**A comprehensive analysis of the effective factors in gaining professional competencies from the nurses’ viewpoints**

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**Abstract**

**Introducation:**Professionalization has a considerable impact on the nurses’ professional performance. The present study aimed to determine the effective factors in gaining professional nursing competencies in 2012.

**Methods:**The present descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted on 147 nurses working in the hospitals affiliated to Jahrom University of Medical Sciences through convenience sampling . The data were collected using valid and reliable researcher-made questionnaire in 5 individual, organizational, clinical, instructor, and in-service training domains.

**Results:**According to the study nurses, the effective factors in individual (23.68+3.53) and organizational (22.39+3.54) domains played more important roles compared to other domains. Moreover, the most important effective factors addressed in 5 domains. .

**Conclusion:** The nursing managers are recommended to provide the ground for creating motivation and interest in nurses and support them psychologically in order to help them gain professional competencies.

**Keywords:** Professional competencies, Nurses

**Introduction**

Nurses comprise the largest part of the service providing human workforce in the health and treatment system. The have the highest contact with the clients and are responsible for a large number of tasks. Due to these numerous complex tasks, nursing is a professional activity which requires great responsibility and accuracy([1](#_ENREF_1)). Yet, nurses’ desertion has become a global problem([2](#_ENREF_2)) which has led to prevention from achieving the global goals of the health systems and has caused professional dissatisfaction for the nurses([3](#_ENREF_3)). The authorities mostly focus on economic and demographic factors, such as employment conditions, for keeping the nurses, but do not pay sufficient attention to cultural, organizational, and occupational values([4](#_ENREF_4)). The more the nurses are committed to their job, the more they will be satisfied with it ([2](#_ENREF_2)). Thus, professionalization is a main factor for keeping the nurses in this job([5](#_ENREF_5)). In fact, professionalization has a considerable impact on professional performance([6](#_ENREF_6)) and should be more focused while nursing shortage([7](#_ENREF_7)).

Professionalization in nursing has been greatly focused during the past few years and it will receive even more attention in future([8](#_ENREF_8)). For years, nursing was identified as a Para profession because of not having academic education, dependence, and low knowledge and research. In addition, it was considered as a feminine job which prevented its professionalization and reduced its value([9](#_ENREF_9)). Nowadays, however, nursing has progressed toward professionalization and nurses are getting professionalized through professional socialization processes. These processes continue by gaining experience and being matched with the professional roles and their related behaviors([10](#_ENREF_10), [11](#_ENREF_11)).

Professional socialization is defined as the process of internalization and improvement of professional identity through gaining knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, norms, and behavioral standards for playing professional roles([12-14](#_ENREF_12)). This process begins by the individuals entering the nursing training program and continues by the end of the training and the beginning of their occupation. In other words, professionalization is the wanted or unwanted outcome of training and experiences in the working environment ([15-17](#_ENREF_15)) is considered as an important issue by the nurses([18](#_ENREF_18)). Moreover, professionalization in nursing is a complex issue involving individual and group aspects of nursing as well as the rights and commitments of the society and the patients([8](#_ENREF_8)).

Professionalization includes concepts, such as competence in a particular field and a set of skills, honesty, and commitment to ethical codes of behavior, responsibility, self-regulation, and judgment([8](#_ENREF_8)).Yet,not only the key values are important, but key behaviors also support these values and ideals. For instance, convincing others for qualifying an individual’s competence includes authoritative behavior and professional attitude leading to improvement of professional identity([19](#_ENREF_19)). Hence, nurses’ professionalization indicates their attitudes towards their profession and can act as a guide for patient safety and care quality([5](#_ENREF_5)). Coulon states that professionalization is the way by which the nurses play their roles with the attitude that care is a complex, multi-dimensional concept whose competencies are manifested through cognitive, emotional, and psycho-motor dimensions([20](#_ENREF_20)). Nonetheless, various studies have shown different levels of professionalization among the nurses. Hwang et al. (2009) conducted a study on Korean and Chinese nurses and showed that both groups had positive attitudes towards their profession([5](#_ENREF_5)). Adams and Miller (2001) also performed a research on 502 nurse practitioners in the U.S. and revealed that they were in high levels of professionalization([9](#_ENREF_9)). However, the results of the study Karadag et al. (2007) conducted on 1047 nurses in Turkey showed that the nurses had low levels of professionalization which required special attention on the part of the managers of the universities and nursing organizations([21](#_ENREF_21)). In the study NikbakhtNasrabadi et al. (2004) conducted to investigate the nurses’ professionalization experiences when entering the clinical stage in Iran, the nurses mentioned that they were not completely professionalized and were faced with a large number of complex problems in this regard([22](#_ENREF_22)). Considering what was mentioned above and the fact that lack of professional behavior leads to violence in nursing and endangers patient safety([23](#_ENREF_23)), development and standardization of the concept of professional competence in various dimensions of nursing profession is a necessity. Thus, the present study aims to determine the effective factors in professional competence from the nurses’ perspective.

**Materials and Methods**

The present descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted on the nurses working in the hospitals affiliated to Jahrom University of Medical Sciences through census in order to assess their viewpoints regarding the effective factors in gaining professional competence. Out of the 200 distributed questionnaires in this study, 147 ones were accurately completed and returned to the researcher. The study data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire which consisted of two sections. The first section involved the demographic information, such as age, sex, working experience, and marital status, while the second part included the effective factors in achieving professional competence. This questionnaire included 30 items in 5 individual, organizational, clinical, instructor’s role in transferring the competencies,and in-service training dimensions. The items were answered through a 3-option scale ranging from “completely agree” to “completely disagree”.Face and content validity of the questionnaire were assessed by giving the questionnaire to 10 professors and applying the necessary modifications. Besides, after conducting a pilot study on 20 nurses, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by Cronbach’s alpha=0.94. After all, the data were analyzed through descriptive as well as inferential statistics.

**Results**

According to the study results, most of the study participants were female (83%), married (61.9%), in 20-30 year old age group, and had less than 5 years of working experience (Table 1).

Based on the nurses’ points of view, the effective factors in individual (23.68+3.53) and organizational (22.39+3.54) domains played more important roles compared to other domains (Table 2).

In this study, 147 nurses had completely answered the 30 research items; therefore, among the 4410 answers, the highest percentages of “agree” and “completely agree” options in each dimension were computed out of 100. The highest percentages of agreement in the individual dimension were related to interest in nursing (62.2%), self-esteem (58.8%), and job satisfaction (58.9%). In the organizational dimension, psychological support of the nursing organizations (59.2%), financial support (55.1%), and providing facilities for patient care (46.9%) were the most important effective factors in gaining professional nursing competencies. The most important effective factors in the clinical dimensions were appropriate interaction between the supervisor and the nurses (63.9%), appropriate interaction between the physicians and nurses (59%), and independence (45.6%). Considering the in-service training dimension, theory-based practical training (44.9%) and appropriate training based on the nurses’ professional duties (32.7%) gained the highest percentages of agreement. Finally, the highest percentages of agreement in the instructor dimension were related to the training method (42.2%), creating motivation (35.4%), and the instructor’s personality (33.3%) (Table 3).

The findings of the current study revealed significant relationships between sex and clinical dimension (P=0.002), marital status and in-service training (P=0.02), and employment status and clinical dimension (P=0.0001).

**Discussion**

In this study, individual, organizational, and clinical factors and instructor were the most important effective factors in the nurses’ professional competencies. In the same line, Manojlovich and Ketefian showed individual and organizational factors to be effective in the nurses’ professionalization ([24](#_ENREF_24)). These two factors also play key roles in gaining clinical competence([25](#_ENREF_25)), clinical decision making([26](#_ENREF_26)), and nurses stay in nursing profession([27](#_ENREF_27)).

Regarding the individual dimension, it can be stated that nursing professionalization can only be achieved through professional members. Since the end of the 19th century, nursing leaders emphasized the necessity for professional attitude and behavior among the nurses([28](#_ENREF_28)). Since the members of each profession have the responsibility for life-long learning and professional improvement([9](#_ENREF_9)), nurses as the important members of the health system are also required to be responsive to the ever changing and ever increasing needs of the society and make attempts for achieving professional competence([29](#_ENREF_29)).In the present study, motivation, self-esteem, and job satisfaction were the most effective factors in gaining professional competence in the individual dimension. Style, as cited in Fitzer, mentioned that in case all the nurses use their natural motivation for self-actualization, nursing professionalization can improve([28](#_ENREF_28)). In the study Yildiz et al. conducted in Turkey also, motivation and job satisfaction were two strong predicators of nurses’ desertion([30](#_ENREF_30)). These two factors seem to have roles in improving the nurses’ professional competence and job satisfaction, as well.

Takasi et al. (2002) indicated that professional identity had a great impact on the nurses’ professional performance([6](#_ENREF_6)). An individual’s behavior leads to attractiveness of one’s personality promoting mutual respect, coordination, commitment, and cooperation. On the other hand, lack of professional behavior results in violence, aggression, and endangerment of patient safety([23](#_ENREF_23)). In the study Gitschel et al. (2006) conducted on the concept of nursing professionalization in Germany, 90% of the nurses believed that they were working at the professional level and considered care quality as the criterion of their profession([31](#_ENREF_31)).

The findings of the study by Wynd (2003) revealed a relationship between nurses’ professionalization and experience, education, membership in professional organizations, and service provision as one of the organization members([11](#_ENREF_11)). In addition, another study indicated a positive relationship between the nurses’ professional competence and their age and working experience([32](#_ENREF_32)). Moreover, AkhtarDanesh stated that various factors could be effective in an individual’s understanding of professionalization. These underlying variables can be assessed through four viewpoints. From the humanistic point of view, professional value involves respect to human dignity, personal integrity, protecting the patients’ privacy, and protecting the patients against harms. Considering the realistic perspective, professionalization is manifested through the individuals’ appearance and speech. From the facilitation perspective, professionalization involves standards and policies together with personal beliefs and values. Finally, policymakers believe that professionalization is developed in an environment where appropriate beliefs and standards are accepted and executed by the staff([33](#_ENREF_33)).

In the current study, organizational factors were the second effective factors in the nurses’ professional competence. In spite of the fact that nurses are the basis of their professional improvement, managers are responsible for facilitating their progress towards professional competence([34](#_ENREF_34)). In fact, the nurses’ capability for professional action is affected by the organizational culture of their working environment. Since the organizational structure of many hospitals is different from professional nursing, it may have negative effects on the patient outcomes([24](#_ENREF_24)).

In the managerial dimension, the study nurses mentioned psychological support of the nurses by the nursing organizations and providing financial support as well as patient care facilities as the main effective factors in gaining professional competencies. Yet, AdibHajbagheri stated that lack of support existed among various stages of nursing([26](#_ENREF_26)). Furthermore, the results of the study by Nikpeyma and Ashktorab showed inappropriate leadership styles and managers’ lack of appropriate planning as the barriers to nurses’ professional performance([29](#_ENREF_29)). Moreover, Karadag et al. stated that lack of nurses’ professional behavior resulted from high workload, long working hours, and insufficient allocated resources([21](#_ENREF_21)). On the other hand, environments and conditions which increase the individuals’ understanding of their capabilities have a positive effect on the members as well as the effectiveness of the organization ([12](#_ENREF_12)). Thus, nursing organizations play a critical role in empowering the nurses and creating a sense of professionalization([21](#_ENREF_21)). Financially supporting the nurses was also among the factors influencing professional competence in this study. Consistently, the study by Tzeng in Taiwan showed that the nurses’ satisfaction with their salary was effective in their desertion([35](#_ENREF_35)). These findings indicate the necessity to provide the nurses with psychological as well as financial support. The facilities and equipment of the departments for patient care and development of specialized wards can also be effective in the performance of the treatment staff. Thus, providing the necessary facilities and equipment for the departments can help nurses gain or improve their professional competence.

The role of clinical environment in achieving professional competence also cannot be neglected because nursing is a performance-based profession and clinical environment is important in desertion([36](#_ENREF_36)) and professional commitment of the nurses([37](#_ENREF_37)). In the present study, interaction among the nurses, supervisors, and physicians and independence were identified as the effective factors in gaining professional competence in the clinical dimension. Rostami explained that one of the reasons for stress in nursing was lack of appropriate working relations and tension in the occupational relationships between the nurses and other staff, particularly physicians. Desirable professional relationships can improve the healthcare, nurses’ and physicians’ success, and patients’ statuses. This will eventually reduce the hospital stay and treatment costs, increase job satisfaction, and decrease the nurses’ occupational stresses([38](#_ENREF_38)). One study assessed job satisfaction and individual as well as organizational features and showed that appropriate professional relationships with physicians affected the nurses’ job satisfaction([39](#_ENREF_39)).

In the current study, training method, creating motivation in the students, and the instructor’s personality were the most important effective factors in gaining professional competence in the instructor dimension. Nowadays, professionalization training is emphasized in universities and professionalization values are expected to be achieved through education. Therefore, a large number of universities of medical sciences around the world have incorporated professionalization in their curricula([40](#_ENREF_40)). However, no such subject exists in nursing curriculum. Professionalization training and evaluation of professional behaviors is an accurate definition of social responsibility of the institutions which are accountable for educational programs([41](#_ENREF_41)). Moreover, training method has a major impact on the students’ self-learning ability because a training method which leads to change in the individuals’ behavior and performance can be effective in life-long learning and result in improvement of professional competence. For instance, in student-based teaching method, professors make more attempts for keeping the students active and take their independence in learning into account. The aim of this method is not just transferring what the professors know to the students; rather, professors teach the students how to learn, encourage and engage them in this task, and create motivation in the students([42](#_ENREF_42)). Nurses’ professionalization is also internalized through their professors and their personalities. Hence, the importance of the professors’ professional behaviors while theoretical and practical training is recommended to be more emphasized.

Considering in-service training, practical instructions related to theoretical contents and nurses’ professional duties were the effective factors in gaining professional competence. In fact, appropriateness of the educational programs according to the learners’ needs is of utmost importance. In other words, in-service training should be executed based on the conditions and facilities of each hospital or institute because these trainings can affect the nurses’ efficiency, self-confidence, awareness, and skills and lead to improvement of nursing care quality.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the current study showed individuals and organizational factors to be highly effective in achieving professional nursing competencies. Understanding these factors enhances the managers’ and professors’ capabilities for empowering the nurses and students for gaining professional competence. Thus, health and treatment systems and managers are recommended to provide appropriate ground for the nurses’ achievement of professional competence and self-actualization in the treatment centers in order to improve patient care and maintain efficient human workforce. Nurses’ professional competence and professional behavior will in turn benefit the nurses themselves, the organization, and the whole treatment team.

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Table 1.Demographic Characteristics of nurses

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| % | N | Variable | |
| 83 | 122 | women | Sex |
| 17 | 25 | men |
| 38.1 | 56 | single | Marital status |
| 61.9 | 91 | married |
| 72.8 | 107 | 20-30years | Age |
| 21.1 | 31 | 31-40years |
| 4.8 | 7 | 41-50years |
| 1.4 | 2 | 51-60years |
| 62 | 80 | Less than 5 year | Years of experience  in nursing |
| 19.4 | 25 | 6-10years |
| 8.5 | 11 | 11-15years |
| 3..9 | 5 | 16-20years |
| 6.2 | 8 | More than 20 years |

Table 2. Descriptivestatisticsoffactors affectingthe developmentof professionalcompetence

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Max | Min | Mean±SD | Domain |
| 6 | 28 | 23.68±3.53 | Individual domain |
| 3 | 24 | 18.58±3.50 | Structor’s role in transferring the competencies domain |
| 6 | 24 | 19.74±3.01 | Clinical domain |
| 6 | 16 | 12.53±2.34 | in-service training domain |
| 6 | 28 | 22.39±3.54 | Organizational domain |

Table3. Frequencydistributionof factors affecting in gaining professional competencies from the nurses’ viewpoints

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| disagree and completely disagree | No comment | agree and completely agree | Phrases | domain |  |
| 6.8% | 30.6% | 62.6% | interest in nursing | Individual domain | 1 |
| 13.6% | 48.3% | 38.1% | Efforts to promote professional | 2 |
| 13% | 48.6% | 38.4% | Willingness to learn new skills | 3 |
| 12.2% | 42.2% | 45.6% | Scientific study and efforts update | 4 |
| 7.5% | 35.4% | 57.1% | Appropriate incentives in the work environment | 5 |
| 6.8% | 34.7% | 58.5% | self-esteem | 6 |
| 6.8% | 34.2% | 58.9% | job satisfaction | 7 |
| 10.9% | 53.7% | 35.4% | Theclinicalfeaturesofhospital | Clinical domain | 8 |
| 14.3% | 43.5% | 42.2% | Interactionand cooperation betweenindividual | 9 |
| 9.5% | 41.5% | 59% | appropriate interaction between the physicians and nurses | 10 |
| 18.4% | 36.1% | 45.6% | independence | 11 |
| 21.1% | 38.8% | 40.1% | Variety ofclinicalenvironment | 12 |
| 3.4% | 32.7% | 63.9% | appropriate interaction between the supervisor and the nurses | 13 |
| 17.7% | 47.6% | 34.7% | apply thesystem of reward andpunishment | Organizational domain | 14 |
| 22.6% | 53.4% | 24% | Transmissionthe spirit ofcriticismand commitment tonursing | 15 |
| 22.4% | 46.3% | 31.3% | Empowernurses | 16 |
| 12.2% | 52.4% | 35.5% | Specify thedutiesandexpectationsofnurses | 17 |
| 17% | 27.9% | 55.1% | financial support | 18 |
| 8.8% | 32% | 59.2% | psychological support of the nursing organizations | 19 |
| 15% | 38.1% | 46.9% | providing facilities for patient care | 20 |
| 19% | 54.4% | 26.5% | specified In servicetraining purposes | in-service training domain | 21 |
| 24.5% | 41.5% | 24% | Set thecontent ofthe curriculumbased on the needsof nurses | 22 |
| 19% | 48.3% | 32.7% | appropriate training based on the nurses’ professional duties | 23 |
| 17.7% | 47.6% | 44.9% | theory-based practical training | 24 |
| 14.3% | 50.3% | 35.4% | teachersmotivatethestudentsDuring his education | Structor’s role in transferring the competencies domain | 25 |
| 15% | 42.9% | 42.2% | training method | 26 |
| 14.3% | 53.7% | 32% | Provideusefulcontent | 27 |
| 29.3% | 37.4% | 33.3% | instructor’s personality | 28 |
| 23.1% | 48.3% | 28.6% | Mode ofteachersinteractwith students | 29 |
| 17.7% | 45.6% | 36.7% | Mode ofinstructor atthebedside | 30 |

Table 4.Correlations between professional competencies Scores and demographic variables

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ward | Employment Type | Work experience | Marital status | age | demographicvariables  domain |
| 0.36 | 0.72\* | 0.50 | 0.88\* | 0.41 | Individual domain |
| 0.56 | 0.04 | 0.38 | 0.83\* | 0.96\* | Structor’s role in transferring the competenciesdomain |
| 0.53 | 0.62 | 0.24 | 0.52 | 0.64\* | Clinical domain |
| 0.94\* | 0.24 | 0.37 | 0.55 | 0.62\* | in-service training domain |
| 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.89\* | 0.28 | 0.34 | Organizational domain |

P<0.05\*