average level. Also, by comparing the percentages in the three areas and also the result of the t-test test, it can be concluded that the students have evaluated their competences in the emotional and mental movement area better than the cognitive area.

In the study of clinical competence of nursing students, the results were generally that 8.96% of students evaluated their competence as very low, 18.7% as low, 35.2% as average, 28.45% as high and 9.22% as very high.

Discussion

The results of the evaluation of clinical competence in the field of cognition showed that the students evaluated their skill level at an

average level. Evaluating the level of competence in different subjects makes the importance of applying scientific and research learning in the clinical environment clearer. The results in some items are consistent with other research.^{26,14} In some skills, such as predicting the patient's needs at the time of discharge, and using evidence in nursing care, more training is needed and emphasizing the student's focus on using them in nursing care. On the other hand, it is necessary to provide the environment and conditions in which students can implement their knowledge. The results of the statistical test showed that the students evaluated their clinical competence in the emotional area above average, which is consistent with the results of other studies.^{25,27} Students and teachers should try to achieve the goals of the clinical course in the emotional field. The evaluation results in the field of psycho-motor skills also showed that the students evaluated their psycho-motor skills above the average.

Comparing the results of clinical competence according to the areas, students have gained more skills in the emotional and psychomotor areas than in the cognitive area. These results can be due to the fact that in the field of cognition, the skills necessary to obtain clinical competence at high levels of the field of cognition are considered. Therefore, students have gained relatively more ability in using emotional and psychomotor skills in nursing care. In this regard, using care information to make the right decision can help the student to perform care as best as possible.

Conclusion

In the examination of clinical competence, in general, students have evaluated their clinical competence slightly above the average. This result is almost consistent with previous studies. In this regard, it should be noted that the goal of nursing education is to acquire clinical competence. Therefore, it is necessary to look for ways to achieve the highest level of clinical qualification in students during the period of study and employment.

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