An analysis of alumni performance: A study of the quality of nursing education

Serap Altuntaş [a,*], Ülkü Baykal [b]

[a] Atatürk University Faculty of Health Sciences, Nursing Management Department, Erzurum, Turkey
[b] Istanbul University Florence Nightingale Nursing Faculty, Nursing Management Department, Istanbul, Turkey

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Background: The professional performance level of their alumni is one of the quality indicators of educational institutions. Nursing education institutions can use their alumni's performance analysis results to enhance their curricula, eliminate deficiencies, improve the quality of education and graduate more highly qualified nurses.
Objective and Design: This is a descriptive, cross-sectional and comparative study, which aimed to determine the professional performances of nurses who graduated from the same nursing faculty.
Methods: The study sample included alumni of Turkey's first nursing faculty, part of the nation's first public university in Istanbul, and their administrative supervisors. The study data were collected using the self-assessment forms of 314 alumni who worked as bedside nurses in 36 Istanbul hospitals, and 314 evaluations by the 195 nurse managers who supervised them. The study's response rate was 82.6%. To collect the study data, the researchers created a performance evaluation form based on the relevant literature. The same form was administered both to the nurse managers and the alumni. The researchers obtained ethical board approval and official permissions from the relevant hospitals to conduct the study. The study data were analyzed by a statistics expert.
Results: According to the study results, the alumni's perceptions of themselves as well as the nurse managers' perceptions of the alumni were different from those of the other nurses with undergraduate degrees in terms of professional knowledge, expectations and ideals. The performance evaluation results showed that the alumni evaluated themselves more positively than their managers did. It was determined that there were highly significant differences ($p = 0.000$) between the values provided by the five sub-dimensions of the scale and the total scale. In addition, the performance level was low in the sub-dimension focusing on research, and there was a significant difference in this sub-dimension ($p = 0.040$).
Conclusions: The study found that the alumni mainly had better evaluations of their own performances than their nurse managers, and that the research skills of the alumni should be enhanced.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The reform movements in Turkish higher education that began in the 1980s have accelerated in recent years, and there have been important developments in higher education around the world (Çelik, 2012; Günay, 2012; Sağlam et al., 2011; Süngü and Bayrakçı, 2010). Many factors, including the rapid development of science and technology, the transformation of industrial societies into information societies, globalization, the business world's higher expectations of university alumni, competition between higher education institutions and the Bologna process make it essential that the quality of higher education institutions be examined and documented using quality assurance systems (Aslan, 2009; Çelik, 2012; Tezsürücü and Bursalıoğlu, 2013; Ulusoy et

al., 2010). Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education is also a primary goal of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Aslan, 2009; Çelik, 2012; Özer, 2012; Süngü and Bayrakçı, 2010). Thus, there are ongoing studies around the world on quality improvement, quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, and many institutions and organizations have been established addressing to quality monitoring and evaluation (Aslan, 2009; Süngü and Bayrakçı, 2010; Tezsürücü and Bursalıoğlu, 2013).

These quality studies in Turkey began in the 1990s in higher education branches such as education and engineering (Aslan, 2009; Çelik, 2012; Öztürk, 2012). They have accelerated since 2005 with the influence of the Bologna process, by the establishment of a range of boards and commissions as a part of the Turkish Higher Education Board and by legal regulations (Regulation for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). In the field of nursing, the Nursing Curricula Evaluation and Accreditation Foundation (HEPDAK, 2013) was established in 2013 with the approval of the higher education board to determine

* Corresponding author.
 E-mail addresses: serap342002@yahoo.com (S. Altuntaş), ulkubay@yahoo.com (Ü. Baykal).

the standards for the evaluation and accreditation of the undergraduate nursing curricula (HEPDAK, 2013). In the past two years, some nursing schools have been included in the accreditation process, and other nursing schools are getting prepared for it.

Another performance indicator of nursing schools is the competency and performance of their graduates (Ovayolu and Bahar, 2006; Safadi et al., 2010; HEPDAK, 2013), which should meet or get beyond the expectations of clients such as health institutions and patients. Evaluations of the competencies and performances of the alumni nurses have been made in many countries, including Korea (Park and Hwang, 2013), the USA (Armstrong et al., 2009; Fero et al., 2009), Taiwan (Cheng et al., 2014; Cheng and Liou, 2013), Jordan (Safadi et al., 2010), Ethiopia (Hailu et al., 2014), Iran (Salsali, 2005) and Australia (Hengstberger-Sims et al., 2008; Ramritu and Barnard, 2001). These studies determined that the newly-graduated nurses in particular lacked the skills and competencies expected from them in the clinical environment, there was a gap between training and practice, and a majority of nurse managers found their performance insufficient (Berkow et al., 2008; Beyea et al., 2007; Burns and Poster, 2008; Fero et al., 2009; Cheng and Liou, 2013; Klein and Fowles, 2009; Marshburn et al., 2009). Moreover, it was found that the newly graduated nurses' lack of these competencies caused serious negative patient care outputs (Hailu et al., 2014).

Nursing education institutions should improve their education quality and enhance it continually to produce the qualified human labor needed by the country. To improve education quality, the institutions should review their curricula periodically, and determine whether their graduates have the knowledge, skills and performances required to meet the current and future health care expectations of health institutions, individuals and families, and society (Bengisu, 2007; Kalaycı, 2008; Sözmen, 2004; Tezsürücü and Bursalıoğlu, 2013).

The results of the evaluation of alumni nurses' competencies and performances will provide important data for making new plans to train qualified nurses, develop nursing curricula by determining new education policies, and increase the quality of education. Moreover, quality professional training will help nurses to prepare for the work environment (Hailu et al., 2014; Park and Hwang, 2013). In particular, newly-graduated nurses will be more self-confident, adapt to professional life better and have lower rates of resignation due to stress (Cheng et al., 2014). All these results will positively affect the quality of nursing services (Hailu et al., 2014; Park and Hwang, 2013). There will also be more demand for the alumni of the nursing schools that produce qualified and competent nurses, which will strengthen the prestige of these institutions and put them in greater demand.

Considering all the contributions and benefits of evaluating alumni's performances and competencies, this study aimed to evaluate the performances of the nurses who graduated from one of Turkey's most established undergraduate institutions. The study results will provide important data to guide educational enhancement by the nursing school in question as well as other institutions.

2. Methods

2.1. Objective and Design

This is a descriptive, cross-sectional and comparative study that was intended to determine the workplace performances of nurses who graduated from an Istanbul nursing faculty.

2.2. Sample

The population of the study included all alumni who graduated from the nursing faculty of a Turkish public university and worked in bedside positions in hospitals, and their nurse managers. Considering that a majority of these individuals could be contacted using purposive sampling, the researchers included the alumni and their nurse managers who

were working in hospitals with 100 or more beds in Istanbul, the Turkish city with the highest number of hospitals (36 hospitals). The researchers contacted 380 alumni and their nurse managers in 16 private hospitals, 16 hospitals of the Ministry of Health and 4 university hospitals that were operating when the study was conducted and agreed to participate in it. Some nurse managers evaluated the performances of multiple alumni under their supervision. The researchers analyzed 628 performance evaluation forms; 314 self-assessment forms and 314 nurse manager evaluations.

Of the 314 alumni included in the study sample, a majority worked in university hospitals (38.2%), were between the ages 26 and 30 (40.1%), had professional experience (71%) and corporate experience (79%) of 10 years or less.

Of the 195 nurse managers, majority worked in university hospitals (38.5%), were between the ages of 35 and 44 (47.1%), had undergraduate degrees (39.5%), had 11 to 20 years of professional experience (54.9) and corporate experiences of <10 years (62.6%). Of them, 73.8% received training on management, and 47.7% of them had learned how to evaluate performance in their training programs.

2.3. Instruments

The study data were collected using a personal information form and a performance evaluation form, both created by the researchers.

The personal information, form provided was used to inquire about the personal and professional traits of the alumni and their nurse managers.

The performance evaluation form was created by the researchers based on the relevant literature (Baykal, 1994; Öztürk, 2002; Uyargil, 2008), and it included the performance evaluation criteria related to the alumni. The researchers also consulted eight faculty member nurses about these criteria to ensure content validity. Afterwards, the researchers conducted a pilot study with 15 alumni to check the understandability of the statements in the form. Based on the suggestions made by the experts and the alumni, the researchers revised the form and used it in the study.

In the study, the alumni evaluated their own performance, and their managers also evaluated them to provide a more objective evaluation of the alumni's performance. Thus, the researchers created two forms that included the same evaluation criteria. On one of these forms, the criteria were arranged for the alumni to evaluate themselves, while the other form was addressed to the nurse managers to evaluate the alumni. The performance evaluation form included 95 items: 34 about practice, 11 about training, 12 about teamwork and communication, 7 about research, 15 about management and 16 about personal traits. The forms were scored using a 5-point Likert type scale (5 = very successful, 4 = successful, 3 = moderately successful, 2 = poorly successful and 1 = unsuccessful) with an "I did not observe/I do not know" option. The forms can be evaluated either sub-dimension mean scores or total mean scores. Higher mean scores indicate better performance.

The researchers tested the validity and reliability of the performance evaluation form, and found that the forms created for the two groups (alumni and manager nurses) had high total item score correlation values (the correlation values were between 0.62 and 0.94 for the nurse manager form and between 0.55 and 0.83 for the alumni form), and high total Cronbach's alpha values (0.98 for the nurse manager form and 0.96 for the alumni form) (Table 1).

2.4. Data Collection

The researchers held preliminary interviews with the nursing services directors of the hospitals that were included in the study. The researchers also went to these hospitals on the scheduled dates, met the alumni and their managers individually, and distributed the data collection tool in closed envelopes to the alumni and nurse managers who volunteered to participate in the study. For the alumni who were not