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ORIGINAL ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA YAZISI

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Evaluating Nursing Students' Attitudes Toward Nurses During Their Clinical Practice

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to assess nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during their clinical practice.

Methods: This descriptive, cross-sectional study involved 197 students from a private university's nursing program. Data were collected using a "Socio-Demographic Information Form" and "an Attitude Scale Toward Nurses During Clinical Practice". The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS 27.0. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results: Students showed a moderate level of positive attitudes toward nurses during clinical practice (Mean = 93.64; SD = 26.06). As students advanced in their year of study, their overall attitude scores and scores in the "collaboration and understanding" category increased significantly. Male students scored significantly higher than females across all attitude subcategories. Students who worked an additional job had significantly lower scores in the "professional development" category compared to those who didn't work extra. Fourth-year intern students who received one-on-one mentoring had significantly higher overall attitude scores than those who did not receive such support .

Conclusion: One-on-one mentoring helps improve the professional relationship between students and nurses and boosts satisfaction with clinical practice.

Keywords: Nursing, student, clinical practice, mentor nurse, nursing education

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, hemşirelik öğrencilerinin klinik uygulamaları sırasında hemşirelere yönelik tutumlarını değerlendirmektir.

Yöntem: Bu tanımlayıcı, kesitsel çalışma, bir vakıf üniversitesinin hemşirelik programından 197 öğrenciyi kapsamıştır. Veriler, "Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu" ve "Klinik Uygulama Sırasında Hemşirelere Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği" kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Veriler IBM SPSS 27.0 ile analiz edilmiştir. 0,05'ten küçük bir p değeri istatistiksel olarak anlamlı kabul edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Öğrenciler, klinik uygulama sırasında hemşirelere karşı orta düzeyde olumlu tutumlar sergilemiştir (Ortalama = 93,64; Standart sapma = 26,06). Öğrenciler öğrenim yıllarında ilerledikçe, genel tutum puanları ve "işbirliği ve anlayış" kategorisindeki puanları önemli ölçüde artmıştır. Erkek öğrenciler, tüm tutum alt kategorilerinde kadın öğrencilerden daha yüksek puan almıştır. Ek bir işte çalışan öğrenciler, ek iş yapmayanlara kıyasla "mesleki gelişim" kategorisinde daha düşük puan almıştır. Dördüncü sınıf stajyer öğrencilerinden bire bir mentorluk alanların, bu desteği almayanlara göre genel tutum puanları önemli ölçüde daha yüksekti.

Sonuç: Bire bir mentorluk, öğrenciler ve hemşireler arasındaki profesyonel ilişkiyi geliştirmeye ve klinik uygulamadan duyulan memnuniyeti artırmaya yardımcı olur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hemşirelik, öğrenci, klinik uygulama, mentor hemşire, hemşirelik eğitimi

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Health services are rapidly changing thanks to technological and scientific advances, and nursing, at the heart of this transformation, is evolving alongside them(1). The International Council of Nurses (ICN) updated its definition of nursing at its 2025 congress. Nursing is a profession dedicated to supporting everyone's right to the highest possible standard of health through a shared commitment to providing collaborative, culturally safe, and person-centered care and services (2). Nursing education programs include theoretical courses, lab work, and clinical practice. Clinical practice helps students develop skills such as caring for real patients, working with healthcare professionals, and making professional decisions (3). Nursing education today isn't just about passing on theoretical knowledge; it also involves helping students develop professional attitudes, values, and identity (4). In this context, clinical practice plays an essential role in nursing education—it's where students apply what they've learned in real settings, build professional skills, and embrace their roles as nurses. One of the biggest factors in effective clinical practice is the support and guidance students receive from their mentor nurses. These mentors are key educators who help students apply what they've learned in theory to real-word situations, observe professional behavior up close, and develop their professional identity (5).

They also make it easier for students to connect what they've learned in class with real-life practice by giving feedback and guidance (6). Plus, the way the nursing students interact with, behave, guide, and communicate directly affects how students see themselves in the profession (7). Research shows that when students trust their mentor nurses, their confidenceincreases, they become more involved in decision-making, and they feel more satisfied with their career choice (8). Aragaw and colleagues (2019) found that the more clinical experience nursing students get, the more positive their attitude toward the profession becomes (7). Likewise, Neumbe and team (2023) stressed that clinical nurses' attitudes play a significant role in how students identify with their profession (9). Feeling valued as part of the clinical team, receiving active feedback, and having a guiding mentor are all key to developing a positive attitude toward nursing (8). Similarly, students, especially during their first practical experiences, struggle with uncertainty, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of making mistakes, which makes learning harder (5,10). The "vulnerability" students feel during clinical practice, combined with professional pressures and high expectations, can lead to a loss of confidence. But when this vulnerability is supported by positive factors such as educator support, peer relationships, and patient feedback, it can become a valuable learning opportunity. Instructors' attitudes play a key role in helping students embrace their nursing roles (10). To ensure students can learn safely in clinical settings, a supportive environment that allows learning from mistakes should be created (5). Also, when mentor nurses gain education and mentorship skills, the quality of practical training improves. This creates differences in the mentoring experience and can lead to inconsistencies in how students' attitudes develop (1). However, in current practice, students usually end up working with any nurse on the clinical ward rather than a specific mentor nurse.

All this research shows that nursing education is an ongoing, multi-faceted process that requires constant development and evaluation. That's why it's really important to assess how nursing students feel about the nurses they work with during their clinical practice, as it plays a big role in their professional growth. This study aimed to examine nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during clinical practice and to determine how these attitudes relate to demographic and academic factors.

Material and Method

Study Design

The study was descriptive and cross-sectional. Its goal was to identify nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during clinical practice and the factors that influence these attitudes.

Research Questions

1. What are nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during their clinical practice?

2. What socio-demographic and academic factors affect nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during their clinical practice?

Location and Time of the Study

The research took place between March 1, 2025, and April 30, 2025, at the nursing department of the Faculty of Health Sciences at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey, involving 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-year students.

Population and Sample

The study population included 205 nursing students from the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years during the 2024–2025 academic year. First-year students were excluded because they hadn't yet started clinical practice . The minimum sample size was set at 130 students on based on statistical calculations using G*Power (version 3.1) at the a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, with a medium effect size (Cohen's d = 0.5) and a power of 0.80. Convenience sampling was employed due to practical constraints of access to the student population via class communication channels (course group chats and institutional email). While this method may introduce selection bias — as participation was voluntary and limited to students reachable through these channels — the sample size was intentionally increased during data collection to 197 students to minimize potential data loss and improve representativeness of the target population. Since the skewness and kurtosis values of the scales do not exceed the limits of -2 and +2, nonparametric tests will be used when the number of group observations is insufficient (n<30), while parametric tests will be used in the analyses (11, 12).

Inclusion Criteria for the Study

- Being willing to participate in the study.
- Being a 2nd, 3rd, or 4th-year student.

Exclusion Criteria for the Study

- Being a 1st-year Nursing student.
- Being enrolled in a different department or faculty.
- Having incomplete or incorrect data.
- Choosing to withdraw from the study.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected using the "Socio-Demographic Information Form" and the "Attitude Scale Toward Nurses During Clinical Practice for Nursing Students."

Socio-Demographic Information Form

This form, developedby researchers based on the literature, includes students' demographic information and their self-assessments of their clinical experience (13). It has 8 questions covering age, gender, grade level, GPA, whether they work a side job, how successful they feel during clinical practice, their satisfaction with the clinical experience, and whether they chose their major willingly.

Nursing Students' Attitude Scale Toward Nurses During Clinical Practice

Developed by Kaplan and colleagues (2024), this scale measures students' attitudes toward nurses during their clinical training. It has 28 items divided into three subcategories: "Cooperation and understanding" (15 items), "Communication skills and guidance" (10 items), and "Support for professional development" (3 items). Only item 18 is reverse-coded. It uses a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree). Scores range from 28 to 140, with higher scores showing more positive attitudes toward nurses (14). The scale's reliability is very high (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.946), and in this study, it was 0.983.

Data Collection

Data were collected online via Google Forms. Participants were reached through their course group chats and institutional email lists, enabling broad and timely access while minimizing resource use.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0. A frequency table was created for sociodemographic questions, and descriptive statistics tables were generated for scale and sub-dimension scores. To examine group differences, for variables with two groups, the independent samples t-test (e.g., Employment Status, Choosing the Department Willingly) was used if normality assumptions were met, while the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (e.g., Gender) was utilized if normality was not met. For variables with three or more groups, a One-Way ANOVA (e.g., Grades, Satisfaction with Clinical Practice) was applied for normally distributed data, and a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test (e.g., Academic Achievement Average, Clinical Practice Performance Evaluation) was used if normality was not met.

(11). All results were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and a significance level of p<0.05.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee of XX Foundation University (decision dated 22.01.2025, number 02), and institutional permission was granted (letter dated 29.01.2025, reference E-54022451-050.04-180685).

Results

The students' sociodemographic information is detailed in Table 1. The average age of the students was 20.80±1.20, and their average academic GPA was 2.93±0.46. Among the participants, 41.6% were third-year students, 88.8% were female, and 81.2% were not working a second job. During their clinical practice, 64.0% of the students rated themselves as successful. Regarding satisfaction with clinical practice, 38.6% were satisfied, 40.61% were somewhat satisfied, and 20.8% were not satisfied. Also, 83.8% of the students said they chose the nursing department willingly (Table 1).

Descriptive statistics for the attitude scale and its sub-dimensions, the average total score was 93.64±26.06, as illustrated in Table 2. The average score for the "collaboration and understanding" sub-dimension was 49.29±13.87, for "communication skills and guidance" it was 33.64±10.05, and for "support for professional development" it was 10.72±2.94. These results show that students generally have a positive attitude overall, with similarly moderate to high positive responses in the sub-dimensions (Table 2).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Information Table (N=197)

Characteristics	**Mean ± SS**	
Age	20.80±1.20	
Academic achievement	2.93±0.46	
Grades	*n*	%
2	77	39.1
3	82	41.6
4	38	19.3
Academic achievement average		
1-2 range	5	2.5
2-3 range	90	45.7
3-4 range	102	51.8
Gender		
Female	175	88.8
Male	22	11.2
Working in an additional job status		
Working	37	18.8
Not working	160	81.2
Clinical practice performance evaluation		
Successful	126	64.0
Partially successful	68	34.5
Unsuccessful	3	1.5
Satisfaction with clinical practice		
Satisfied	76	38.6
Partially satisfied	80	40.6
Not satisfied	41	20.8
Response to choosing the department willingly		
Yes	165	83.8
No	32	16.2

Table 2. Attitude Scores of Nurses During Clinical Practice

Sub-dimensions	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SS
Cooperation and Understanding	197	15	75	49.29	± 13.87
Communication Skills and Guidance	197	10	50	33.64	± 10.05
Support for professional Development	197	3	15	10.72	± 2.94
Total Scale Score	197	29	140	93.64	± 26.06

Nursing students' attitudes toward nurses during their clinical practice, based on their demographic characteristics, are detailed in Table 3. When comparing by class level, 4th-year students scored the highest across all subcategories and overall. This difference is especially significant in the "cooperation and understanding" subcategory ($p=0.029$) and the total scale score ($p=0.038$). Male students showed statistically significantly more positive attitudes toward nurses across all subcategories ($p<0.05$). Looking at whether students have a part-time

job, a significant difference was only found in the "support for professional development" subcategory (p=0.048). When comparing by GPA, students with GPAs between 3.1 and 4.0 had higher averages in all areas and total scores, but this wasn't statistically significant (p>0.05). Comparing satisfaction with clinical practice, students who were satisfied had the highest scores in all subcategories and overall, while those who were not satisfied had the lowest. This difference between groups is highly significant (p<0.001). When looking at whether students chose their department willingly, those who did had higher average scores, but this difference was not statistically significant (p>0.05).

Table 3. The Relationship Between Socio-Demographic Variables and Nursing Students' Attitudes Toward Nurses During Clinical Practice

	Cooperation and Understanding	Communication Skills and Guidance	Support for Professional Development	Total Scale Score
Characteristics	**Mean ± SS**	**Mean ± SS**	**Mean ± SS**	**Mean ± SS**
Grades				
2 (a)	48.88±15.00	32.96±11.06	10.45±3.25	92.29±28.59
3 (b)	47.28±13.06	32.72±9.62	10.49±2.89	90.48±24.56
4 (c)	54.45±12.11	37.00±8.19	11.74±2.12	103.18±21.92
Test;p	3.613[f]; **0.029*** **c>b****	2.684[f];0.071	2.894[f];0.058	3.325[f]**;0.038*** **c>b****
Academic achievement average				
1-2 range	35.40±16.09	24.00±13.41	7.20±4.02	66.60±33.28
2-3 range	48.91±14.77	32.94±10.92	10.53±3.20	92.39±28.33
3-4 range	50.30±12.65	34.73±8.82	11.05±2.51	96.08±22.89
Test;p	4.149[h];0.126	3.924[h];0.141	5.027[h];0.081	4.693[h];0.096
Gender				
Female	48.47±13.24	33.07±9.52	10.61±2.79	92.15±24.62
Male	55.82±17.12	38.14±13.01	11.59±3.91	105.55±33.95
Test;p	-2.774[u] **;0.006***	-2.929[u] ;**0.003***	-2.363[u] ;**0.018***	-2.951[u] ;**0.003***
Employment Status				
Employed	47.35±15.68	32.18±11.69	9.68±3.60	89.22±30.62
Unemployed	49.74±13.43	33.97±9.65	10.96±2.72	94.66±24.89
Test/p	-0.943[t];0.347	-0.973[t] ;0.332	**-**2.030[t]**; 0.048***	-1.148[t] ;0.253
Satisfaction with clinical practice				
Satisfied (a)	55.54±12.56	37.55±8.58	11.97±2.50	105.07±22.95
Partially satisfied (b)	47.68±11.74	33.16±8.75	10.44±2.56	91.28±22.03
Not satisfied (c)	40.85±14.91	27.32±11,64	8.93±3.35	77.10±29.04
Test;p	18.692[f]; **0.0001*** a>b>c	16.085[f]; **0.0001*** a>b>c	17.376[f]; **0.0001*** a>b>c	18.763[f]; **0.0001*** a>b>c
Clinical practice performance evaluation				
Successful	50.23±13.79	34.63±9.55	10.85±2.97	95.71±25.59
Partially successful	47.74±13.51	31.97±10.42	10.54±2.74	90.25±25.72
Unsuccessful	45.00±26.00	30.00±20.00	9.00±6.00	84.00±52.00
Test;p	2.374[h];0.305	3.687[h];0.158	1.316[h];0.518	3.254[h];0.197
Choosing the department willingly				
Yes	49.58±13.59	33.78±10.10	10.75±2.95	94.10±25.93
No	47.81±15.40	32.94±9.96	10.56±2.90	91.31±27.05
Test;p	0.657[t];0.512	0.431[t];0.667	0.321[t];0.748	0.552[t];0.582

*t;T test, Independent Samples Test; f:One way Anova; u:Mann Whitney U test; h:Kruskal Wallis test; *p<0.05; **Tukey test.*

Discussion

Nursing education is a dynamic process in which theoretical knowledge is transformed into professional behavior. In this study, the meanoverall attitude score of nursing students toward nurses during clinical practice was 93.64±26.07. Neumbe et al. (2023) reported that although students generally hold positive attitude toward the profession, factors such as social perceptions, job uncertainty, and low salaries lead to the devaluation of nursing (9). This aligns with our study, –which showed relatively lower scores, especially in the "support for professional development" subcategory. Although students perceive the profession positively, a lack of sufficient guidance and support in clinical settings might weaken their professional growth. Strong attitudes toward professional areas like collaboration and communication suggest that effective guidance supports students during clinical practice. The study also found that senior students' attitudes toward nurses were significantly higher in total scores and across all subcategories than those of other classes. This matches findings from (15). Neumbe et al. (2023), in a study conducted in Uganda, similarly reported that as students advance through clinical training, quality mentoring enhances self-confidence and professional commitment, thereby positively influencing learning outcomes (9).The positive attitude of fourth-year students toward nurses highlights the impact of supportive clinical interactions. The study suggests that mentor nurses and their interactions with students play a key role in shaping these attitudes.

Among student, 38.6% were satisfied, 40.6% were somewhat satisfied, and 20.8% were not satisfied with clinical practice. These findings show how much the guidance experience affects satisfaction. The results based on gender are also interesting. Male students had significantly more positive attitudes toward clinical nurses across all subcategories than female students. In the qualitative study, the majority of participants stated that male students encountered gender-based barriers in the clinical environment which negatively affected the adoption of professional roles (16). This finding is not consistent with the qualitative evidence reported by [16], in which the majority of participants indicated that male students encountered gender-based barriers in the clinical environment that negatively affected their adoption of professional roles. The divergence between those findings and the present results may be explained by several interrelated factors. First, male nurses constitute a numerical minority in clinical settings, which may result in heightened individual attention and mentoring from ward staff, fostering more positive interactions. Second, male students may experience fewer role ambiguity conflicts than their female counterparts, given that nursing remains a female-dominated profession in many cultural contexts—including Turkey—where female students may internalize conflicting social expectations about gender and professional identity (16). Third, increased social visibility as a minority group may lead male students to adopt more proactive professional behaviors, which in turn may be reinforced by positive feedback from clinical staff. These dynamics warrant further investigation in future qualitative and mixed-methods research.The study also found that students who don't work a second job have a significantly more positive attitude toward the "support for professional development" subcategory than those who do. This suggests that balancing work life with academic and clinical responsibilities makes it harder for students to fully benefit from guidance and nursing support. Factors such as time management, lack of motivation, and burnout can negatively affect professional development. On the other hand, students who keep working while studying might find that balancing academic workload and work-life responsibilities can hurt their professional motivation (17,18). This aligns with the study, which highlighted that working nursing students have poor time management skills, negatively affecting their academic motivation and learning efficiency (15). It was also noted that when students are under time pressure, they can't make the most of guidance and struggle to internalize their professional roles. Those authors further emphasized that under time pressure, students are less able to capitalize on mentoring opportunities and struggle to internalize professional roles, as excessive workload and inadequate rest disrupt the learning process. These findings are consistent with the present results and indicate that students managing dual work-study responsibilities derive comparatively less benefit from mentoring programs, with consequent negative effects on their professional attitudes. Overall, it can be said that students trying to juggle work and education do not get enough out of guidance programs, which negatively affects their attitudes.

Another important finding in clinical practice concerns how nurses in the clinical setting interact with student nurses. Although institutions provide brief orientation sessions for responsible nurses on student nurses, students actually spend most of their clinical time with

ward nurses. These nurses usually haven't received any formal training in mentoring student nurses or orienting them to the clinical environment. Students only work directly with a responsible or mentor nurse during the "Nursing Management" course practice. Because of this, the support students get is often lacking, and their clinical experience ends up being unstructured and dependent on individual initiative. In this context, all nurses involved in clinical practice should undergo a structured program on student nurse education, their roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined, and sustainable mentoring systems should be established in clinical settings.

The study shows that mentoring nursing practices didn't provide enough satisfaction for students, revealing a gap between clinical success and actual satisfaction. Just because students completed their practice successfully doesn't mean they felt emotionally, professionally, or socially fulfilled. In Ethiopia, students who regularly interacted with their mentor nurses had higher clinical satisfaction and better attitudes. Especially those who worked with their mentor nurses at least three days a week were significantly more likely to develop positive attitudes (7). This supports the idea that the group of students with low satisfaction in our study may not have received sufficient guidance or clinical practice experience. The present study found , students who interacted well with their mentor nurses had higher clinical satisfaction and better attitudes (19). Similarly, the results of the study show that mentor nurses' failure to adequately fulfill their educational and facilitative roles creates disappointment among students. This significant gap between expectations and practice has been shown to be a major factor in reducing student satisfaction (20). Additionally, a multicenter European study found a strong link between the quality of clinical mentoring and student satisfaction. Mentor nurses' availability, clear feedback, and professional guidance significantly increased students' satisfaction with their practice (21). However, to avoid data loss and ensure better representation, the samplı size was increased during data collection via convenience samling, and the study included 197 student. Student class years, statistical analysis showed significant differences in overall attitude scores and the "cooperation and understanding" subcategory between 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year students ($p<0.05$). This suggests that professional maturity and clinical experience contribute to the development of positive attitudes (22).

The completion of clinical practice requirements alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful outcomes; ; the quality of the mentoring process is a key factor directly shaping student satisfaction and professional attitudes. The fact that attitude scores increase with class level shows that clinical experience positively influences professional attitudes over time, aligning the findings (7). Likewise, students who receive mentor-nurse support tend to have more positive attitudes, highlighting how structured mentoring in clinical settings contributes to the development of students' professional identity (8).

Having experienced nurses who guide, support, and model ethical values for students really helps them improve their clinical decision-making skills and develop a positive attitude toward the profession (5,10). When designing an optimal clinical training environment, it is essential to consider various factors, clinical teaching environment, clinical instructor specific charateristics, and the individual characteristics (5,23).

Conclusion

The study found that nursing students generally have a moderate attitude toward the nurses they work with during clinical practice. However, their attitudes varied significantly depending on factors such as gender, year in school, employment status, and satisfaction with their clinical experience. These findings show that the interaction between students and nurses directly impacts the quality of nursing education and that mentorship plays a crucial role in this relationship. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of clinical training in nursing education, it's necessary to take comprehensive structural and teaching-related steps.

Limitations

This study was limited to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year nursing students at a single foundation university. Therefore, the findings apply only to this university and these student levels. The data collection tool relied on self-reporting, which may introduce bias due to participants' subjective perceptions. Also, since the study was conducted at a foundation university, the results don't reflect the experiences of students from different types of universities (public or private) or other regions, so the findings cannot be generalized to all nursing students.

Declarations

Funding

The researchers received no funding for this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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