



The effects of nursing education on professional values: A longitudinal study



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ABSTRACT

Background: It is considered to be extremely important to ensure that nurses adopt professional values during their education in order to improve nursing practices and develop a professional identity.

Objectives: The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of nursing education on development of professional values.

Design: This study was designed as a longitudinal study.

Settings: The study was conducted in a nursing department at a nursing school in the western Turkey.

Participants: The population of the study consisted of nursing students who were enrolled in the nursing department in academic year of 2011–2012. The data of the study were collected from 59 first-year students in 2011 and 83 fourth-year students in 2015.

Methods: The data of the study were collected using Personal Information Form and Nursing Professional Values Scale-NPVS. The participants responded to the same questionnaire in their first and fourth years in the department.

Results: The scale mean score of the students in their first year was 3.44 ± 0.635 . The highest scores were obtained from the subscales of responsibility, security, and autonomy. Their scale mean score in their fourth year was 3.93 ± 0.727 . The highest scores were obtained from the subscales of dignity and autonomy. The difference between the mean scores was statistically significant ($p = 0.001$).

Conclusions: It was concluded that nursing education had a significant effect on development of professional values.

1. Introduction

Professional values are a major determinant for attitudes and decisions of nurses (Schmidt, 2016). A professional nursing practice is possible only when nurses are aware of their professional values and act accordingly (Lyneham and Levett-Jones, 2016). Well-established professional values will certainly help nurses to make better decisions, develop a positive professional identity, avoid moral distress, and represent nursing care well (Posluszny, 2014). Thus, schooling has a vital role in developing professional values in students.

The professional values of nursing students have been widely investigated (Kaya et al., 2016; Schmidt, 2016; López-Pereira and Arango-Bayer, 2015; Lin et al., 2014). However, the effects of nursing education on development of professional values have been seldom documented. Besides, the effects of nursing education on professional values in Turkey have remained considerably unknown.

The aim of this study is to analyze how nursing students perceived their professional values in their first and fourth years in the

department in order to reveal any change that might have been promoted by nursing education. The results of the study are thought to provide substantial data regarding effects of nursing education on the nursing students' perception about professional values for school administrators and teaching staff. This study aims to raise awareness in nursing students towards a global understanding of professional values.

2. Background

Professional values are commonly characterized with professional standards recognized by the professional practitioners and groups that provide guidance to educational programs and practices and also shape beliefs and attitudes (Lyneham and Levett-Jones, 2016; Moon et al., 2014). Professional values are derived from the codes of ethics (Jiménez-López et al., 2016; Gallegos and Sortedahl, 2015). Seven fundamental values of nursing are aesthetics, sacrifice, equality, freedom, dignity, justice, and truth (Kaya et al., 2016; Gallegos and Sortedahl, 2015; Moon et al., 2014). Aesthetics signifies care, affection,

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and self-discipline. Individuals who value aesthetics most prioritize a comfortable work environment and a positive image for themselves and others. Sacrifice basically refers to being considerate about other people's well-being. Equality can be defined as recognition of equal rights and privileges for everyone. Freedom is about self-discipline, independence, and choices, particularly, the capacity of making choices. Dignity means respecting people and groups and appreciating their unique characteristics. Justice is defined as courage, honesty, morality, and an incentive to protect moral values and justice. Truth, finally, is described as following of the ethical codes and commonly accepted practice standards (Moon et al., 2014; Altun, 2008).

Developing professional values starts with the formal nursing education and continues with professional practice (Kaya et al., 2016; López-Pereira and Arango-Bayer, 2015; Posluszny, 2014), which, therefore, should be one of the major missions of nursing schools (Kaya et al., 2016). Schank and Weis (2001) believe that achievement of educational experiences is very effective in developing professional values in students. When nursing students fail to develop and internalize professional values during their education, they may act outside the Code of Ethics during their careers by putting public image of nursing and collective professional identity potentially at risk (Posluszny, 2014). Therefore, nursing students should be closely followed up in terms of development of their professional values (Lin et al., 2014). Nevertheless, similar studies have focused on the correlation between nursing education and the development of professional values and yielded contradictory results. It has often been reported that nursing education promotes the development of professional values; whereas, some other studies have showed no such changes or differences at all. Similarly, Kaya et al. (2016) examined the development of professional values of nursing students at the beginning and end of the academic year and reported an improvement in their professional values. Leners et al. (2006) investigated how students adopted professional values within the curriculum of a research-intensive, baccalaureate nursing (BSN) program located in the western United States and found that the students achieved to develop professional values. Lin et al. (2014) also conducted a correlational analysis on professional values scores of the first-year and the fourth-year students and reported that the changes in the perception of professional values were statistically significant. Özcan et al. (2012) conducted a study with midwifery students in Turkey and stated that both personal and professional values of students could be improved through education. Moreover, a systematic review showed that education and achieving learning experiences influenced growth and development of professional values positively (Parandeh et al., 2014). On the other hand, Fisher (2014) found no statistically significant difference in the professional values scores of the undergraduate students in their first and fourth years in the department. Bang et al. (2011) also did not find any statistical difference between scores of the second-year and the fourth-year nursing students in Korea. Dönmez and Özsoy (2016) further noted that there was no statistically significant difference between total scores of students according to their grades. Karadağlı (2016) compared the students' grades and their NPVS mean scores and determined a statistically significant difference which was explained by higher scores of the first-year students.

3. Methods

3.1. Aim and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent the perception of undergraduate nursing students towards professional values changed during their four-year education. The study was designed as a longitudinal study. The study sought answers for the question "Are there differences in nursing students' professional values between the beginning and the end of the undergraduate nursing program?"

3.2. Sample and Setting

The population of the study consisted of 90 students who were enrolled in the nursing department in academic year of 2011–2012. 90 students were included in the study and therefore no sampling method was used. All students were included in the study except for those who were absent in the class or those who were on sick leave. The data of the study were collected from 59 first-year students in 2011 and 83 fourth-year students in 2015.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were collected with a Personal Information Form and the Nursing Professional Values Scale (NPVS).

3.3.1. Personal Information Form

This form was developed by the researchers in line with the recent literature and included four questions concerning age, gender, grade, and whether or not they were working as a nurse.

3.3.2. Nursing Professional Values Scale-NPVS

The Nursing Professional Values Scale was developed by Weis and Schank (2000). Validity and reliability study of the scale were conducted by Orak in 2005 in Turkey. The scale has a total of 36 items and five subscales as dignity (11 items), responsibility (9 items), taking action (8 items), security (4 items) and autonomy (4 items) (Orak, 2005). The scale is a 5-point Likert scale and scored as *not important* (1), *a little important* (2), *important* (3), *very important* (4), and *absolutely important* (5). The scale scores and its subscale scores are evaluated with arithmetic means and higher scores signify that nursing students place a greater importance on their professional values.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be 0.96 in the reliability and validity tests (Orak and Alpar, 2012). The scale has been widely used in many studies in Turkey and the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was reported to be 0.92 by Çetinkaya-Ulusoy et al. (2015), 0.97 by Kantek et al. (2015) and 0.91 by Kaya (2013). Table 1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients of the present study and it was found to be 0.95 in 2011 and 0.96 in 2015.

3.4. Data Collection

The first part of the study data was collected in 2011 when the students first entered the department and the second part was collected in 2015 when they were the fourth-year students. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the data before data collection forms were delivered to them. In 2011, the forms were handed out to 80 students. 69 students completed and returned them and it was noted that 10 forms were excluded from the study due to incomplete data and 59 forms were included in the analysis. In 2015, on the other hand, the forms were distributed to 85 students and all forms were collected back. Only 2 forms had incomplete data and 83 forms were analyzed. Finally, 142 forms were analyzed in total. In the classroom, the forms were delivered to nursing students who were voluntary to participate in the study and attended the class on that day. It took 20–25 min for students to complete the

Table 1
The Cronbach Alpha coefficients of the study.

	Item	Cronbach Alpha (2011)	Cronbach Alpha (2015)
NPVS	36	0.95	0.96
Dignity	11	0.86	0.96
Responsibility	9	0.89	0.94
Taking action	8	0.84	0.94
Security	4	0.75	0.85
Autonomy	4	0.86	0.86

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