1. Introduction

Learning styles are factors that directly affect students’ learning processes. Learners use different styles based on their personal differences. The recognition of learning styles and teaching based on that recognition will help lecturers use suitable methods of teaching. Teachers should pay attention to their students' personal differences for the learners' educational needs to be met effectively (Engels and Gara, 2010; Samarakaoon et al., 2013; Nuzhat et al., 2013; Boström and Hallin, 2013). Investigating the factors which are effective in learning is a multidimensional task which depends on the social, political, cognitive and affective growth of learners. One of the issues which can guide us to desirable learning is doing research about learning styles and their relationship with academic achievement. Learning style is a person's learning preferences in apprehending, organizing, and processing information and learning experiences (Smith, 2010; Buali et al., 2013). Learners use different learning styles due to their personal differences. Different methods have been designed for determining people’s learning styles. One of the most prominent ones is Kolb’s learning style. Kolb recognizes learning as a process by means of which knowledge is created through a change in experience (Kolb and Kolb, 2005).

Research and the results of the application of learning style-related theories have led to a variety of classifications for learning styles. Therefore, different researchers use different scales and categories to classify learning styles (Dobson, 2009). Yet, most of these scales and classifications are very similar to each other and focus on learning environment preferences, emotional and cognitive conditions, personality types or cognitive styles (Boyde et al., 2009; McVicar et al., 2010). Nurse education should enhance students' capacities and prepare them for life-long learning so that they can update their knowledge with regard to nursing theories and practice. One of the important matters in nurse education is how to create a proper environment for learning (Falk et al., 2016). In view of the important role of learning styles in learning and academic achievement, the present study aims to investigate the effects of education based on nursing students’ preferred learning style on their academic achievement.

1.1. Background

Kolb's model is designed based on empirical learning. Learning involves a series of human activities, including sensation, reflex, thinking and doing. Based on this style, the four main learning abilities are reflection observation, concrete experiences, active experiment and abstract conceptualization. A person's preference for using any one of these four items will develop a different learning style. Thus, the four learning styles are divergent, convergent, assimilative and accommodative. Each of the learning styles has weak points and positive points; the perfect learner is someone who uses different styles in different situations appropriately (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; van den Berg,
2.1. Data gathering

First, the aims of the study were explained to the students, and the researchers got their consent for participation in the study. Then, a pretest was given about all the topics of the course “the learning process and education of the patient for students”. Next, the students completed Kolb’s learning questionnaire. The items on the pretest and the posttest were the same. The purpose of the pretest was to determine the participants’ awareness of the goals of the courses; the purpose of the posttest was to measure their academic success. The length of each term was approximately 4 months.

Considering the dominant learning style, the students who were in the “divergent” category made use of the group discussion method with an overflow of ideas for learning the topics of the course in question. The lecturer, in addition to introducing appropriate sources for studying the lesson before beginning a group discussion, presented the necessary guidelines before each discussion. Each group had one leader who, besides guiding the group, would, at the end or beginning of each session, present a summary of the results of the group’s discussion for the whole class. The lecturer, in addition to supervising the activities of the groups during the discussion, would guide the students as necessary. The lecturer would specify a time during the class, as well as outside-class hours, for problem-solving and guide the students if they needed help. The participants were free to consult the teacher outside the class hours if they had any questions about the implementation of the method of education or the course sources (none of the participants visited the teacher for this purpose, however). To implement the intervention of small-group discussions, the researchers divided the students into 8 groups with 5 students in each. The students were divided randomly; yet the groups were formed in such a way that each group would include a student with one of the four learning styles, except the assimilative style which only one student was found to have.

At the end of the fourth session, the students took one exam, and at the end of the term, the final exam was given. Then, the data was analyzed using SPSS software, version 16, and descriptive and analytical statistics (Chi-Square, Wilcoxon and Friedman Test).
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