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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Opinions of Graduates, Nurse Educators and Nurses on the Competencies Gained by Graduate Education in Nursing: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Continuous and systematic monitoring, evaluation, and restructuring of postgraduate nursing education—through active stakeholder engagement—has become increasingly vital. This qualitative study aimed to explore the perspectives of graduates, nurse educators, and practicing nurses concerning the competencies acquired through postgraduate nursing education. A total of 24 participants from these three stakeholder groups contributed to the research. Data were collected via tailored information forms and semistructured interview guides, and analyzed using the MAXQDA software. The findings were categorized into three main themes and 14 subthemes. The results revealed a strong alignment between the competencies expected from postgraduate education and those actually attained, while also highlighting several challenges and offering constructive recommendations. The study underscores the need to enhance postgraduate nursing education within a competency-based framework and calls for further research involving broader and more diverse populations to facilitate both national and international comparisons.

1 | Introduction

Postgraduate nursing education plays a critical role in improving the quality of healthcare services by enhancing nurses' knowledge, skills, and competencies. It also supports professional development and contributes to the sustainability of the nursing profession (Berthelsen et al. 2020; Fennimore et al. 2018; World Health Organization 2016). As healthcare systems grow increasingly complex, nurses are expected to possess not only foundational clinical skills but also advanced competencies in leadership, research, strategic thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Şenyuva et al. 2025).

Postgraduate programs enable nurses to develop enhanced clinical decision-making abilities, ethical practice competencies, and the capacity to translate research into clinical applications (Feliciano et al. 2021; Dracup et al. 2005). Graduates of these programs often assume leadership roles within healthcare teams and contribute actively to institutional decision-making processes (Berthelsen et al. 2020; Sadeghnezhad and Ghanei Allhosseini 2020).

The literature indicates that nurses with postgraduate education make faster and more accurate clinical decisions than those with only undergraduate training. They are more proficient in conducting research, integrating evidence into clinical practice, mentoring colleagues and students, and contributing to curriculum development (Mårtensson et al. 2020). Furthermore, they tend to demonstrate greater adherence to ethical standards and professional responsibilities (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

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Summary

- Importance of stakeholder involvement
  - Continuous and systematic monitoring, evaluation, and restructuring of postgraduate nursing education require active participation from stakeholders, including graduates, nurse educators, and practicing nurses.
- Expected and acquired competencies
  - The study identified a parallel between the competencies expected from postgraduate nursing education and those actually acquired. However, challenges persist in achieving these competencies, alongside significant recommendations for improvement.
- Recommendations for enhancement
  - Postgraduate nursing programs should be restructured within a competency-based framework. Further research with larger, diverse samples and comparative studies at national and international levels is recommended to ensure continuous improvement.

Global organizations, including the World Health Organization (2016) and the American Nurses Association (ANA 2015), emphasize that postgraduate nursing education not only fosters individual growth but also enhances the quality of care at a societal level. Consequently, the development of a well-qualified nursing workforce has become a strategic priority in healthcare policy worldwide.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain in cultivating core competencies among postgraduate nursing students (Wang et al. 2023). Assessing the level of competency achieved by graduates is complex, especially since they are already considered qualified nurses (Jølstad et al. 2019). Similarly, Mårtensson et al. (2020) highlight the need for graduate education programs to evaluate students based on clear, standardized criteria and outcomes, underscoring the importance of reliable and valid assessment tools.

However, there is a notable lack of standardized instruments for evaluating the outcomes of postgraduate nursing education. Existing studies often focus on isolated competencies (e.g., research, leadership, clinical judgment) and fail to provide a comprehensive assessment of the broader skill set developed through these programs (Stadnicka et al. 2018; Kjellaas et al. 2020). This gap hampers effective evaluation and limits the feedback necessary for curriculum development and improvement.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to contribute to the comprehensive and multistakeholder evaluation of competencies acquired through postgraduate nursing education. By doing so, it seeks to identify the strengths and limitations of current programs and to offer a foundation for future policy and educational improvements.

2 | Materials and Methods

2.1 | Aim

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of graduates, nurse educators, and clinical nurses regarding the competencies gained through postgraduate nursing education.

2.2 | Research Question

What are the stakeholders' views on the competencies acquired through postgraduate nursing education?

2.3 | Research Design

A qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was employed to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders in postgraduate nursing education. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights from postgraduate nursing graduates, nurse educators, and clinical nurses. The phenomenological approach was chosen to deeply understand the essence and meaning of participants' experiences, which aligns with the study's aim (Creswell and Creswell 2017; Van Manen 2016).

Although phenomenological studies commonly employ methods such as those proposed by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), or Van Manen (1997), this study adopted thematic analysis. Although the methods suggested by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), or Van Manen (1997) are generally used in phenomenological studies, thematic analysis was adopted in this study. This method aligns with the study's multidimensional focus and allows comparisons across different participant groups, facilitating a comprehensive representation of competencies and experiences.

The integration of a phenomenological framework with thematic analysis was deliberately chosen to ensure rich and meaningful data while maintaining methodological rigor and clarity.

2.4 | Participants and Sampling

The study population consisted of graduates with postgraduate education in nursing in Türkiye, nurse educators conducting postgraduate education, and nurses working with graduates who have completed postgraduate education in nursing.

Although there is no established principle regarding sample size in qualitative research, data collection is considered complete when satisfactory data have been collected, no new information emerges, and the same data begin to repeat (Polit and Beck 2006). For this reason, maximum diversity and criterion sampling methods, both qualitative sampling techniques, were used to determine the study group. The aim of maximum diversity sampling is to increase the diversity in the interviewed group. In this context, participants were selected to meet the inclusion criteria and to increase diversity. Each nurse, nurse educator, and graduate (according to the participant) was

selected based on their different institutions, clinics, and areas of expertise, thus enriching the study. In criterion sampling, it is aimed to examine all situations that meet a set of predetermined criteria (Charmaz 2011, cited in Baltacı 2018). The participants in the study meet the specified inclusion criteria. As a result, the study was conducted with a total of 24 participants, including 8 graduates, 8 nurse educators, and 8 nurses.

Criteria for inclusion of graduates in the study

- At least a master's degree
- Postgraduate education in different nursing fields
- Working in the clinical field
- Working in different units in the clinical field
- Working in different tasks/positions in the clinical field
- Having different periods of professional experience

Criteria for inclusion of nurse educators in the study

- Conducting postgraduate education in different nursing fields
- Working in different nursing schools

Criteria for inclusion of nurses in the study

- Having worked/working with graduates with postgraduate education

2.5 | Data Collection Tools

Data were collected with Information Forms and Semistructured Interview Forms prepared separately for each participant group (graduates, nurse educators, and nurses).

2.5.1 | Information Forms

It was developed by the researchers separately for each participant group (graduate, nurse educator and nurse) in line with the literature. The forms included questions to determine the identifying characteristics of the participants (age, gender, education level, institution, experience) (Kavurmacı et al. 2021; Satır and Murat 2021).

2.5.2 | Semistructured Interview Forms

Interview forms were created by the researchers for each group in line with the literature. In the form created for the graduates, there are eight open-ended questions aiming to determine the opinions of the graduates of postgraduate education in nursing about the competencies that postgraduate education provides graduates, the effects/contributions of these competencies on individual and professional life, and the acquisition of these competencies (Oldland et al. 2023). In the nurse educator form, four open-ended questions were created to determine the views of nurse educators conducting postgraduate education in nursing on the competencies that postgraduate education provides to graduates, the effects/contributions of these competencies on individual and professional life, and the acquisition of these competencies (Creswell and Creswell 2017; MacNamara et al. 2010). Finally, four open-ended questions were prepared to determine the opinions of other nurses working with nurses with postgraduate education about the competencies that postgraduate education in nursing provides graduates, the contributions of these competencies to the field, and the acquisition of these competencies (Creswell and Creswell 2017; Satır and Murat 2021).

The questions in the Interview Forms were presented to the participants for their opinions in order to evaluate their suitability and comprehensibility to the purpose of the research and the theoretical framework; pilot application was made and finalized in line with the suggestions.

2.6 | Trustworthiness and Rigor

This study adopted the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A transparent approach was adopted throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, with every procedure related to the data analysis being recorded. In terms of credibility, interviews were conducted with a sufficient number of participants and for the required duration, ensuring diversity among the participants. For consistency, the findings were presented directly without interpretation. To ensure confirmability, the data was coded by two independent researchers. Consistency in data collection was ensured through the use of an interview form. Information about the research method was clearly presented, and transferability was ensured by quoting participants' statements.

2.7 | Data Collection

The data were collected between October 2023 and January 2024. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant in line with the questions in the Semistructured Interview Forms prepared for each participant group. Individual interviews were conducted online by determining the appropriate day and time with the participants. A Zoom link was sent to each participant during the interviews. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 min on average. In addition, the verbal consent of the participant was obtained before the interview, and the interview was recorded.

2.8 | Data Analysis

The data were coded and analyzed in MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis program. First, the audio recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed. Written interview data were transferred to MAXQDA 2022 program (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2019). An inductive approach was employed in analyzing the data transferred to the MAXQDA 2022 program. MAXQDA is a

qualitative data analysis software that enables researchers to code, interpret, and present findings through tables/figures, thereby facilitating evaluation and interpretation (Yakut Çayir and Saritaş 2017). In this study, interview audio recordings were transcribed by the researchers and uploaded to MAXQDA 2022 in a ready-to-analyze format. This version of the software does not include any artificial intelligence components. The data were analyzed and coded separately for each group. After all the coding was completed, subthemes related to the purpose of the research were created based on the responses of participants to the questions in the interview form in order to analyze and compare the meanings of the codes. Codes that were related to each other were grouped under themes and named accordingly. The research was reported following the COREQ checklist (Tong et al. 2007).

TABLE 1 | Descriptive characteristics of graduates ($n=8$).

Code	Institution	Age	Gender	Educational status
G1	UH	29	Female	Master's degree
G2	U	28	Female	Master's degree
G3	U	37	Female	PhD
G4	U	33	Female	Master's degree
G5	RTH	32	Female	Master's degree
G6	U	30	Female	Master's degree
G7	RTH	42	Female	PhD
G8	RTH	50	Female	Master's degree

Abbreviations: RTH, Training and Research Hospital; U, university; UH, University Hospital.

3 | Results

3.1 | Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic data of nurses with postgraduate education (Table 1), nursing faculty members (Table 2) and nurses working with graduates (Table 3).

Of the participants, 54.4% ($n=13$) were nurse educators, 29.4% ($n=7$) were bedside nurses, 8.3% ($n=3$) were education nurses, and 4.1% ($n=1$) were executive nurses; 87.5% ($n=21$) were female, and 12.5% ($n=3$) were male. The mean age was 40.04 ± 10.3 (min 28 max 58) and the mean duration of professional experience was 14.4 ± 8.6 (min 3 max 31) years.

TABLE 2 | Descriptive characteristics of nurse educator ($n=8$).

Code	Institution	Age	Gender	Title	Total working time as an academic	Postgraduate program	Years of experience in a postgraduate program
NE 1	SU	53	Female	Associate professor	17	Department of Public Health Nursing	8
NE 2	FU	40	Female	Doctor lecturer	6	Department of Public Health Nursing	3
NE 3	SU	43	Female	Doctor lecturer	4	Department of Nursing Education	4
NE 4	SU	51	Female	Associate professor	18	Department of Surgical Nursing	9
NE 5	FU	38	Female	Doctor lecturer	9	Department of Management in Nursing	4
NE 6	SU	51	Female	Associate professor	18	Department of Surgical Nursing	9
NE 7	SU	58	Female	Professor	28	Department Of Obstetric Health And Diseases Nursing	6
NE 8	FU	52	Female	Professor	28	Department of Fundamental Nursing	9

Abbreviations: FU, Foundation University; SU, State University.

3.2 | Themes and Subthemes Obtained From the Participants' Views on the Competencies Acquired by Graduate Education

Data obtained from the participants' views on the competencies gained by postgraduate education in nursing:

- Expected competencies from postgraduate education
- Competencies acquired through postgraduate education
- Suggestions for developing postgraduate education competencies (Figure 1).

3.2.1 | Expected Competencies From Postgraduate Education

The main theme of the competencies expected from postgraduate education was grouped under five subthemes (Figure 1).

3.2.1.1 | Knowledge and Skill Competency. Participants consider the theoretical knowledge and skills gained in postgraduate education as an important competence. Deep theoretical knowledge specific to the field and the ability to directly apply this knowledge in clinical settings are expected competencies.

TABLE 3 | Descriptive characteristics of nurses ($n = 8$).

Code	Institution	Age	Gender	Educational status	Unit/department	Total years of clinical experience
N 1	RTH	31	Male	Undergraduate	Intensive Care	15
N 2	SH	53	Male	Master's degree	Cardiology	31
N 3	RTH	39	Female	Undergraduate	Department of Nursing Management	15
N 4	RTH	39	Female	Master's degree	Department of Education	13
N 5	RTH	32	Male	Undergraduate	Thoracic Surgery	7
N 6	SH	36	Female	Undergraduate	Medical Oncology	8
N 7	UH	36	Female	Undergraduate	Intensive Care	8
N 8	UH	28	Female	Master's degree	Department of Education	5

Abbreviations: RTH, Research and Training Hospital; SH, State Hospital; UH, University Hospital.

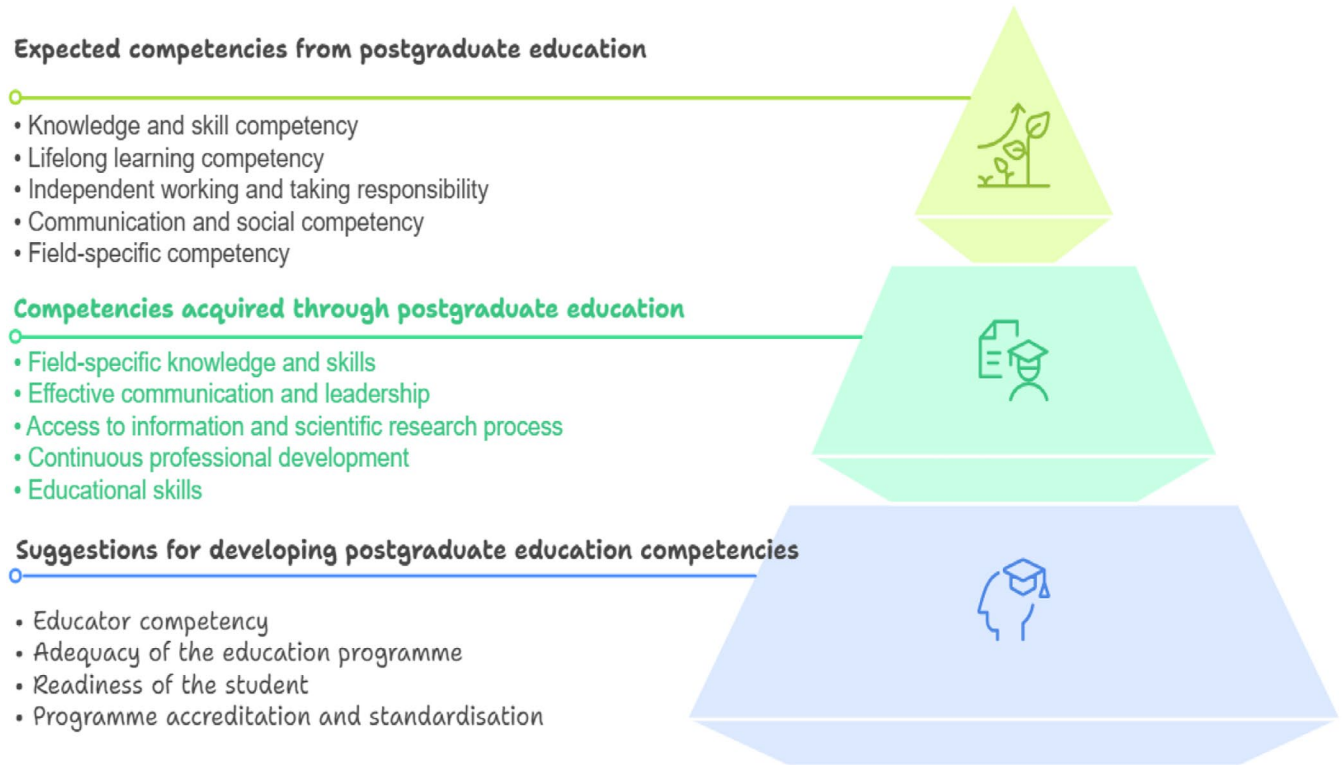

FIGURE 1 | Themes and subthemes obtained from the participants' views on the competencies.

> From the very beginning, we look at these nurses as students who want to specialise and deepen in their field. In other words, their personal characteristics also come to the fore; they are and should be hardworking idealists
>
> (NE6)

> He should be able to look at things differently, he should be able to transfer his theoretical knowledge to practice in the field, otherwise what is the point? (G3)

3.2.1.2 | Lifelong Learning Competency. Lifelong learning competence is seen as a critical competence for the personal and professional development of graduates. Participants state that graduates should follow current issues, attend courses, and develop more specific skills within their specialization. Especially considering the rapid changes in the field of health, it is emphasized that professional development should be continuously supported.

> We aim to educate our students as continuous learners who have the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy, finding and applying information, and we expect this from them.
>
> (NE3)

> Everything is changing, it is in constant change. Changes in medicine are also reflected on us. After all, changes in medicine should also be reflected in patient care. Therefore, we need to constantly renew ourselves and we need to master the clinics. (G8)

3.2.1.3 | Independent Working and Taking Responsibility. Graduate graduates are expected to have the ability to work independently, take initiative, and lead when necessary. These skills are considered to play an important role, especially in management and academic careers. It was stated that they should be able to carry out a job requiring expertise independently, develop new strategic approaches to solve complex problems, and produce solutions by taking responsibility.

> She fulfils her duties and responsibilities within the team and I definitely think that a graduate nurse will work more actively in terms of work sharing. (G4)

> We want to be able to cooperate, to identify problems, to see care needs and to intervene in line with these needs, to intervene in a crisis, we want to have these skills.
>
> (NE7)

3.2.1.4 | Communication and Social Competency. In the subtheme of communication and social competence, the participants used expressions related to being able to effectively transfer specialized knowledge and skills, develop, interact, communicate orally and in writing using a foreign language, and use information and communication technologies effectively.

> During these patient admissions, nurses are one of the people that patients deal with the most, and it would be very good if these nurses speak a foreign language. (N2)

> In clinics, patients are with nurses for the first time and throughout the process, and as a nurse with a postgraduate education, I think we should be able to communicate with them more effectively. (G5)

3.2.1.5 | Field-Specific Competency. In the subtheme of field-specific competencies, the participants used expressions related to being a role model, observing professional and ethical values, being able to develop strategies and policies on issues related to their field, and being able to use the knowledge, problem solving, and/or application skills they have assimilated in their field in interdisciplinary studies.

> I think that they should not be the ones who do what they are told, but the ones who make decisions and can do it at certain standards. They should make a difference, they should be able to look holistically, see the problem and produce solutions. I would like to see this, frankly (G4)

> I should know better, be able to apply what I know, and be able to recognize his scientific knowledge from his practices, otherwise what is the point of this education? (N4)

3.2.2 | Competencies Acquired Through Postgraduate Education

The main theme of the competencies that the participants think that postgraduate education provides is grouped under five subthemes (Figure 1).

3.2.2.1 | Field-Specific Knowledge and Skills. In the subtheme of field-specific knowledge and skills, participants stated that graduates generally provide more effective and patient-oriented care in clinical settings, and that nurses with specialized education can quickly identify problems and produce solutions in situations requiring critical care. These nurses make important contributions to health institutions by improving their clinical skills and patient management.

> As a result, I think that they are better equipped for the profession and have deeper theoretical and practical skills related to their field.
>
> (NE3)

> I think that nurses with postgraduate education work more patient-oriented. (N5)

> I saw how I developed. So, in terms of skills, first of all, having a master's degree increases one's self-confidence. You know, you are aware of what you are doing and why, you can question these are important skills in our job. (G6)

It is stated that graduates have in-depth theoretical knowledge and specific field skills, especially in their fields of specialization, and that they have the capacity to make a difference in the sector with this deep knowledge. These competencies enable graduates to be recognized as experts in their fields.

> In master's degree, they have the capacity to become experts in this way. They are equipped with theoretical knowledge in the field of expertise. We can clearly observe this in patient care and practices. (N3)

3.2.2.2 | Effective Communication and Leadership. In the subtheme of effective communication and leadership, it is seen that the ability to communicate effectively and make autonomous decisions is vital for professionals working in the field of health. Leadership skills are recognized as a part of both individual and team-based effective working and professional development. The ability of nurses to assume the leadership role in teamwork and provide effective coordination plays a critical role in improving the quality of health services.

> I realised that we can show leadership qualities when necessary. I can lead that group because I have knowledge about this subject and I can lead because I have received that information and I can foresee it. (G2)

> Some of the graduated students actually worked as responsible nurses in management and clinics. They were there as role models or to display their leadership qualities and they were successful. (NE1)

> They can improve themselves in areas such as leadership, teamwork, co-operation and communication and solve the problems they face more easily. (NE2)

3.2.2.3 | Access to Information and Scientific Research Skills. In the subtheme of scientific research skills, most of the participants emphasize the importance of postgraduate graduates to have research skills and scientific thinking ability. In particular, they state that developing research competence is the basis for transferring evidence-based practices to the field and providing high-quality care.

> ...Research ideas are constantly spinning in my head. For example, this happened after the master's degree. I realised that I could look at things from different perspectives. (G1)

> What I lacked was the ability to do research, to look at a subject academically. It had many advantages such as how to access the right information. Professionally, it has been a serious guide in terms of accessing information and finding ways to get support when I cannot access it. (G4)

3.2.2.4 | Continuous Professional Development. In the continuous professional development subtheme, the importance of continuous professional development for postgraduates is emphasized. Participants stated that graduates should follow current issues, attend courses, and develop more specific skills within their areas of specialization. Especially considering the rapid changes in the field of health, it is emphasized that professional development should be continuously supported.

> Everything is changing, it is in constant change. Changes in medicine are also reflected on us. After all, changes in medicine are reflected in patient care. Therefore, we need to constantly renew ourselves and we need to have a good command of the clinics. (G8)

> Of course. I can definitely say that I am not the nurse I used to be. (G3)

> At the point of lifelong learning, I think that the more you start to know, the more you realise how much you don't know. (NE2)

3.2.2.5 | Educational Skills. In the subtheme of educational skills, the participants state that graduates' ability to use effective teaching methods and tools and active learning methods has improved in terms of education and training skills. Thanks to these skills, they emphasize that they are more successful in their roles as educators and are effective in transferring knowledge.

> For example, I saw a friend explaining information to the patient before each procedure, before discharge, in a more scientific way and in a way that the patient could understand, and I liked it very much. They deal with student nurses in the same way. (N6)

3.2.3 | Suggestions for Developing Postgraduate Education Competencies

The suggestions of the participants regarding the acquisition of competencies in postgraduate education were grouped under four subthemes (Figure 1).

3.2.3.1 | Educator Competency. The participants stated that it is important that the educators should be experienced in their field and have up-to-date knowledge, and that it is also

important that they are equipped with professional experience and skills.

> Maybe educators should not be so far away from the field of practice. Also, I think the educators need to go to the clinics a little more. Faculty members definitely need to attend clinics in postgraduate education. (G4)

> Even educators do not have a good command of foreign languages. I think there should be a threshold. He should at least have a good command of English. Follow the publications, attend congresses abroad. (NE4)

3.2.3.2 | Adequacy of the Education Program. In this subtheme, the participants emphasized that the theoretical and practical dimensions of graduate education programs should be improved, rich teaching methods and technology should be used, and course contents should be developed. In particular, it is suggested to cooperate with clinical settings and integrate real-world experiences into the education process. It is thought that this will help students develop their professional skills directly.

> Too much theoretical knowledge is loaded, we have neither time nor energy for practice, I think this is wrong. We focus on the thesis after the lectures anyway. (G4)

> It would be good to take students in education programmes and organise some activities, symposiums, events in hospitals to ensure such an interaction of both education, field and academia. (G1)

> Developments, especially practices abroad, should be followed and course contents can be updated accordingly. I think it would be better if we can be encouraged to do research while we are still students. (G3)

3.2.3.3 | Readiness of the Student. In this subtheme, the participants stated that nurses should have certain competencies when starting postgraduate education. It was stated that professional experience in the field and foreign language knowledge would make graduate education more effective.

> For example, students should not start postgraduate education immediately after finishing their undergraduate education. They do not know the field and everything is up in the air. There should be prerequisites, postgraduate education should not start without a certain period of experience. (NE2)

3.2.3.4 | Program Accreditation and Standardization. In the subtheme of program accreditation and standardization, participants emphasized the importance of standardizing graduate education programs and strengthening accreditation efforts. Accreditation processes are considered to be of critical importance in ensuring that educational standards are consistent and of high quality at the national and international levels.

> First of all, whichever major discipline you are working in, or whichever major discipline you are doing your master's or doctorate in, the criteria of that major discipline must be met within the framework of competence, especially the criteria of professional organisations, international organisations, etc. (NE8).

> Actually, this is to ensure standardisation. In other words, not to develop different training programmes, but to develop training programmes with the same standard and the same competence. (G6)

4 | Discussion

In the research conducted to determine the competencies gained by postgraduate education in nursing with stakeholder participation, important results regarding the competencies expected from postgraduate education in nursing, the competencies gained, and suggestions for improvements were presented.

4.1 | Competencies Expected and Acquired to Be Gained by Postgraduate Education

When the participants' opinions regarding the competencies expected from postgraduate education in nursing were examined, it was emphasized that lifelong learning, independent decision-making, taking responsibility, communication, and cooperation are important for both current and future nurses, in addition to basic professional knowledge and skills competence. This finding aligns with other studies on the seventh and eighth level postgraduate education outcomes of the National Qualifications Framework (Council of Higher Education 2010) and the expectations for postgraduate education. Bozkurt et al. (2022) found that specialization and career in nursing were among the expectations (Bozkurt et al. 2022). Kjellaas et al. (2020) stated that the expectations of nurses from postgraduate education are to maximize the quality of nursing by providing more professional and holistic care to patients (Kjellaas et al. 2020). Aydın (2019) stated that the expectations of nurses from postgraduate education are to provide individual and professional development and to make a career (Aydın 2019). Wangensteen et al. (2018) stated that nurses turn to graduate education for scientific leadership and more professional care (Wangensteen et al. 2018). The common views shared by graduates, nurse educators, and nurses working in clinical settings regarding the competencies expected from specialist nurses, both globally and nationally,

indicate that key stakeholders in nursing education will guide not only undergraduate but also future studies on postgraduate education in nursing.

The fact that graduates of postgraduate education in nursing acquire competencies such as field-specific knowledge and skills, effective communication and leadership, access to information, and engagement in the scientific research process, continuous professional development, and educational skill competencies is considered as a satisfactory result showing that the objectives of the postgraduate program have been achieved. Kjellaas et al. (2020) stated that nurses who received postgraduate education "apply more professional patient care"; Aydın (2019) stated that nurses who received postgraduate education gained professionalism features such as reflecting the expertise knowledge-skills to the clinical field, increasing the existing knowledge-skill accumulation, gaining critical thinking skills, being more self-confident, evidence-based care, increasing the tendency to conduct research; Shattoet al. (2019) stated that nurses who graduated from postgraduate education increased their independence and self-confidence in the clinic and that education contributed to the development of leadership skills; Chari (2017) stated that postgraduate education improved nurses' leadership skills and supported their communication and problem-solving skills; Grønvik et al. (2018) stated that nurses after postgraduate education have a more positive attitude towards using evidence-based approach in their studies; Wong et al. (2017) stated that master's graduate nurses perform at the highest level in clinical practice and are involved in complex care delivery and management processes. Shatto et al. (2019) found that nurses with a master's degree are better than other nurses in critical and analytical thinking.

In a study conducted with graduate students and graduates, it was shown that the participants were not fully trained to have innovative practical skills and therefore only passively participated in innovative practices. They mostly chose to work in basic nursing jobs; they could not apply any innovative practical skills developed during their postgraduate education due to heavy workload (Wang et al. 2023). Similarly, the majority of MNS nurses did not apply their scientific research capacities at work, and their scientific research skills gradually decreased with the increase in working years (Li et al. 2019).

However, the journey to gain competency and assume advanced practice roles can be challenging. These results, which align with studies in the literature, suggest that the achievement of graduate program objectives should be continuously monitored, and additional studies should be conducted for objectives that are not fully achieved, since graduate education has important results reflected in many areas such as the graduate, health care service, colleagues, and educators.

In general, evaluating the expected and acquired competencies reveals common emphases. The presence of these common emphases is considered positive in terms of national and international competencies and is thought to be satisfactory. The strong overlap between expected and acquired competencies indicates that the education programs have achieved their determined goals and have contributed to nurses becoming more competent in their clinical, managerial, and academic roles.

4.2 | Suggestions for Developing Postgraduate Education Competencies

In the research, when the competencies expected and gained from graduate education were evaluated as hopes and realities, it also brought important suggestions. In addition to the importance of the programs, difficulties and challenges experienced, suggestions such as educator competence, adequacy of the education program, student readiness, and program accreditation and standardization have come to the fore based on experiences. Nurse educators have great responsibility in gaining the targeted competencies from postgraduate nursing education. In this context, the appropriate preparation of nurse educators is critical for the development of nurses' knowledge, skills, and attitudes (World Health Organization 2016). In our study, the competence of the faculty member is parallel to the findings of similar studies such as the faculty member's approach and experience (Aydın 2019). All these findings suggest that the numbers of nurse educators are insufficient and therefore the workload is high, and the number of nurse educators should be re-evaluated. Situations such as the lack of competence and numerical inadequacy of nurse educators, which are perceived as a global crisis, also significantly affect postgraduate education. In this context, it is seen as an area that requires investment in many international and national reports (World Health Organization 2016; Hemşirelik Eğitim Programları Değerlendirme ve Akreditasyon Derneği 2024).

Massimi et al. (2017) stated that postgraduate education curricula in Italy are different from clinical experiences, graduates cannot show the desired progress in leadership roles, and suggested that the curriculum should be developed to focus more on clinical skills and further policies should be developed for the employment of graduates. Kesten et al. (2021), Aydın (2019), Şendir et al. (2018) stated that due to the lack of accreditation of postgraduate education in nursing, education programs have different characteristics from each other and graduates have different competencies at different levels. Other problems experienced in postgraduate nursing education are the lack of a clear job description for nurses receiving postgraduate education and therefore not being able to work in the field of education, not being given expert staff and managers not being aware of the potential of these nurses (Aydın 2019; Kjellaas et al. 2020), nurses not being employed in the field of expertise, not finding the opportunity to transfer their theoretical knowledge to practice (Casey et al. 2017), the expectations of the academy and the field do not overlap and that managers do not support the use of education (Kjellaas et al. 2020), the view that it does not contribute to the advancement of their careers, the research process is not given importance (Aydın 2019), the clinical experience of nurse educators is insufficient (Şendir et al. 2018), and the solution suggestions for these problems are stated as nurse educators having clinical experience (Aydın 2019), and career opportunities and job descriptions are clearly determined (Kjellaas et al. 2020). These problems and solution suggestions, both in the research and in the literature, are of serious importance when the future of nursing and nursing education, predicted and unpredictable paradigms/factors are considered.

As stated in the conceptual framework, in addition to the importance of postgraduate education in nursing, evaluating the

current situation from the perspective of stakeholders and providing different perspectives on competencies is valuable for planning future steps.

5 | Conclusion

As a result, the research conducted to determine the competencies gained in postgraduate education in nursing with stakeholder participation reveals the visibility of today's situation and contains important steps for the future.

Stakeholders bear significant responsibility in achieving the objectives of graduate programs, enhancing their quality, and ensuring that students gain the expected competencies. This study, which contributes to the visibility of the strengths and weaknesses of postgraduate education in nursing, grouped the competencies expected and gained through postgraduate education, along with suggestions, under 3 main themes and 14 subthemes. However, important topics such as educator competence/competence, curriculum content, student readiness, program accreditation, and standardization stand out in the problems and suggestions in graduate education. The data obtained from the opinions of graduates, nurse educators, and nurses about the competencies gained by postgraduate education in nursing in order to reinforce and sustain the strengths and strengthen the weaknesses. In line with these results,

- Continuous improvement of graduate education curricula in nursing
- Continuous and systematic gathering of stakeholder views on graduate education curricula
- Supporting the continuous development of nurse educators who play an active role in graduate education
- Developing policies and strategies for graduate education programs in nursing at national and international levels

6 | Relevance of Clinical Practice

Graduate education in nursing enhances the quality of healthcare services by contributing to the professional development of graduates, improving their individual and professional competencies.

7 | Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Strengths

- The diversity of participants and the inclusion of different stakeholders added richness to the research, providing a multidimensional and holistic perspective
- Interviews provided in-depth results

Limitations of the Study

- Limited to the self-reports of participants participating in qualitative interviews.

Author Contributions

Emine Şenyuva: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, project administration, supervision, writing – review and editing. **Ümran Görügen:** conceptualization, methodology, investigation, project administration, supervision, writing – review and editing. **Nazik Yalniz:** conceptualization, data curation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, visualization, resources, roles/writing – original draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethics Statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethics Committee permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of a Istanbul Topkapi University Ethics Committee (Date: 15.12.2023, Number: E-49846378-302.14.1-2 300 015 306).

Consent

Verbal consent was obtained from the participants before the individual interview, indicating that they agreed to participate in the study and to record the interviews.

Considering that it would be appropriate to keep the participants' identity information confidential, quotations from the graduates were indicated as G1, G2, quotations from nurse faculty members as NE1, NE2, and quotations from nurses as N1, N2, and so on, in parentheses.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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