THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NURSING

Lecturer Dr. Belgin BOZ YUKSEKDAG
Anadolu University, Yunus Emre Campus, 26470
College of Open Education, Testing Research Unit,
Eskisehir, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Nursing that the reason of its essence arises from social requirements is a practical discipline. It requires knowledge and skills. This knowledge and skills must be updated with developments in the health field.

However, because of their living conditions, nurses cannot continue the formal education. Distance nursing programs provide flexibility to them. In this study will be handed the importance of distance education for nursing and the attitudes of nurses towards distance nursing programs.

Keywords: Nursing, distance nursing education, attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a profession that offers health services to individual, family and society. It is originated from the traditional female role. Traditionally woman has the roles such as wife, mother, daughter and sister. And since human existence, women were interested in people who need care like babies, children and the elderly. In this context, nursing is known as a profession specific to women. During periods increased inequality of women and men in the world, women were removed from health services (Turan, Öztürk, Kaya and Atabek Aştı, 2011; Ulusoy 1998). Also, in Turkey, after the proclamation of the Republic, women gained some of the fundamental rights. After the women had these rights, formal nursing education was started (Ulusoy, 1998).

The early 1970s, nurses worked in clinical and hospitals. Today, they are working in factory, social care homes, and private workplace so on. Also, they are working in different countries (Seloilwe, 2005). One of the factors affecting the nursing profession, how it is perceived by society (Çınar and Demir, 2009). Being a woman affects this perception significantly. Being women of nurses have adversely affected the independence and legal, organizational and economical rights of the nursing profession. On the other hand, because of the affection and compassion expectation of society, nurses felt psychological pressure. Therefore nurses remained far from science-based systematic thinking. Also, this situation led to seek their rights and a solution for their needs and problems. The uncertainty of the roles and different education levels of nurses were caused to get jobs outside of nursing (Çınar and Demir, 2009).

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Budgen and Gamroth (2008) declared that the entry level to nursing programs shifted to university to improving the quality of education and to recognize as an academic discipline besides the application dimension. Although the first graduate nursing education started in 1955 in Turkey (Ulusoy, 1998), today, there are still health vocational schools and two-year associate degree programs. Nurses with different levels of education may lead to problems towards the qualified, reliable and equal service.

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In this context, nurses who follow developments in science and technology and use the research results in the fields of application will be effective and important in the provision of quality health services.

But, nurses can update their knowledge and skills only with the continuity of education. On the other hand, nurses cannot continue the formal education due to their living conditions. They have trouble in individual, occupational and familial context (Beldarrain, 2006; Atack 2003).

The goal of distance nursing education is to provide equivalent to formal education (White, 2006). Computer technology can be used for various purposes in distance nursing education. It can be used

instead of traditional teaching methods or as supportive. On the other hand, it has gained importance an alternative way to gain of clinical skills (Bloomfield, While &Roberts 2008). When the distance nursing education is planning, it should be taken decisions that affect all aspects of the education system.

Because learning environment is a system that consisting of instructors, students, course materials and technology etc. (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek, 2009). In this context, when developing distance nursing courses, there are issues that need to be considered (Moore and Kearsley. 2005). Some of these are,

- ➢ **Determination of content**
- ➢ **Configuring and sequencing of the materials**
- ➢ **Selection medium**
- ➢ **Determination of teaching strategies**
- ➢ **Ensuring interaction**
- ➢ **Evaluation of learning**
- ➢ **Giving feedback to students**
- ➢ **The choice of production methods to create course materials**

Bates (1995) stressed the use of technology in the distance education. The number of students is important. Because choice of medium depends on the number of students choosing courses. On the other hand, students need education to use effectively technology. The researcher added that technology is a no problem, it is a tool. The problem is what will be taught, how to teach (Bates, 1995).

THE ATTITUDES OF NURSES TOWARDS DISTANCE NURSING EDUCATION

Buxton (2004) stated that nurses tend to choose the distance nursing education programs. Because these programs give flexibility in their life. So they could get a higher education. They want to minimize their stress by choosing distance nursing education programs. In a qualitative study conducted with 20 nurses, 80% of participants stated that they have different working hours, and wanted to organize to their working conditions the distance education programs (Boz, 2008). The participants stated that distance education programs more convenient to them because they are married and have children, and are working in shifts. A participant expressed as "we work....in terms of time and effort....this facility would be better...." (Boz, 2008). Friedlander (2007) stated that the attitudes of nurses who married and have children are positive. White (2006) indicated that 54.5 % of the nurses who choose distance education were married.

Additionally, Yu and Yang (2006) found that attitudes of nurses who are working and have family responsibilities are more positive towards the web-based courses. In

contrast to this work, Boz Yüksekdağ (2013) declared that no significant difference between the attitudes of nurses related to distance education and marital status.

But, in the same study, the attitudes of nurses working permanent night were more positive both nurses who working day and shift. Friedlander (2007) reported that attitudes of nurses who work 40 hours per week and over towards the distance nursing education were more positive. This finding is similar to the result of study of Boz Yüksekdağ (2013).

Bonnel (2008) stated that the distance learners found valuable critiques and suggestions that they received from their tutorials and peers. In addition to, Johnson (2008) and Su (2006), stressed that the absence of interaction will lead to feelings of loneliness. Huckstadt and Hayes (2005) emphasized that the future of distance nursing education depends on well-structured interactive programs.

According to Su (2006), interaction is very important, because it related to the motivation, participation and responsibility of learners in the distance learning process. Boz (2008) noted that 80% of nurses asked the suitable distance nursing programs to their working conditions and time.

Also, all of the participants (100%) asked the counseling of experts in the field, and feedback. 75% of participants asked immediate feedback (Boz, 2008).

On the other hand, Thomas (2010) found that many nurses are reluctant related to use of computer and Internet. The researcher added that the one of the most important reasons of this is technical problems, and old nurses have more problems than younger in technical skills. Wilbright, Haun, Romano, Krutzfeldt, Fontenot and Nolan (2006) denoted that in some university hospitals in USA, computer literacy skills of nurses are middle or worse. They added that many nurses do not have the required minimum computer skills to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently.

Boz Yüksekdag (2013) noted that 89.7 % of the participants have a computer with an Internet connection at home. 90.2 % of the participants have a computer with an Internet connection in the workplace. 59.8 % of the participants use the internet between 5-7 days per week. The participants of study (76.3%) use the computer to search for the most professional knowledge.

and work areas. In this context, in the creation of distance nursing education programs, the proximity to the computer technology of the target audience is important for the adoption of these programs. 69.1 % of the nurses want to participate to the distance nursing education programs to complete the most undergraduate degree (28.4 %). 12,9 % of the participants have formal associate degree and 24,7 % have open education associate degree.

RESULTS

According to the above findings, it is likely; nurses will prefer to distance education programs to increase their education level.

In this context, flexible distance nursing education programs facilitate their social and professional lives. The designers of distance nursing education should take into account the working conditions of nurses.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHORS

Belgin BOZ YUKSEKDAG has been working at Anadolu University College of Open Education Testing & Research Center as a lecturer doctor. She graduated from the School of Nursing of Hacettepe University in 1990. She earned her MS degree from the Graduate School of Istanbul University (Health Sciences Department), Internal Medicine Nursing in 1995, and also the MA degree from the Graduate School of Anadolu University (Distance Education Department), in 2008. She earned her PhD degree from the Graduate School of Marmara University (Health Sciences Department), Psychiatry Nursing, in 2013.

Belgin BOZ YUKSEKDAG
Anadolu University Yunus Emre Campus,
Testing Research Department, 26470 Eskisehir TURKEY
Tel: 0 (222) 3350580-2713
Mobile: 0 554 514 0122
Email: bboz@anadolu.edu.tr

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