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Students' Perception on taught Theories and Clinical Practice in Nursing Education Training

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Résumé: La théorie et la pratique sont deux composantes importantes de la formation infirmière. Lorsque les connaissances acquises en théorie se transforment en pratique, un apprentissage efficace se fait dans l'enseignement infirmier. Cependant, la recherché montre qu'il existe un fossé entre la théorie et la pratique. Cette étude a été menée pour savoir s'il existe un lien entre les théories enseignées en classe et la pratique de la profession infirmière. La conception qualitative phénoménologique et les entretiens semi-structurés individuels en face à face ont été utilisés pour collecter les données dans cette étude.

Quatre thèmes principaux ont été déterminés dans l'étude: "Enseignement infirmier, écart entre théorie-pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier s'il y en a, raisons de l'écart entre théorie-pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier et suggestions pour combler le fossé entre théorie-pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier ". Douze étudiants sur seize, soit soixante-quinze pour cent, ont expliqué qu'il n'y avait pas d'équilibre entre la théorie et la pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier. Ce déséquilibre explique la notion d'écart entre théorie et pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier. Les étudiants ont montré la complexité l'environnement d'enseignement théorique par rapport à l'environnement d'apprentissage clinique. En effet, ces environnements ont un impact sur l'expérience d'apprentissage des étudiants en sciences infirmières. Pour combler cet écart, nombreux étudiants ont suggéré l'équilibre entre la théorie et la pratique, en les soutenant davantage l'enseignement clinique, et l'opportunité de résoudre le problème de la barrière de langue entre les étudiants, les professeurs de théorie et les professeurs de clinique. À la suite de cette étude, du fossé entre la théorie et la pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier, la conception qualitative utilisée dans ce document a fourni des données nouvelles et riches sur la qualité de l'éducation, les raisons et la solution concernant les lacunes de la théorie et de la pratique dans l'enseignement infirmier à l'Université du Proche-Orient dans le Nord Chypre. Les résultats de cette étude contribueraient à la révision du programme de formation en sciences infirmières de cette université. Il s'agit de la première étude dans la

République de Chypre du Nord portant sur l'écart entre la théorie et la pratique.

Abstract:

Theory and practice are two important components of nursing education. When knowledge acquired in theory translates into practice, effective learning takes place in nursing education. However, research shows that there is a gap between theory and practice. This study was conducted to find out if there is a connection between theories taught in the classroom and the practice of nursing. Qualitative phenomenological design and one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data in this study.

Four main themes were identified in the study: "Nursing education, theory-practice gap in nursing education if any, reasons for the theory-practice gap in nursing education and suggestions for bridging the theory-practice gap in nursing education ". Twelve out of sixteen students, or seventy-five percent, explained that there was no balance between theory and practice in nursing education. This imbalance explains the notion of a gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Students showed the complexity of the theoretical teaching environment compared to the clinical learning environment. Indeed, these environments have an impact on the learning experience of nursing students. To bridge this gap, many students suggested balancing theory and practice, supporting them more with clinical teaching, and the desirability of solving the language barrier issue between students, theory teachers and others clinical professors. As a result of this study on the gap between theory and practice in nursing education, the qualitative design used in this paper provided new and rich data on the quality of education, the reasons and the solution regarding the Gaps in theory and practice in nursing education at the University of the Near East in North Cyprus. The results of this study would contribute to the revision of the nursing education program of this university. This is the first study in the Republic of Northern Cyprus to examine the gap between theory and practice.

1. Introduction

Clinical learning is a key area that explains the importance of the performance of nursing students in the clinical setting, and provides the students an avenue to practice their skills, develop their professional identity, increase their knowledge and apply the theoretical and practical knowledge in the clinical setting[1].Globally, according to Shahin and Tork[2], the goal of nursing education is to provide professional clinical competency/skills and improve the delivery of safe and quality nursing care. To achieve this level of competency, the nursing student must acquire solid knowledge in a wide variety of subject areas and training that requires both a high level of theoretical and practical knowledge, as the classroom and practices are important[2]. Clinical setting increases the quality of health care.

According to Saifan *et al.*[3], nursing education consists of two main parts: the theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part reflects the knowledge passed on in-class giving students the opportunity to build a range of powerful examples drawn from the experience. The practical part focuses on improving skills in the clinical field and prepares nursing students to be able to "Do" as "Knowing" clinical principles in practice and encouraging students to use their

critical thinking skills to solve problems. This can only be achieved by ensuring that nursing students apply what they have learned in the classroom and in the laboratory to real life situations.

Nevertheless, an increasing rift between nursing theory and nursing practice has been presented by numerous studies over the years [4-6]. The literature shows that there is a gap between the theoretical and practical components of nursing education [3-9], and is apparently the most critical issue in nursing education.

The existence of Theory-Practice Gap (TPG) revolves around the inadequacies of the system; resource constraints; the challenges of the clinical learning environment; clinical placement and supervision and nurse factors [7]. On the other hand, Aththiligoda *et al*.[10]noted that lack of knowledge and skills, insufficient equipment, lack of time to perform, procedures, inadequate clinical supervision, and poor supervisory relationships are factors leading to gaps between nursing education theory and practice. The gap between theory and practice may be disappointing for nursing students. Therefore, nursing education significantly requires an integration of theory and practice. This combination is more important in nursing education because, understanding the theory behind the practice allows students to connect and develop their knowledge to react to unforeseen situations and achieve better results for patients [11].

To better understand how nursing educators could facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge into practice or to minimize the gap between theory and practice, it is important to assess the current state of knowledge on this gap. In line with the above-mentioned

knowledge, no study was conducted on the subject in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The aim of this study is to obtain the perception of students on a possible gap between theoretical and clinical education.

The results of this study will help faculty and university administrators to understand the errors and weaknesses in their education system. In addition, this study would provide solutions and recommendations that could be useful to decision makers while making improvements to the nursing curriculum. From a practical point of view, the idea is that understanding this topic would provide the foundation for new approaches; measures and policies that can help nursing educators fill these gaps more effectively. The data will contribute to the evaluation of the educational program of nurses.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1. Study design
This research has descriptive phenomenological method. Phenomenology focuses on the meaning of the experiences lived by man and the way individuals interpret their world in their given context [12]is the case of the perception of nursing students in the gap between theory and perceived practice during their course education. This study concerns the field of education, especially nursing education.

2.2. Population and sample/participants
As part of this study, the population includes second, third and fourth year students from Nursing Faculty at Near East University for the 2018-2019 academic year. Quantitatively, it was estimated at 200 students.

The sampling technique called purposive sampling was used. The number of participants

required to reach the sample size depended on the saturation. Polit and Beck[12]consider data saturation as one of the guiding principles of sampling for qualitative research. The saturation of the sample is reached when no new data is obtained. If participants are good informants who are able to reflect on their experiences and communicate effectively, saturate can be achieved with a relatively small sample[12].

As the sample size was not prior determined. Students were invited to the school and informed about the nature of the research. Among them, sixteen student volunteers were recruited into the study to collect data and consent forms were provided to these volunteers. However, it was up to them to express, from their own experiences, possible gap between theory and practice in their education.

2.3. Data collection
Individual, semi-structured in-depth interview was used as the method to collect data for this research. According to Bryman[13], semi-structured in-depth interview allows participants to describe their lives and experiences in their own words, to 'tell it like it is'.
Data collection occurred through a guided process. Interviews were conducted in a quiet meeting room and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim[14].

Two data collection tools were prepared: First tools included the issue of socio-demographic (i.e.: Country, Class, Gender and Age) and second included semi-structured questionnaire form on learning, theory, practice and gaps between theory and practice in nursing education. Semi-structured questions form was prepared according to the opinions of several

authors who have written on the existence of a gap between theory-practice in nursing education and the sub-questions of stimuli according to individual experiences of the participants.

This method, according to Palmquist[15], accounts for conflicting comments and unresolved issues regarding the meanings and application of concepts and procedures. After the form was prepared, expert opinion were obtained from five faculty members specialized in nursing education. Nursing faculty Dean granted permission for data collection.

Prior to this research, pilot interviews were conducted to familiarize and interact with the volunteers. The researcher and volunteers needed to feel comfortable before starting the interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, each participant received an explanation of the purpose of the study and the method that is going to be used to collect data. Interviews lasted at least 40 minutes including a short briefing prior to the interview and preparation. All discussions were conducted in English, recorded on a tape and then copied to a master computer accessible only to the research team. The study was conducted from July to middle August 2019 based on a semi-structured questionnaire.

2.4. Data/Findings-handling
Sixteen volunteers' data collection book were analyzed using a conventional content analysis that, according to Hsieh and Shanon[16], allows subtheme and group themes to generate only data. The analysis of recorded content that began in the early stages of data collection includes open coding, creating categories and sub-themes that emerge as the main theme of the study. Open coding is the reading of the audio tapes of the data of the interviewees

translated verbatim, and the transcripts listened to and read respectively several times to allow an immersion and an appreciation of all the data (Verbatim).

The transcripts were then read word by word and notes composed of words or sentences of the text representing the underlying thoughts or concepts. The researcher makes a decision on how to categorize data after-interpreting the elements that sound similar. Categories with similar events and incidents were grouped into subtopics. This approach was continued until the appearance of a global label for a sub-theme representing all initial concepts or thoughts.

All data in a subtopic have been reviewed to ensure a match between the data and the subtopic. The sub-themes were then grouped into group themes, then into emerging themes with the researcher's agreement. An examination of the analytical process was performed by comparing codes and transcripts to improve reliability.

2.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations that were taken into account included the right to self-determination, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and fair treatment. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from eleven members of the Ethics Committee and approved by the Dean of Near East University, which served as an ethics approval body at the period that the study was conducted (Ethics Committee Approval Number:927-2019). Participation was voluntary and each participant signed an informed consent before participation in the study.

3. Results

The findings of this study should provide a better understanding of nursing education in

Cyprus. This study focused on students' perceptions of a possible gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Student statements were collected and integrated into four main themes and each of these themes emerged from these sub-themes.

These data are presented in two sections, the first of which is the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents and the second corresponds to the themes and sub-themes selected for this study.

3.1. Profiles of participants

This section presents the data pertaining to the socio-demographic parameters of the students who participated in this study. Four parameters were selected: Country, class, gender and ages. The survey profiles of this study show that the participants were from different African countries, including Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Of these, Nigerians were the majority with forty-four percent followed by Zimbabweans with thirty-one percent, Tanzanians thirteen percent, Cameroonians and South Africans with six percent each. Fourth grade students were highly represented with fifty percent, followed by third-grade with thirty-one percent, and those in the second-grade were minority with nineteen percent. The females dominated the males at seventy-five to twenty-five percent and their ages ranged from 19-42 years, of which the age of 22 was the majority with twenty-five percent.

3.2. Themes related to Theory-Practice Gap in nursing education

The data collected from respondents come from their experience of life on Theory-Practice Gap, which is the subject of these investigations. Supported textually, the thematic analysis of the

data highlighted 4 themes followed by 14 sub-themes.

Four main themes were identified in the study. The first main theme is Nursing Education. Sub-themes of nursing education the Balance between Theory and Practice, which is the Retention of Learning, Interaction between Theory and Practice, Experience and Nursing Image of the Students were determined. The second main theme is Theory-Practice Gap in Nursing Education. The sub-themes retained in Theory-Practice Gap are: Gap Impact on the Students 'Learning Experience and Students' Fears in this Gap.

Main-themes and Sub-themes

The third main theme concerns the Reasons for the Theory-Practice Gap in Nursing Education. These reasons were determined by a Clinical Environment characterized by Hospital Conditions, Patient Conditions and Lack of Confidence between nurses and students, as well as patients and students; Academic Environment that determines the laboratory education problems, the lecturers stuff missing and student selflessness for his learning; and Communication problem was determined as a language barrier. Finally, the Fourth main Theme is Suggestion to Close Theory-Practice Gap. These suggestions are as follows: Education should be balanced between Theory and Practice, Students Need to be More Supported, Solve the Problem of the Language Barrier, Prepare and Improve the Education Laboratory.

1. Main Themes:
Nursing Education
The students said that theory is what they learn in class and practice is what they experience when they go to the hospital to express what

they have learned in class. They said that theory and practice should be combined to have a good result. They supported the importance of practice in nursing education because theory helped them learn to practice. According to them, the students must have a solid theoretical knowledge to better practice nursing. In addition, they said that the theory learned in the classroom should be accompanied by demonstrations on mannequins in the clinical lab by the same theory teachers before going to the clinical setting. The statements of these students emerge from the following sub-themes:

Balance, Interaction, Experience and Nursing image of student.

Themes		Sub-themes	
1.	Nursing Education	**a.**	Balance
		b.	Interaction
		c.	Experience, practice
		d.	Nursing image of student
2.	Theory-Practice Gap in Nursing Education	**a.**	Gap impact
		b.	Fears of students in the theory practice gap
3.	Reasons for Theory Practice Gap	**a.**	Academic environment
		b.	Clinic environment
		c.	Negligence
		d.	Language barrier
4.	Suggestions to Close Theory Practice Gap	**a.**	Balance
		b.	More support
		c.	Preparing laboratories
		d.	Solve language barrier

a. Balance

Although the literature on nursing education shows the need to maintain a balanced approach between nursing education theory and practice in order to have a good nurse capable of caring for patients, Nursing Education should try to make it 50/50 theory with practice is merged together education [3-5,7, 8, 17], students statements on this balance are somewhat different. Some students or eighty-two percent said that in their education there is more theory than practice.

"Usually we do more theory than practice and what we do in theory is not as profiled …… I feel it should be profiled as it should be for nursing."

"Ok, I am having more theory than practice, so I think there is a gap"

"I notice some differences, but many things here in Cyprus is just the theory, no more time for practice; because theory….."

"I realized that in my second year and I noticed we do not really go for practice like the theory—they always give us more of the theory than practical."

"Yes, there is gap. We have more theories…….."

"Yes, in theory and practice at Near East University, we have gap between them. Actually the theoretical part is more than the practical."

"Of course, there is a difference. Umm what I can say is that sometimes what we learn in class is not what we observe in practice."

b. Interaction

In Nursing Education, a reciprocal influence between theory and practice is required. This influence should also exist between educators, students and patients in clinical settings. In this study, sixty-six students state that they have noted the lack of interaction between theory and practice, as well as the lack of accessibility to patients and lack of interaction with the patients and their lecturers.

"… lack of accessibility to patients due to the language we speak, which is different from theirs, make them not feel confident to us..."

"My experience is that the gap is mainly wide because of lack of accessibility to patient and lack of interaction as much as possible and, but right now the Gap I can see that there is that missing like the stuff missing in between which we learnt in class but we can't see them in the hospital."

c. Experience, practice

In Nursing Education, the lecturers own knowledge or mastery of theoretical and practical subjects. This knowledge will enable them to learn students well. Students who do not receive a good learning will be less effective in the practice of his profession. In this study, the students talked about some experiences for their training.

The majority of students or seventy nine percent said that teachers do not give them all in reality and often some things are missing. Therefore other students said that they lack information and experience. Such a situation, according to the students, will make them lazy. One percent said that what they see the teachers doing they too can do it better if teachers do it right.

"I would say that the key for the education for nursing students is a practice; because if you are not practicing every time, you will be lazy and you will not have more information about your patient."

"….you need to do it, because it is what you see teachers do that you can do better."

"when teachers properly demonstrated practical lesson, I will myself property internship"

d. Nursing image of student

Nursing students must develop their skills by drawing on the different aspects of their education (theoretical and practical aspects) to enable the integration of knowledge that can be mobilized in a professional situation. For this reason, students can relate their image to everything they learned. In this study, all students shared different perspectives on their education at Near East University. Twenty two percent have a positive image, saying that they have not noticed a discrepancy between theory and practice and have not made a big difference between theory and practice, because the two aspects of education go together and complete. According to them, they have the opportunity to practice at the hospital. They also say that they have learned a lot from the nurses and these nurses are experienced.

"Hummmm, there is no really much difference."

"To me, the theory studied in class doesn't deviate at all from practice I realized internship."
"Well, like I said, the gap is no really much referring to where I did practice. It has no really affected me though there is much language barrier."

"Mmm, the gap is no much. It is just little. The only thing is that the staff nurses maybe in the hospital need to update themselves because in the theoretical aspect they teach us the current nursing research…… the current nursing care. But when we get to the hospital it is like they are still using the old nursing care. So the gap is no that too much, they just need to update themselves."

"…So, from what I have seen and practice in the hospital, there is no really much gap between theory and practice!"

On the other hand, seventy eight percent of students gave a negative image by saying that the nurses did not allow them to interact with the patients or administer the care; they remained standing by observing what the nurses were doing. So, some students talked about their discomfort, that they will not be good nurses and unable to solve the patients' problems.

"The impact I have is sometime a lot of times I do feel like I am not doing enough or I am not doing what I am adequately meant to do in terms of like what I am supposed to know and learn from the practice I don't."

"I believe that, while we have been thought as student, we should be able to practice. But sometimes they might not allow us to interact with patients or administer care to patients …"

Theory-Practice Gap in Nursing Education

In this study, eighty-eight percent of students surveyed felt that there was a gap between theory and practice in nursing education at the University of the Near East, because the theoretical aspect is much more taught than the convenient aspect. According to these students, the theoretical aspect and the representation of nursing care provided in the classroom do not correspond perfectly to the nursing practice at the hospital. The theory studied in class gives only a mean or ideal vision and does not highlight the uniqueness of the real needs of each patient. This justifies the existence of a gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Thus, sixty-three percent of students say that this gap has an impact on the learning

experience of students and other students say they are afraid of the gap between theory and practice in nursing education. The student statements emerge from the following sub-themes:

a. Gap impact on the students' learning experience

The answers of the students are divergent on this point of view. For certain (i.e. nineteen percent) the impact is positive and for the others (i.e. eighty-one percent) the impact is negative. However, other students have responded that the gap between theory and practice in nursing education has no impact because the understanding of some knowledge can be progressive.

"Well, as for me, it did not have much impact because I will later get to know it better. Those things I did not know in the first year, at least I used other materials to know it."

"I do not really have bad impact or not. But I have a good impact, because right now I theoretically learnt a lot. Practically I am still trying because you live alone, but it has been absolutely good."

"There will be nurses without experience…. With little experience. This is very dangerous I can say! Yes…., because there will be nurses with no experience……. So there will be poor quality of nursing care."

"It has a lot of implications: 1°) the gap in theory and practice makes some nurses to be lazy; 2°) it makes them to forget what they were taught in school. 3°) it reduces the interpersonal relationship between the patient and the nurse, because the way we were taught interpersonal relationship is not the way they are doing it in the hospital, just to be sincere with ourselves. So it has lot implications."

Also, students show that the gap exists in nursing education and this triggers trajectories of change of competence of students who do not have the same effectiveness.

"The gap Hmmm…, actually the negative impact is like since Hmmmm…, due to the language barrier and all this, because when you get to the hospital (like NEU Hospital), there is language barrier. Sometimes the nurses want to show us something but due to the language barrier they can't give us that much education."

"But the thing is when I start working in hospital set up, and I have theoretical basis and my first experience as a nurse now in practice it wasn't so good. I feel to do some of the thing that I thought I knew so that one will lead me to decreased connivance and definitely it will give negative impact on my work as a nurse."

b. Fears of students in the theory practice gap

Obstacles in nursing education are frightening that the student can see when he is in education or even when he is practicing his profession. The gap between theory and practice in nursing education is a major obstacle, as some students have pointed out. The majority of students said that the gap scares them for different reasons: their education was not adequate, they risk to be a nurse that they did not want to be, they could be deficient in their knowledge, individuals will not be confident of them and the fear of making mistakes like curse a patient

"My main fear is fear of not being adequate or fear of not knowing what I am meant to know same way as other people."

"My big fear is to be a nurse that I don't want to be. Because, I like the profession of nurse so much, but the way maybe we are learning will make me be a nurse I don't want to be. I want to be a professional nurse or someone who can be good at doing something, at taking care of the patients; but sometimes because of language barrier and lack of communication, we don't really get much what the teacher is teaching us. So the consequences will be like sometimes they bring you a patient, you try to care for him but you are unable, while the patient considers you to know well.

This is the big fear I have today: being a nurse student by name but when you are at the hospital or when you are working somewhere, when you find someone fell down and you are not able to solve his/her problem. That is the big fear I have."

"Fear about gap between theory and practice is to that ……… it affects the nurses who supposed to guide me when I realize that this person is not exactly doing what they taught me in class. So I guess that my fear is to tell or ask why the person does not teach me what I learnt in school"

"Hum, the number one fear is, in the future you might be deficient in your knowledge when you are facing with a situation because of your lack of experience as you have not done it hands-on; you might find yourself in a terrible situation when you have the theory up but then there is another part of you like experience even you are doing it by yourself. So there might not even know what to do"

Reasons of Theory-Practice gap

Based on the alternation between theory and practice at the university, this device in nursing education aims to articulate theoretical and practical knowledge, knowledge and action, reasoning ability and operational know-how. However, the answers that we have obtained

from the teaching situations experienced daily by the students show that this is not self-evident. In fact, the student is simultaneously confronted with two environments (academic and clinical), the problem of communication and his responsibilities regarding his education.

Students responded that the academic environment, the clinical environment, the lack of communication and the student's neglect of his education were the reasons for which they identified the gap between theory and practice in nursing education.

a.   Academic environment

Academic environment is characterized by the conditions of education under theoretical aspects which contribute to develop knowledge on the practical aspects to which the student will have to apply in the clinical environment and the organization of the passage of practices to the clinical laboratory. Students said that they do not use to full capacity the clinical laboratory.

"To me, the gap is like maybe it depends on lecturers. Maybe the lecturer depends on the theory aspect. So if s/he used to give much theory than practice, that will be a barrier; maybe the language barrier also is one the reasons.

"…even in the laboratory we are not using the laboratory to full capacity"

"…the teacher does not explain well or s/he tries to explain but you don't get him/her."

"…..probably the teacher just come to class and read the note and didn't explain well something like that or just gives project you come and he doesn't feedback on the work then when you get to hospital those mistakes you made them again"

b. Clinical environment

Clinical environment which constitute the frame of the life, is characterized by all the conditions of the hospital (hospital culture type of hospital: private or state) and the conditions of the patients. The students said that these conditions of the hospital deprived, lack of collaboration with the patient are the reasons for gap in nursing education.

"The hospital we go to for practice is a private one, and we see that when we go there we can't really get interact with patients and administer care…"

"When we go to hospital, and we don't really have access to patient base on the lack of the language: we don't speak same language; sometimes the patients don't find us confident that we can help them or take care of them."

"To me… The only thing I see is that the staff is not sure to update themselves by the hospital management, which has to consistently doing exam for the staff nurses and also introducing the new nursing care…, the new quality care, new things like evidence pre-practice. The hospital has to be updating their staff nurses"

c. Negligence

In this category, the concentrations of the student as well as the mastery of the theoretical notions by the student were taken into account. Participants felt that some students were studying the nursing profession without enough information and did not focus on classroom teaching. To do this, they enter the care service without having enough knowledge.

"Students in particular. Some students don't take nursing seriously or they don't take it as serious job. Hum… probably the student didn't focus in class or was not taking the lectures seriously,…"

d. Language barrier

Communication is a very important foundation in education. Poor communication between instructors, students and patients would encourage students not to use their educational capacity in the clinic. A common and comprehensive language in all communicators characterizes good communication. The students said that instructors and patients communicate in Turkey, while students speak English, which is the language of training. A wide barrier is created, causing poor communication, because of the gap between the theory and practice in nursing education at the University of the Near East. Students stated that language was a major barrier to nursing education at this university.

"In terms of communication with the professional nurses, if we want to talk with them, we do communicate with our phones sometimes."

"Mostly when we go to the hospital we find patients that don't speak English and I, myself nurse student I don't speak Turkish. So lack of communication between nurse student and patients; also lack of communication between students and teacher because sometimes we find other teachers, they don't really speak well English. It can be also lack of communication between nurse students and professional nurses that we find at the hospital when we go for practice. Sometimes they don't also really speak English. So it is the lack of communication between all of them: Lack of communication between student nurses and patients at the hospital, and between students and teachers in the class."

"I know that we probably deal with the language barrier, but we have to try, we have to be at least more practical."

"Ok, for example in this university setting, one of the major reasons why there is this gap is the language barriers. It does not say a lot to tell you a lot to show you …..Or because they cannot express themselves to speak English and s/he speaks Turkish;…"

Suggestion to Close Theory Practice Gap

The gap between theory and practice is evident in the education sector. Indeed, to preserve the human in the educational field, it would be desirable to ensure that training devices resist the temptation of efficiency at all costs, filling and manufacturing professionals to established standards.

Students were asked about ways to narrow the gap between theory and practice. The need to balance or adjust the two aspects (Theory and Practice) of nursing education, as well as to open and improve the channels of communication between professors of theory and practice, between educators and students and between students and patients to further support students and improve laboratories for nursing students was highlighted.

Sixty-nine percent of students suggested that if they received the relevant theory before a clinical placement, they would be better able to integrate theory into practice. However, this theory had to be up-to-date and reflect what is actually seen in practice, and that these aspects of teaching (theory and practice) are provided by educators who are proficient in the language of learning; to say the English language, communication barrier in their education.

a. Balance

Preventing and reducing nursing education problems by encouraging and facilitating the

training of nurses would help to avoid the gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Indeed, according to student responses, to reduce the GPT: theory and practice should be at 50/50, lecturers should be adjusted, the major solution to try in theory and put forward practical examples or studies of cases.

"Coming to class and learn something ……. You learn faster than this online staff. So theory and practice should be 50/50."

"So I think the school can put it 50/50, meaning that you study in class and you go for practice."

"I think there should not be a gap, in the first place it should be balanced like if you have 50% of theory, the other 50% should be of practice. Not that you have like 70% of one and 30% of the other, etc."

"Mmm, personally I think …… it is better for the theory and practical part to be 50/50 than the practical to be more or the theory to be more…. It is better for them to be 50/50 so that students will be able to do both theory and practical aspect."

"So it is almost balanced so that when we work out there we know everything like we almost get the necessary."

"So for me, you should have the balance and not just the full course on the theory."

"To me, as I said, to eradicate this gap between theory and practical aspect, since all the topic is like communicating practical and theory aspect in nursing, so as I already said, if the teachers and students balance them (50/50), it will be much better for both students, hospital and the lecturers."

b. Student need more support

Teaching and guidance are important component that should be provided by the lecturers and preceptors in nursing education. The students explained the importance of being supported during their learning. Nursing students reported lack of support from the lecturers and nurse during their clinical experience. Some students indicated that this support should be started from the school before going to the clinical area

The students felt that they did not receive good support in the clinical field because at one point they found that the nurses were giving care to the patients without interest to the students to observe the procedure.

"So to reduce this gap will be like, when you go for practice, they university staff must assign a kind of committee or some people; it can be from teacher's staff that can come with us at the hospital and in case we need to ask questions or when we have difficulties, they can help us."

"I need a support or somebody to guide me so that I may know if what I am doing is right or not."

"You can use internet to try to find a real clinical examples to help you. On the other hand the lectures can assist the student by like what I said giving them questions taught theories but with a clinical implication with real hospital cases or real clinical cases where students are asked to provide solution through the application of knowledge or application of their theories."

"Give us a good environment for us to do more practical or maybe there should be on the same level, the practical and the theory. So it is really the school authority's work."

"I think personally the gap must be filled because I think it will be good if we are taking at hospital and then taught and practice that same thing. It's going to make more impact than teaching and after two days going to the hospital to go practice then after all the theories done and go to the hospital and practice. I think it is better we are taught and after being taught practice immediately in the hospital."

c. Preparing, improving clinics and laboratories

However, there are several students who explained that the nursing laboratory in their school is not equipped enough to prepare nursing students for the real complex clinical environment. The students showed the need for better and more advanced equipment in their laboratory.

"I will suggest that we are given access to our laboratory so that in case you forget stuffs you can go in and practice on the mannequins."

"I knew that practice specially starts with the laboratory although we go further at the hospital."

"…even in the laboratory we are not using the laboratory full capacity"

"I would say — like I said before, it needs more practice; and equipment should be, when we are learning for especially fundamental field, that is when we are first years we really feel what nursing is. So the equipment should be there when the lecturers are showing us. At least the equipment should be made available for us to see 'this is what the lecturer is talking about and it is there, s/he can show us, but we do not have it."

d. Solve the language barrier

To live is to communicate. No personal or professional lives without words or exchanges.

Communication makes it possible to share, seduce and convince. It will not matter to say something specific, but only to talk to each other. Language is a means of communication exclusively of mankind.

Some students complained about the communication method of their theoretical and clinical instructors. Instructors do not know how to deal with students and help them because of the language that creates obstacles. Some explained that they used the translation of messages to facilitate communication with the instructors. And other students were using the Internet, especially YouTube, to solve or manage this gap.

"For theoretical aspect, they have to give us lecturers who can purely speak English because here we are sometimes having problems in the sense that if you don't understand or if you raise your hand, it is not an explanation to them.

"So I feel that when they assign a lecturer that understands language enough, I guess the gap will not be obvious and I guess they avoid all this gap different between theory and practice."

"Now because of internet I can go on YouTube different platforms and I should be doing more reading."

Taking into account the class of students who responded to this research, it appears that the majority of second year students reacted to the interaction, the experience, the gap effect, the problem of the academic environment, the balance between theory and practice and the language barrier.

Those of third year responded in majority on balance, impact of gap and support of the students. Fourth year students majority spoke

about the experience, nursing image, gap impact, solve language barrier and suggested balance between theory and practice in nursing education.

Concerning the countries of origin of students; the majority of Nigerian and Zimbabwean students responded on the impact of gap, nursing image, balance, student fears, experience, students need more support, and solve language barrier. Those from South Africa and Tanzania mostly discussed the laboratory problem, clinical environment, language barrier, students need more support, and nursing image. The one from Cameroon answered more about the student's negligence, solve language barrier and support more.

4. Discussion

Nursing education is the responsibility of different actors. It is the university, the clinicians and the students who are the all-star plate of these actors. Each of these actors plays an important and interdependent role in the development of the student nurse. Nursing schools responsible for academic input must provide accurate, up-to-date teaching in evidence-based teaching methods that reflect the current clinical environment. This includes consideration of staffing levels, communication constraints and a strong awareness of the importance of adaptation to the clinical context.

The student who remains at the center of operation of the main actors must be motivated to learn and think about the practice. The results of this study theme could be transferable to other regions with similar conditions to that of this study. Analysis of some articles in the literature shows that this topic has been examined in several other studies [18-20].

The present study provided additional information in gap existence between theory and practice in nursing education, reasons as well as important suggestions and systematic interventions to reduce or close the gap between the theory and practice in nursing education. Nursing students who spoke about their perceptions produced these elements. Everyone knows that students are the most important component of the nursing education process. As a result, their experiences and perceptions are important in the development of the nursing education process.

When students were confronted with this situation, they felt a strong sense of dissatisfaction because they felt that the theoretical and practical knowledge they profited from in their education would not match the ones they imagined. They thought it was important for them to understand their limits but especially their possibilities, in order to afford to improve their knowledge.

In the study, student responses were classified into four key areas: Nursing education, the existence of a gap between theory and practice in nursing education, its reasons and strategies for fill the gap.

Respondents point out the discordance in nursing content as taught in the classroom to link the academic ideal to the reality of practice. This difference was noted by the fact that education is focused more on the theoretical aspects than on the practical aspects, sometimes the theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom is also limited. Students encounter some field cases that teachers did not think about during classroom instruction, as reported by some students. Considering the magnitude of this difference, some students said that it is a lot

and that there is a big gap between the theory and practice of nursing education.

Some studies in the literature show that nurses receive more theoretical knowledge than practical knowledge in official universities, which in turn creates the gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical practice. While nursing programs at the hospital provide direct access to nurse and research of best practices, immediate availability of clinical placements while in school and direct employment after graduation [21, 22].

Nursing education according to Saifan *et al*.[3],consists of two main parts: the theoretical part which reflects the knowledge passed on in class, giving students the opportunity to build a range of powerful examples drawn from the experience. The practical part, which focuses on improving skills in the clinical field and prepares nursing students to be able to "Do" as "Knowing" clinical principles in practice and encouraging students to use their critical thinking skills to solve problems. This can only be achieved by ensuring that nursing students apply what they have learned in the classroom and in simulation laboratory to real life situations.

Wells and McLoughlin[23] emphasized that clinical education is still an integral part of the nursing curriculum and is the foundation for bridging the gap between theory and practice. However, the literature still shows a huge gap between theory and practice[24,25]. Students continue to complain of a contagious imbalance in their learning, where theory dominates practice. Therefore, the academic and clinical community in the learning of nursing students must assume its responsibilities for the education and effective preparation of nursing

graduates, taking into account the theoretical aspects of institutions and practices in clinical settings[26]. The hope is to improve the nursing education system if nurse educators and practitioners understand and appreciate the university-clinical role, its benefits, its elements and its challenges.

Literature demonstrates the gap between theory and practice as one of the major challenges in nursing education and practice today. Despite all the measures taken to reduce this gap, there is a persistent gap between what nurses learn in school and practical applications in clinical settings [6,21,27].

The gap between theory and practice can affect students in various areas of life; according to the reactions of the students surveyed for this study, the gap between theory-practice is very dangerous because it can induce inexperienced nurses and reduce the interpersonal relationship between patient-nurse, student-teacher, student-nurse and student-patent.

These elements are consistent with previous studies supporting the lack of adaptation to clinical context, lack of self-esteem and self-image, stress and anxiety related to errors, conflicts with other nurses and complaints patients were contributing factors to the discrepancy between theory and practice [28-31].

The language barrier is a communicational problem in nursing education at this study site. Both in the classroom and in the clinic, students are often confronted with this type of situation and sometimes find it difficult to cope with it. They are sometimes frustrated at not being understood and sometimes not understanding anything for their future being that nurse.

As language is an obstacle to communication, the support provided to students for nursing learning from an academic point of view is insufficient. Since teachers and preceptors do not speak English in favor of the Turk language, they cannot properly guide students in this area. According to Msiska *et al.*, the inappropriate communicational attitude of nurse educators has a negative impact on the students they teach[32].

Therefore, Chaun and Barnett[33] pointed out that the lack of harmony, communication and interpersonal relationships between the educator and the student adversely affects the learner's theoretical and practical learning.
In addition, Guzman *et al.*[34] stated that the communicative attitude, approach, interpersonal relationships and neutrality of the speaker create trust between students and their teachers. A common language helps foster verbal communication. Indeed, the use of the same language allows a better understanding of messages during exchanges between different people.

The best communication is achieved when teachers and students speak the same language, or when nurses in the clinic speak the same language with student nurses and patients. Jagosh *et al.*[35] believe that speaking and listening skills is an important aspect of communication in a clinical setting. Warnea *et al.*[36] suggest that nurse practitioners should be a model for the nursing student by facilitating individualized counseling and professional learning.

In the classroom, teachers remain the facilitators of student learning and the creators of productive classroom environments, where students can develop the skills they may need.

Thus, students are required to participate actively in classroom learning to develop their skills. But an investigated student indicated that the existence of the gap between theory and practice sometimes stems from the negligence of students. Student do not attend theoretical lessons or are present at the courses but do not follow the teaching properly, because of their distractions in the classroom. As a result, such students have found increased multiple difficulties in clinical practice. Maben *et al*.[37] indicate that students are unable to transfer knowledge acquired at university to the clinical setting or that they are insufficiently prepared for clinical placements by the university. That is the essence of the gap between theory-practice in nursing education.

The results of this student support study are consistent with those of several other studies in which nursing students must be accompanied in clinical learning [36,38,39]. Most students explained that they were not well supported by teachers and nurses in clinical settings, so they needed more support during the initial period of clinical learning. This may be due to the lack of effective communication because of the language that was a major barrier. One of the students said that sometimes the communication took place by the translation of the massages on the phone.

Roter *et al*.[40] states that clinical instructors and theory teachers should be aware of the importance of the stage of nursing students learning. They should increase students 'confidence in improving communication[41],and by creating a stimulating and supportive environment, as increasing the knowledge and skills of nursing students should reduce students' stress levels.

In this study, most students have shown the need to strengthen communication because language is a barrier in teaching in this university and coordination between theory teachers and clinical instructors, between these teachers and students. This situation has also been mentioned in the literature [5,6,42,43].Cheng[44] indicated that if the cooperation between theory and practice is not adequate, this could result from the difficulty of transferring theoretical knowledge into one area of the clinical complex. According to Hope *et al*.[42]; Ousey and Gallagher[45], this situation can lead many students to be shocked when they examine their ideal expectations and knowledge in a real-world context.

This could widen the gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Therefore, the results of this study and the results of several articles suggest that more channels of communication should be opened between theory teachers, clinical instructors and students who are the main players in nursing education[44, 20,33].

Nursing teachers should constantly find ways to show students the importance of a strong theoretical foundation for achieving excellence in their professional practice. This goal would be achieved through classroom learning experiences and clinical practices.

Felder and Brent[47] demonstrated the importance of active and constructivist learning that emphasizes multiple teaching modalities, including learning-by-doing and the fact that the student serves as a teacher for learning he is learning.

For Mendenhall[48], the educator and those enrolled in the course assume the role of teacher

and student at different times in the classroom. In these roles, all course participants optimize their learning by observing, reflecting, sharing and applying course material in the classroom and in the clinical environment. Both the teacher and the student are essential to creating an active learning environment, which should foster students' interest in the subject and encourage their participation.

Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou[49] pointed out that the educator's desire to balance theory / practice, class / clinic, and student / teacher roles is most often expressed in the overall curriculum rather than in an only course.

5. Conclusions

Theory and practice are two important components of nursing education. When the knowledge gained in theory transitions into practice, effective learning is visible in nursing education. However, research shows that there is a gap between theory and practice in nursing education. Four main themes were determined in the study.

The first main theme is nursing education. The sub-themes determined in nursing education: The balance between theory and practice, interaction between theory and practice, experience and nursing image of the students. The second main theme is theory and practice gap in nursing education. The sub-themes identified in theory-practice gap: Gap impact on the students' learning experience and fears of students in the theory practice gap.

The third main theme concerns the reasons for the theory-practice gap in nursing education. The sub-themes determined in the reasons for

the theory-practice gap in nursing education: Academic environment, clinical environment, student negligence for his learning and language barrier.

Finally, the fourth main theme is suggestion to close theory and practice gap. The sub-themes determined in suggestions to close theory and practice gap: Balance, students need to be more supported, preparing laboratories and solve the problem of the language barrier.

Students were asked about ways to narrow the gap between theory and practice. The need to balance or adjust the two aspects (theory and practice) of nursing education, as well as to open and improve the channels of communication between the teachers of theory and practice, between educators and students and between students and patients to further support students and improve laboratories for nursing students has been highlighted.

This is the first study in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with the title of gap between theory and practice. Therefore, the information raised in this study can be useful to nursing students, nursing educators, clinical nurses and other health actors at this University. The results of this study could also be transferred to be useful to other countries with similar conditions. Students' perceptions about nursing education, the gap between theory and practice, the reasons and solution of the gap will contribute to the curriculum revision.

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