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Preferred learning styles among nursing undergraduates at KAATSU International University, Sri Lanka

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Background: Every person has a unique way of learning. A thorough understanding of students' learning style in higher education is useful for curriculum development and implementation of different teaching methods. Therefore, the awareness of an individual's learning style is essential to increase the students' efficiency of learning and academic performance.

Objective: The objective of this study was to determine the preferred learning styles among nursing undergraduates of KAATSU International University (KIU), Sri Lanka.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 327 nursing undergraduates. Data were collected using a pre-tested (n=10), self-administered questionnaire which included three parts: A-socio-demographic factors, B-learning-related factors, and C-VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic)) questionnaire version 8.01 to identify their preferred learning styles. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. SPSS version 23.0 was used for data analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of KIU.

Results: Among the nursing undergraduates, most were female (97.9%) and most belonged to the age group 21-30 years (64.5%). The unimodal learning style was predominant (68.5%) while the remainder had a multimodal learning preference (31.5%). The kinesthetic learning style was the most popular unimodal learning style (49.8%) followed by aural (12.8%), visual (4.6%) and read/write (1.2%). Among multimodal learners, the majority were quadrimodal (21.1%). Among quadrimodal learners, the majority had a high preference (76.1%) for VARK type 1 (switching from mode to mode depending on the context). Most participants preferred to learn in a calm environment (78.6%). There was no significant association between learning styles with demographic or learning related factors ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusion: Nursing curricula should incorporate more practical sessions, teaching strategies with real-life situations, demonstrations, applications, and simulation to enhance learning as most nursing undergraduates preferred kinesthetic learning style. The learning environment should be designed with quiet personal spaces as most learners preferred a calm environment to learn.