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Research article

Stakeholder perspectives on graduates' acquisition of competencies in nursing bachelor's degree programs: A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

Background: In nursing education, greater emphasis should be placed on stakeholder perspectives, and these perspectives should be integrated into the educational process. Stakeholder perspectives are of great importance in determining the extent to which graduates achieve program competencies, and if necessary, in revising these competencies based on the relevant feedback.
Objective: This study aimed to determine stakeholder perspectives on the acquisition of nursing program competencies by graduates of undergraduate nursing programs.
Design: Exploratory qualitative research design.
Participants and setting: The study was conducted in June 2024 through focus group interviews with a total of 20 internal and external stakeholders.
Methods: The data were collected using Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Forms. The data were organized according to common/similar categories by content analysis.
Results: The data obtained based on the views of the participants on the acquisition of nursing program competencies by graduates of nursing education programs were divided into three categories: *Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education* (professional knowledge and skills, lifelong learning), *Competencies That Need Improvement* (critical thinking/problem-solving skills, communication skills, foreign language proficiency, professional values, and managerial skills), and *Suggestions to Improve Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education* (suggestions related to education, the profession, and institutional/administrative matters). Additionally, 10 subcategories associated with these categories were identified.
Conclusion: Competencies expected in members of the profession of nursing are a global topic of discussion, and the findings of study provide important insights for future studies. In line with these results, it is recommended to enhance collaboration with stakeholders and conduct regular meetings involving all stakeholders. The outcomes of these meetings should guide the structuring of educational programs to ensure the acquisition of competencies, and relevant activities should be planned and implemented accordingly.

1. Introduction

With globalization, while technological advancements are occurring in many countries, the quality of healthcare services is also changing day by day due to economic challenges, staff shortages, changing demographic characteristics of patients, and increasing expectations. This situation requires increasing the quality of healthcare services, as well as the quality of the healthcare workforce (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing [CASN], 2015; Nursing National Core Education Program [HUÇEP], 2022; Global Education for Leadership in Nursing Education and Science [GANES], 2019).

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters have highlighted the critical role of nurses on the frontlines and underscored the importance of the profession of nursing once again (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health [APPG], 2016). Today, with the lifelong learning approach, the concept of competence, which is multidimensional and includes knowledge, skills, and competencies, emphasized as what the learner must achieve, is accepted as a dynamic

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learning process that closes the gap between the individual's capacity and the requirements of their profession. Defined as the combination of knowledge and skills related to success in the profession, competence sets out the minimum work standards required for the individual to do their job effectively (Jones et al., 2016; Södersved Källestedt et al., 2020; Turhan and Burgaz, 2014; Widarsson et al., 2020). Nursing education is of great importance in training nurses with the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary to improve the health of the populations they serve, including professional ethical principles and values, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills (da Conceição Bento et al., 2015; HUÇEP, 2022; GANES, 2019; Turkish Ministry of Health, 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). Nursing education program competencies are statements that define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that nursing students should acquire until they graduate from the program. In this context, in Türkiye, the National Competencies of Undergraduate Nursing Programs have been determined (HUÇEP, 2022). "In the context of national competencies, the questions being addressed are: 'What qualities should individuals graduating from your program possess? What should they know? What skills should they have? What competencies should they be equipped with?'". Based on the answers to these questions, educational institutions determine their program competencies (HUÇEP, 2022). Regarding these competencies, it is important to involve stakeholders and ensure their participation in data collection, analysis, decision-making, management, evaluation, updating, and improvement processes (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2024; Lewallen, 2023; Oermann, 2023; Shellenbarger and Chicca, 2023).

In educational programs, a stakeholder is an individual, group, or institution that is directly or indirectly affected by the activities of a program in achieving its goals/competencies or influences the educational program through their activities (Shellenbarger and Chicca, 2023). *Internal stakeholders* are individuals, groups, or (if applicable) affiliated institutions within the organization that are affected by or affect the institution (e.g., students, faculty members, administrative staff). *External stakeholders* are individuals, groups, or institutions outside the organization that are affected by or affect the institution (e.g., clinical nurses, nurse managers, nursing care service managers, patients, patient relatives, other healthcare professionals, faculty members from the nursing departments of other universities, professional associations/institutions) (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2024; GANES, 2019; Lewallen, 2023).

The opinions of internal stakeholders play a critical role in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing educational programs, assessing the achievement levels of program competencies and student satisfaction, making the educational process more student-centered, and improving learning experiences. External stakeholders, on the other hand, give an insight into which competencies should be prioritized in education and how compatible the program is with the real world by evaluating the performance of graduates in the workplace and the needs of the sector. This helps graduates become better prepared for the dynamic and changing needs of the current and future health sector (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2024; Keshmiri et al., 2019; Murararaneza and Mtshali, 2021; Virgolesi et al., 2020). In nursing education, gathering the opinions of stakeholders is crucial for updating educational programs, identifying needs and expectations, ensuring quality, and enhancing communication and collaboration. This process improves the quality of nursing education, enabling graduates to be more effective and successful in the healthcare sector. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on the views of stakeholders, and these views should be integrated into the educational process (Lewallen, 2023; Oermann, 2023; Shellenbarger and Chicca, 2023). In the review of the literature, no study addressing the perspectives of internal and external stakeholders regarding the acquisition of nursing program competencies by graduates could be encountered. In this context, this study is expected to contribute to the literature.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Objectives

This study aimed to analyze the opinions and perspectives of stakeholders, such as nurses, educators, managers, students, patients, and academics, regarding the achievement of nursing education program competencies by graduates. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the views of stakeholders on the competencies gained by graduates from nursing education?
2. What are the views of stakeholders on the competencies that need to be developed among graduates?
3. What are the recommendations of stakeholders for the achieving nursing education competencies by graduates?

2.2. Design

This study was carried out with an exploratory qualitative research design to get a better understanding of the experiences of stakeholders (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021).

2.3. Participant selection and recruitment

The inclusion criteria of the study were being a stakeholder of nursing education programs, having knowledge of stakeholder engagement or experience, working/receiving services with student/graduate nurses, and taking an active role in an education program. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were reached, appointments were requested, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and invited them participate. Those who agreed to participate were asked to suggest a time that would be the most convenient for them. The maximum variation sampling method, which is a qualitative sampling technique, was used to determine the sample. The ideal number of participants for focus group interviews is six or eight (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). In this study, three focus group discussions were held. Six stakeholders participated in the first focus group discussion, 6 stakeholders participated in the second focus group discussion, and 8 stakeholders participated in the third focus group discussion. As a result, the study was conducted with a total of 20 participants, 8 internal stakeholders and 12 external stakeholders.

2.4. Data collection

The focus group interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform in June 2024. The focus group interview method was used in this study because it is an interview method that is used to obtain information about a specific subject with multiple individuals person and allows different views/ideas to emerge by using the effect of group dynamics in an environment where individuals can freely express their thoughts (Krueger, 2002). A Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Form was developed based on similar studies (den Hertog and Boshuizen, 2022; İnangil et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Kukkonen et al., 2023; Södersved Källestedt et al., 2020; Turhan and Burgaz, 2014; Virgolesi et al., 2020; Yavuz Yılmaz et al., 2022). The interview guide was tested and piloted on a sample and discussed in detail among the authors. The interviewees were asked open-ended questions to describe their opinions or experiences regarding the development of targeted achievements in nursing education program competencies for graduates. Some examples of questions are given below.

- Which forms of knowledge, skills, and competencies do you think nursing education provides to graduates you work with/nurses who provide care to you?

- Which forms of knowledge, skills, and competencies that you think graduates should have that you think are missing or partially insufficient among the competencies you mentioned? Could you elaborate on this a little?
- What can be done to ensure that graduates/nurses you work with reach these forms of knowledge, skills, and competencies or improve their competencies? What are your suggestions?

The focus group interview was held online by a researcher who acted as a reporter and another researcher who acted as a moderator. Since the interviews were video-recorded, no additional observation form was used. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, lasting approximately 30–75 min.

2.5. Validity and reliability

The criteria of credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability were taken into consideration in ensuring the rigor of the data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). For this purpose, to increase the credibility of the results, sufficient numbers of participants and the necessary time were allocated to conduct the interviews, and a conceptual framework was created in line with the literature. The diversity of participants (including different stakeholders) was ensured. To increase consistency, all findings are presented directly without interpretation. To increase transferability, care was taken to explain the research in detail, comparisons made to studies on the subject were interpreted in detail by generalizing, and the purposive sampling method was used. To increase the construct validity of the study, the researcher did not act in a directive manner, and the data were confirmed with the participant providing the data, and their opinion and approval were obtained. Moreover, subjective judgments were not involved in the data collection process. The transcripts of the interviews were checked for verifiability and read multiple times for the in-depth understanding of the data (Polit and Beck, 2012).

2.6. Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using the MAXQDA 2022 program, which is a qualitative data analysis program, and the content analysis method was used to analyze the data. The content analysis process consisted of 4 stages: “data coding”, “category and subcategory creation”, “organization of categories and subcategories”, and “definition and interpretation of findings”. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed by an expert transcriptionist verbatim and turned into written text. Two researchers (YŞ, ÜG) first reviewed the text of the interviews and had a general understanding of the text. Then, they read the text line by line and coded the data independently of each other. In the next step, the codes were compared for similarities and differences, and categories and subcategories were created based on the objective and research questions of the study. As a result of this process, 3 categories and 10 subcategories were revealed.

2.7. Ethical considerations

Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Committee of a university (Date: 17.05.2024, Number: 2024/237). It was explained to the participants that the interviews would be recorded, and their written and verbal permission was obtained. For the confidentiality of the identifying information of the participants, they were given codenames while quoting their statements (IS1, IS2, … for internal stakeholders and ES1, ES2, … for external stakeholders).

3. Results

3.1. Demographic characteristics

While 8 of the participants were internal stakeholders, and 12 were external stakeholders. The mean age of the participants was 36 ± 10.23 (Min: 21, Max: 54). It was determined that 75 % of the participants were women ($n = 15$), 35 % ($n = 7$) had bachelor’s degrees, and 35 % (n = 7) had master’s degrees. Forty percent ($n = 8$) of the participants were working at state universities, 25 % ($n = 5$) were working at research and training hospitals, 15 % ($n = 3$) were working at university hospitals, and 15 % (n = 3) were working at foundation universities. The mean experience of the participants in their current roles was 8.1 ± 7.46 years (Min: 0, Max: 25) (Table 1).

3.2. Categories and subcategories obtained based on participant views

Data obtained based on the views of the participants on the acquisition of nursing education program competencies by graduates were divided into three categories:

- Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education
- Competencies That Need Improvement
- Suggestions to Improve Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education

These categories included 10 subcategories (Fig. 1).

- Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education

The category of competencies acquired from nursing education was divided into two subcategories: “essential professional knowledge and skills” and “lifelong learning” (Fig. 1).

- Essential Professional Knowledge and Skills

All participants agreed that nursing education provides graduates with essential professional knowledge and skills.

> *“Training students with a vision to provide holistic care in line with the philosophy of nursing is actually what all of our competencies prioritize.”* (IS2)

> *“I believe they [graduates] can develop a holistic approach more: while working with some of my colleagues in nursing, they are able to understand why I asked them to do something. For instance, they might say, ‘Is this why you wanted me to check the blood pressure, or why do you want to give this medication? …but first, let me check the patient’s pulse.’”* (ES6)

The participants stated that the clinical practices in which graduates participated during their undergraduate education were effective in the development of professional knowledge and skills.

> *“…I think their confidence improves with internship practices. They get the opportunity to transfer their existing knowledge into practice.”* (ES1)

The participants (preceptors, students, and faculty members) emphasized that clinical mentorship/preceptorship programs contributed to the development of professional knowledge and skills.

> *“Preceptors participate in our education, support our students, and take part in clinical assessments, and many steps have been taken in this regard, which greatly contributed to the development of students…”* (IS4)

Table 1
Participants' (stakeholders') demographic characteristics ($n = 20$).

Code	Age	Gender	Educational background	Position	Institution	Experience
IS1	21	Women	Bachelor's Degree	Student	Private University	4th Grade
IS2	41	Women	PhD	Faculty Member (Associate Professor-Department of Nursing Management)	State University	10 Years
IS3	36	Women	Master Degree	Faculty Member (Lecturer-Department of Nursing Education)	Private University	7 Years
IS4	37	Women	PhD	Faculty Member (Associate Professor-Department of Fundamentals of Nursing)	State University	10 Years
IS5	46	Women	PhD	Faculty Member (Associate Professor-Department of Surgical Nursing)	State University	22 Years
IS6	21	Man	Bachelor's Degree	Student	State University	3rd Grade
IS7	22	Man	Bachelor's Degree	Student	State University	4th Grade
IS8	42	Women	PhD	Faculty Member (Assistant Professor-Department of Nursing Education)	State University	4 Years
ES1	52	Women	Master Degree	Preceptor	University Hospital	15 Years
ES2	31	Man	Master Degree	Nurse Manager	University Hospital	10 Years
ES3	30	Women	Master Degree	Nurse Educator	State Hospital	5 Years
ES4	35	Man	Master Degree	Other Healthcare Professionals Radiology Technician	Training And Research Hospital	11 Years
ES5	45	Man	Bachelor's Degree	Patient	Training And Research Hospital	Received Inpatient Treatment For 5 Days
ES6	35	Women	Master Degree	Other Healthcare Professionals Physician	Training And Research Hospital	5 Years
ES7	25	Women	Bachelor's Degree	Graduates/Nurse	Private University	3 Years
ES8	51	Women	Bachelor's Degree	Nurse Manager	University Hospital	25 Years
ES9	54	Women	PhD	Association Member	State University	22 Years
ES10	42	Women	PhD	Association Member	State University	8 Years
ES11	24	Women	Bachelor's Degree	Graduates/Nurse	Training And Research Hospital	2 Years
ES12	30	Women	Master Degree	Nurse Manager	Training And Research Hospital	3 Years

- Lifelong Learning

The participants noted that nursing education raises awareness among graduates about participating in research, following continued education activities, and attending scientific events such as conferences and symposia as a part of lifelong learning. They also mentioned that especially new graduates are eager to improve themselves.

"Currently, within the scope of 21st-century skills, they expect us to be researchers. In other words, there is a desire for us to have a strong research orientation. Honestly, I believe that the education we received at school has improved this aspect of us…"

(IS7)

- Competencies That Need Improvement

The category of competencies needing improvement was divided into 5 subcategories: "critical thinking/problem-solving skills", "communication skills", "foreign language proficiency", "professional values", and "managerial skills" (Fig. 1).

- Critical Thinking/Problem-Solving Skills

The participants (nurse managers and faculty members) stated that graduates needed improvement in critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

"They are very inadequate in problem-solving. When they encounter any problem, they become confused and don't know what to do."

(ES12)

Some participants pointed out that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are complex and advanced abilities that cannot be fully developed through undergraduate nursing education, which lasts only 4 years.

"The difficulties new graduates face in critical thinking and prioritizing problems indicate that critical thinking is not adequately taught. This shows a deficiency that needs to be addressed, and we need to introspect and question the reasons behind it."

(ES10)

A participant (nurse educator) noted that the lack of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in graduates might also be related to their work environment. Newly graduated nurses tend to follow what they observe in experienced nurses in the work environment rather than adding to the competencies acquired during their undergraduate education.

"Newly graduated nurses take things directly from experienced nurses without questioning them and put them into practice. So, they seem to be completely closed to critical thinking. It may be because of seniority, they may be afraid to ask questions, but I have observed such a situation in the field, especially in newly graduated nurses."

(ES11)

- Communication Skills

The participants reported that newly graduated nurses need improvement in both team communication and communication with patients and their families. They noted that communication problems arose due to a tendency to avoid responsibility and a fear of making mistakes.

"It is getting worse, and I have to mention that. I mean, there is a tendency among new graduates to avoid responsibility, struggle to express themselves, or immediately try to distance themselves from responsibility when it arises."

(ES4)

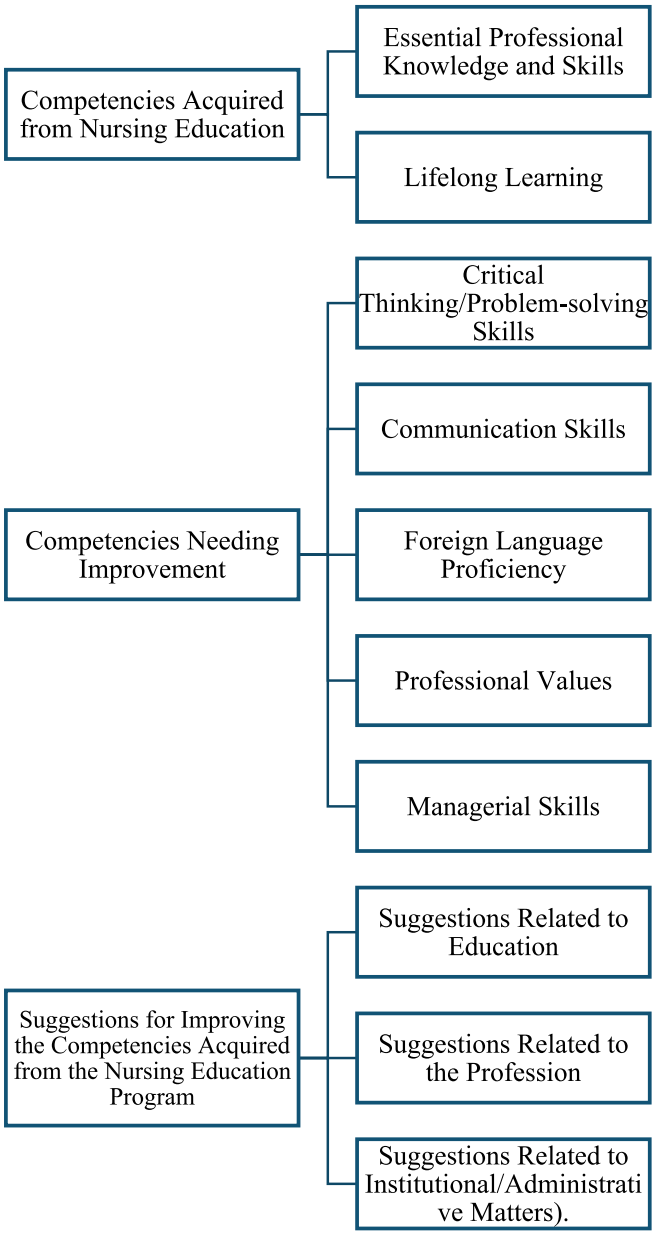

Fig. 1. Categories and subcategories obtained from participants' views.

"We experience a lot of communication problems with patients/relatives, physicians, and other team members. This is partly due to a lack of self-confidence. From my perspective, I am afraid of causing pain to the patient, so I am hesitant to touch them, even though I know I need to try."

(IS1)

Some participants emphasized that newly graduated nurses belong to Generation Z, and the communication issues experienced by them could stem from generational differences and individual characteristics.

"*We have quiet students who don't like to talk and make comments. This can cause a problem in communicating with both patients and their colleagues. They may struggle to find the balance between where to be professionals and where not to be, and this can blur boundaries. I believe all this is related to the individual's personal characteristics."*

(IS2)

- Foreign Language Proficiency

The participants (faculty members) also argued that graduates need further improvement in foreign language proficiency, which is one of the expected competencies for nursing graduates.

A participant (faculty member) highlighted the recent increase in the number of foreign patients in Türkiye, emphasizing that every nurse should have a basic level of English proficiency.

"I mean, why are we trying to teach English? We need to clarify this to our students first. Why should our students know English? It changes the level of their proficiency. I think there's confusion at the outset. Is it necessary for every nurse to know English? That's a question, but every nurse in Türkiye should be able to speak basic English in [to prepare for] an emergency with a patient."

(IS3)

- Professional Values

Some participants (especially nurse managers and nurse educators who worked closely with graduated nurses) pointed out that the professional awareness of graduated nurses had not fully developed, and the COVID-19 pandemic period, in particular, had negatively affected the acquisition of professional values by these nurses.

"They are not aware of the importance of nursing. Most of them only see it as obeying an order. They are not aware of the role of nursing… I honestly see a greater disconnection from the field in every new graduate, and I mostly blame this on the [COVID-19] pandemic period."

(ES12)

- Managerial Skills

According to the participants, graduates need improvement in managerial skills such as leadership, quality management, and legal regulations.

The participants (nurse educator and nurse manager) noted that graduated nurses do not have sufficient knowledge of hospital quality systems and do not view themselves as a part of the quality control process.

"Graduates, when they enter the field, do not view quality management work as part of their responsibilities. They do not consider tasks such as filling out forms, reporting observed issues to the quality unit, and other related processes as their own responsibility. They either do not take responsibility in this area or lack the necessary knowledge."

(ES3)

Additionally, one participant (association member) stated that graduates also lack knowledge of their legal responsibilities.

"For example, we struggle with conveying legal responsibilities. Our graduates learn their rights very well, but they do not learn their responsibilities."

(İS2)

3.2.1. Suggestions to improve competencies acquired from nursing education

The suggestions of the participants for improving the competencies acquired from the nursing education program were divided into three subcategories: "suggestions related to education", "suggestions related to the profession", and "suggestions related to institutional/administrative matters" (Fig. 1).

- Suggestions Related to Education

The participants stated that for graduates to acquire the identified program competencies, first of all, educators/lecturers should improve themselves in terms of educational skills.

"First of all, I can only teach what I know well. Therefore, if I improve myself, I can also improve the students."

(IS2)

"If you do not use educational methods that the student actively participates in, as an instructor, you cannot reach the goals and [targeted] outcomes of the course that you aim for. When we look at it from the perspective of instructors, we need to improve ourselves. and adapt to the times…"

(ES9)

The participants highlighted that accreditation efforts contribute to the formation of a common language in nursing education. They emphasized the need for standardization in education.

"Institutions like HEPDAK and HUÇEP are great achievements, but only the faculties that apply for accreditation are aware of this and are trying to implement it—I'm saying they are trying. They may know what they need to do, what they should expect from the student, how they should assess it, but faculties outside of this may not have such awareness or knowledge."

(IS4)

"…if there is educational equality, for example, if this process (accreditation) is implemented in every faculty, I believe it will be more beneficial."

(ES11)

The participants (all internal stakeholders) stated that current topics such as the future of nursing, innovation and entrepreneurship, the climate crisis, and disaster nursing should also be included in the educational content. They recommended that graduates improve themselves in these areas in line with the requirements of the times.

"Nursing is a field very suitable for social entrepreneurship, and there are areas where they can realize their potential and create projects in different fields. We need to engage in activities that will develop their entrepreneurial skills. The way to do this is through project writing… We need to have courses on combating the climate crisis and its effects. We need to create more recycling and upcycling ideas that affect this in students so that they can spread them to society."

(IS2)

"Disaster nursing, psychological resilience during disasters—these are areas where all faculties urgently need to improve their curricula. … because in the event of a possible Istanbul earthquake, we will need every student from every corner of the country as a workforce. This is an important factor."

(ES6)

All participants emphasized the importance of faculty-hospital collaboration in ensuring that the established professional competencies are acquired.

"It would be much more beneficial to create a supportive work environment where students/graduates can gain professional self-confidence, and while doing this, both faculty members and nurses in the clinic should work together."

(ES2)

The participants stated that increasing the diversity of clinical practice areas and experiencing different practice areas during the educational process will contribute to the development of the professional competencies graduates.

"Integrating shift-based work into undergraduate education programs can be helpful in taking part in a little practice before going to the field. When I was in internship, I also worked night shifts at the hospital. It was beneficial for me to experience that period. After graduation, I had a clearer idea of what to expect."

(ES7)

"I think it would be beneficial to have internship experiences in different fields and be taught about various forms of employment, such as 12-hour shifts, night shifts, 24-hour shifts…"

(IS7)

The participants argued that preceptors/mentor nurses play a crucial role in the development of professional competencies and are often perceived as role models. They also highlighted the importance of selecting the right preceptor/mentor nurse.

"…the choice of a preceptor is very important because students generally see preceptors as role models. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to this."

(ES1)

The participants (internal stakeholders) stated that faculties should establish an effective assessment and evaluation system to determine the extent to which professional competencies are acquired.

"…we need to reach most or even all of the competencies. For this, we need a good evaluation system. HEPDAK draws us a good roadmap in this regard…"

(ES10)

- Suggestions Related to the Profession

The participants drew attention to the need to create a common professional image of the profession.

"We also need to create a common professional image. I think this is very important. I mean, even nursing professors in Türkiye do not have a common understanding of nursing. Therefore, we need to discuss this more, clarify it and present it to our students."

(ES10)

- Suggestions Related to Institutional/Administrative Matters

The participants (external stakeholders) pointed out that the acquisition of professional competencies is not only the responsibility of nursing programs, and institutions (hospitals) have a substantial role in maintaining these competencies.

"… from now on, in our institutions (hospitals), there should be things that motivate the employees. I mean, I think when they do research or participate in a symposium, they should be able to take this time as a permitted leave, they should be motivated and supported in some way."

(ES3)

"Critical thinking, communication, lifelong learning… actually, all the competencies we are discussing are those that can be developed through education after graduation."

(ES10)

"…So, this education process continues for nurses after graduation."

(ES6)

4. Discussion

4.1. Demographic characteristics

In this study, maximal diversity was ensured by including

stakeholders who could comprehensively represent the internal and external stakeholders of nursing education programs. The Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Nursing Education Programs (HEPDAK), which is the authorized institution responsible for the accreditation of undergraduate nursing education programs in Türkiye, also recommends communicating with stakeholders and taking their opinions about the aims, current achievements, and future plans of educational institutions. This approach, defined as "stakeholder participation", has an important place in the accreditation process (HEPDAK, 2024). In their study on stakeholder views on the development of a competency-based undergraduate nursing program, Virgolesi et al. (2020) included 14 different stakeholders, and while Ashghali-Farahani et al. (2018) studied neonatal nursing education programs with the participation of different stakeholders such as graduate students, graduates, instructors, neonatologists, and nurses. In a mixed-design study conducted by Vattanaamorn et al. (2022) to determine the factors affecting the achievement of targeted program outcomes by nursing students, opinions were obtained from instructors, students, and preceptor nurses. The results of this study were similar to those in the literature, and this may be explained by the inclusion of the views of all relevant stakeholders in this context.

4.2. Categories and subcategories

Virgolesi et al. (2020) stated that stakeholder participation is the basis of education, especially in competency-based education, and curricula should be developed so that learning outcomes are compatible with the competencies needed by society. The results of this study demonstrated the importance of taking into account the views of stakeholders in determining the competencies expected from graduates and evaluating the achievement of these competencies.

- Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education

The category of competencies acquired from nursing education was grouped under 2 subcategories: basic professional knowledge and skills and lifelong learning (Fig. 1). In the GANES report, professional knowledge and skills constituted one of the core competencies that graduates should acquire in nursing education programs (GANES, 2019). In Türkiye, it is included as the first targeted competency among the TYYÇ's 6th-level undergraduate competencies (YÖK, 2024) and HUÇEP Nursing Undergraduate Education Program National Competencies (HUÇEP, 2022). Purabdollah et al. (2023) found that the core competencies that undergraduate nursing students should acquire according to their participants were individualized care, professional knowledge and skills, nursing processes, and professional development. Yavuz Yılmaz et al. (2022) reported that 75–80 % of intern nursing students considered themselves sufficient in terms of professional knowledge and skills. Södersved Källestedt et al. (2020) emphasized that nurse managers were generally dissatisfied with the competencies of newly graduated nurses and determined that their skills and lifelong learning competencies were insufficient (Oermann et al., 2010). In the study performed by Turhan and Burgaz (2014), senior nursing students generally stated that they achieved professional knowledge and skills and lifelong learning competencies at the "very good" level. Missen et al. (2015) emphasized that there were weaknesses and difficulties in the professional lives of nursing graduates, their clinical skills were not sufficient in practice, and these skills needed to be improved. The results of this study, which were similar to those in the literature, showed that graduates are expected to acquire the professional knowledge and skills that qualified members of the profession should have and showed the importance of lifelong learning in terms of professional development during nursing education. It was also observed that graduates demonstrated these competencies in the fields they worked in, thus suggesting that these competencies were also observed by stakeholders.

- Competencies That Need Improvement

The category of competencies that need improvement was divided into 5 subcategories: critical thinking/problem-solving skills, communication skills, foreign language proficiency, professional values, and managerial skills (Fig. 1). According to Hyun et al. (2020), the majority of nurse educators and administrators thought that new graduates felt less competent about professional values and ethical principles, and they should be supported in terms of practicing safely with sufficient knowledge. Södersved Källestedt et al. (2020) emphasized that nurse managers were generally dissatisfied with the competencies of newly graduated nurses (Oermann et al., 2010) and found that especially their interpersonal communication competencies were insufficient, and this affected their professional competence development. In the study carried out by Kavanagh and Szweda (2017), about a quarter (23 %) of newly graduated nurses stated that they had program competencies, while the others thought their competencies should be improved especially in terms of critical thinking/problem solving skills, communication skills, and foreign language. Missen et al. (2015) revealed that graduates of nursing programs had problems in communicating with patients/families or colleagues and other members of the health team in the clinical field. Numminen et al. (2014) stated that nurse educators and nurse managers should improve the competencies of newly graduated nurses in evidence-based nursing practices and management of holistic and comprehensive care activities. Turhan and Burgaz (2014) asserted that senior nursing students had the lowest levels of competencies in the categories of informing the relevant people and institutions about issues related to their field, transferring their thoughts and suggestions for solutions to problems in written and verbal form, supporting their thoughts and solutions with quantitative and qualitative data and sharing them with experts, using a foreign language to follow developments in their field, communicating with colleagues, and using information and communication technologies. In Utley-Smith's (2004) study, nurse managers stated that newly graduated nurses should have competencies in health promotion, supervision, interpersonal communication, and case management, and evidence-based decisions can be a roadmap for updating education programs. The result of this study was similar to the literature and showed that the opinions of all stakeholders regarding the competencies that newly graduated nurses needed to develop were similar. This result also suggested that nursing education programs should be restructured to develop competencies such as critical thinking/problem-solving skills, communication skills, foreign language skills, professional values, and managerial skills.

- Suggestions to Improve Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education

The recommendations of the participants for the improvement of nursing education program competencies in graduates were divided into three subcategories, namely, suggestions related to education, suggestions related to the profession, and suggestions related to institutional/administrative matters (Fig. 1). Kukkonen et al. (2023) and Widarsson et al. (2020) stated that the competencies of newly graduated nurses were sufficient for their current work lives, but to reach a better level, the harmony between the healthcare system and nursing education program competencies should be increased. They also emphasized that continuous dialogue with stakeholders should be maintained. In the study conducted by Numminen et al. (2014), nurse educators and administrators stated that integration between nursing education and the clinical field should be ensured to provide nursing education program competencies to newly graduated nurses. The result of this study, which was in line with other results in the literature, suggested that interviews should be held at regular intervals to strengthen cooperation with stakeholders, education programs should be structured in a way to ensure that nursing students acquire program competencies in line with the results obtained, and activities/studies should be planned and

carried out.

5. Conclusion

The data obtained based on the views of the participants on the acquisition of nursing education program competencies by graduates were gathered under three categories: *Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education* (professional knowledge and skills, lifelong learning), *Competencies That Need Improvement* (critical thinking/problem-solving skills, communication skills, foreign language proficiency, professional values, and managerial skills), and Suggestions to Improve Competencies Acquired from Nursing Education (suggestions related to education, suggestions related to the profession, and suggestions related to institutional/administrative matters). Additionally, 10 subcategories associated with these categories were identified. When all this information is considered together, it is seen that competencies associated with undergraduate nursing programs are a global topic of discussion, the results of studies conducted in different countries are compatible with each other, and they point out important findings for future studies. In line with these results, the following recommendations can be made:

- It is need to increase cooperation with stakeholders and conduct regular meetings to cover all relevant stakeholders.
- The outcomes of these meetings should guide the structuring of educational programs to ensure the acquisition of competencies, and relevant activities should be planned and implemented accordingly.
- Considering the importance of the topic, although the sample size of this study was appropriate for focus group interviews, the study should be conducted with larger samples and different research methods.
- Studies that will enable national/international comparisons should be conducted.

5.1. Limitations

The results of this study are limited to the participants who agreed to participate in the focus group interviews and their self-reports.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Emine Şenyuva: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Nazik Yalnız:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Yağmur Şen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Ümran Görügen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation.

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