



## Does participation of nursing students in social activities affect their social emotional learning skills?



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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** One of the basic conditions for raising qualified and equipped individuals in today's world is to ensure their participation in social activities. Participation in social activities supports the development of social emotional learning skills in individuals. Providing scientific evidence supporting social emotional learning is also important for developing the social emotional learning skills of nursing students.

**Objectives:** This study examined the effect of nursing student participation in social activities on their social emotional learning skills.

**Design:** Descriptive study.

**Setting and participants:** The population of this descriptive study consisted of all undergraduate students studying in the nursing faculty at a state university in Turkey (1202 students). No sample was selected in the study with the goal of assessing the entire study population. The study was conducted with 715 students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

**Method:** Data were collected using the Information Form and the Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale. The data was analyzed using frequency, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Pearson-correlation, one-way ANOVA, t-test, and Chi-square statistical methods.

**Results:** More than 50% of the students did not participate in social activities. The students that did participate in social activities made more friends, found more opportunities for socialization, had increased self-confidence, and approached different views with tolerance. The students did not participate in social activities due to lack of time and financial difficulties. The students had high social emotional learning skills total and subscale scores. The participation of students in social activities affects their social emotional learning skills positively.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, nursing students' opportunities for participating in social activities should be increased and their participation in social activities should be supported through encouraging initiatives.

### 1. Background

One of the basic conditions for raising qualified and equipped individuals in today's world is to ensure their participation in social activities (Türnüklü, 2004). Social activities refer to all activities that individuals carry out in the scientific, social, cultural, artistic, and sports fields to gain new interests and skills ([http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/25699\\_0.html](http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/25699_0.html), 11.04.2016). These activities, which individuals participate in during their free time, enable them to develop a strong personality and have a good quality of life by improving their cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being (Aslan and Cansever, 2007; Elias, 2006; Torkildsen, 2005). Thus, individuals learn to tolerate different thoughts, beliefs, and cultural values (Ardahan and Lapa, 2010; Kiper, 2009; Doster et al., 2006), gain new values, and develop self-control

mechanisms (Simpkins et al., 2006; Kam et al., 2004). In addition, social activities enable individuals to develop their skills of self-expression, effective communication, collaborative work, taking responsibility, planned work, and problem-solving (Durualp, 2014; Ahmetoğlu, 2009; Simpkins et al., 2006; Kam et al., 2004; Başaran, 2000). Participation in social activities also supports development of social emotional learning skills in individuals.

Social emotional learning, which consists of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and social-emotional competence, is a complex and multilateral competence existing within all dimensions of life (Goleman, 2012). Social emotional learning is the process of recognizing, organizing, and managing emotions, having empathy, making right decisions, taking responsibility, acting ethically and fairly, and avoiding negative behaviors so that individuals can fulfill their

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responsibilities in life (McKown, 2017; Swartz, 2017; Arslan and Akin, 2013; Kabakçı and Totan, 2013; Cohen, 2006; Elias, 2006; CASEL, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2005). Having social emotional learning skills enables individuals to fit into society as well as take and maintain social roles and responsibilities (Totan and Kabakçı, 2010). Individuals with developed social emotional learning skills behave more autonomously, learn to reject unsuitable requests, establish healthy relationships, develop empathy, respects other individuals' rights and emotions, and work in cooperation with others (Swartz, 2017; Gömleksiz and Kan, 2012; Türnüklü, 2004). Studies have emphasized that individuals with high levels of social emotional learning skills have higher academic achievements and learning desires as well as advanced problem-solving skills (Arslan and Akin, 2013; Kusché and Greenberg, 2001; Petersen, 2012; Totan and Kabasakal, 2012; Totan and Kabakçı, 2010).

Today, nursing education aims to educate nursing students with professional, human, and social values, affectivity, and social emotional learning skills (Hall and Mitchell, 2017; Durualp, 2014; Kabakçı and Owen, 2010). Therefore, providing scientific evidence supporting social emotional learning is important for developing these skills in nursing students (Gömleksiz and Kan, 2012). However, this is not sufficient. Supporting their participation in social activities is also important to train nursing students with these characteristics (Türnüklü, 2004). In relevant studies, it is suggested to organize, increase, and disseminate social activities suitable for students' active participation to support their emotional and artistic (creative) intelligences, enrich their social experiences and affective aspects, and enable them to express themselves (Yeşilyaprak, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Aslan and Cansever, 2007; Cohen, 2006; Simpkins et al., 2006).

There are studies that separately address participation of students in social activities (Kaya et al., 2016; Gedik and Orhan, 2014; Ardahan and Lapa, 2010; Kaya, 2011; Kurtepe, 2011; Sabbağ and Aksoy, 2011) and their social emotional learning skills (Swartz, 2017; Durualp, 2014; Kabakçı and Totan, 2013; Arslan and Akin, 2013; Cohen, 2006). However, there is no study of nursing students examining the mutual influence of these two parameters. Therefore, this study is unique because it examines the relationship between participation of nursing students in social activities and their social emotional learning skills.

The study examined the effect of nursing students' participation in social activities on their social emotional learning skills. In this context, answers to the following questions were sought in this study:

1. What is the participation level of nursing students in social activities?
2. What is the social emotional learning skill level of nursing students?
3. Does the participation of nursing students in social activities affect their social emotional learning skills?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study setting

This is a descriptive study.

### 2.2. Sample

The population of this study consisted of all undergraduate students studying in the nursing faculty at a state university in Turkey (n = 1,202). No sample was selected in the study to assess the entire study population. The study was conducted with 715 students who agreed to voluntarily participate in the study.

### 2.3. Instrument

Data were collected using the Information Form and the Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale.

#### 2.3.1. Information Form

The researchers developed this form in accordance with the literature (Swartz, 2017; Kaya et al., 2016). The form consisted of total 10 questions. In the form, there were 8 close-ended questions to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the students and their participation in social activities and 2 open-ended questions to determine the opinions of students about the benefits of participating in social activities and the difficulties which they had during the activities. The answers given to open-ended questions were grouped by doing a content analysis.

#### 2.3.2. Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale (SELSS)

The SELSS was developed by Kabakçı and Owen (2010). This four-point Likert type scale consists of 40 items and 4 subscales (communication, problem solving, coping with stress, and self-esteem enhancing skills). Total scale scores range from 40 to 160, with higher scores indicating higher social emotional learning skills. The total Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.85 (Kabakçı and Owen, 2010). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.93 for the whole scale and 0.87 for the subscale of problem-solving skills, 0.67 for the subscale of skills of coping with stress, 0.89 for the subscale of self-esteem enhancing skills, and 0.78 for the subscale of communication skills.

## 2.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software package (IBM Corp. Released 2013. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.), descriptive statistics (frequency, arithmetic mean and standard deviation), Pearson-correlation, one-way ANOVA, t-test, and Chi-square statistical methods.

## 2.5. Data collection

The researchers collected data using the face-to-face interview method after a brief explanation was given to the students. Data collection process was completed between February–May 2017.

## 2.6. Study area

The nursing faculty where the study was conducted is an institution that supports students' social activities with sports, artistic, and cultural activity clubs/groups created for this purpose in the faculty. Participation in these activities depends on students' interest, ability, and voluntariness. Students can attend more than one club. Volleyball, basketball, chess, and football are the available sports activities. The sports teams represent the faculty by participating in competitions held every year in the university. Painting, theater, folk dance, modern dance, musical instrument, end-blown flute, tambourine, and cinema studies are the available artistic and cultural activities. These studies, which have continued for more than ten years, are guided by competent/specialized trainers. The students do not pay for any social activities; the faculty finances students for trainer fees and necessary materials. All of these activities occur within school hours outside the curriculum and in areas (sports hall, showroom, etc.) specifically reserved for these activities. All the activities are presented to all students on special occasions in the form of demonstrations, theater performances, concerts, exhibitions, etc. during the academic year (approximately 28 weeks). Students participating in the activities are considered on leave during demonstrations and competitions.

## 2.7. Ethical considerations

Before conducting the study, an ethical committee approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Clinical Investigations at Istanbul Bakırköy Dr. Sadi Konuk Education and Research Hospital

(Date: 09.06.2016 & Decision Number: 2016/05(06)). Then, permission was obtained from the dean's office of the nursing faculty where the research was conducted. Subsequently, permission for using the Social Emotional Learning Skills Scale was received from Kabakçı and Korkut Owen. The student participation in the study was based on the principle of volunteerism. A brief explanation was given to the students about the study and their verbal consent was obtained before distributing the data forms.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students

Of the students, 27.6% were freshmen, 27.4% were sophomores, 21.7% were juniors, 23.3% were seniors, 87.4% were female, and 12.6% were male. The mean age of the students was  $20.8 \pm 1.3$  years (min:18–max:27).

#### 3.2. Participation of nursing students in social activities

Of the students, 32.9% participated in social activities outside the faculty and 58.3% did not participate in any social activities. Of those who participated in social activities, 41.9%, 37.3%, and 36.6% participated in artistic, sports, and cultural activities, respectively. Students participated in these activities for an average of  $2.76 \pm 2.1$  years and allocated an average of  $5.53 \pm 4.7$  h per week for these activities (Table 1).

Students expressed that participating in social activities enabled them to make more friends, become more social, increase their self-esteem, and tolerate different views. They also stated that they experienced difficulties participating in social activities because of lack of time, economic problems, and difficulty maintaining activities. To increase participation in social activities, the students suggested that schools present different types of social activities, allocate time for social activities in the curriculum, and promote social activities (Table 2).

#### 3.3. Social emotional learning skills of nursing students

The students' total mean score on the social emotional learning skills scale was  $123.85 \pm 14.9$ . The students' subscale mean score was  $35.44 \pm 4.7$  for problem solving skills,  $32.06 \pm 4.8$  for self-esteem enhancing skills,  $27.20 \pm 4.2$  for skills of coping with stress, and  $29.14 \pm 3.8$  for communication skills (Table 3).

**Table 1**  
Participation of nursing students in social activities (n = 715).

	n	%
Social activity participation status <sup>a</sup>		
Participating in social activities in the faculty	87	12,2
Participating in social activities outside the faculty	235	32,9
Participating in no social activity	417	58,3
Type of social activity participated in (n = 284) <sup>a</sup>		
Sports activities	106	37,3
Artistic activities	119	41,9
Cultural activities	104	36,6
	Min–max	Mean ± SD
Duration of social activity (years) (n = 278)	1–10	2,76 ± 2,1
Weekly time allocated for social activity (hours) (n = 278)	1–20	5,53 ± 4,7

<sup>a</sup> More than one answer was given.

**Table 2**  
Opinions of nursing students about participating in social activities.

	n	%
Benefits of participating in social activities <sup>a</sup> (n = 284)		
I have made more friends	209	29,2
I became more social	206	28,8
My self-esteem has risen	199	27,8
My tolerance for different thoughts and beliefs increased.	198	27,7
My sociability skill improved	184	25,7
My self-expression skill improved	179	25,0
My sense of responsibility improved.	166	23,2
My cooperation skill improved.	147	20,6
I discovered my skills, I recognized myself	136	19,0
My academic success increased	37	5,2
Difficulties in participating in social activities <sup>a</sup> (n = 154)		
I had difficulty allocating time for social activities.	230	32,2
I could not afford to participate in social activities	123	17,2
I had difficulty maintaining the activities.	74	10,3
I experienced problems with the physical structure (environment, conditions).	58	8,1
Suggestions for increasing participation in social activities <sup>a</sup> (n = 154)		
Presenting different types of social activities	49	31,8
Allocating time for social activities in the curriculum	35	22,7
Increasing promotions for social activities in school	32	20,8
Increasing opportunities for participating in social activities	21	13,6

<sup>a</sup> More than one answer was given.

**Table 3**  
Nursing students total and subscale mean scores on the social emotional learning skills scale (n = 715).

	Number of items	Min–max	Mean ± SD
Problem solving skills	11	18–44	35,44 ± 4,7
Coping with stress	10	15–40	27,20 ± 4,2
Self-esteem enhancing skills	10	15–40	32,06 ± 4,8
Communication skills	9	16–36	29,14 ± 3,8
SELS totally	40	69–160	123,85 ± 14,9

#### 3.4. The effect of nursing students' participation in social activities on their social emotional learning skills

A significant difference was found between the students' SELS total and subscale mean scores in their participation in social activities ( $p < 0.001$ ). The total and subscale scores of the students who participated in social activities were higher than those who did not (Table 4).

No significant relationship was found between the participation of students in social activities held in the faculty and their SELS total and subscale mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 4). However, a significant difference was found between the students' SELS total and subscale mean scores and their participation in social activities held outside the faculty ( $p < 0.001$ ). The total and subscale scores of the students who participated in social activities outside the faculty were higher (Table 4).

No significant relationship was found between the social activity type (artistic, cultural, and sports activities) in which the students participated and their SELS total and subscale mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 4). No significant relationship was found between both the duration of social activities and the weekly time (hours) allocated by the students for social activities and their SELS total and subscale mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 4).

A significant difference was found between the students' SELS total and subscale scores and their opinions about the benefits of participating in social activities ( $p < 0.01$ ). The students who expressed the benefits of participating in social activities (making more friends, becoming more social, increasing self-confidence, etc.) had higher mean scores than those who did not think participating was beneficial (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
The effect of nursing students participation in social activities on their social emotional learning skills (n = 715).

	Problem solving skills	Coping with stress	Self-esteem enhancing skills	Communication skills	SELS totally
<b>Social activity participation status*</b>					
Participating in no social activity	t = -2,68 p = ,008	t = -5,52 p = ,000	t = -4,09 p = ,000	t = -4,51 p = ,000	t = -4,92 p = ,000
Participating in social activities in the faculty	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
Participating in social activities outside the faculty	t = 2,90 p = ,004	t = 5,42 p = ,000	t = 4,15 p = ,000	t = 4,39 p = ,000	t = 4,92 p = ,000
<b>Type of social activity participated in (n = 284)*</b>					
Sports activities	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
Artistic activities	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
Cultural activities	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
Duration of social activity (years) (n = 278)	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
Weekly time allocated for social activity (hours) (n = 278)	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05	p > 0,05
<b>Benefits of participating in social activities* (n = 284)</b>					
I have made more friends	t = 3,08 p = ,002	t = 6,45 p = ,000	t = 4,59 p = ,000	t = 4,19 p = ,000	t = 5,24 p = ,000
I became more social	t = 3,27 p = ,001	t = 6,48 p = ,000	t = 4,94 p = ,000	t = 5,38 p = ,000	t = 5,77 p = ,000
My self-esteem has risen	t = 3,48 p = ,001	t = 4,06 p = ,000	t = 4,72 p = ,000	t = 4,61 p = ,000	t = 4,92 p = ,000
My tolerance for different thoughts and beliefs increased	t = 3,14 p = ,002	t = 5,95 p = ,000	t = 4,62 p = ,000	t = 5,47 p = ,000	t = 5,51 p = ,000
My sociability skill improved	t = 2,45 p = ,015	t = 5,43 p = ,000	t = 4,14 p = ,000	t = 5,07 p = ,000	t = 4,86 p = ,000
My self-expression skill improved	t = 2,79 p = ,005	t = 6,14 p = ,000	t = 4,03 p = ,000	t = 3,43 p = ,000	t = 4,87 p = ,000
My sense of responsibility improved	t = 3,55 p = ,000	t = 5,39 p = ,000	t = 5,01 p = ,000	t = 4,62 p = ,000	t = 5,25 p = ,000
My cooperation skill improved	t = 2,70 p = ,007	t = 4,58 p = ,000	t = 3,12 p = ,002	t = 3,21 p = ,001	t = 3,89 p = ,000
I discovered my skills, I recognized myself	t = 2,06 p = ,039	t = 34,60 p = ,000	t = 3,83 p = ,000	t = 3,85 p = ,000	t = 3,90 p = ,000
My academic success increased	t = 3,29 p = ,001	t = 4,86 p = ,000	t = 3,52 p = ,000	t = 4,25 p = ,000	t = 4,54 p = ,000

Participation of the students in social activities and their socio-demographic characteristics were compared (Table 5). A statistically significant difference was found between participation of the students in social activities and grade (academic year), gender and age (p < 0.05). The rate of not participating in any social activities was

**Table 5**  
Compared of the nursing students participation in social activities and on their mean scores on the social emotional learning skills scale with socio-demographic characteristics (n = 715).

	Class	Gender	Years
<b>Social activity participation status*</b>			
Participating in social activities in the faculty	p > 0.05	x <sup>2</sup> = 4,35 p = ,056	p > 0.05
Participating in social activities outside the faculty	p > 0.05	x <sup>2</sup> = 5,11 p = ,030	p > 0.05
Participating in no social activity	x <sup>2</sup> = 12,79 p = ,005	x <sup>2</sup> = 9,51 p = ,003	t = -2,65 p = ,008
<b>Type of social activity participated in (n = 284)*</b>			
Sports activities	p > 0.05	x <sup>2</sup> = 11,09 p = ,001	p > 0.05
Artistic activities	p > 0.05	x <sup>2</sup> = 7,98 p = ,005	p > 0.05
Cultural activities	p > 0.05	p > 0.05	p > 0.05
<b>Scale of SELS</b>			
Problem solving skills	F = ,139 p = ,936	p > 0.05	p > 0.05
Coping with stress	F = 6,60 p = ,000	p > 0.05	r = ,092 p = ,014
Self-esteem enhancing skills	F = ,105 p = ,936	p > 0.05	r = -,021 p = ,578
Communication skills	F = ,48 p = ,368	t = 2,90 p = ,004	r = -,013 p = ,733
SELS totally	F = ,128 p = ,278	p > 0.05	r = -,034 p = ,362

lower in seniors than the others (x<sup>2</sup> = 12, 79 p = , 005). It was determined that the ones not participating in any social activities were mostly female students (x<sup>2</sup> = 9.51 p = 0.003), male students participated in social activities out of school more (x<sup>2</sup> = 5.11 p = 0.030). Average age of the students not participating in any social activities was lower (t = -2,657 p = , 008) (Table 5).

No statistically significant difference was found between the type of social activity which the students participate in, and grade and age (p > 0.05). There was a statistically difference between the type of social activity (artistic and sports activity) which the students participate in, and gender (p < 0.05). It was determined that male students (x<sup>2</sup> = 11, 09 p = , 001) participated in sports activities more and female students (x<sup>2</sup> = 7.98 p = 0.005) participated in artistic activities more. There was no significant difference between participation in cultural activities and gender (p > 0.05) (Table 5).

The students' socio-demographic characteristics, such as grade, gender and age, and their SELS total and sub-dimension mean scores were compared (Table 5). It was found that the grade of the students was significantly different only from mean score of the sub-dimension of coping with stress (p < 0.05). The seniors' mean score of coping with stress was higher than the other grades (F = 6, 60 p = , 000). It was found that gender of the students was statistically significantly different only from mean score of the sub-dimension of communication skills (p < 0.05). Female students' mean score of communication skills was higher than that of male students (t = 2, 90 p = , 004). It was found that age of the students had a positive and weak-degree relationship only with mean score of the sub-dimension of coping with stress (r = , 092 p = , 014), score of coping with stress increased weakly as the age increased (Table 5).

#### 4. Discussion

Nursing is a profession based on interpersonal relationships (Tutuk et al., 2002). Improving interpersonal relationships of nursing students

requires scientific knowledge as well as participation in social activities, which is a method of learning through experience. Studies determine that university students participate in social activities, but mostly in those requiring passive participation such as listening to music, going to the cinema/theater, and reading books (Afyon and Kırkpınar, 2014; Ardahan and Lapa, 2010; Balci, 2003; Kiper, 2009; Mansuroğlu, 2002; Önder, 2003). The present study determined that > 50% of the students did not participate in social activities before (Table 1). Today, young people prefer social activities requiring no active participation and are more interested in the ways of entertainment in virtual environments. However, social activities are not merely an activity to spend free time and have fun, but they also have many benefits for students' social and individual development. Therefore, education programs should be structured to include different social activities (theater, music, folk dance, dance clubs, basketball, soccer teams/activities, etc.) that will support nursing students' social and scientific developments. Students, faculty managers, and faculty members should be motivated and encouraged to participate in social activities.

Participation in social activities (artistic-cultural-sports) contributes to individuals' physical, psychological, and social development, supports their personality development, and develops their cognitive and affective health (Durualp, 2014; Ardahan and Lapa, 2010; Demir and Demir, 2006; Doster et al., 2006; Simpkins et al., 2006). By participating in social activities, individuals recognize themselves and other people, develop their self-expression, communication, and problem-solving skills, learn cooperation, and take responsibility (Sarıkoç and Kaplan, 2017; Demirtaş, 2010; Kiper, 2009; Cohen, 2006; Türnüklü, 2004; Huang and Carleton, 2003). The participating students who were involved in social activities stated that they made more friends, had more opportunities to socialize, increased their self-esteem, and increased their tolerance to different opinions. These characteristics, which are also important and desirable qualities in the nursing profession, suggest that nursing students should be encouraged to participate in social activities.

The study determined that students did not participate in social activities due to lack of time and financial difficulties (Table 2). Ardahan and Lapa (2010) report that university students living in major cities have higher participation in social activities but do not find enough time to participate in social activities. Similarly, Afyon and Kırkpınar (2014), Kaya (2011), Sabbağ and Aksoy (2011), Müderrisoğlu (2002) showed that students are unable to participate in social activities because of low income, lack of financial opportunities, and lack of facilities and opportunities for social activities on the university campus. To increase participation in social activities, the students suggested that schools present different types of social activities, allocate time for social activities in the curriculum, and promote social activities (Table 2). The faculty where the study was conducted is located in Istanbul, Turkey's most crowded city with heavy traffic. The residential areas in Istanbul are scattered and distant from each other. The nursing faculty is far from the center campus of the university. Students might have experienced these problems because the social activities were scheduled at the end of the lessons and the course schedule was intensive.

Social emotional learning enables individuals to recognize, regulate, and manage their emotions, empathize with others, make the right decisions, take responsibility, act ethically and fairly, and avoid negative behaviors (Swartz, 2017; McKown, 2017; Arslan and Akın, 2013; Kabakçı and Totan, 2013; Elias, 2006; Cohen, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2005). Considering that the total score on the SELS ranges between 40 and 160, the study determined that the students had high total and subscale scores in social-emotional learning skills (Table 3). Sarıkoç and Kaplan (2017) found high level of social emotional learning skills in nursing students. This is a satisfactory result because it suggests that nursing students have the qualities reflecting social emotional learning skills.

The studies published by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) (2017) found a positive relationship

between children's social life and social emotional learning. Similarly, Sarıkoç and Kaplan (2017), Yeşilyaprak (2014), Cohen (2006), Simpkins et al. (2006), and Türnüklü (2004) have shown that social emotional learning is influenced by the social processes in individuals' lives. There is no study showing the relationship between social emotional learning and social activity processes. A significant difference was found between the students' SELS total and subscale mean scores in their participation in social activities ( $p < 0.001$ ). The total and subscale scores of the students who participated in social activities were higher than those who did not. No significant relationship was found between the participation of students in social activities held in the faculty and their SELS total and subscale mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, a significant difference was found between the students' SELS total and subscale mean scores and their participation in social activities held outside the faculty ( $p < 0.001$ ). The social activities held in the faculty occur with other nursing students in a familiar environment. However, the social activities held outside the faculty enable students to interact with different social groups in different environments. This may be the reason for the result obtained.

No significant relationship was found between the social activity type (artistic, cultural, and sports activities) participated in by the students and their SELS total and subscale mean scores ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 4). This result shows that, regardless of the type of social activity students participate in and how long they perform these activities, participating in social activities is influential in the development of social emotional learning skills in students. This result is important to demonstrate that participation of students in social activities should be supported.

Durualp (2014), Denham et al. (2012), Denham and Brown (2010), Elias (2006) determined a high level of socioemotional learning skills in individuals with high self-perception, communication skills, sense of responsibility, and self-confidence. The students who expressed the benefits of participating in social activities (making more friends, becoming more social, increasing self-confidence, etc.) had higher mean scores than those who did not find the participation beneficial (Table 4). This result suggests that the social emotional learning skills of students who are aware of the benefits of social activities improve.

In the present study, the effect of socio-demographic characteristics of the students on their participation in social activities and SELS was examined (Table 5). It was seen that the ones not participating in any social activities were mostly female students. It was determined that male students participated in social activities out of school and sports activities more and female students participated in artistic activities more. This result suggests that male students are more interested in sports activities and female students are more interested in artistic activities, and this is promoted by the society. In a study conducted by Kirtepe (2011); male students were determined to participate in sports activities more. It is considered that less participation of female students in the social activities and the activities out of school is associated with the fact that traditional approach has an effect on socio-cultural characteristics of the society and women-men roles.

It was seen in the study that the seniors' rate of participation in social activities was higher and average age of the students not participating in any social activities was lower (Table 5). Based on this finding and our observations, we can say that the seniors participate in social activities more since they have adapted themselves to university education and faculty. Since the other grades- thereby the students with lower average age- are still in the adaptation process, they are not able to allocate enough time for social activities. Unlike our study finding, in the studies conducted by Kaya (2011) and Ardahan and Lapa (2010) over university students, no significant difference was determined between age of the students and their participation in social activities.

Participation in social activities contributes to physical, psychological and social development of the individual, supports his/her personality development and supports his/her developing communication and problem solving skills and coping with stress (Sarıkoç and Kaplan,

2017; Durualp, 2014; Ardahan and Lapa, 2010; Huang and Carleton, 2003). It was seen in the study that mean scores of coping with stress increased as the students' grade and age increased. It was determined that female students' mean score of communication skills was higher than that of male students (Table 5). This finding suggests that communication, one of sub-dimensions of social emotional learning skills, is associated with gender and coping with stress is associated with experience. However, it is not possible to say this for certain and studies are needed, which shall be conducted on this subject more comprehensively and with larger sample groups. In the studies conducted by Kabakçı and Owen (2010), Totan and Kabasakal (2012); no significant difference was determined between the students' SEL total and sub-dimension mean scores and gender. In the study conducted by Durualp (2014); it was determined that female students' SEL total and sub-dimension mean scores were higher than those of male students. As is seen, there are not any exact results related to this subject in the studies.

## 5. Conclusion

University education is not a process in which students acquire only scientific and professional knowledge. It is a period in which students are expected to be active due to their youth energy, and which leaves a mark on individuals' lives. This period is an important opportunity for individuals to complete their socio-cultural development before starting a work life. Having intense and beneficial social and scientific activities during this period is also an important gain for professional life. This is even more important for nursing students who prepare themselves for a profession that offers human health services but causes them to suffer from stress, emotional burdens, and a heavy workload because they are responsible for human life. Nursing students are expected to be self-aware, emotional, high-ability, social, and communicative individuals. Therefore, it is important for them to benefit from every opportunity and environment that enable them to develop these qualities during their school years. Participation in social activities is an important experience for acquiring and developing these personal aspects. This study examined the effect of participation of nursing students in social activities on their social emotional learning skills, and found the following results: i) the participation of students in social activities was not sufficient or at the desired level, ii) more than half did not participate in any social activity. However, the students stated that participation in social activities increased the number of friends, made it possible to get more social, increased self-confidence and enabled them to treat tolerantly. However, it was determined that they had difficulties in participation in a social activity for reasons, such as inability to allocate time, economic problems, having difficulty in continuing activities. The students' social emotional learning skill scores were high. The participation of students in social activities affects their social emotional learning skills positively. Participation in social activities increases the students' communication skills, social relationships and abilities of coping with problems. The fact that the students improve the mentioned abilities of them during university education shall make a significant contribution to both individual and Professional life of them in the future. From this aspect, we believe that it shall be beneficial to support and promote the participation in social activities.

## 6. Recommendations

In accordance with these results, it is advisable

- to increase the opportunities for nursing students to participate in social activities,
- to encourage nursing students to participate in social activities through incentive initiatives such as rewards, granting a leave of absence during social activities, opportunity for representing their school, systematically making announcements, publishing social activities on the web page, etc.,

- to provide nursing students with free-time in the curriculum to ensure their participation in social activities and with opportunities for interacting with other individuals or student groups.

## Contribution of each author

- Sevim Ulupınar, Emine Şenyuva and Nil Küçük Yüceyurt: Design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work
- Sevim Ulupınar and Emine Şenyuva: Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content.
- Emine Şenyuva and Nil Küçük Yüceyurt: Final approval of the version to be published
- Sevim Ulupınar and Emine Şenyuva: Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

## Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

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