

EFFECT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR HEAD NURSES ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND SOFT SKILLS

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Abstract

Background: The world is entering an era that requires the use of new abilities, particularly soft skills. Those skills encompass cognitive, interpersonal, and intellectual, as well as practical capabilities. They can be learned and improved through appropriate training efforts, as well as combined to achieve complex personal and organizational outcomes. **Aim:** The study examined the impact of soft skills educational program for head nurses on their knowledge and skills. **Design:** A quasi-experimental research was utilized. **Setting:** This study was conducted at the New Kasr El-Aini Teaching Hospital which provides paid services it includes all specialties, the hospital is affiliated to Cairo University Hospitals. **Subjects:** Convenience sample (n=33) of head nurses at the selected departments and critical care units. **Tools:** Data was collected via three tools: 1st Personal characteristic data tool, 2nd soft skills knowledge questionnaire, and 3rd an observational checklist of soft skills practices. **Results:** The study revealed significant statistical differences in total soft skills knowledge and soft skills knowledge dimensions during assessment periods. The total mean score across all dimensions increased significantly from ($\bar{x}=16.40$) pre-program to ($\bar{x}=27.60$) post-program and ($\bar{x}=21.00$) at follow-up. All (100%) and (76.7%) of head nurses had high satisfactory knowledge level immediately post program and 3 months post program respectively, compared to (83.3%) of them had unsatisfactory knowledge level preprogram. Additionally, there were significant differences in total observed head nurse's soft skills mean scores and all dimensions, with the overall total mean score increased from ($\bar{x}=56.96$) pre-program to ($\bar{x}=97$) post-program and ($\bar{x}=76.75$) at follow-up. Also, the majority (97%) of head nurses had unsatisfactory level of observed soft skills preprogram. While, all of them (100%) had highly satisfactory level of observed soft skills immediately post program and satisfactory level three months post program **Conclusion:** The study found a significant improvement in head nurses soft skills knowledge test scores, and soft skills practice immediately and three months after program implementation compared to preprogram. Moreover, the highest percent of them had high satisfactory knowledge level immediately post program and 3 months post program respectively. All of them had highly satisfactory level of observed soft skills immediately post program and satisfactory level three months post program compared to preprogram. **Recommendations:** Administrators should encourage application of information technology system to equip nurses with advanced soft skills, administrators should implement regular soft skills training programs for nursing staff to enhance their knowledge and practices of soft skills, to improve patient, and organizational outcomes, and conduct regular monitoring to identify gaps.

Keywords: Educational Program, Head Nurses, Soft Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, soft skills are some of the most in-demand skills in any workplace. Recently, educational researchers and employers have placed increasing attention on the importance of knowledge or also known as soft skills as evidence suggests that soft skills are an important predictor in employability. Also the job market today is a dynamic and challenging scope for young people graduating from various educational institutions; the job opportunities are more for graduates who possess soft skills that are expected at workplaces (Asefer, & Abidin, 2021).

Ritter, Small, Mortimer, & Doll, 2018, keng 2020, nowadays, reported that competition is serious amongst employees at workplace, and there is a need for high-quality manpower to face the upcoming challenges. Employers recruit new employees on the basis of competencies in technical and nontechnical or soft skills. Therefore, complexity of today's work environment has created the need for soft skills, that proven its impact in improvement of manpower personal and professional life outcome.

Soft skills are personal traits that enhance interaction, job performance, career growth and social competence that enables persons to be accomplished more (Tang, 2018). Soft skills refer to a set of personal attributes, behaviors, and qualities that enable individuals to effectively interact with others and navigate social situations. Unlike technical or applicable to almost any profession or field. (Vasanthakumari, 2019). Also, they were defined as interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people, adding that they are a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with others. (Allison, Denise & Courtney, 2020)

Soft skills include a wide range of abilities, such as communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, leadership, using technology, time management, creative and critical thinking skills, problem-solving, conflict resolution and negotiation. These skills are essential in today's workplace because they help individuals build positive relationships with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders, and they contribute to a positive and productive work culture. (Hussein, & Elsaïad, 2021).

Soft skills are important in the workplace because they enable individuals to build positive relationships with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders. They also contribute to a positive and productive work culture and can lead to career advancement and increased job satisfaction. While some people may have a natural talent for certain soft skills, they can also be developed and improved through training, practice, and feedback. Employers often value soft skills just as highly as technical skills, and job seekers should make sure to highlight their soft skills in resumes and interviews. (Succi, & Canovi, 2020).

Lee, Peter, (2019), indicated that soft skills Increased job satisfaction as when nurse managers possess soft managerial skills, they can effectively communicate with their staff and create a work environment that fosters job satisfaction. This can result in decreased turnover rates, increased staff morale, and improved job performance and effective

resource allocation as soft skills enable nurse managers to allocate resources effectively, such as staffing, equipment, and supplies. This helps to ensure that patient needs are met, and resources are used efficiently.

Dewolf, Clarebout, Wauters, Van Kerkhoven, & Verelst, (2021) mentioned importance of soft skills that are essential for nurses, as they play a critical and important role in patient care and outcomes. Also add soft skills components in nursing include, communication and interpersonal skills as nurses must be able to effectively communicate with patients, families, and other healthcare professionals. This includes ability to listen actively, giving clear instructions, and providing emotional support. In addition, Teamwork as collaboration and teamwork are essential in healthcare settings as nurses must work closely with doctors, other nurses, and support staff to ensure the best possible patient outcomes.

Significance

Soft skills have become significant for both personal and profession life, possessing and practice of soft skills help individual to connect psychologically with others, and the organization to understand the needs of others, and directs them to act accordingly for mutual benefits (Zaman at al., 2018). **A study conducted by Wonderlic (2020) found that 93%** of hiring leaders stated that soft skills are an “essential” or “very important” element when making hiring decisions and are important for achieving organizational goals and success .Study done by Prada, (2019). concluded that soft skills increased productivity - employees' efficiency in their tasks and responsibilities increases which will help to achieving the organization goals.

From the clinical experience of the investigator in different clinical setting, it was observed that head nurses lack the ability to use soft skills which are needed for the management of people and the workplace, such as thinking skills, interpersonal and collaboration skills, information technology management, leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, problem solving and decision making. Which may be reflected on staff satisfaction, production and retention in their workplace setting that consequently will affect on achievement of organization goals, objectives and success. Therefore, the present study program will equip head nurses with soft skills that can improve their communication, help them to work together effectively, have meaningful careers, and contributing to the growth of an organization.

Aim of the study

The current study conducted for the aim to evaluate the effect of the educational program for head nurses on their knowledge and soft skills.

Research hypothesis

- H(1): There will be a statistical significance difference in the test score of head nurses knowledge after program implementation compared to before and after three months later.
- H(2): There will be a statistical significance difference in the mean scores of head nurses skills after program implementation compared to before and after three months later.

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

The theory of Action:

The subjects of the present study are head nurses who are adult learners so that, utilized the Adult Learning Theory - Andragogy of Malcolm Knowles as a theoretical frame work. This theory developed by Malcolm Knowles (1978-1990) and modified by (Pappas, (2013), the anagogical model based on several assumptions include:1- need to know&2- learner's self-concept,3- The role of the learner's experience&4- Readiness to learn, 5- Orientation to learning& 6-Motivation.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental (one group pretest/posttest) design was utilized in this study.

Setting:

This study was conducted at the New Kasr El-Aini Teaching Hospital which provides paid services it includes all specialties, the hospital affiliated to Cairo University Hospitals. The study was conducted in dialysis units, emergency department, different ICU units, medical and surgical departments.

Sample:

Convenience sample (n=33) of head nurses working in the previously selected units were included in this study. Head nurses were part of the active workforce during the data collection period, and were accepted to participate in the soft skills educational program.

Data collection questionnaires:

Three tools were utilized as follows:

1st: Personal characteristic data Sheet

It was developed by the researcher, it include code, age, gender, marital status, educational level, working unit, years of experience in nursing profession, attendance of previous training program.

2nd: Soft Skills knowledge Questionnaire:

It was developed by the researcher guided by literature review Singh (2018) and Kantrowitz (2005), to assess head nurses knowledge related soft skills. It will be used to assess the participants' knowledge related to the soft skills. It composed of 30 questions divided as follow: multiple choice (10 question MCQ), 10 question true false and 10 question matching.

Scoring system

Subjects responses was rated as the follow: correct answer was score (1) and incorrect answer was take (zero score). Total knowledge was categorized as less than 60% was considered unsatisfactory, 60% to less than 75% was satisfactory and 75% or more was considered highly satisfactory (Chiu, Mahat, Rashid, Razak, & Omar, 2016).

3rd: Soft skills observational checklist:

It was developed by the researcher based on literature review by Williams (2017) and Beardmore (2019). It will be used to assess the participants' soft skills practices. It composed of (59) items sub scaled of (7) dimensions

Scoring system:

Items was measured against two points scores (done = 1) and not done =0. A total score of practices was computed by summing up responses as follow: less than 60% considered unsatisfactory, 60% to less than 75% was satisfactory and 75% or more was considered highly satisfactory (Washor, 2015).

Tools Validity

Content validity was checked by a panel of five experts from the nursing administration department at the Faculty of Nursing at Cairo University. The content, coverage, clarity, wording, length, format and the overall appearance of the tool were checked.

Tool reliability

The reliability of the study tools was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha test, a widely accepted measure for internal consistency. The Soft Skills knowledge tool demonstrated high reliability with Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.87. The Soft Skills observational checklist exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.75, signifying an acceptable level of reliability. These results suggest that the tools used in the study were reliable and provided consistent results.

Ethical Consideration:

Primary approval was obtained from the Faculty of Nursing Cairo University research ethical committee.

The procedure

First phase (need to know& learner's self-concept):

After thoroughly reviewing relevant literature, the researcher developed the study's research tools, ensuring their reliability and validity through a rigorous process. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Nursing-Cairo University, and the hospital's medical and nursing director permitted the study. The researcher then met with the nurse director to clarify the study's objectives and collaborated with the hospital administration. Subsequently, head nurses that were informed about the study's purpose and significance, and their written consent for participation was obtained, adhering to ethical guidelines and preserving the voluntary nature of participation.

Second phase (The role of the learner's experience& Readiness to learn):

Before implementing the program, an extensive assessment was conducted to evaluate the head nurses' knowledge of soft skills using a soft skills knowledge questionnaire, and direct observation for head nurses 'soft skills using soft skills observational check list. The head nurse was observed three times across different working days during morning shift.

Based on the assessment data, a custom educational program was developed to address the identified needs, which experts then reviewed for its alignment with educational objectives, and a detailed timetable was planned for optimal session distribution.

The the soft skills educational program implementation was carried in one month for the head nurses, consisting of 8classroom instruction sessions and practical exercises.

The program's purpose, objectives, and content were shared with the head nurses upfront, and the researcher has to repeat several numbers of sessions every day according to head nurses availability, patient's work load and the unit's working general conditions.

In addition, the researcher has occasionally to conduct some of sessions to one or two of head nurses because of nursing shortage at the period of program implementation, each session began with an introduction and ended with feedback.

Third phase (Orientation to learning& Motivation):

In this phase, after implementation of the soft skills educational program, the researcher has evaluated the immediate effect of program and after 3 months (follow-up) using the same previous tools.

RESULTS

Table (1), Table 1, shows that more than two thirds (69.7%) of head nurses were in age group 35-<45years old and all of them (100%), had bachelor degree. Also, around two thirds (63.6%) of them works at different units that involve (emergency, dialysis operation room). All of them (100%) worked full time.

Table (1): Frequency Distribution of Head Nurses Personal Characteristics (n=33)

Demographic data	No.	%
Age		
35-<45	23	69.7
45-<55	8	24.2
55+	2	6.1
Educational level		
nursing diploma	0	0
bachelor degree	33	100.0
Unit		
Medical units	4	12.1
Surgical units	2	6.1
ICU	6	18.2
Others*	21	63.6
Attend soft skills Training program		
No	30	90.9
Yes	3	9.1
Working status		
Full time	33	100.0
Part time	0	0

Figure (1), shows that the highest percentage (90.9 %) of the head nurses were female. while the last percentage (9.1%) were male.

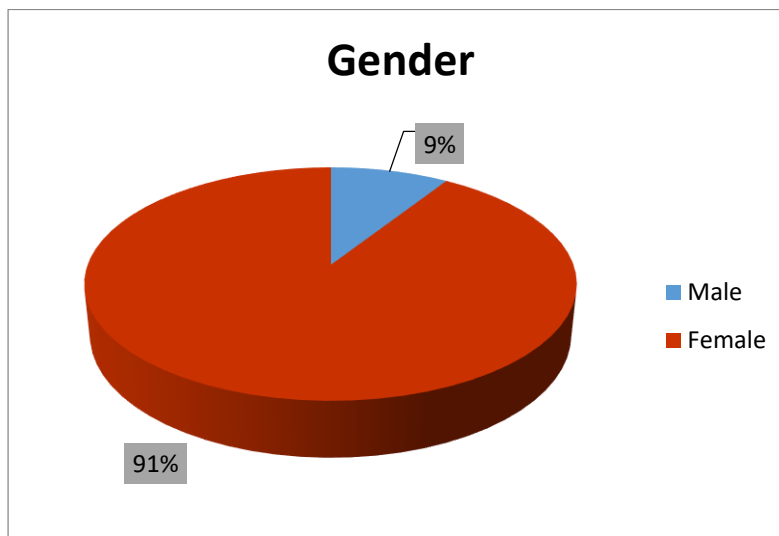


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Head Nurses According to their Gender n= (33)

Figure (2), shows that more than half (54.4%) of head nurses had work experience from 15 to less than 20 years. While the least percentage (15.2%) of them had work experience from 20 to less than 30 years.

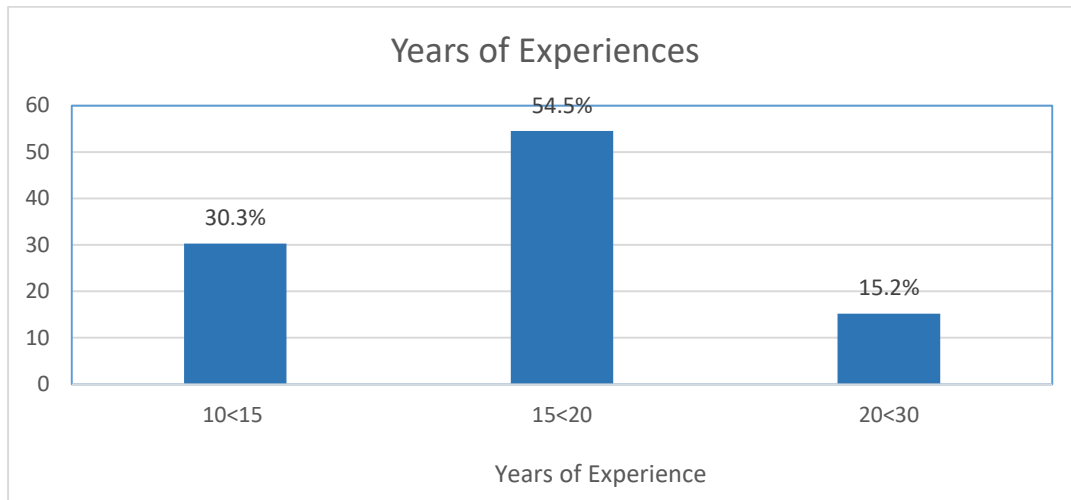


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of head nurses according to their years of experience in nursing profession n= (33)

Table 2 displays that there was highly statistical significant differences between all dimensions and total of knowledge questionnaire during different periods of assessment. Also, the table shows that there was statistically significant increase in head nurses' knowledge test scores, immediately post program and 3 months post program (92%&70%) respectively compared to preprogram (54%).

Table (2): Comparing the Mean difference of head nurses soft skills knowledge test scores among Different Periods of Assessment (Pre-program- Post-program – Follow-up) (n=33)

Knowledge dimensions	Pre		Post		Follow up		ANOVA	p-value
	Mean.	SD	Mean.	SD	Mean.	SD		
Soft skills definition	0.45	0.62	1.97	0.17	1.58	0.61	77.654	.0001*
Soft skills importance	0.67	0.48	0.97	0.17	0.97	0.17	10.458	.0001*
Leadership skills	3.55	0.97	5.67	0.65	4.88	1.14	42.834	.0001*
Interpersonal and collaborative skills	3.94	1.12	7.52	0.71	4.79	1.22	106.704	.0001*
Problem solving	0.82	0.81	1.94	0.24	1.48	0.51	32.469	.0001*
Conflict Resolution & Negotiation Skills	4.79	1.03	6.87	0.92	5.43	1.66	71.763	.0001*
Creative thinking skills	2.24	0.75	2.67	0.65	1.88	0.74	10.072	.0001*
Total mean score	16.4	1.3	27.6	1.6	21.0	1.7	406.757	.0001*
Mean percentage	54.6%		92%		70%			

*P value is significant at ≤ 0.05 .

Table (3) illustrates that head nurses had unsatisfactory knowledge level (83.3%) preprogram. While, all of them (100%) and (76.7%) had high satisfactory knowledge level immediately post program and 3 months post program respectively. Also, table clarifies

that there was a statistical significant difference in total head nurse soft skills knowledge levels during different periods of assessment., ($X^2 = 80.1, P = 0.00^*$).

Table (3): Frequency Distribution of head nurses soft skills knowledge levels during Different Period of Assessment (Pre, Immediately Post Program and Three Months Post Program) (n=33)

Knowledge	Pre		Post		3 months post program		Chi-square	p-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Un satisfactory(< 60%)	25	83.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	80.1	0.000*
satisfactory(60% - < 75)	8	26.7	0	0.0	23	76.7		
Highly satisfactory(≥ 75)	0	0.0	33	100.0	10	33.3		

*P value is significant at ≤ 0.05 .

Table (4) concludes that there was a highly statistically significant difference in observed head nurse's soft skills mean scores in all dimensions and total scores during different periods of assessment. Data in the table added that the highest mean percentage (97%, 76.75%) achieved immediately post program and three months post program compared to (56.6%) preprogram. Also data in the table showed that information technology not applied in the hospital.

Table (4): Mean Differences of Observed Head Nurses Soft Skills during Different Periods of Assessment (Pre, Immediately Post Program, and Three Months Post Program) (n=33)

Dimensions	Pre		Post		Follow up		ANOVA	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interpersonal and collaborative skills	10.94	1.98	15.97	0.17	11.58	2.36	77.952	.00001*
Leadership skills	6.2	1.5	9.9	0.17	8.5	1.8	61.10	.00001*
Problem solving	4.52	1.28	6.94	0.35	5.55	1.80	29.254	.00001*
Conflict Resolution & Negotiation Skills	6.70	1.67	10.00	0.00	6.85	2.44	39.456	.00001*
Creative thinking skills	6.6	2.3	8.6	1.9	8.2	2.1	8.50	.00001*
Information technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	---
Total mean score	34.96	2.8	51.41	1.86	40.68	2.5	391.16	.00001*
Mean percentage %	56.96%		97%		76.75%			

*P value is significant at ≤ 0.05 .

Table (5) displays that the majority (97%) of head nurses had unsatisfactory level of observed soft skills preprogram. All head nurse (100%) had highly satisfactory level of observed soft skills immediately post program and (100%) of them had satisfactory level three months post program. Also, data in table add that there was highly statistical significant difference of observed soft skills during different periods of assessment ($X^2 = 80.1, P = 0.000^*$).

Table (5): Frequency Distribution of observed head nurses soft skills levels during different Period of Assessment (Pre, Immediately Post Program and Three Months Post Program) (n=33)

Observation	Pre		Post		3months post program		Chi-square	p-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Un Satisfactory(< 60%)	32	97.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	80.1	0.00*
Satisfactory(60% - < 75)	1	3.0	0	0.0	33	100.0		
Highly Satisfactory(> 75)	0	0.0	33	100.0	0	0.0		

*P value is significant at ≤ 0.05 .

Table (6) reveals that there were significant statistical positive correlations between head nurse's total knowledge test score and their observed soft skills ($r = 0.90$, $p = 0.02^*$). Also, data clarifies that there was statistical significant positive correlation ($p = 0.03^*$ & $p = 0.02^*$) post program & three months respectively. While, there is no statistical significant correlation ($p = 0.73$) preprogram.

Table (6): Correlation between head nurses soft skills of total knowledge test score and observed soft skills. (n=33)

Observed soft skills	Knowledge	
	R	P
Pre	0.06	0.73
Post	0.37	0.03*
Follow up	0.03	0.02*
Total	0.90	0.02*

*P value is significant at ≤ 0.05 .

DISCUSSION

Regarding **head nurses soft skills knowledge**, the data revealed that there were high statistically significant differences in head nurses' knowledge mean scores regarding soft skills knowledge dimensions and total during different period of assessment. The highest mean scores were observed immediately post-program implementation and three months later, compared to the scores before program implementation. From the researcher's perspective, this improvement in soft skills knowledge dimensions may be attributed to the head nurses' necessity to acquire additional information about various soft skills utilized in unit management. Such knowledge is deemed crucial for enhancing their efficiency in clinical practice and contributing to their career advancement.

The results of the current study are consistent with those of a study conducted by Ginting, Mahiranissa, Bektı, and Febriansyah (2020) reported a positive reaction and increased knowledge among participants after exposure to a soft skills training program. Similarly, in line with these findings, a study by Hussein (2021), who identified highly statistically significant differences in nurses' knowledge and soft skills immediately post-intervention compared to the pre-program period. Furthermore, the present study aligns with the

research conducted by Sharma and Dayanand (2023), wherein they observed a highly significant difference in soft skills knowledge level scores before and after the implementation of a soft skills training program.

As regard to **Soft Skills knowledge level**, the current study indicate that all head nurses achieved a high satisfactory knowledge level immediately post-program, with over two-thirds of them maintaining a high satisfactory knowledge level three months post-program. This observation reflects a notable enhancement in the total mean scores of knowledge levels immediately post-program implementation and three months post-program compared to the pre-program implementation period. Notably, all head nurses had a low satisfactory knowledge level before the program implementation. From the researcher's perspective, this improvement could be attributed to the implementation of the soft skills educational program and the acquisition of various knowledge and skills by head nurses throughout the program concerning soft skills and their practical application in the workplace. The findings of the present study align with those of Hussein (2021), who demonstrated that prior to the implementation of the training program, only one-quarter of the studied head nurses possessed satisfactory knowledge about soft skills. In contrast, after the program implementation, a majority of them exhibited significantly improved knowledge, marking a highly statistically significant difference.

Concerning **observed soft skills practices**, the results of the current study revealed there was a statistically significance difference with marked improvement in all dimensions of soft skills practices during different period of assessment immediately post program implementation and three months later compared to before program implementation. From the researcher's perspective, the observed significant improvement in head nurses' soft skills practice can be attributed to the implementation of the soft skills program and an increased interest among head nurses to apply these skills, especially given their importance in interactions with various healthcare providers, patients, and relatives. Consequently, they can achieve their goals and objectives more easily, while also enhancing their competence in critical thinking, interpersonal skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, and problem-solving.

The current study's results align with the findings of Chadha and Sharma (2018), who reported increased mean scores across all participants' skills after a four-month soft skills training. Additionally, these results are consistent with a study by Hoffman, Myler, and Hines (2019), which demonstrated the beneficial effects of a soft skills program on nursing students' communication, clinical interaction skills, and positive problem-solving and conflict resolution. Another study by Maria and Rania (2017) observed that soft skills training enhanced nursing practices.

Furthermore, the current study's results agree with the findings of Yousef, Shazly, and Omar (2020), who indicated that a soft skills training program for nurses was effective and recommended for implementation in all nursing curricula due to its positive impact on nursing practice. As regard to Observed **Soft Skills level**, the current study's results indicated that all head nurses achieved a high satisfactory level of observed soft skills

practice immediately post-program and three months post-program. There was a marked improvement in the total mean scores of observed soft skills practice levels both immediately post-program implementation and three months post-program compared to the pre-program period. It is noteworthy that all head nurses had a low satisfactory observed soft skills practice level before the program implementation.

Concerning information technology skills, the head nurses exhibited insignificant changes in their skills levels both before and after the program implementation, as well as three months post-program. This lack of significant improvement could be interpreted as a result of the absence of an information system in the hospital, with the electronic health records, barcode medication, and computerized orders not being implemented. In contrast to the present study, the results contradict the findings of Salem (2021), who reported that nursing staff achieved high mean scores, particularly in communication and documentation information technology. These findings align with the study conducted by Hussein (2021), which revealed that less than a quarter of the studied head nurses had satisfactory job performance before the implementation of the soft skills training program. In contrast, the vast majority of them exhibited satisfactory job performance immediately after the program implementation, showing a highly statistically significant difference.

Current results showed positive significant correlation between head nurse soft skills knowledge and observed soft skills practices immediately post program and during three months post program (follow-up phase). While, data revealed insignificant relation between soft skills knowledge and practices pre-program. Also, results revealed significant relation between total soft skills knowledge and practices. From the researcher's perspective, this result can be attributed to the education program raising awareness among head nurses. The findings of the current study are consistent with the study conducted by Asefer and Abidin (2021), which demonstrated strong empirical support for the causal relationship between soft skills acquired by employees and their work performance.

CONCLUSION

The finding of the present study concluded that there was a significant improvement in head nurses soft skills knowledge test scores, and soft skills practice immediately and three months after program implementation compared to preprogram. The highest percent of them had high satisfactory knowledge level immediately post program and 3 months post program respectively. All of them had highly satisfactory level of observed soft skills immediately post program and satisfactory level three months post program compared to preprogram. Moreover, the study demonstrated significant positive correlations between soft skills knowledge, and soft skills practice among head nurses immediately post program implementation and post three months later(follow-up) but there was in significant relation pre-program.

RECOMMENDATION

- Administrators should encourage application information technology system to equip nurses with advanced soft skills,
- Administrators should implement regular soft skills training programs for nursing staff to enhance their knowledge and practices of soft skills, to improve patient, and organizational outcomes,
- Managers should conduct regular monitoring to identify gaps.
- Incorporate soft skills into the nursing curriculum to ensure that future nurses are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and practices required to meet market demands in soft skills.
- Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of soft skills training programs on nurse manager and nursing staff.
- Replicate the current study with a larger sample of head nurses to generalize the results.

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