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Examining the Factors Influencing Turkish Nursing Students' Motivation: An Explorative Qualitative Study

Perihan Güner[1] iD **, Zuhal Zeybekoğlu[2]** iD **, Pelin Karaçay[3]** iD **, Kafiye Eroğlu[3]** iD

[1]Istanbul Bilgi University Faculty of Health Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey

[2]Koç University Learning and Teaching Office, Istanbul, Turkey

[3]Koç University School of Nursing, Istanbul, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect the motivation of students in a Bachelor of Science nursing program.

Methods: A qualitative study was carried out with 32 Bachelor of Science nursing students with different class studying in a non-profit foundation university. Data was collected through four focus groups using a semi-structured interview form. Content analysis was used to analyze data.

Results: The following five themes emerged: Choosing the university, but not the future profession; lack of a feeling of belonging to university; group cohesion; student-faculty relationship; quality of education.

Conclusion: In this study showed how important it is for students' motivation to study on a large campus rather than on an isolated campus.

Keywords: Focus groups, Motivation, Nursing student, Nursing education, Qualitative research

Perihan GÜNER

Zuhal ZEYBEKOĞLU

Pelin KARAÇAY

Kafiye EROĞLU

Correspondence: Perihan Güner

Istanbul Bilgi University Faculty of Health
Sciences, Istanbul- Turkey

Phone: +905327863543

E-mail: perihan.guner@bilgi.edu.tr

Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinin Motivasyonunu Etkileyen Faktörlerin İncelenmesi: Nitel Bir Çalışma

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, lisans hemsirelik ogrencilerinin motivasyonlarını etkileyen faktörleri incelemektir.

Yöntem: Bir vakıf üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan 32 Lisans hemşirelik öğrencisi ile nitel bir çalışma yapılmıştır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak dört odak grup görüşmesi ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde; içerik analizi kullanılmıştır.

Sonuç: Çalışmada, Üniversiteyi seçmek ama geleceğin mesleğini seçmemek; üniversiteye ait olma duygusunun olmaması, grup uyumu; öğrenci-öğretim üyesi ilişkisi; Eğitim kalitesi olmak üzere beş tema belirlenmiştir.

Sonuç: Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin motivasyonu için izole ve küçük bir kampüs yerine, büyük bir kampüste eğitim almanın ne kadar önemli olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Odak grup, Motivasyon, Hemşirelik öğrencisi, Hemşirelik eğitimi, Nitel araştırma

Nurses constitute the largest number of healthcare professionals worldwide. The role nurses play in meeting societal demands for safe, evidence-based, and quality care is increasingly recognized (1) Today, it is expected the undergraduate nursing programs to have graduates who can cope efficiently with various professional difficulties right after graduation (2). However, nursing students usually graduate without acquiring the necessary information and skills and lack of motivation to perform their jobs, and this leads to burnout and a waste of time and money. Undergraduate nursing curricula that are not appealing to students (3). and nursing faculty members who frequently have difficulties in motivating students need special attention in this respect (4).

To motivate young people, it is important to understand what motivation is and how one can be motivated to act in a certain way. Motivation is a prerequisite in the learning process and is the key component in academic achievement (5-6). Motivation can be influenced by many factors such as finding something worthy of learning, the education environment, and the attitude of faculty members (7). Determining the factors motivating students is of necessary in nursing programs (6) especially from the perspective of students (8). In the study by Dalir et al. (9), it was reported that nursing students had a moderate level motivation. On the other hand, it was determined that 30% of nursing students continue their education without desire and motivation (10). In Turkey, while some of some studies found that inner motivation levels of nursing students were higher than outer motivation levels (11-13), one of them revealed both inner and outer motivation levels were high (14). Considering studies regarding motivation in Turkey and other countries, the motivation level of nursing students, who will assume important professional responsibilities shortly after graduation, is low to moderate and factors influencing their motivation have not been investigated in depth. Thus, it has been strongly recommended that new studies should be carried out to understand the motivational factors of nursing students (15) because of their decreasing level of motivation throughout their studies (2). The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to examine the factors that affect the motivation of students in a Bachelor of Science nursing program.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design
This exploratory qualitative study was carried out to examine the factors that affect the motivation of Turkish students in a Bachelor of Science nursing program. This type of research design allows the participants in the research to express their opinions and experiences about the subject being researched clearly and provides researchers with real data for comprehensive analysis (16).

Sample
Four different focus groups were conducted with overall 32 nursing students studying in a non profit foundation university in Istanbul. The Bachelor of Science nursing program is a four-year program that accepts students according to the results of the nation-wide matriculation exam. A total of 120 students register in the program and around 30 students study at each level every year. However, not all completed the program. The graduation rate for all undergraduate students in the program during the time of this study was monitored after the study had been completed. It was seen that the graduation rate fluctuated among the years: 97% in 2016; 69% in 2017; 77% in 2018, and 93% in 2019.

For this study, instead of selecting participants randomly from each level, the researchers employed a purposive sampling method, which suggests choosing participants who will contribute most to the study because of their knowledge, skills, or experience about the research topic under investigation. Researchers selected and invited 12-15 students from each level to guarantee the ideal number of participants in each focus group. However, the participation in the sophomore-level focus group remained low due to students' conflicting exam schedules. The sample includes 32 nursing students, which includes 31 female participants with an average age of 21years and 75.0% live in the dormitory (Table 1)

Data Collection
Data were collected via four focused groups that were held between 20 and 31 May 2018. The focus group method was chosen for this study to collect rich data from students at different levels. Data were collected via four focused groups with the participation of 32 nursing students (freshman: 7, sophomore: 5, junior: 11, and senior: 9). One of the researchers of this study who had no prior contact with the participants but had sufficient training and prior experience in conducting and analyzing focus group studies held focus groups, each of which lasted approximately 90-120 minutes.

In a focus group, responses to the questions are developed as a result of the interaction among individuals in the

group. Individual responses have the potential to trigger a discussion. Thus, group dynamics affect the content and depth of the answers given to the questions (17). That's why all focus groups were recorded with the consent of all participants to enable the moderator to closely observe and concentrate on group interactions and processes and a semi-structured interview form was used during each focus group to address any issues that emerged from individual responses to the discussion (Table 2).

Table 1. Distribution of nursing students' socio-demographic characteristics (n=32)		
Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Min-Max	Mean±SD
Age	19-24	21±1.413
	n	%
Class		
Freshman	7	21.9
Sophomore	5	15.6
Junior	11	34.4
Senior	9	28.1
Gender		
Female	31	96.9
Male	1	3.1
Marital status		
Single	32	100.0
Where and who lives together		
Dormitory	24	75.0
With the family	2	6.3
With a friend/friends at home	2	6.3
Alone at home	2	6.3
Both with the family at home and in dormitory	2	6.3

Table 2. Semi-structured form for focus groups	
Theoretical courses	Clinical practice
1. How do you evaluate the theoretical courses you have received?	**1.** How do you evaluate your clinical practice in general?
2. How do you think a quality theoretical course should be?	**2.** How do you think a quality clinical practice should be?
3. What do you think about the students' interests and motivation in your classes?	**3.** What do you think about the students' interest and motivation in clinical practice?

Data Analysis

All data generated through four focused groups were transferred from tape records to written transcripts. In data analysis, ''content analysis technique'', which consists of data coding, finding of themes, organization of codes and themes and their description and interpretation of findings, was utilized (17). The basic process in content analysis is to bring together the data in the framework of certain concepts and themes and to organize and interpret them in a meaningful manner. As triangulation of data analysis process was necessary to reach some common understanding for approaching collected data, coding process was carried out separately by all researchers who later on had three online and two face-to-face meetings to discuss emerged codes and to identify themes according to initial data coding process. Some codes were brought together to ensure relevancy and clarity while some others were eliminated to avoid repetition. Researchers had long discussions on identifying emerging themes. Especially, it was difficult to identify the first theme as "choosing the university, but not the future profession" because researchers did not consider the pre-university perception of participants as a motivational factor from the beginning of data analysis. The non-nurse researcher (ZZ) facilitated the focus groups and participants reviewed the codes and her focus group notes again. The whole process of categorizing codes into under five themes on which researchers were in complete agreement took almost four months. To be able to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, in addition to the triangulation of data analysis, the researchers adopted what Auerbach and Silverstein [18]. called "justifiability as an alternative to reliability and validity". Objectivity was ensured by iteratively visiting codes and themes; the whole details of the coding and interpretation process were explained as transparently as possible, and all data analysis was aggregated to make it communicable and coherent.

RESULTS

This study yielded that nursing students' perceptions about the factors that influence motivation to fall into five themes that are inextricably intertwined. Overall results showed that the nursing students' motivation is low and is largely influenced by not only educational factors but some other factors that are associated with students' perceptions about the nursing profession and the university they choose to study at.

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Theme 1: Choosing the university, but not the future profession

It was found that nursing students' initial motivation was low when they came to university due to their perceived perceptions about their future profession. Most of the participants reported that they did not want to be a nurse, but they wanted to study at the university where this research was conducted because of the prestige and popularity of the university and its rich and diverse social opportunities. They wanted to hold a diploma from this prestigious university and studying at the Nursing program of the university was their only option due to their scores on the university entrance exam. A sophomore student said:

"My university entrance exam score was low, so I had no choice other than nursing. However, I chose this university because of the value and importance attached to nursing as a profession. It makes this university distinctive from others for me."

Theme 2: Lack of a feeling of belonging to the university

Participants emphasized that studying far from the main campus forced them to lead an isolated university life and this isolation became such a critical factor for motivation that it gradually undermined their attachment and belongingness to the university. The contrast between what they dream of and what they experience in an isolated campus seemed to disrupt students' expectations for being a student in a prestigious university. It seems that their lack of social life opportunities in an isolated campus led to a lost sense of belonging to the university and decreased their motivation. A sophomore student said:

"There are a lot of facilities and social activities, but we cannot attend any of them because of our isolated campus.… I cannot even feel myself belonging to this university where I cannot benefit from any social activities. This is far more important than academic life for our motivation".

Another example is from a junior student:

"This is a university. We still feel that we are in a high school. Our department gave us a pre-determined schedule that gave us no freedom to plan our time. We go to school five days a week. We do not have proper break times. We want a half-day off to have some time for socialization. We want more clubs, social activities and decent places to get socialized. As a result, I don't feel like I'm studying at this university."

Theme 3: Group cohesion

The smaller the program is the more cohesive the student groups become. But it was found that this feature of the program had a negative influence on motivation. Participants said that group cohesiveness dramatically affected their lived experience and their motivation. Students were in proximity to each other regardless of their level of study at the university, thus most of the time they learned many things about the department by word-of-mouth communication. As a sophomore student said:

"We are 120 people all together as a whole department and I think this is the cause of all problems that we have now."

Any negative experience of one level was a source of demotivation for students at other levels. This is like a snowball effect; even a minor problem gets bigger because of word-of-mouth communication. For instance, a senior student said:

"Any problem that occurs in freshman courses can harm us. Let me give you an example. Freshman students did not attend one of their clinical practice as a whole class. This had reflected us though we did not have any involvement. We received a warning because of their fault. This is not fair".

Theme 4: Student-faculty relationship

Student-faculty interaction had a different impact on motivation. When students "liked" their instructors, their motivation increases. On the other hand, some of them said that their motivation dramatically decreased in courses where the instructors treated them like a child, embarrassed one or two in front of others, or biased against students who raised their voice for fair treatment. Most of them used several emotionally loaded words to describe the student-faculty relationship. Some of them even compared their relationships with their instructors with their relationships with their parents. Although they complained about being treated like a child, some of them criticized their instructors for being too reserved and distant. They wished their instructors to take care of them as their parents did before coming to university. They wish the faculty find club activities for them or find solutions to their problems in their residential areas. They felt that they got demotivated when faculty were reluctant to help them with their problems. A sophomore student said:

"Faculty can motivate us. This is their responsibility.... but they always criticize us. We hear neither appreciation nor a motivating word.... They always make us feel incapable."

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Theme 5: The quality of education

Participants have some conflicting opinions in terms of the quality of education. They all appreciated the quality of faculty and real-life focus in the program. However, they believed that overemphasis on theory, excellence in academic performance, unfair treatment by some faculty, and heavy workload decreased their motivation greatly. Although students are content with the quality of theoretical education, they feel that most of the theoretical parts can be shortened to leave some free time for students. One of the freshman students said:

"The educational program is rather long with too much emphasis on theory. The classes start at 8:00 am and end at 5:00 pm. It is like a high school. This routine life makes us unhappy and decreases our motivation."

Most of the participants were highly critical about expectations for excellence in academic performance. They always feel under pressure to satisfy the high standards of faculty. A sophomore student said:

"During our clinical duties, we spend an enormous amount of time and energy to complete lots of assignments, but we are always criticized of what we do. We are expected to excel at everything that we are required to do."

Participants apart from freshman students who do not go to clinical practice expressed their concerns for unfair treatment of some faculty during the internship. It is a problem not to expect the same workload from all students and not to use some common criteria to evaluate student performance. A senior student expressed her experience as follows:

"There is a real issue about motivation. We do our internship under the supervision of 3 or 4 instructors. There is a communication breakdown among the instructors. Each instructor is responsible for 3-4 students. Depending on the instructor, some students experience a great deal of anxiety while some others complete their internship without having any problem".

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study was carried out to examine the factors that affect the motivation of students in a Bachelor of Science nursing program. One of the most important findings of the present study was that the way students experienced university life did matter; when their experience was negative, their motivation level decreased, and they lost their sense of belonging to the university. Students' exhaustive exam-centered life during high school and the competitive university entrance exam at the national level shaped students' expectations from the university. That is why their initial expectations from the university were mostly social rather than academic. This contradicts with their lived experience that was shaped by intensive academic realities of the program that seemed to be a source of great disillusionment for students. The importance of social and academic integration is emphasized in literature (19). This study showed that social integration can be far more important than academic integration in the initial stages of university life. However, as students progressed in their studies, the importance attributed to social life seemed to fade out.

In a study carried out with nursing students in Poland, it was shown that the prestige of the nursing profession is low in society (20). Similarly, in a study carried out in Turkey, it was found that 48.2% of the nursing students think that nursing is considered as an auxiliary profession in the community and 21.8% think that nursing has no respectability in the society (21).

In the present study, it was also found that living in an isolated campus life led to the loss of feeling of belonging to the university. A sense of belonging in students is associated with academic achievement and emotional well-being as it influences their attendance, academic motivation and achievement (22). In this study, students expressed that an isolated education far from the campus had a negative impact; students had to build closer relations with each other and living close caused problems such as excessive gossips, word-of-mouth communication.

Another important theme that emerged in the present study was student-faculty relationships. Their motivation increased with a faculty member who built a positive rapport. This was also highlighted in a study that shows the importance of interpersonal relations as perceived by both clinical faculty and the students (23).

Finally, this study shows the importance of program-specific issues on students' motivation. As perceived by participants, some weaknesses in the way courses were structured, scheduled, taught and evaluated affected their motivation. These results are quite in line with the prior studies which show the positive effect of fair workload and evaluation, positive communication, guidance, and constructive feedback in clinical practice (24) on motivation while discouraging teaching approaches (25) and overly intensive Schedule (2) and the sources of students' demotivation.

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Limitation

The study has some limitations. It is performed qualitatively and in a single university, which makes it difficult to generalize its results. However, its effect on motivation of students in nursing programs is of important to examine qualitatively.

CONCLUSION

In this study showed how important it is for students' motivation to study on a large campus rather than on an isolated campus. It was revealed that the most important positive sources of motivation for the students were studying the university on a large campus, interacting with other students, participating in social activities at the university, and not being too busy schedule to participate in these activities. In addition, it was determined that the students chose the university, not the nursing profession when decided to studying university. School and university administrators on the entire isolated and small campus should be aware of all these factors besides the qualification of the faculty for the motivation of students. They can schedule the weekly schedule to allow students to socialize and organize activities that allow students to interact with students studying in other departments. The results of this study can also help researchers conduct follow-up studies to further understand how identified motivational factors operate in different settings, such as isolated vs. large campus universities.

IMPLICATION FOR NURSING PRACTICE

Neither the nursing as a profession nor getting a quality education to become a good nurse did not motivate students. Interestingly, rich and diverse social opportunity that the university offered was found to be the most important sources of student motivation. Thus it seems important to fulfill students' social expectations from the university in their early years of nursing education.

DECLARATIONS

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that there is no conflicts of interest.

Availability of Data

Available upon request.

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Ethics Approval

Before the study, approval was obtained from the ethics committee of Koç University (2016. 116.IRB3.070). Besides, written permission was obtained from the school where the study was performed and written informed consent form from the participants was collected.

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