

The Effect of Nursing Students' Emotional Intelligence Levels on Their Attitudes Toward the Nursing Profession

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the effect of nursing students' emotional intelligence levels on their attitudes toward the nursing profession.

Methods: In this study involving 746 nursing students from the nursing department of a university's faculty of health sciences, a specific sample selection was not employed; instead, an attempt was made to reach the entire population. The study was conducted with 586 (78.55%) students. The data was collected between March and April 2021 using the information form, Emotional Intelligence Test, and Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession.

Results: The nursing students' Emotional Intelligence Test mean score was 140.08 ± 18.06 , and their Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession mean score was 4.24 ± 0.30 . Males ($t = -2.856$; $p = .004 < .01$; $d = 0.324$; $\eta^2 = 0.014$), those who chose the nursing profession willingly ($t = 5.272$; $p = .001 < .01$; $d = 0.436$; $\eta^2 = 0.045$) and satisfied with being nursing students ($t = 2.851$; $p = .005 < .01$; $d = 0.343$; $\eta^2 = 0.014$) had higher emotional intelligence total scores. Those who choose the profession willingly ($t = 13.099$; $p = .001 < .01$; $d = 1.084$; $\eta^2 = 0.227$) and were satisfied with being a nursing student ($t = 10.691$; $p = .001 < .01$; $d = 1.286$; $\eta^2 = 0.164$) had higher attitude toward the profession total scores. Emotional intelligence levels explained their attitudes toward the nursing profession by 16.6% ($R^2 = 0.166$; $F = 117.176$; $p = .001 < .01$).

Conclusion: The results showed that nursing students had average levels of emotional intelligence and a positive attitude toward the nursing profession. Those who chose the profession and became nursing students had higher emotional intelligence and more positive professional attitudes. Emotional intelligence increases the attitude level of nursing students toward the nursing profession overall. Therefore, to strengthen their positive attitudes towards the profession, nursing students should be encouraged to participate in scientific and social activities that will improve their emotional intelligence levels.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, nursing, nursing students, attitude, occupations

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence affects the quality of care provided by nurses (1). It is also a crucial attribute influencing the quality of nurses' tasks, such as clinical decision-making and critical thinking (2). Therefore, it is essential and important to impart and enhance emotional intelligence skills during the education of nursing students who are future practitioners of the nursing profession (3). Previous studies have emphasized that emotional intelligence facilitates learning in nursing students (4) and that cognitive skills should be balanced with emotional intelligence (5). Developing emotional intelligence in nursing students will support them in career planning and contribute to becoming more considerate healthcare providers in the future (6). Christianson (5) and Dugué et al. (7) found that students with good emotional intelligence skills were more successful and productive throughout their education and professional careers. Emotional intelligence also affects nursing students' teamwork (8), caring behaviours

(1), personal and social responsibilities (9), empathy (10) and communicationskills (3).

Nursing students are expected to be able to cope with the emotional difficulties that arise during clinical training and to manage the emotional problems related to themselves, their peers, and patients before graduating and entering the profession. To ensure this, it has been proposed that emotional intelligence should be incorporated into the nursing curriculum to empower nursing students to develop positive professional attitudes (11) because nurses dissatisfied with their jobs with a negative attitude toward the profession are more likely to encounter psychological problems such as nervousness, stress, and anxiety. Nurses with a negative attitude toward the profession can negatively influence their colleagues and lower their job performance and motivation (12). Studies observed that nursing students' attitudes toward the profession affect their career choices

(13), perceptions of the profession's image (14), peer support (15) and career choices and motivations (16) during student years. A study on the relationship between nursing students' thoughts about their profession and their emotional intelligence reported that students who love their profession, want to pursue it and would recommend it to others evaluate their emotions better and are more optimistic, and that this perspective reflects positively on their emotional intelligence levels (17). As this positive reflection may be the other way around, it was anticipated that students' emotional intelligence levels may also affect their attitudes towards the nursing profession. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine the relationship between nursing students' emotional intelligence levels and their attitudes toward the nursing profession.

2. METHODS

2.1. Aim and Type of Research: This correlational cross-sectional study was conducted to determine the relationship between nursing students' emotional intelligence levels and their attitudes toward the nursing profession.

2.2. Research Questions: What is the level of emotional intelligence of nursing students?

What is the level of attitude of nursing students toward the nursing profession?

Does the level of emotional intelligence in nursing students affect their attitudes toward the nursing profession?

2.3. Universe and Sample of the Research: The study population covered all students (N=746) in the nursing department of a health sciences faculty in the Black Sea Region of Turkey. An attempt was made to reach the entire population without sample selection. The research was conducted with 586 (78.55%) students who agreed to participate.

2.4. Data Collection Tools: An information form to collect students' sociodemographic data, the Emotional Intelligence Test, and the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession were used.

Information Form: There are five questions about nursing students' gender, age, grade year, whether they choose nursing willingly, and their satisfaction with studying nursing.

Emotional Intelligence Test (EIT): It was developed by Hall in 1999, and its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Ergin in 2000. It is a 30-item 6-point Likert-type scale with five subscales, each comprising six items: emotional awareness, managing emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. A score of 155 and above from the EIT indicates a high level (fairly strong) of emotional intelligence. A score between 130-150 is considered normal (some improvement is needed), and a score of 129 and below is regarded as a low level (definitely needs improvement) of emotional intelligence (18). The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.84 in the original study and 0.92 in this study.

Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (ASNP): Developed by Çoban and Kaşıkçı in 2011 (19), it is a five-point Likert-type scale with three subscales regarding nursing profession characteristics (18 items), preference for the nursing profession (13 items), and attitude toward the general state of the nursing profession (9 items), totalling 40 items. Eight items contain negative statements and are reverse-scored. Higher scores from the scale indicate a positive attitude toward the nursing profession. Individuals with an average score below three may be considered to have a negative attitude. In contrast, those with an average score of 3 and above may be deemed to have a positive attitude. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.91 in the original study and 0.85 in this study.

2.5. Data Collection: After obtaining institutional and ethics committee approval, data were collected through Google Forms using personal email addresses between March and April 2021. Students who volunteered to participate marked the checkbox stating 'I accept to participate in the study' at the beginning of the data collection tool and proceeded to answer the questions, submitting their responses to the researchers.

2.6. Data Analysis: Frequency and percentage analyses were used to determine the participating students' descriptive characteristics and mean and standard deviation statistics were used to examine the scale. The relationships between subscales determining the students' scale scores were analysed through Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses. To investigate variations in scale levels based on the descriptive characteristics of students, t-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), post hoc tests (Tukey, LSD), and effect size calculations using Cohen's d and Eta squared (η^2) coefficients were employed. The results were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and a 5% significance level.

2.7. Ethical Consideration: To conduct the research, written permission from the dean's office of the faculty of health sciences to which the nursing department is affiliated (Date: 29.01.2021, Number: E-63582098.299.1009) and approval from the university's ethics committee (Date: 24.02.2021, Number: 24237859-207) were obtained.

2.8. Limitations of the Research: The research is limited to the opinions of students from the nursing department of a university's faculty of health sciences.

3. RESULTS

84.3% of the students were female, and 50.5% were under the age of 21. 53.1% chose the nursing profession willingly. 27% were first-, 24.1% were second-, 20.1% were third-, and 28.8% were fourth-year students. 86.3% were satisfied with studying nursing.

Their Emotional Intelligence Test total mean score was 140.08 ± 18.06 , and the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession total mean score was 4.24 ± 0.30 . The mean scores for the subscales are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' mean scores on the Emotional Intelligence Test and Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession (n=586)

Emotional Intelligence Test Subscales	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Emotional awareness	18.00	36.00	30.04	3.57
Managing emotions	11.00	36.00	25.70	5.34
Self-motivation	13.00	36.00	28.01	4.48
Empathy	15.00	36.00	28.96	4.24
Social skills	9.00	36.00	27.35	4.57
Emotional Intelligence Test Total	93.00	180.00	140.08	18.06
Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession Subscales				
Nursing profession characteristics	3.61	5.00	4.62	0.30
Preference for the nursing profession	1.85	5.00	3.93	0.61
Attitude toward the general state of the nursing profession	3.00	5.00	3.92	0.28
Attitude scale for the nursing profession total	3.38	5.00	4.24	0.30

A weak positive correlation was found between students' total scores on ANSP and EIT ($r=0.409$; $p=.001<.01$). Weak

but significant positive correlations were found between the subscales ($r=0.363-0.170$, $p<.01$) (Table 2).

The regression analysis to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between the Emotional Intelligence total and Attitude Scale for the Nursing Profession total yielded significance ($F=117.176$; $p=.001<.01$). Emotional Intelligence total explains the total change in the Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession total by 16.6% ($R^2=0.166$). Emotional intelligence increases nursing students' overall attitude toward nursing ($\beta=0.409$) (Table 3).

The emotional intelligence subscales, including emotional awareness, managing emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills, explained 17% of the nursing students' total attitude toward the nursing profession. The model was significant ($R^2=0.17$; $F=24.961$; $p=.001<.01$). Students' emotional awareness ($\beta=0.170$) and empathy ($\beta=0.161$) levels, respectively, affect their attitude levels toward the nursing profession positively ($p<.01$) (Table 4).

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Between Emotional Intelligence and Attitude Towards Nursing Profession Scores

		Emotional Intelligence Test Total	Emotional awareness	Managing emotions	Self-motivation	Empathy	Social skills
Attitude scale for the nursing profession total	r	0.409*	0.363*	0.318*	0.352*	0.348*	0.290*
	p	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001
Nursing profession characteristics	r	0.296*	0.332*	0.170*	0.212*	0.286*	0.236*
	p	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001
Preference for the nursing profession	r	0.341*	0.247*	0.318*	0.334*	0.256*	0.217*
	p	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001
Attitude toward the general state of the nursing profession	r	0.289*	0.282*	0.189*	0.214*	0.279*	0.229*
	p	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001

* $<.01$; Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3. The effect of emotional intelligence on attitudes toward the nursing profession

Independent Variable	Non-Standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	P	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	SE	β			Alt	Üst
Constant	3.263	0.091		35.756	.001	3.083	3.442
Emotional Intelligence Total	0.007	0.001	0.409	10.825	.001	0.006	0.008

*Dependent Variable=Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession Total, $R=0.409$; $R^2=0.166$; $F=117.176$; $p=.001$; Durbin Watson Value=1.717

Table 4. The effect of emotional intelligence subscales on attitudes toward the nursing profession

Independent Variable	Non-Standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	P	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	SE	β			Lower	Upper
Constant	3.153	0.104		30.428	.001	2.949	3.356
Emotional awareness	0.015	0.004	0.170	3.324	.001	0.006	0.023
Managing emotions	0.004	0.004	0.063	1.033	.302	-0.003	0.011
Self-motivation	0.008	0.005	0.113	1.702	.089	-0.001	0.017
Empathy	0.012	0.004	0.161	2.746	.006	0.003	0.020
Social skills	0.000	0.004	-0.002	-0.030	.976	-0.008	0.007

*Dependent Variable=Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession Total, $R=0.421$; $R^2=0.170$; $F=24.961$; $p=.001$; Durbin Watson Value=1.702

Nursing students who were male ($t=-2.856$; $p=.004<.01$; $d=0.324$; $\eta^2=0.014$) chose the nursing profession willingly ($t=5.272$; $p=.001<.01$; $d=0.436$; $\eta^2=0.045$), and were satisfied with studying nursing ($t=2.851$; $p=.005<.01$; $d=0.343$; $\eta^2=0.014$) had statistically significantly higher total emotional intelligence scores (Table 5).

In the nursing profession characteristics subscale, for female students ($t=2.474$; $p=.014<.05$; $d=0.281$; $\eta^2=0.010$), those who chose the profession willingly ($t=13.099$; $p=.001<.01$; $d=1.084$; $\eta^2=0.227$) and were satisfied with studying nursing had statistically significantly higher attitude toward the nursing profession total mean scores ($t=10.691$; $p=.001<.01$; $d=1.286$; $\eta^2=0.164$) (Table 6).

Table 5. Differentiation of emotional intelligence scores according to descriptive characteristics

Demographic Features	n	Emotional Intelligence Total	Emotional awareness	Managing emotions	Self-motivation	Empathy	Social skills
Gender		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Female	494	139.166±17.924	30.024±3.517	25.302±5.278	27.660±4.448	28.964±4.203	27.217±4.614
Male	92	144.989±18.112	30.141±3.913	27.902±5.221	29.902±4.209	28.967±4.512	28.076±4.310
t=		-2.856	-0.288	-4.346	-4.476	-0.008	-1.657
p=		.004	.774	.001	.001	.994	.098
Age		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
17-20	296	140.439±17.901	30.203±3.534	25.980±5.006	28.071±4.183	29.020±4.445	27.166±4.904
21 and above	290	139.714±18.250	29.879±3.623	25.435±5.674	27.952±4.776	28.907±4.045	27.541±4.212
t=		0.486	1.094	1.234	0.322	0.323	-0.994
p=		.627	.274	.218	.748	.747	.320
Grade year		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
1	158	141.076±18.412	30.076±3.681	26.329±4.879	28.538±4.254	28.975±4.597	27.158±4.821
2	141	141.028±17.523	30.411±3.289	25.773±5.540	27.993±4.439	29.177±4.358	27.674±4.647
3	118	138.254±17.590	29.805±3.731	25.119±5.176	27.788±4.228	28.703±3.971	26.839±4.326
4	169	139.633±18.539	29.870±3.611	25.491±5.701	27.692±4.877	28.959±4.027	27.621±4.443
F=		0.725	0.807	1.289	1.111	0.266	1.017
p=		.537	.490	.277	.344	.850	.385
Choosing the nursing profession willingly		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Yes	311	143.698±17.528	30.508±3.492	26.820±5.217	28.839±4.166	29.633±4.199	27.897±4.462
No	275	135.989±17.814	29.516±3.609	24.455±5.227	27.076±4.649	28.207±4.184	26.735±4.630
t=		5.272	3.377	5.473	4.841	4.110	3.093
p=		.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.002
Satisfaction with studying nursing		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Yes	506	140.921±17.916	30.150±3.592	26.010±5.198	28.277±4.332	29.036±4.349	27.449±4.574
No	80	134.763±18.198	29.363±3.439	23.813±5.913	26.338±5.054	28.513±3.544	26.738±4.561
t=		2.851	1.833	3.446	3.633	1.023	1.293
p=		.005	.067	.002	.002	.238	.197

F: ANOVA Test; t: Independent Groups T-Test; Post Hoc: Tukey, LSD

Table 6. Comparison of nursing students' attitude scores toward the nursing profession according to their descriptive characteristics

Demographic Features	n	Attitude Scale for Nursing Profession Total	Nursing Profession Characteristics	Preference for the Nursing Profession	Attitude Toward the General State of the Nursing Profession
Gender		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Female	494	4.250±0.307	4.638±0.294	3.938±0.618	3.923±0.280
Male	92	4.203±0.319	4.554±0.339	3.911±0.582	3.924±0.288
t=		1.329	2.474	0.391	-0.040
p=		.184	.014	.696	.968
Age		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
17-20	296	4.240±0.301	4.608±0.304	3.957±0.592	3.916±0.290
21 and above	290	4.244±0.317	4.643±0.300	3.910±0.632	3.930±0.271
t=		-0.151	-1.417	0.925	-0.602
p=		.880	.157	.355	.547
Grade year		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
1	158	4.232±0.315	4.582±0.314	3.969±0.568	3.911±0.319
2	141	4.260±0.268	4.654±0.269	3.954±0.604	3.913±0.256
3	118	4.240±0.331	4.609±0.329	3.955±0.639	3.915±0.278
4	169	4.239±0.321	4.653±0.296	3.869±0.640	3.947±0.265
F=		0.221	2.124	0.910	0.612
p=		.882	.096	.436	.608
Choosing the nursing profession willingly		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Yes	311	4.381±0.264	4.673±0.296	4.254±0.479	3.978±0.264
No	275	4.086±0.281	4.571±0.300	3.571±0.540	3.860±0.286
t=		13.099	4.147	16.238	5.191
p=		.001	.001	.001	.001
Satisfaction with studying nursing		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Yes	506	4.292±0.290	4.635±0.303	4.065±0.523	3.934±0.273
No	80	3.928±0.231	4.563±0.294	3.099±0.462	3.856±0.319
t=		10.691	1.974	15.600	2.316
p=		.001	.049	.001	.041

F: ANOVA Test; t: Independent Groups T-Test; Post Hoc: Tukey, LSD

4. DISCUSSION

Emotional intelligence is a professional skill considered essential for a career in the nursing profession. Nursing students' capacity to understand, express and manage their own and others' emotions is important in developing positive perceptions, beliefs and behaviours related to the profession (7,20). This study examining nursing students' emotional intelligence levels and attitudes towards nursing demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and attitudes towards nursing. As students' level of emotional intelligence increased, their attitudes towards the profession also increased positively. A study further suggested that adopting nursing values is related to students' emotional intelligence skills (21). However, in this study, emotional intelligence subscales also positively affected students' attitudes towards the nursing profession. This is because nursing students' levels of emotional intelligence positively influence their problem-solving skills (22), their transitioning to the profession and competency (23), their resilience, as well as their ethical, critical, and empathetic thinking styles (24), and their communication in clinical settings (25). These factors may have positively influenced the professional attitudes of nursing students.

If the development of emotional intelligence is compromised, it can lead to failures in interpersonal relationships and professional life. Therefore, nurses are particularly expected to have higher emotional intelligence (26). In the current study, however, the nursing students had moderate levels of emotional intelligence. The nursing students were aware of their emotions but seemed to struggle with managing them. Supporting these results, nursing students had a medium level of emotional intelligence (8,22), with their lowest score being from managing emotions subscale (10). However, according to national and international studies, nursing students are expected to have high levels of emotional intelligence (27,28). On the other hand, this study found that students, especially male students, who were satisfied with studying in the department of nursing had high levels of emotional intelligence, mainly in managing their emotions and self-motivation. It has been previously mentioned that male students generally had higher levels of emotional intelligence and were better than female students in expressing and utilizing emotions (29). The differing results of studies may be attributed to cultural differences (24). Additionally, nursing students who voluntarily chose the profession had higher emotional intelligence levels across all subscales compared to others. This finding may be due to the positive impact of self-sensitivity on emotional intelligence among nursing students (27).

Attitude towards the profession is a determinant of professional success and satisfaction in nursing (30). In this study, the nursing students were found to have a positive attitude toward the profession, which is similar to the results of some other studies (14,15,31-33). Professional attitudes of nursing students can be improved in educational processes and clinical practices. Finally, consistent with previous studies, this

study found that students who are female (16,31), voluntarily chose nursing (13,15,31), and are satisfied with studying in the nursing program (14,15) have more positive attitudes toward the profession. Nurses' attitudes toward the profession are thought to be associated with their professional attitudes (34). Therefore, being satisfied with studying nursing may foster a positive attitude in this context.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that the nursing students had average levels of emotional intelligence and positive attitudes toward the nursing profession. A positive relationship was found between emotional intelligence and their attitudes toward the nursing profession, and it was inferred that emotional intelligence increased nursing students' attitudes toward the profession.

We suggest improving the emotional intelligence levels of students who have problems managing their emotions despite being aware of them, incorporating emotional intelligence in the nursing curriculum to offer students who have not chosen the profession willingly or are not satisfied with being a nursing student support in the components of emotional intelligence and guiding students to scientific activities such as seminars, courses, etc. on these topics. This may increase their overall performance, and they can be empowered in emotional awareness and management, empathy, self-motivation, and social skills. Developing emotional intelligence can lead to more positive attitudes toward the profession among students, contributing to the overall enhancement of the quality of the nursing profession.

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