

## **Study of nursing interns' needs through their practical competency self evaluation**

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**Abstract:** Background: Nursing needs highly specialized competencies to accurately determine patients' states and cope with the problems that may occur during nursing care. The purpose of the study was to assess nursing interns' needs through their practical competency self evaluation. Design: A descriptive correlational research design was utilized to conduct this study. Sampling: It consisted of all available nursing interns (380) who were enrolled in internship year within the academic year 2019-2020. Setting: It was conducted at different departments and units at governmental and private hospitals. Instrument: Practical competency self evaluation questionnaire was used for data collection. Results: Showed that more than half of nursing interns (59.2%) were competent, while more than two fifths (40.8%) were incompetent. The highest mean score with the first ranking related to practical competency self evaluation was professional behavior, while the lowest mean score with the last ranking was critical thinking. Also the highest mean score with the first ranking related to practical needs was critical thinking Conclusion: More than two fifths of nursing interns (40.8%) had practical competency needs and there was highly statistical significant negative correlation between nursing interns' practical competency self-evaluations and their needs. Recommendation: hospitals should provide adequate training programs to improve nursing interns' practical competency and their needs to have high competency level.

**Key words:** *Nursing interns, Practical competency self evaluation*

### **Introduction**

Nurses are required to be competent in theoretical and scientific knowledge, specific psychomotor and technical skills, communication, cultural competence, professional values, and ethical conduct to face the complexity of real clinical setting (Donovan, 2018). Moreover, he or she is expected to forge conceptual links between

theoretical knowledge acquired at tertiary institutions and practical work, must maintain feedback between theory and practice in order to reinforce the alignment of the two (Smith, 2020). Nursing interns should hold professional responsibility and have self-confidence, rather than simply being assigned to complete or go through the motions of a

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clinical experience, thus clinical teaching and the teacher role are crucial to prepare nursing Interns for practice (AlThiga, Mohidin, Park & Tekian, 2017).

The practice of nursing requires a complex combination of various attributes and nursing interns require highly specialized competencies to accurately determine patients' states and predict and cope with the problems that may occur during nursing care (Molina-Mula & Gallo-Estrada, 2020). Competency in general has been defined as the ability to perform the task with desirable outcomes under the varied circumstances of the real world and as the overlap of knowledge with the performance components of psychomotor skills and clinical problem solving within the realm of affective responses (Burke, 2020)

Professional competency is a fundamental concept in nursing, which has a direct relationship with quality improvement of patient care and public health, modern views to the principles of professionalism emphasize that quality improvement in the health care system is the ethical and professional responsibility of all the medical professions, particularly nurses. Therefore, they should entail commitment to professional competency,

honesty with patients and the improvement of the care quality (Karami, Farokhzadian & Foroughameri, 2017).

Practical competency is a fundamental concept in nursing, which has a direct relationship with quality improvement of patient care and public health, modern views to the principles of professionalism emphasize that quality improvement in the health care system is the ethical and professional responsibility of all the medical professions, particularly nurses. Therefore, they should entail commitment to professional competency, honesty with patients and the improvement of the care quality (Stanhope & Lancaster, 2019).

Core-competencies is considered the essential competencies that a nurse is expected to possess at entry to practice as an outcome of their nursing education in order to provide the public with safe, effective and ethical care, Nursing core competencies include assessment and intervention, communication, critical thinking, teaching, human caring relationship, management, leadership and knowledge integration skills (Ko & Yu, 2019).

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Having competency leads to an improved quality of patient care and an increased patient satisfaction with the nurses and helps promote nursing as a profession and improve nursing education and clinical nursing. In addition, patients expect nurses to be competent and to behave them in a reasonable way. Following high prevalence of medical incidents, the government, the media, and the public have become concerned about the quality of clinical care and have focused their attentions on clinicians' competency (Schofield et al, 2018).

There is a need for nursing interns to demonstrate that they are clinically competent to perform certain roles. In this respect, lack of attention to professional competency in nursing interns can cause problems for organizations and question their activities. Nursing interns' poor competency may lead to some undesirable consequences including nursing interns' frustration, job dissatisfaction, and their attrition (Aboshaiqah & Qasim, 2018).

It is important that nursing interns evaluate their competency by self-assessment to capture objective and subjective data about their knowledge base and actual performance also to

improve personal and professional development, For nursing interns a self-assessment is a vital part of preparing for a post-graduation job search, self assessment is defined as a systematic and transparent process of analyzing one's practices to improve the profession, it Serves as an aid in clarifying areas for improvement, enhancing self-esteem, and developing self-awareness (Keshk, Qalawa & Ibrahim, 2018).

#### **Significance of the study**

Nursing interns are baccalaureate nursing graduates enrolled in the undergraduate clinical internship year. There are many issues and challenges that face nursing interns during transition from theory to practice worldwide. From the clinical experience of the investigator, it was noted that there were difficulties in many procedures that face nursing interns working in different hospitals in Egypt. So it is important to assess nursing interns' needs to meet these challenges. From these perspectives, the purpose of the study was to assess nursing interns needs through their practical competency self evaluation.

#### **Purpose**

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The purpose of the study was to assess nursing interns needs through their practical competency self evaluation.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the nursing interns' competency levels?
- 2) Is there a difference in nursing interns' needs by the study setting?
- 3) What are the nursing interns' needs based on their practical competency self evaluation?

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

A descriptive correlational research design was used for conducting this study

#### **Setting**

The study was conducted at Menoufia University Hospital, Shebin El-Kom Teaching Hospital, The New Helal Hospital, El Bagour Hospital, Ashmoun Hospital, Abou El Rish Hospital, Nasser Institute Hospital, Magdy Yacoub Hospital, Oncology and Burn Hospital, as well as Private Hospitals such as German Saudi Hospital, Al shifa Specialized Hospital, Ganzouri Hospital, Sherif Moktar Hospital, Al Amal Hospital, Al Moalemin Hospital, Legislation Association Hospital where

nursing interns were trained during the study.

### **Sample**

All available nursing interns who were enrolled in internship year within the academic year 2019-2020 were included. The total number was 380 nursing interns from the above mentioned settings at the time of the study.

### **Instruments**

One instrument was used. It was practical competency self evaluation questionnaire. It consisted of two parts.

#### **Part One:**

It includes demographic data about the participant. This part included intern's age, gender, name of work unit, marital status, residency, previous education, and great point level (GPA).

#### **Part Two:**

It was adapted by the investigator and guided by Dellai, Mortari & Meretoja, (2009). It included 75 items categorized under five dimensions (professional behavior, critical thinking, injury and illness prevention, relationship and caring, and clinical skills).

#### **Scoring system:**

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This score was developed by **Dellai, Mortari & Meretoja, (2009)**. Responses for each question were measured on a three point likart scale as follows, 3 (capable), 2 (partially capable), 1(not capable). Score of each category was summed up and converted into percent score. Nursing interns had poor level of competency if the percent scores was <60%, moderate level of competency if the percent scores were 60% - <75% and high level of competency if the percent score was >75%. From this instrument nursing interns were determined to be competent and had low needs if the score >75% High level of needs was considered if the score <75%.

#### **Validity of the instruments**

A committee that was composed of 5 experts in administration were selected to share (3 professors and 2 Assistant Professors)in judging the instrument. No modification was required.

#### **Ethical considerations**

Approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing,

#### **Results**

**Table (1).** Distribution of nursing interns according to their demographic characteristics (n=380).

Menoufia University. The privacy and confidentiality of data were maintained and assured by getting participants' consent to participate in the research before data collection. Anonymity of participants was granted.

#### **Statistical analysis**

Data was coded and transformed into specially designed form to be suitable for computer entry process. Data was entered and analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) statistical package version 22. Graphics were done using Excel program.

Quantitative data were expressed as mean & standard deviation ( $X \pm SD$ ).

Qualitative data were expressed as number and percentage (No & %).

Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between the study variables.

***P-value at 0.05 was used to determine significance regarding:***

- P-value > 0.05 to be statistically insignificant.
- P-value  $\leq$  0.05 to be statistically significant.
- P-value  $\leq$  0.001 to be high statistically significant.

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<b>Demographic items</b>	No	%
<b>Age</b>		
23	317	83.4
24	63	16.6
Mean $\pm$ SD	23.17 $\pm$ 0.37	
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	310	81.6
Male	70	18.4
<b>Marital status</b>		
Not Married	97	25.5
Married	283	74.5
<b>Previous graduation level</b>		
General secondary school	312	82.1
Secondary technical school	18	4.7
Technical institute	50	13.2
<b>Graduation grade</b>		
Excellent	68	17.9
Very good	273	71.8
Good	39	10.3
<b>Training Hospital</b>		
Governmental	245	64.5
Private	135	35.5
<b>Have you ever worked while studying?</b>		
Yes	46	12.1
No	334	87.9

Table1. Illustrates distribution of socio demographic characteristics of nursing interns in the study sample. As indicated from the table more than four fifths of the studied nursing interns (83.4%) were 23 years old with a mean of 23.17 $\pm$ 0.37. The majority of them (81.6%, 74.5%, 82.15%) were females,

married According to their grade in academic years more than three fifths of them (71.8%) had very good grades. According to training hospitals, 64.5% were working in governmental hospitals and 35.5% were in private hospitals. More than four fifths of them didn't work while studying (87.9%).

**Table (2).** Ranking and Mean Score of Studied Nursing Interns Regarding Practical Competency Self Evaluation Items (n=380)

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Competency items	Maximum	Mean ± SD	% score	Ranking
Professional behavior	45.00	39.52± 4.084	87.82	1
Critical thinking	45.00	37.98 ± 4.123	84.41	5
Client and nurse safety	45.00	38.26 ± 4.376	85.01	3
Relationship and caring	45.00	38.51± 4.299	85.58	2
Clinical skills	45.00	38.01 ± 4.651	84.47	4

Table 2 clarifies ranking of studied nursing interns according to their mean scores of practical competency self evaluation items. As indicated from the table, the total mean score of studied nursing interns regarding total practical competency self evaluation items was (192.281±7.809). The highest mean

score (first ranking) was related to professional behavior (39.524±.084) with mean percentage of (87.82%). In addition the lowest mean score (last ranking) was related critical thinking (37.984±.123) with mean percentage of 54.76%.

**Figure (1):** Distribution of Studied Nursing Interns According to Total Practical Competency Self Evaluation Level (n=380)

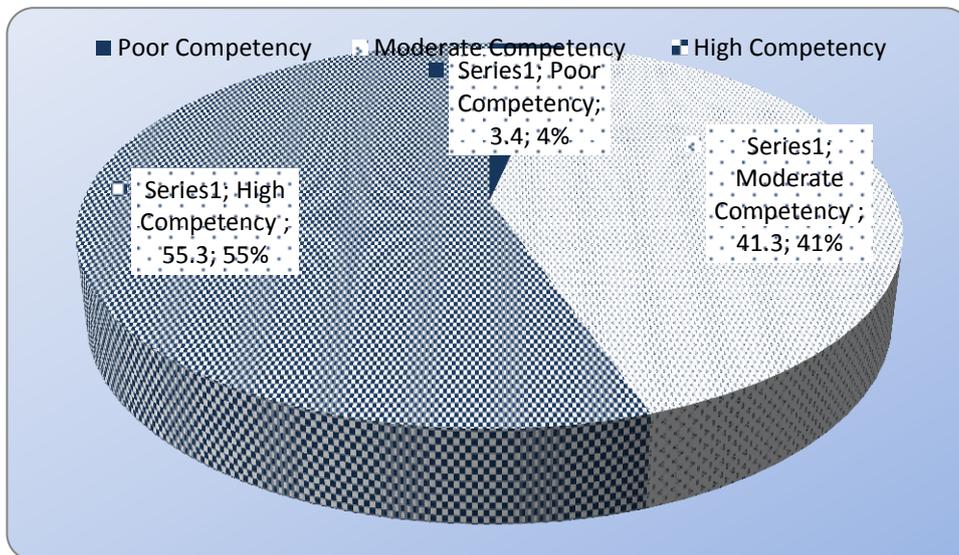


Figure 1. Clarifies Distribution of Studied Nursing Interns According to Total Practical Competency Self Evaluation. As showed from the figure more than half of nursing interns

(55.3%) had high level self evaluation competency. While, 41.3% of them had moderate competency level and 3.4% of studied subject had poor competency level.

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**Figure (2):** Ranking of Studied Nursing Interns Regarding to Total Practice Needs (n=380).

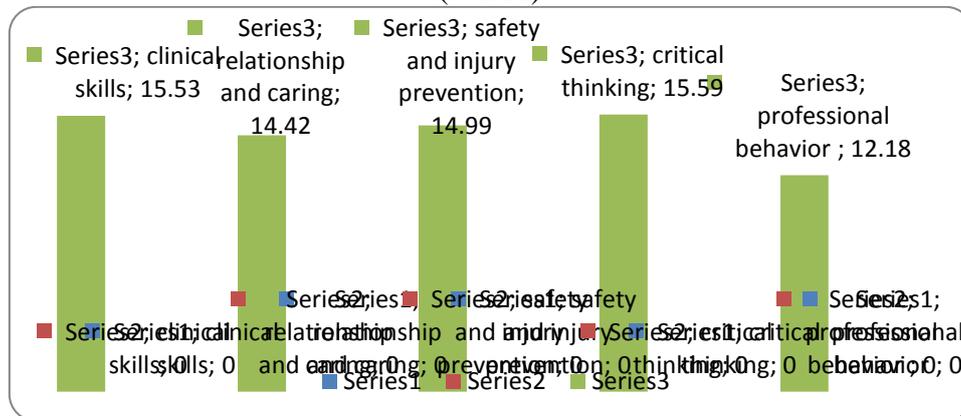


Figure (2). Clarifies ranking of studied nursing interns regarding to total practical needs. As indicated from the figure, the highest mean score was (first ranking) related to critical

thinking (15.59%). In addition the lowest mean score (last ranking) was related to professional behavior (12.18%).

**Table (3):** Level of competency of studied nursing interns in governmental and private hospitals.

Competency Levels	Governmental (n=245)		Private (n=135)		X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	no	%	No	%		
Poor competency (n=13)	10	4.1	3	2.2	11.08	0.004*
Moderate competency (n=157)	115	46.9	42	31.1		
High competency (n=209)	120	49.0	90	66.7		

Table (3): Illustrates Level of competency of studied nursing interns in governmental and private hospitals. As demonstrated from the table 245 of nursing interns who were in governmental hospitals, about 4.1% of studied subject had poor competency, 46.9% of them had moderate competency and 49% had high competency. On the other hand 135 of

nursing interns were in private hospitals, 2.2% of studied subject had poor competency, 31.1 of them had moderate competency and 66.7% had high competency. Moreover, private hospitals had high competency Level (66%) than governmental hospitals (49%). Also there was a very highly statistical significant difference between nursing interns in

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governmental Egyptian schools competency levels of studied subject  
 statistical significance between and training hospital.

**Table (4):**Practical Competency Needs of Nursing Interns in Governmental and Private Hospitals

Practical Competency Needs	Governmental (n=245)		Private (n=135)		X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	no	%	no	%		
In competent (n=155)	116	47.3	39	28.9	12.27	.000**
Competent (n=224)	129	52.7	96	71.1		

Table (4) illustrates Practical Competency Needs of Nursing Interns in Governmental and Private Hospitals. As demonstrated from the table more than two fifths of nursing interns in governmental hospitals (47.3%) were incompetent and more than half of studied subjects (52.7%) were

competent. While 28.9% of nursing interns in private hospitals were incompetent and 71.1% were competent. Thus, nursing interns' practical competency needs at governmental hospital (47.3%) more than private hospitals (28.9%).

**Table (5):** Level of Competency of Intern Nurses Having Different Social Characteristics

Total competency needs	Poor competency (n=13)		Moderate competency (n=157)		High competency (n=210)		X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
	no	%	No	%	no	%		
<b>Age</b>								
23	10	76.9	135	86.0	172	81.9	1.494	0.474
24	3	23.1	22	14.0	38	18.1		
<b>Sex</b>								
Female	12	92.3	122	77.7	176	83.8	3.257	0.196
Male	1	7.7	35	22.3	34	16.2		
<b>Marital status</b>								
Not married	3	23.1	28	17.8	66	31.4	8.776	.012*
Married	10	76.9	129	82.2	144	68.6		
<b>Graduation grade</b>								
Excellent	2	15.4	30	19.1	36	17.1	1.483	0.83
Very good	9	69.2	114	72.6	150	71.4		

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Good	2	15.4	13	8.3	24	11.4		
<b>Previous graduation level</b>								
General secondary school	10	76.9	136	86.6	166	79.0	7.703	0.103
Secondary technical school	1	7.7	2	1.3	15	7.1		
Technical institute	2	15.4	19	12.1	29	13.8		
<b>Have you ever worked while studying?</b>		0.0		0.0			0.0	
Yes	2	15.4	30	19.1	14	6.7	13.2	0.001**
No	11	84.6	127	80.9	196	93.3		
<b>Training hospital</b>								
Governmental	10	4.1	115	46.9	120	49.0	11.08	0.004*
Private	3	2.2	42	31.1	90	66.7		

Table (5). Clarifies Level of Competency of Intern Nurses Having Different Social Characteristics.

As indicated from the table nurses who were married had higher level of competency than unmarried nurses, intern nurses in private hospitals were more competent than interns in governmental hospitals. Therefore,

there was a statistical significant difference at 5% level of statistical significance. In addition there was no statistical significant difference between nursing interns' level of practical competency in relation to self evaluation according to their age, sex, graduation level and GPA.

**Table (6):** Correlation between total competency of Nursing Interns and their Needs (n=380).

Study variables	Total competency	
	R	p-value
<b>Total needs</b>	-0.981	0.000**

\*\*Highly statistical significant P=0.000

Table (6). illustrates correlation between total competency of Nursing Interns' and their needs. As indicated from the table that there was highly statistical significant negative

correlation between nursing interns' practical competency self evaluations and their needs. This could mean that when competency is high, needs are low.

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**DISCUSSION**

Nursing interns are baccalaureate nursing students who start the role transition from senior students to professional nurses through an internship training program. One of the mechanisms considered and implemented to support new graduate nurses in the work place is internship program which is accessible by most hospitals in various format. Transition from student to skilled nurse is a stressful experience due to the increase in the newly graduated nurse responsibility and accountability. Transition is a period of learning, adjustment and socialization, when the nurse applies, consolidates and increases their existing knowledge, gaining competence (knowledge, skills and attitude) that is applicable to the nursing practice of the clinical situation or patient population in which they are expected to perform (Aboshaiqah & Qasim, 2018).

Additionally, nursing interns require highly specialized competencies to accurately determine patients' states and predict and cope with the problems that may occur during nursing care, they need to develop the competency of new routines in quality improvement programs for patients, the abilities of nursing interns to plan and organize the

work are of little benefit to patients if the competencies that they have such as ( professional behavior, critical thinking and clinical skills) are not present, therefore the urgency of adequate nursing interns' competencies in changing and improving care is evident (Missen, McKenna & Beauchamp, 2016).

Thus, this study was conducted to assess nursing interns needs through their practical competency self-evaluation at governmental hospitals, as well as private hospitals through answering the following questions; the 1<sup>st</sup> question was " What are nursing interns' competency levels?", the 2<sup>nd</sup> question was " Is there a difference in nursing interns' needs by the study setting?" and finally the 3<sup>rd</sup> question was " What are the nursing interns' needs based on their practical competency self evaluation?".

This study revealed that the highest score (the first ranking) was professional behavior. While, the lowest score (the last ranking) was related to practical competency self evaluation was critical thinking. In agreement with the present study results, the results of Helmy, Shaban, Al Sharkawy and El Sayed (2014) who clarified that the majority of nurses intern have a high competency

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level in dimensions of professional behavior.

In disagreement with the present study, results that showed that the lowest score with the last ranking was critical thinking, the results of Al-Mahmoud, Dorgham and Abd El-Megeed (2013) stated that considerable percent of nursing interns had a moderate competency level in the dimension of critical thinking. Also Mohamed (2016) who studied "Relationship between critical thinking disposition of nursing students and their performance for patients on hemodialysis" revealed that fifty percent of the students were ambivalent dispositions towards critical thinking.

On the other hand, Adib-Hajbaghery, Karbasi-Valashani and Heidari-Haratmeh, (2012), who studied the "Correlation of Clinical Skills Self-Assessment of Nursing Internship Trainees with Their Teachers' Evaluation", clarified that the overall self-evaluation of professional behavior skills (main base of practical competence) was at a moderate level and also reported that the majority of the students have also evaluated themselves as good in the areas of clinical skills except the areas of relation and communication as they had low scores

This study illustrated that more than two fifths of nursing interns in governmental hospitals were incompetent and half of studied interns were competent. While the percentage of intern nurses in who were competent in private hospitals were more than interns who were incompetent. From this result, it can be clarified that the highest competency level was at the private hospitals where there is low nursing interns needs. While the lowest competency level was at the governmental hospitals where there is great and lot of nursing interns' needs, with highly statistical significant difference.

In agreement with this study, the results of the survey by Buchanan, Jenkins and Scott (2015), who performed a study called "Student Clinical Education in Australia: A University of Sydney Scoping Study" and showed that private hospitals play great role in education and coaching and see this investment as strategically important and the private health centers invest in the existing and the future health-care workforce, with statistical significant difference.

Also, the result of this study was similar to Safaan and Ebrahim (2018) who studied "Problems and Obstacles Facing Nursing Interns and Its Relation to Their Performance At Clinical Setting: A

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Comparative Study” where it was found that level of problems occurrence that faced nursing interns during internship year was at average level at Benha University Hospital and Private Hospitals had low level of problems occurrence. Additionally, the highest level of total obstacles was present at Benha University hospital and it was more than private hospitals that faced nursing interns during internship year, the relationship was highly statistical significant difference.

Furthermore, a study called “Assessing Clinical Competencies of Intern Nursing Students: A Comparative Study in both Private and Governmental Health Sectors” performed by El-Shrief and Ageiz (2018) and proved that there were statistically significant differences between both hospitals (governmental and private) related to all competency domains, as the majority of intern nurses at the private hospitals achieved an expert competence level than intern nurses at the governmental hospitals, with statistical significant difference.

On the contrary, Mohamadirizi, Kohan, Shafei, & Mohamadirizi. (2015) who studied “The relationship between clinical competence and clinical self-efficacy among nursing and midwifery students” and found that no statistical

significant correlations were documented between non-public and governmental sectors according to intern students’ level of clinical competence.

This study clarified that the highest mean score (first ranking) was related to practical needs was critical thinking. In addition the lowest mean score with the last ranking related to practical needs was professional behavior. In agreement with this study result, the results of Athari, Sharif, Nematbakhsh & Babamohammadi (2017) who conducted a study to evaluate critical thinking skills of students in Isfahan University and revealed that critical thinking scores of nursing interns were low level and so critical thinking was considered to be the first need.

On the other hand, a descriptive study for Adib Hajbaghery & Eshraghi Arani (2018) who conducted study about “Assessing nurses’ clinical competence from their own viewpoint and the viewpoint of head nurses in Iran” and found that caring and safety of patients is the first needs for nurses. In addition this result was in contrast with Janet, Kathie, Sydnee and Nathan (2018) who mentioned that the first challenges for preparation of Newly Graduated Nurses was enhancing communication and finding inter-professional support.

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Also this result was not consistent with Papastavrou, Dimitriadou, Tsangari, & Andreou (2016) who study "Nursing students' satisfaction of the clinical learning environment"; and found that nursing students were highly satisfied with the learning environment and their satisfaction has been positively related to their critical thinking. Additionally, this finding disagreed with Carlson, Kotzé & Van (2016) who conducted a study on "enhancing support for nursing students in the clinical setting" and found that nursing interns used their critical and creative thinking skills to apply their nursing knowledge, attitudes, values and logic during patient assessment, utilizing both deductive and inductive reasoning to express patient care.

This study clarified that there was a highly statistical significant negative correlation between nursing interns' practical competency self-evaluations and their needs. These results were in accordance with Wambui & Githui (2019) who conducted a study about "Interns' Satisfaction With the clinical learning environment: A Cross-Sectional Study" and stated that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between expressed needs of nursing interns and their competency.

Also this result was supported by Al-mahmoud, Dorgham & Abd El-megeed (2013) who conducted a study about "Relationship between nurse interns' satisfaction regarding internship program and clinical competence" and revealed that there was a negative statistical significant correlation between nursing interns' competencies and needs. On the other hand, the results of Parchebafieh, Memarian & Vanaki (2020) who conducted a study about "Providing Clinical Safety and Security for Nursing Students: Spontaneous Learning. Electronic" and reported that there weren't statistically significant differences.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the current study findings, it was concluded that: more than half of studied nursing interns had high competency level, more than two fifths of nursing interns had moderate competency level and the rest of them had poor competency level. Additionally, the first ranking with the highest mean score of practical competency was professional behavior, while the last ranking with the lowest mean score was critical thinking. Also nursing interns had the highest competency level was at the private hospitals with low needs in comparison with governmental hospitals

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nursing interns had highest level of their practical needs.

Additionally, the highest mean score with the first ranking related to practical needs was critical thinking followed by clinical skills in second rank. In addition, nurses and clients' safety were in the third rank. Relationship and caring came in the fourth order. The last ranking order was professional behavior. Also there was a highly statistical significant difference between nursing interns' level of practical competency self evaluation and duration of working during studying, their marital status and training hospital. Finally, there was highly statistical significant negative correlation between nursing interns' practical competency self-evaluations and their needs.

#### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1- Hospitals should put in their training policies nursing interns' training principles to enhance development of nursing interns' competency.
- 2- Head nurse should provide continuous observation and monitoring of nursing interns during their work and provide continuous evaluation of their work.

- 3- Nursing' managers should consider themselves as a role model for nursing interns and encourage nursing interns to be independent, responsible and self regulators and allow nursing interns to participate in problem solving and decision making process.

- 4- Hospitals should provide adequate training programs to improve nursing interns' practical competency and encourage them to have high competency level.

- 5- Nursing interns should be allowed to attend formal educational programs that aimed at identifying their needs and improving their practical competency.

- 6- Training programs that meet the training needs of intern nurses should be implemented.

- 7- Further studies are recommended to be conducted on other nursing interns to assess their needs and how to evaluate their competency.

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