

## Original Article

# The Effectiveness of Counseling in the Internship Program According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This research study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling offered in accordance with Maslow's basic human needs in an internship training program.

**Methods:** Adopting a design that is quasi-experimental with simple time-series, this study was conducted with 60 students selected from fourth-grade senior students. During the internship program, counseling based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was offered through face-to-face interviews and "WhatsApp" chats by faculty members. The data collection tools were the Introductory Information Form, Nightingale Internship Program Evaluation Scale, and General Self-Efficacy Scale. The students received a pre-test, mid-test, and post-test.

**Results:** 80 percent of the participants were female, and their mean age was  $21.83 \pm 1.04$  years. We found that the students had significantly higher theoretical and practical competence scores in the middle, and at the end, of the internship program when compared with their initial scores ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively). We determined that at the beginning of the internship program, the students experienced more problems in terms of physiological needs, the need for self-esteem, and the need for self-actualization than they did at the end of the program ( $p = 0.002$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ,  $p = 0.013$ , respectively). Counseling had a positive influence on the students' General self-efficacy ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Counseling by evaluation of students' problems in order of their basic needs was shown to be an effective support strategy for developing of students' professional practice training. We recommend that counseling services based on Maslow's basic human needs module be offered with regard to the practices in nursing schools.

**Keywords:** Counseling; internship program; Maslow's hierarchy of needs; nursing student.

### Introduction

The aim of clinical practice, which is an important part of the nursing education process, is to enable students to utilize their theoretical knowledge in real contexts. The student's practice in the clinical setting enables the development of psychomotor skills and occupational socialization (Tosun et al., 2008; Bicer et al., 2015; Turan et al., 2017;). Various universities pilot innovative programs to make clinical practice more efficient and instructive. One of them is the internship program (Ozbayir et al., 2011; Sabanciogullari et al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2016; O'Brien & Hathaway, 2018). Internship programs in nursing education are not common in Turkey; however, they have been integrated into some nursing programs (Tosun et

al., 2008; Bicer et al., 2015; Sabanciogullari et al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2016). In their study, Buyuk et al. (2014) showed that internship programs provide students with self-confidence and develop communication skills, yielding statistically significant results (Buyuk et al., 2014).

During the internship program, students may encounter some problems that may affect the effectiveness of professional practice (Kumcagiz et al., 2005; Karadag et al., 2013; Karaoz, 2013). To cope with these problems, they need people to receive counseling. In their study, Tosun et al. (2008) argued that at the beginning of the internship program, students had expected the instructors to help them with the practices and support them theoretically. In the same study,

91.4% of the students said that they had solved the patient-care problems that they encountered during the internship program by consulting the instructors (Tosun et al., 2008). Turan et al. (2017) also found that students had expected counseling in terms of theoretical knowledge, practice skills, and psychological support from the instructors during their internship (Turan et al., 2017). In the literature on nursing, there are counseling programs that are aimed at reducing students' wearing down and improving their academic performance (Hamid et al., 2009; Karadag et al., 2015).

It is necessary to prioritize the problems of students during the counseling process. One of the methods used to determine the priorities of the problems is Maslow's hierarchy of basic human needs. Basic needs are arranged in a hierarchy as physical, safety/security, love/belonging, esteem/self-esteem, and self-actualization needs (Bulut et al., 2010). In our study, the counseling program for the students during internship program was designed and implemented on the basis of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a theory of motivation and personality that was developed by psychologist Abraham H. Maslow. We thought that it would be effective to look at the solution to the problems this way. The literature on nursing shows studies in which Maslow's hierarchy is used (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006; Levett-Jones et al., 2007). The same method was used and found to be effective in a study entitled Evaluation of mentorship program in nursing education: A pilot study in Turkey by Bulut et al. (2010).

In the literature, there are descriptive studies that show the opinions and suggestions of nursing students studying in internship programs during internship practice in Turkey and elsewhere in the world (Brathwaite & Lemonde, 2011; Sabanciogullari et al., 2012; Bicer et al., 2015). There is no study on offering counseling to students during the internship program. It is thought that the counseling given during the internship program contributes to the development of students' professional practice training. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling provided in the internship program.

### Research Hypotheses

H0a: The counseling given during the internship program has no effect on the perceptions of student nurses toward professional competence.

H0b: The counseling given during the internship program has no effect on student nurses' general self-efficacy beliefs.

H0c: The counseling given during the internship program has no effect on student nurses' self-report of clinical practice.

### Methods

This research study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling offered in accordance with Maslow's basic human needs in an internship program. This research was organized as quasi-experimental which was a simple time-series. The population of the study consisted of all fourth-grade senior students in the fall term of the 2017-2018 academic year at a state university in Konya, Turkey. There was no sampling for the study. All students were invited to participate in the study, and 60 out of 65 students volunteered to take part. The participation rate in the study was 92.30%.

**Procedure:** The students at the target university conduct clinical practice within the internship program in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters of their 4<sup>th</sup> grade for 4 days a week (The Regulation of University). The internship program continued for 14 weeks with 4 full days a week. Within the internship program, the students conducted their practice in internal medicine clinics, surgical clinics, pediatric clinics, gynecology and obstetrics clinics, psychiatric clinics, and family health centers. The students conducted their practice at three different clinics during the program and spent 4–5 weeks in each clinic. Prior to the internship program, a meeting was held with the students who were to be involved in the program, the instructors who were responsible for conducting the program, and the head nurses at the clinics where the practice sessions were to be conducted. At the meeting, the students received information regarding the aim, goals, and evaluation of the program. In the study, the student group received counseling during the internship program. The counseling was offered through face-to-face interviews in clinics and online "WhatsApp" chats by the researchers supervising the counseling program. The lecturers responsible at the clinic where the internship program was being conducted offered another counseling service. The content of the consultancy program was shaped in accordance with "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid," which was developed by Abraham Maslow in 1943 and ranks the priorities of the things an individual requires. According to this theory, the students

received counseling in areas where they might require help with their physiological needs (breathing, eating, water, sex, sleeping, discharge), safety/security needs (physical and psychological security and protection), social needs (communication, belonging, acceptance of love), esteem/self-esteem needs (self-esteem, self-esteem, success, respect for others), and self-actualization needs (learning, problem solving, intelligence learning). Firstly the problems raised by the students were prioritized in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and then counseling was given during internship program (14 weeks with 4 full days a week) (Table 1). In the study, the students were observed through a pre-test (The 1 st week), mid-test (The 7 st week), and post-test (The 14 st week).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

**Introductory Characteristic Form:** The form developed by the researchers after a literature review addressed the sociodemographic characteristics of the students (age and gender) and included three open-ended questions ( Bicer et. al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2016; Turan et al., 2017). In the form, the students were asked to give a score between 0 and 10 (0: totally inadequate and 10: totally adequate) to evaluate their level of theoretical and practical skills to determine their levels of professional competence perceptions. In addition, the form also included a space where the students could write the problems they experienced during the internship program (physical, security, love and belonging, respect, and self-realization problems). (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006; Levett-Jones et al., 2007; Bulut et al., 2010).  
**Nightingale Internship Program Evaluation Scale (NIPES)**

Developed in 2016 by Sahin et al., NIPES consists of 39 items in six subscales that were assessed for validity and reliability (Sahin et al., 2016). The chi-square value of the goodness of fit indexes obtained by the confirmatory factor analysis in a degree of freedom of 696 was 321.24; RMSEA was.001; the GFI value was.89; and the AGFI value was.87. In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the NIPES were .97, .99, and .96 (on the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test, respectively) for the whole scale;.92,.97. Accordingly, the mean score of each subscale and the total score of the scale varied between 1 and 5. In the scale and subscales, a mean score closer to 1 shows that the student had negative opinions about the internship program, whereas the student had positive opinions if the score was closer to 5.

### **General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)**

The original form of GSES was first developed with 20 items by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1981), who then developed the 10-item form (Jerusalem& Schwarzer, 1992). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be.87, and the test-retest correlation coefficient was.92 in the reliability and validity study conducted by Celikkaleli and Capri in 2008 (Celikkaleli & Capri, 2008). In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were found to be .83, .90, and.91 for the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test, respectively. The Likert-type items in the scale were scored between 1 and 4 in the original form. The lowest score was 10, while the highest score was 40. The increase in the scores of people was interpreted as an increased level of general self-efficacy.

**Data analysis:** In data evaluation, the descriptive statistics included numbers, percentage values, means, and standard deviation. The normal distribution of the numerical variables was evaluated by Skewness and Kurtosis values and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Repeated measures analysis of variance (follow-up analysis by Bonferroni test) was used to evaluate the difference between the mean scores obtained from the three assessments at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, of the professional practice and NIPES, GSES, and professional competence perceptions of students. The relationship between numerical variables (NIPES, GSES, and professional competence perception) was evaluated through Pearson correlation analysis. The effect of the independent variables with an effect on general self-efficacy levels was evaluated through multiple regression analysis. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Ethical Considerations:** Written approval was obtained from the University Medical Faculty Hospital Non-Clinical Research Ethics Committee (2018/1190) and the University Faculty of Health Sciences (19087896-200-E.12802). All patients were informed about the study, and written consent was obtained before data collection.

### **Results**

Eighty percent of the students who participated in the study were women, and their mean age was  $21.83 \pm 1.04$  (min: 20, max: 25) years. We found a very significant difference between the mean scores of student nurses showing their perceptions of theoretical and practical competence at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, of the internship program ( $p < 0.001$ ). In the advanced

analysis, we found that the students had significantly higher theoretical and practical competence scores in the middle and at the end of the internship program when compared with those obtained at the initial stage ( $p < 0.05$ ).

We found a significant difference between the student nurses' total scores on *NIPES* and their mean scores on the subscales of personal development and the general characteristics of the program ( $p < 0.05$ ). We also found a very significant difference between the mean scores of the subscales of guidance/counseling and communication with patients/their relatives at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the internship program ( $p < 0.001$ ). In the advanced analysis, we found that the students' mean scores on *NIPES* and three subscales at the end of the internship program, personal development, general characteristics of the program, and communication with patients/their relatives, were significantly higher than their scores at the beginning ( $p < 0.05$ ). We also found their mean scores on the guidance/counseling subscale at the end of the internship program to be significantly higher than they were in the middle of the program ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

There was an extremely significant difference between the student nurses' *GSES* mean scores at the beginning ( $26.73 + 4.88$ ), in the middle ( $29.56 + 5.28$ ), and at the end ( $29.65 + 4.94$ ), of the internship program ( $p < 0.001$ ). We found in the advanced analysis that the students' mean scores on *GSES* in the middle and at the end of the internship program were significantly higher than those at the beginning ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

We found a significant positive correlation between the student nurses' total scores on *NIPES* in the internship program and the subscales of professional development, personal development, guidance/counseling, general characteristics of the program, and communication with patients/their relatives ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3). As the students' total scores on *NIPES* and the five subscales increased,

their levels of general self-efficacy also increased. We determined that there was a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between the student nurses' scores on *GSES* and their considering themselves sufficient in both theoretical and practical terms (theoretical  $p < 0.001$ , practical  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3). As the students' level of considering themselves sufficient in both theoretical and practical terms increased, their levels of general self-efficacy also increased.

In the multiple regression (backward method) analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the eight independent variables that were found to have an effect on the student nurses' *GSES* score together, we found that five of the independent variables, *NIPES* total score, its subscales of professional development, personal development, communication with patients/their relatives, and the students' level of considering themselves to be sufficient in practical terms, did not have significant effects ( $p > 0.05$ ), whereas the other three variables (the students' level of considering themselves to be sufficient in theoretical terms  $p < 0.001$ , *NIPES*' subscales of guidance/counseling, and the general characteristics of the program had significant effects ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4).

Table 5 presents data on the respects in which the students experienced problems at the beginning and at the end of the internship program, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The student nurses experienced more problems in terms of physical needs, the need for respect, and the need for self-realization at the beginning of the internship program than they did at the end, and this difference was statistically significant ( $p = 0.002$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ,  $p = 0.013$ , respectively). Even though the students experienced more problems in terms of security and social needs at the beginning of the internship program than they did at the end, the difference was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 5).

**Table 1:** Counseling Program according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs

Basic needs	Content
Physiological needs	Nutrition
	Suit up
	Transportation

Safety/security needs	Aggressive patient population Infection control Employee safety
Social needs	Communication with patient/relatives and medical staff
Esteem/self-esteem needs	Acceptance by patient and staff Inability to practice skills Inadequacy in theoretical knowledge Devices and materials in clinical setting Critical patient care
Self-actualization	Problem solving Coping with stress

**Table 2:** Nursing students' Pre-test, Mid-test and Post-test Score Means of *NIPES* and *GSES* (n: 60)

The Scale and Subscales	Pre-test	Mid-test	Post-test	F	p
	$\bar{x} \pm SD$	$\bar{x} \pm SD$	$\bar{x} \pm SD$		
NIPES Total*	3.95±.63	3.91±1.02	4.16±.53	4.486	.015
NIPES Subscales					(Pre<Post)
Professional development	4.04±.69	4.00±1.06	4.22±.68	1.661	.199
Personal development	3.85±.72	3.87±1.09	4.14±.70	4.243	.019 (Pre<Post)
Guidance / counseling	4.34±.66	4.02±1.28	4.53±.59	5.547	.006 (Mid<Post)
General characteristics of the program	3.70±.85	3.83±1.07	3.97±.79	3.644	.032 (Pre<Post)
Characteristics of the practice area	3.83±.88	3.58±1.24	3.85±.72	1.136	.328
Communication with the patients and their relatives	4.00±.68	4.08±1.00	4.29±.60	5.153	.009 (Pre<Post)
General Self-Efficacy Scale (Total Score)**	26.73±4.88	29.56±5.28	29.65±4.94	12.823	.000 (Pre<Post)

\*The score range for the total scores on the scale is between 1 and 5. Pre: Pre-test, Mid: Mid-test, Post: Post-test \*\*The score range for the total scores on the scale is between 10 and 40. F: Repeated measures analysis of variance (sd:2), Post-hoc analysis: Bonferroni test

**Table 3:** The relationship between the student nurses' total scores on GSES, NIPES scores, and perceptions of professional competence (n: 60)

Independent Variables	General Self-Efficacy Belief	
	r	p
NIPES Total Score	.46	.000
Professional development	.32	.013
Personal development	.42	.001
Guidance / counseling	.32	.012
General characteristics of the program	.39	.002
Characteristics of the practice area	.23	.082
Communication with patients and their relatives	.38	.003
The Perception of Professional Competence		
Having a perception of theoretical self-efficacy for professional practice	.36	.005
Having a perception of practical self-efficacy for professional practice	.30	.020

r: Pearson correlation analysis

**Table 4:** The effect of the independent variables on general self-efficacy level: the results of multiple regression analysis (n: 60)

Independent Variables	B	S. Error	( $\beta$ )	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
Fixed	-.32	.5.85	-	.054	.957	-12.03	11.40
Level of perception of theoretical competence for professional practice	1.55	.44	.39	3.513	.001	.67	2.43
NIPES- Guidance / counseling	2.54	.97	.30	2.612	.012	.59	4.48
NIPES- General characteristics of the program	1.66	.72	.27	2.313	.024	.22	3.10

R: .59 Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>: .31 F: 9.720 p: .000 Durbin Watson: 1.74

Dependent variable: General Self-Efficacy Level

**Table 5:** Effect of counseling program on students' problems according to Maslow hierarchy of needs (n: 60)

Problems according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Before Counseling Program	After Counseling Program	p
	n (%)	n (%)	
<b>Physiological needs problem</b>			
Yes	36	8	0.002*
No	24	52	
<b>Safety/security needs problem</b>			
Yes	13	8	0.238*
No	46	52	
<b>Social needs problem</b>			
Yes	8	6	0.754*
No	52	54	
<b>Esteem/selfesteem needs problem</b>			
Yes	19	7	0.008*
No	41	53	
<b>Self-actualization problem</b>			
Yes	13	7	0.013*
No	46	5	

\*McNemar test.

## Discussion

This research study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling offered in accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in an internship program. At the end of the study, the results of the post-test in the internship program showed that the students had higher mean scores, indicating that their level of considering themselves to be sufficient in both theoretical and practical terms was higher than it was on the pre-test ( $p < 0.001$ ). Application areas where theoretical knowledge acquired during nursing education is transferred to real environment provide students with the opportunity to gain professional identity, to gain professional and personal skill behaviors, and to learn by doing (Karagoz, 2013). In studies conducted, students stated that internship practices

increased their clinical knowledge and skills and contributed to their utilization and development of theoretical knowledge and that they found themselves sufficient in terms of theoretical and practical skills (Ozbayır et al., 2011; Büyük et al., 2014). Our study yielded results equivalent to those of other studies that show that professional practice contributes to students' considering themselves to be sufficient both in theory and practice.

Clinical education enables students to communicate professionally with healthy/sick individuals, develop professional knowledge and skills, and develop problem-solving and decision-making skills (Ates et al., 2018). The literature also shows that internship practices develop the communication skills of student nurses in terms of

communication with patients and their families (Buyuk et al., 2014; Ates et al., 2018).

In our study as well, when we evaluated the competence of student nurses in communicating with the patients/their relatives during the internship program on the basis of their self-reporting, we found that their mean scores on the subscales of communication with patients/their relatives were significantly higher than those at the beginning ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2). According to these results, the students experienced difficulty in communicating with patients and their relatives at the beginning of the internship program; however, they developed their communication skills at the end of the program thanks to the counseling that they had received.

Many factors influence the success of clinical education, which is a part of nursing education, because, due to their nature, individuals have certain needs in their environment. When they cannot meet these needs, their chances of being successful in fulfilling the tasks they are responsible for decrease. Maslow classified these needs under certain headings. When we evaluated our students according to these needs, we determined that they experienced more problems in terms of physical needs, the need for respect, and the need for self-realization at the beginning of the internship program than they did at the end, and this difference was statistically significant ( $p = 0.002$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ,  $p = 0.013$ , respectively) (Table 5). We think that the counseling interventions through "WhatsApp" chats and face-to-face interviews provided to students at the beginning of the internship program regarding their areas of problem were effective.

The international criterion in nursing education is that nurses who are experts in their fields offer the training (Celikalp et al., 2010). The instructors' role, particularly as a role model and supporter in both theoretical courses and practice areas, positively reinforces the students' learning behavior and respect toward the profession (Karadag et al., 2013). Tosun et al. (2008) reported that 91.4% of the students stated they had solved patient-care problems that they encountered during the internship training program by consulting the instructors and that they needed to feel safer and receive constant counseling in their practice and clinical decisions (Tosun et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Karadag et al. (2013), when students were asked about their suggestions so that they could experience fewer problems in

clinical practice, 37.2% of the students wanted faculty members to have more communication with students. Sabanciogullari et al. (2012) reported that 36.4% of the students needed counseling from teaching staffs in terms of theoretical knowledge and practice skills during the internship practice and that 11.7% said that they needed counseling in psychological terms (Sabanciogullari et al., 2012). The literature emphasizes that various methods should be developed for the training of qualified nurses and states that counseling programs might be one of these methods (Jannati et al., 2012).

In our study, counseling was provided to assist students in their practice-related problems, and unlike the counseling programs in the literature, they had the opportunity to contact researchers via "WhatsApp" even when they were not together so as to ensure continuous counseling. The literature shows that counseling during nursing education affects students' attitudes positively, improves academic performance, alleviates anxiety, increases self-esteem, and positively affects the professional attitudes of students (Cassidy, 2009; Peyrovi et al., 2009; Karadag et al., 2015).

When the effect of counseling during the internship program was evaluated, we determined that the total score on NIPES and the mean scores on its subscales of personal development, the general characteristics of the program, guidance/counseling, and communication with patients/their relatives were significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) at the end of the internship program (Table 2). It is stated in the literature that proper and prompt interventions with regard to nursing students who have problems in terms of theory and practice are effective in increasing the effectiveness of the education system (McSherry & Marland, 1999). To intervene in this problem, we believe that a counseling service that is based on the principle of here and now is the right method. Therefore, we used "WhatsApp" chats to offer counseling whenever needed. In our study, when we evaluated the adequacy of guidance/counseling on the basis of the self-report of the student nurses during the internship program, the mean scores on the guidance/counseling subscale were found to be significantly higher than those at the beginning of the internship program ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2) shows that the counseling was effective.

The individual's belief of their ability to cope with a stressful situation in an extensive area and the

demands that come from the environment and leave them in a difficult position is defined as the general self-efficacy belief (Luszczynska et al., 2005). In our study, the mean scores of students on GSES at the end of the practice were found to be higher than those at the beginning, and this difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2). We found a moderate, significant, positive correlation between the student nurses' GSES scores and their total scores on NIPES in the internship program and its subscales of professional development; personal development; guidance/counseling; general characteristics of the program; and communication with patients/their relatives. Moreover, as the students' level of consideration of themselves to be sufficient in theoretical and practical terms for professional practice increased, their general self-efficacy levels also increased (theoretical  $p < 0.001$ , practical  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

In the multiple regression (backward method) analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the eight independent variables that were determined to have an effect on GSES scores of student nurses, we found that three variables (considering themselves to be sufficient in theoretical terms  $p < 0.001$ , guidance/counseling, and the general characteristics of the program, which were among the subscales of NIPES,  $p < 0.05$  (Table 4) had a significant effect. According to these results, it was found that the counseling and the characteristics of the planned professional program positively affected the students' professional development and their general self-efficacy beliefs. We think that students' problems solved by intervening in the areas according to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the problem is a priority affects the increase of general competence beliefs.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

At the end of the study, the results of the post-test in the internship program showed that the students' mean scores, showing their level of consideration of themselves to be sufficient in both theoretical and practical terms, the mean scores on GSES, the total scores on NIPES, and the mean scores on its subscales (particularly in its subscales of guidance/counseling and the general characteristics of the program) were significantly higher than the pre-test. These results show that determine students' needs for evaluation of problems in order of their basic needs priority is helpful for their development. Therefore, we

recommend the use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs module to determine the priorities of problems when implementing the counseling program. It can be implemented in every practical terms to make the practices of nursing students more active in nursing schools. Further studies can be conducted with a larger sample group.

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