

## Original Article

# The Achievements Gained by Nursing Students from Internship Practices: A Descriptive Study

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### Abstract

**Background:** The internship practice for nursing and other health professions is regarded to be an appropriate teaching model for developing these skills of students.

**Objective:** This study was performed to determine the achievements of nursing students from internship practices.

**Methods:** This was a descriptive study. The population of study consisted of all interns students in a nursing faculty in Turkey (N=250). The sample was not used in the study, the participation of all interns was aimed with voluntary participation (n= 230, participation rate= 92.0%). A Personal Information Form and an Achievements Gained from Internship Practices Form (AGIP) were used for data collection. Number-percentage distribution, Mann Whitney U test, Kruskal Wallis test were used for the data analyzed in the SPSS 22.0. Written permission was obtained from the institution, and verbal permission from the students.

**Results:** It was determined that the total score they got was  $117.98 \pm 3.47$ , including  $6.69 \pm 2.28$  scores from the sub-dimension of the nursing process,  $7.04 \pm 2.17$  scores from the sub-dimension of practice,  $6.82 \pm 2.15$  scores from the sub-dimension of basic nursing knowledge and  $7.24 \pm 2.27$  scores from the sub-dimension of communication from the AGIP. It was determined that the students who selected the nursing as first choice and were 21-23 aged got higher scores from the sub-dimensions of practice, basic nursing knowledge and communication and that the students working as nurses got higher scores from the sub-dimensions of communication.

**Conclusions:** It was determined that the achievement gained by students from internship practices was at the medium level. Since the results have revealed that nursing students' achievements in intern practices may differ by their socio-demographic characteristics, educators should consider these characteristics in curriculum planning.

**Keywords:** achievement; internship; nursing students; education; practice.

### Introduction

Learning is a process involving the experience, knowledge acquisition, skills and competencies

that cause a long-term behavioral change (De Sanctis, 2015). Curriculum contents are shaped according to the problem-based and life-long learning philosophy that can produce solutions to the needs of the society with instructional

programs at universities (Gonzalez-Chorda, & Macia-Soler, 2015). In this context, the debates on improving the quality of healthcare professionals' education are increasing both nationally and internationally (Aiken, 2010; Council of Higher Education, 2010).

The internship practice for nursing and other health professions is regarded to be an appropriate teaching model for developing these skills of students (Watson et al. 2008). Internship is a practice that allows students to practice the theoretical knowledge they have received in the clinic, to adapt to the profession and to develop a professional identity (Kim, 2007). In the internship practice, it is anticipated that students will be able to see the problems they may encounter in the real working environment more comprehensively and to gain the experience of intervention. The objectives of internship practice are to evaluate healthy and sick individuals by using a systematic approach with bio-psychosocial dimensions, to use basic therapeutic communication skills in their care, to cooperate with team members, to provide care in accordance with the basic codes of ethics within ethical sensitivity, and to be able to use the research findings in nursing care. Furthermore, the other objectives of internship practice consisting of being able to produce solutions for the problems and needs of nursing, to criticize health policies and their implications on nursing, to develop projects for the solution of the problems encountered in the working environments and to evaluate the importance and necessity of organizing in nursing are among the objectives of the program.

Although the internship practice programs in nursing in the world vary by universities, it is observed that they are basically structured to last for a total of 36-54 weeks through a rotation of 4-6 weeks (Chung et al., 2008; Kim 2007). In Turkey, nursing students complete internship practices in the basic fields of nursing discipline (internal medicine nursing, surgical diseases nursing, women's health and diseases nursing, pediatric nursing, mental health nursing, public health nursing) through a rotation of 180 hours on average in each field. In the internship practice, nursing students are expected to be successful in terms of the nursing process,

psychomotor/cognitive skill practice, basic nursing knowledge and communication (Chung et al., 2008; Kim 2007, Sabancıoğulları et al. 2012).

When the literature is reviewed, it is stated that the outcomes gained from clinical practices meet half of the objectives of nursing undergraduate education (Stupans et al., 2012, Tiwaken et al., 2015). Chan (2004) determined that the most important factor in gaining nursing knowledge and skills is the clinical practice environment. However, many nursing students have limited opportunities to practice in clinical environments. Therefore, it is important to determine the achievements of nursing students about their practices. In this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the level of achievements gained by nursing students from internship practices?
2. What are the variables that affect the level of achievements gained by nursing students from internship practices?

## Methods

**Design and sample:** This descriptive study was conducted during March and June 2016 at a Nursing Faculty in western Turkey. Intern nursing students studying at the nursing faculty constituted the population of the study (N=250). No sampling method was used in the study, an attempt to reach the whole population was made, and 230 intern nursing students constituted the sample (participation rate=92.0%). The inclusion criteria were being a student at a nursing faculty and volunteering to participate in the study. At the faculty where the study was conducted, students take compulsory and elective courses related to nursing science in the first three years. In the final year internship practice, students perform an internship practice in a total of 6 fields (Internal Medicine Nursing, Surgical Diseases Nursing, Women's Health and Diseases Nursing, Pediatric Nursing, Mental Health Nursing, Public Health Nursing). In this internship practice, nursing students are evaluated in terms of the nursing process, psychomotor/cognitive skill practice, basic nursing knowledge and communication at the end of each rotation. Students are evaluated in

terms of data collection, care planning, practice and evaluation steps of the *nursing process*; the use of medical equipment and supplies, applications related to nursing care, education and consultancy steps of the achievements *in the list of psychomotor and cognitive skills*; oral examinations by responsible educators and patient visits steps of the *basic nursing knowledge*; and interpersonal and professional relationships with educators, health team members and patients steps of the achievements *for communication*.

**Data collection and measurement:** The data were collected by the Personal Information Form, which was created by the researchers by reviewing the literature, and the Achievements Gained from Internship Practices Form (AGIP) (Aydin & Argun, 2010; Karadağ et al., 2015; Kim 2007; Sabancıoğulları et al. 2012; Shafakhah et al. 2015). **The Personal Information Form** includes 7 questions to determine the socio-demographic and educational information of students.

**The AGIP** is a rating scale consisting of 17 items prepared by the researchers by reviewing the literature (Karadağ et al., 2015; Kim 2007; Sabancıoğulları et al. 2012; Shafakhah et al. 2015). The achievements in this field were examined in the fields of *nursing process, practice, basic nursing knowledge* and *communication*. The evaluations in the statements given for each achievement were rated between 1 point, "I never find myself sufficient" and 10 points, "I find myself quite sufficient". It can obtain minimum score 17, maximum score 170 from AGIP. Getting a high score from the AGIP indicates that the student's competence has increased regarding achievements of intern practices. Statistical analyses were performed for the validity and reliability of the form. The researchers carried out the pilot study by applying the scale to 15 intern nursing students. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was determined to be 0.965. The explanatory factor analysis was performed within

the scope of validity. Accordingly, it was determined that the KMO value was 0.929 and that the 4-factor structure with an eigenvalue greater than 1 (*nursing process, practice, basic knowledge* and *communication*) explained 79.79% of the variance. It was determined that the factor load of each item in the scale took a value between 0.593 and 0.872. These results show that the AGIP is a valid and reliable tool.

In the study, the data were collected by interviewing students face to face in the classrooms. The data collection lasted approximately 20 minutes for each student.

**Ethical Considerations:** It was approved by the administration of the Nursing Faculty, and the students were informed that their participation was voluntary. Verbal consent was received from the students prior to beginning the study.

**Statistical Analysis:** SPSS 22.0 program (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IU., USA) was used for the data analysis. Continuous variables were calculated as means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis was used to determine the suitability of data to normal distribution. Comparisons were made using the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The Dunnett's T3 post-hoc test was used for further comparisons. The level of significance in all analyses was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

**Descriptive:** The average age of the intern nursing students who constituted the research sample was  $22.87 \pm 1.03$  years, 73.5% of them were in the 21-23 age group, 27.0% of them lived in a metropolis for the longest time, and 81.3% of them graduated from general high school. 24.3% of the students chose nursing as the first option in the university entrance examination. It was determined that 12.2% of the students now work as nurses (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of students' personal characteristics (n=230)

Characteristics	n	%
Age groups		
21-23	169	73.5
24-26	61	26.5
The place of living for the longest time		
Metropolis	62	27.0
City	50	21.7
Town	61	26.5
Village	57	24.8
Graduated high school		
Vocational school of health	30	13.0
General high school	187	81.3
Science High School	13	5.7
Order of preference		
First option	56	24.3
Second option and after it	174	75.7
Working status as a nurse		
Working	29	12.2
Not working	201	87.8

**The achievements gained from internship practices:** When the students' levels of self-sufficiency in terms of the achievements they gained from internship practices were examined, it was determined that the mean item score intern nursing students got from the sub-dimension of the *nursing process* was  $6.69 \pm 2.28$ ,  $7.04 \pm 2.27$  from the sub-dimension of *practice*,  $6.82 \pm 2.15$  from the sub-dimension of *basic nursing knowledge* and  $7.24 \pm 2.17$  from the sub-dimension of *communication*. The total AGIP score was determined to be  $117.98 \pm 3.47$  (Table 2). Regarding the *nursing process*, it was determined that the students' data collection phase score was  $6.35 \pm 2.73$ , the diagnosing phase score was  $6.90 \pm 2.20$ , the care planning phase score was

$6.86 \pm 2.48$ , the application phase score was  $6.47 \pm 2.57$  and the evaluation phase score was  $6.68 \pm 2.60$  (Table 2). For the acquisition of a practicing skill in the field of *practice*, it was determined that the score for the basic drug information and safe drug administration was  $6.95 \pm 2.57$ , the score for the preparation of patient diagnostic procedures was  $6.90 \pm 2.48$ , the score for the use of medical equipment and supplies was  $6.92 \pm 2.55$ , the score for the compliance with the ethics codes was  $7.34 \pm 2.53$ , the score for counseling was  $7.07 \pm 2.44$ , and the score for education was  $7.28 \pm 2.60$  (Table 2). In the field of *basic nursing knowledge*, nursing students evaluated themselves at the score level of  $6.69 \pm 2.54$  for the use of theoretical knowledge in

practice,  $6.50 \pm 2.53$  for conducting research, and  $6.80 \pm 2.50$  for evidence-based practising (Table 2). In the classification related to the field of *communication*, it was determined that the students

gave a score of  $7.29 \pm 2.41$  for communication with a healthy or sick individual,  $7.17 \pm 2.28$  for communication with the health team members and  $7.25 \pm 2.68$  for empathy (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Achievements gained by students from internship practices (n=230).

Area of achievements	M	SD
Nursing process	6.69	2.28
Data collection	6.35	2.73
Diagnostics	6.90	2.20
Care planning	6.86	2.48
Application	6.47	2.57
Evaluation	6.68	2.60
Practice	7.04	2.27
Basic drug information and safe drug administration	6.95	2.57
Preparation of patient diagnostic procedures	6.90	2.48
Use of medical equipment and supplies	6.92	2.55
Compliance with the ethic codes of conduct	7.34	2.53
Counseling	7.07	2.44
Education	7.28	2.60
Basic nursing knowledge	6.82	2.15
Use of theoretical knowledge in practice	6.69	2.54
Conducting research	6.50	2.53
Evidence-based practising	6.80	2.50
Communication	7.24	2.17
Communication with a healthy or sick individual	7.29	2.41
Communication with the health team members	7.17	2.28
Empathy	7.25	2.68
Total Score	117.98	3.47

**The effect of some variables of students on the sub-dimensions of the AGIP:** It was determined that the intern nursing students in the 21-23 age group got significantly higher scores from the sub-dimensions of the *nursing process*, *practice*, *basic nursing knowledge* and *communication* compared to the students in the 24-26 age group ( $p=0.047$ ,  $0.027$ ,  $0.010$ ,  $0.017$ , respectively) (Table 3). It was determined that the scores that the students, who graduated from general high school, got from

the sub-dimensions of the *nursing process*, *basic nursing knowledge* and *communication* were statistically higher compared to the students who graduated from science high school and vocational school of health ( $p=0.017$ ,  $0.011$ ,  $0.013$ , respectively). It was determined that the students who graduated from vocational school of health got the lowest scores from all sub-dimensions. It was determined that the type of high school graduated had no statistically significant effect on the *practice* sub-dimension score ( $p= 0.085$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The effect of some variables of students on the sub-dimensions of the AGIP (n=230).

\* Mann-Whitney U test

\*\* Kruskal-Wallis test

<i>Characteristics</i>		<i>Nursing process</i>			<i>Practice</i>			<i>Basic nursing knowledge</i>			<i>Communication</i>			
		<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>U/KW</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>U/KW</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>U/KW</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>U-/KW</b>	<b>p</b>	
Age groups	21-23	45.84	426.500*	0.047	45.45	421.000*	0.027	45.34	407.000*	0.010	46.64	409.500*	0.017	
	24-26	36.26			37.48			37.81			33.79			
Graduated high school	General school <sup>a</sup>	high	120.47	8.199**	0.017	120.12	4.928**	0.085	121.22	8.996**	0.011	121.67	8.674**	0.013
	Health school <sup>b</sup>		83.12			93.40			82.23			87.47		
	Science school <sup>c</sup>	high	118.73	b< a, c		100.00			109.92	b< a, c		91.46	b< a, c	
Order of preference	First option		127.95	194.000*	0.107	132.46	191.000*	0.028	136.41	189.000*	0.007	137.95	188.500*	0.005
	Second option and after it		111.49			110.04			108.77			108.46		
Working status as a nurse	Working		97.55	232.000*	0.127	94.32	226.000*	0.072	101.23	284.500*	0.225	119.45	202.500*	0.015
	Not working		117.99			118.44			117.48			86.98		

\* Mann-Whitney U test

\*\* Kruskal-Wallis test

It was determined that the scores that the students, who chose the nursing department as the first option, got from the sub-dimensions of the *practice*, *basic knowledge* and *communication* were statistically higher compared to the students who did not prefer the nursing department in the first place ( $p=0.028$ ,  $0.007$ ,  $0.005$ , respectively). It was determined that the order of preference for the nursing department had no statistically significant effect on the sub-dimension score of the *nursing process* ( $p=0.107$ ) (Table 3).

It was determined that the *communication* sub-dimension score of the students working as nurses was statistically higher compared to the students who did not work as nurses ( $p=0.015$ ). It was determined that the status of working as a nurse had no statistically significant effect on the *nursing process*, *practice* and *basic knowledge* sub-dimension scores ( $p=0.127$ ,  $0.072$ ,  $0.225$ , respectively) (Table 3).

## Discussion

It is necessary to improve the quality of education and training to ensure that nurses provide effective and quality service to human health at the professional level Aydın & Argun, 2010). Clinical environments are among the most important factors that ensure the development of the professional identity, values, knowledge and skills of nursing students (Gonzalez-Chorda, et al., 2015; Ozturk et al., 2013). In this study, the expectations, recommendations and achievements of students for practices were determined.

**Examination of the achievements gained by students from internship practices:** It was determined that the achievements gained by students from internship practices were at a medium level. With respect to students' achievements from internship practices, it was determined that the field in which they considered themselves to be the most sufficient was *communication* and the field in which they considered themselves to be the most insufficient was the *nursing process*. Pazar, Demiralp and Erer (2017), it was also found out that the communication skills of nursing students were moderate in their work in their study. In the other study conducted by Kyrkjebo and Hage (2005), it was also found out that most nursing students had difficulties in implementing the nursing process.

Nurses, who have to make decisions such as giving care to patients with different needs, making a diagnosis, performing an intervention and evaluating results, are required to use problem-solving skills to improve patient care quality and help individuals (Zaybak et al., 2019). Nursing students use the nursing process to use their problem-solving skills for the planning of the care. In the study carried out, intern nursing students considered themselves to be "sufficient at the medium level" for the data collection, planning, practice and evaluation steps of the nursing process, and they considered themselves to be "less sufficient" according to the sub-dimensions of *practice*, *basic nursing knowledge* and *communication* achievements. Similarly, in a study carried out by Ozer and Kuzu (2006), students' competencies related to all steps of the nursing process were determined to be moderate.

In this study, it was determined that intern nursing students got the lowest and highest scores from the "data collection" and "diagnosis" steps of the *nursing process*, respectively. In the study carried out, it was also determined that the step in which students had the most problems was diagnosis. The nursing process is a problem-solving method that provides students with a critical perspective in solving problems. The fact that students had problems in the diagnosis phase suggested that students lacked in theoretical knowledge about the etiology of diseases or problems that needed to be solved. The fact that similar results were also reached in the relevant literature reveals that it is necessary to further focus on the issues such as the formation of diseases, cause and effect relationship and physiology in the nursing curriculum.

It was determined that the field in which intern nursing students considered themselves to be the most sufficient within the scope of the sub-dimension of practice was "compliance with the codes of conduct", "education and counseling", and the field in which they considered themselves to be the most insufficient was "the preparation of patient/individual diagnostic procedures", "the use of medical equipment and supplies". At the faculty where the study was conducted, the curriculum progresses from health to illness. For this reason, students are present in the fields of practice as observers during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year practices.

It is possible that they independently evaluate the patient, perform an intervention during the internship practices. Health education and counseling are expected from students in all their practices up to the internship. Education and counseling are among the independent roles of nurses, and the fact that nurses have gained these skills during their student years is important for the independent functions of the profession to develop the practising skill. The fact that students are not given the opportunity for interventional procedures in practice due to the high number of students and malpractice cases in recent years was considered to be the reason for the fact that students considered themselves to be the most insufficient for the skills of "preparing patient/individual diagnostic procedures", "using the medical equipment and supplies". The need to proceed to simulation methods emerged due to the tendency of nursing students to increase their skills in using medical equipment and supplies (Gantt & Webb-Corbett, 2010). The purpose of each occupational group is to provide effective and useful service at the highest level and to proceed in this direction. The occupations need scientific studies leading to the development of their own professional knowledge and professional practices to achieve this purpose (Ashktorab et al., 2015). It was determined that the field in which intern nursing students considered themselves to be the most sufficient within the scope of the sub-dimension of *basic nursing knowledge* was "evidence-based practising" and the field in which they considered themselves to be the most insufficient was "conducting research". These results are compatible with the expectations from a nurse with a bachelor's degree on research because while a nurse with a bachelor's degree is not expected to conduct research by herself, she is expected to use the research findings obtained in practice. Communication is a vital element in nursing in all areas of activity, including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, education, and health promotion. In the study carried out, it was determined that intern nursing students got the highest score in relation to the internship practice achievements from the sub-dimension of communication. In the study of Erenel, Dal, Kutluturkan and Vural (2008), nurses' opinions about internship practice were asked, and nurses stated that internship practice increased the knowledge and skills of students, ensured the adaptation of students to the profession, increased their self-confidence and increased

their communication skills and sense of responsibility. Shafakhah et al. (2015) determined that nursing students had moderate clinical communication skills. In the study carried out, it was determined that the field in which intern nursing students considered themselves to be the most sufficient within the scope of the communication step was "communicating with the patient/patients' relatives", and the field in which they considered themselves to be the most insufficient was "communicating with the healthcare personnel". In the studies conducted, it was determined that more than half of nursing students had obstacles in communication with health professionals (Aydin & Argun, 2010; Shafakhah et al., 2015). In the same studies, it was determined that health professionals stated that they considered themselves as the people reducing the workload and did not establish counseling communication (Sabancıoğulları et al., 2012).

#### ***Examination of the effect of some variables of students on the sub-dimensions of the AGIP:***

According to the analyses performed between the achievements gained by students from internship practices and some variables, it was determined that students in the 21-23 age group considered themselves to be statistically significantly more sufficient for all sub-dimensions (*nursing process, practice, basic nursing knowledge, communication*) compared to students in the 24-26 age group. In Turkey, a central examination is held to go to higher education after high school education. Students are placed with the order of success of the results they get from the exam. According to the results of the study carried out, it is thought students gain the transition to higher education examination at an early age and do not repeat the year during their education. Therefore, it has been concluded that these students are academically more successful and perceive themselves as more sufficient for all of the sub-dimensions in the AGIP.

It was determined that the scores that vocational health school graduate nursing students got from the sub-dimensions of the *nursing process, basic knowledge and communication* were statistically lower compared to the students who graduated from general high school and science health school. Vocational health school graduate nursing students are trained as intermediate staff through master-apprentice training. Vocational health school graduate students are expected to be good practitioners instead of producing

information and conducting research. The fact that vocational health school graduate students got lower scores from the sub-dimensions that require knowledge and thought processes (*nursing process, basic nursing knowledge, communication*) compared to the *practice* dimension in the research results also supports this opinion.

It was determined that the students who preferred nursing as the first option considered themselves to be statistically significantly more sufficient in the fields of *practice, basic nursing knowledge* and *communication* compared to those who preferred nursing as the second option and after it. It has been shown in a study that choosing the nursing profession as the first option is closely related to loving the nursing profession, commitment to the nursing profession, and motivation (Çelik et al., 2014). Therefore, it is normal that nursing students with high motivation towards the nursing profession perceive themselves more sufficient in the fields of *practice, basic nursing knowledge* and *communication*.

It was determined that the *communication* sub-dimension score of the students working as nurses was statistically higher compared to the students who did not work as nurses. The fact that the students currently working as a member of the health team perceived themselves sufficient in communicating with the health team and the educator was considered to be an expected result.

**Conclusion:** It was determined that nursing students expected healthcare personnel to be explanatory and informative towards them at the highest percentage and expected instructors to support them theoretically in practice at the highest percentage. It was determined that students recommended "their friends to be eager and sociable" during intern practices at the highest percentage while they recommended that "the number of clinics should be increased/the number of students per clinic should be decreased" at the highest percentage for the improvement of the field of practice. It was determined that nursing students considered themselves sufficient at the medium level for the achievements gained from internship practices. With respect to students' achievements from internship practices, it was determined that the field in which they considered themselves to be the most sufficient was *communication* and the field in which they considered themselves to be

the most insufficient was the *nursing process*. It was determined that the students who had high motivation and were younger got higher scores from the sub-dimensions of *practice, basic nursing knowledge* and *communication* and that the students working as nurses got higher scores from the sub-dimensions of *communication*.

**Implications for education:** Meetings in which educators and clinic nurses participate together and students' expectations are discussed should be organized at the end of every academic year. The necessary planning should be performed to meet the expectations and recommendations of students from health personnel, educators and students, and efforts should be made to improve the fields of practice by cooperating between the faculty and the hospital. The deficiencies in theoretical knowledge and practices should be determined, solution proposals should be produced, and workshops should be organized.

**Recommendations for future research:** The reasons why students considered themselves to be the most insufficient in the field of the nursing process should be identified with qualitative studies through focus group discussions. The achievements related to the internship practice of nursing students studying at different faculties should be determined. Along with the results obtained from other studies, the profile of internship practices in nursing should be created.

**Limitations:** The fact that this study was conducted at a nursing faculty is the limitation of the study, and the results of the study can be generalized only to this group.

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