Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

UNIMAS FINAL YEAR NURSING STUDENTS' READINESS TOWARDS TRANSITION TO PROFESSIONAL NURSING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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72120

Bachelor of Nursing with Honours

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This graduation exercise is submitted in partial fulfilment of requirement for the degree
of Bachelor of Nursing (with Honours)

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

2023

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

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This declaration is made on the 27ᵗʰ day of September year 2023.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Transitioning to nursing practice after graduating from nursing school is a complex process. Transition shock, one of the common phenomena that occurs to many newly graduated nurses around the globe. Many theories have been constructed to understand this transition process. It is undeniable that the inability to meet expectations and work readiness may influence the new nurses' sustainability in the profession. However, limited studies have been done to study work readiness among final-year nursing students. Therefore, this study aims to explore the final-year nursing students' readiness towards their transition to the nursing profession. **Methods:** This study used descriptive qualitative to explore UNIMAS final-year nursing students' readiness towards the transition. Semi-structured and face-to-face interviews were conducted among the participants and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. **Findings:** Two themes have emerged in exploring the final-year nursing students' expectations towards the transition which are role transition and fear and anxiety of incompetencies. Then, there are a few challenges that influence their readiness which are the opportunity to learn, interpersonal relationships and occupational hazards. To overcome the challenges, they also perceived some strategies that may facilitate their readiness such as establishing a network of social connections, personal development, and compartmentalisation. **Conclusion:** The final-year nursing students have different expectations and levels of readiness towards the transition to nursing practice based on their clinical experiences. However, they agreed that entering the transition phase is a challenging period and being able to come out with strategies helps them to cope. **Keywords:** Transition, nursing practice, work readiness, final-year nursing students.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

LIST OF SYMBOLS

Symbols		**Meaning**
Comma (,)	:	To indicate a short pause of about 1 to 3 seconds.
Ellipses (...)	:	To indicate a longer pause (more than 3 seconds) or if the participants are trailing off.
Em dash (-)	:	To indicate a change in speech such as repeating words or sudden change the language.
Slashes (//)	:	To indicate overlap in the time of the interviewer and the participants were talking.
Quotes (" ")	:	To indicate when someone is talking.

Adapted from Peraza (2019)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the research problem, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study and definition of terms used in this study.

1.1 Background of the study

Transitioning to nursing practice after graduating from nursing school is an indistinct and unpredictable process. The experiences and expectations of practising nursing skills are conceivably diverse among fresh graduates. This perhaps correlates to their ability to cope with the transition process and acceptance of the realities of working life. However, the transition from undergraduate student to a professional healthcare provider is indisputably perceived as a period of intense stress (Naidoo et al., 2014; Morley et al., 2007 as cited in Opoku et al., 2020). This phenomenon has occurred globally within the healthcare workforce including the nurses. Numerous theories have been established to comprehend the experiences of newly graduated nurses during their first year of adjustment to a clinical setting. Some of the existing theories are Kramer's reality shock theory, Benner's novice to expert theory, Bridges transition theory and Duschcher's stages of transition theory (Graf et al., 2019).

According to Duscher's stages of transition theory, there are three stages of the transition process which are stages of doing, being and knowing. In the first three to four months, the newly graduated nurse may perceive the responsibilities of nursing professional roles as both exhilarating and compelling. After some time, the level of

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intensity and anxiety will increase progressively as they discover unfamiliarity and variations in clinical practice. They begin to have self-doubt and become insecure after their limited clinical experiences and knowledge are constantly challenged by unpredictable work environments. Concurrently, they are also keen to seek acceptance by adjusting to the working demands and improving themselves. The second stage comes into being when the newly graduated nurses gain a comfort level with their professional roles and responsibilities which is in the next four to five months after orientation. At this stage, the newly graduated nurses gradually become self-reliant in providing care with underlying rationale and begin to evaluate the relevance and efficiency of the healthcare system. Crisis in confidence may arise along the way but at the end of the second stage, they are occupied and persistent in their professional development. In the final stage, the desire for work-life balance becomes firm and stronger. Their professional identity becomes temporarily unstable because of residual exhaustion from prior stages which causes them to show dissatisfaction with the working hours and practice environments. Nevertheless, the advancements of the newly graduated nurses to manage clinical situations and increase confidence in performing nursing skills allow them to upgrade their level of practice to care for more complicated patients, be assigned as a nurse in charge, or become a preceptor (Duchscher & Windey, 2018).

It is crucial to understand the experience of newly graduated nurses during the transition period to ensure retention and improve job satisfaction. However, limited studies have been conducted to explore nursing students' viewpoints regarding the transition to nursing practice as their readiness to fully function as registered nurses will impact their experience during the transition period. Therefore, this study is carried out to

comprehend the nursing students' preparedness towards their transition to nursing practice.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.2.1 Nursing shortages

Nursing shortages are one of the major issues in the healthcare system. An ageing nursing workforce as well as low retention rates of nurses in today's health trends leads to the shortage of nurses issues internationally (Jones & Sherwood, 2014 as cited in Kinghorn et., 2017). Many other countries including Malaysia are facing a shortage of professional nurses. Malaysia has an ageing population from age 65 years and above which is predicted to double by the year 2030 (Barnett et al., 2010). Therefore, the demands for nurses and social care have to increase in response to this ageing population and increasing levels of chronic ill health (Atefi et al., 2014).

1.2.2 Newly graduated nurse retention in the nursing profession

Various factors lead to nursing shortages. One of the factors is the high rate of job turnover among nurses (Camveren et al., 2020). The International Council of Nursing (ICN) has affirmed that the retention of new and existing nurses should be prioritised worldwide (Catton, 2019 as cited in Camveren et al., 2020). High patient acuity and high staff turnover rates pile up the challenges newly graduated nurses encounter in their first year of practice (Kavanagh & Szweda, 2017 as cited in Graf et al., 2019). Their experiences during the transition period can impact their decision as to whether or not to stay in the nursing workforce (Clark & Springer, 2012 as cited in Hampton et al., 2021).

As mentioned in a study conducted by Kim et al. (2021), 17.6% of the young generation of nursing students particularly those who were born between 1997 to 2012 have the intention to leave the workforce within 2 years of employment and one out of six students contemplating to quit nursing before becoming a registered nurse in Korea. Therefore, it is significant to improve the retention rate of new nurses to improve the supply of the nursing workforce to meet society's demands.

1.2.3 The preparation of the nursing students

Many countries such as Australia, and the United Kingdom including Malaysia have shifted their pre-registration nursing education from hospital-based apprentice-type training to university-based education (Arunasalam, 2017). Even though the transition to a higher nursing education benefits the nurses' professional development, it has affected the newly graduated nurse with limited clinical exposure causing them to be unprepared to work and has low self-confidence to perform nursing care (Jamieson et al., 2019). Besides, nursing students also are presumed to acquire knowledge and develop their nursing skills to become as competent as registered nurses during their undergraduate degree (Jacob et al., 2014 as cited in Graf et al., 2019). As it is crucial to prepare newly graduated nurses for their transition to the nursing profession, it is also equally important for the nursing students to learn their expectations and coping strategies to adapt to the transition shock as the risk for the novice nurses to leave the profession during the transition period is high without preparation (Hampton et al., 2021). Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the UNIMAS final-year nursing students' readiness towards their transition to the nursing profession.

1.3 Research questions

The following are the research questions used to guide the study:

1.3.1 How do the final-year nursing students expect their transition to nursing practice?

1.3.2 What are the challenges that influence the final-year nursing students' readiness towards the transition to nursing practice based on their clinical experiences?

1.3.3 What are the perceived strategies among the final year nursing students to prepare themselves for the transition to nursing practice?

1.4 Research objectives

The following are the research objectives of the study:

1.4.1 To explore the final year nursing students' expectations towards the transition to nursing practice.

1.4.2 To explore the challenges that influence the final year nursing students' readiness towards the transition to nursing practice.

1.4.3 To identify the perceived strategies among the final year nursing students to prepare themselves for the transition to nursing practice.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study can benefit the Department of Nursing, UNIMAS by providing insights to improve the nursing curriculum by including courses of study related to work readiness. This is significant to expose the nursing students, particularly the final year nursing

student regarding the nature of working in a real clinical setting. These courses can allow them to discover potential challenges and understand ways to adapt to the transition shock.

The findings from this study also can be advantageous to nursing educators in their teaching sessions. Nursing lecturers and clinical instructors may incorporate effective teaching and learning strategies that comprise genuine experiences related to professional practice roles. Learning from numerous experiences and circumstances encountered by nursing educators can help nursing students widen their perspectives towards the nursing profession. This is beneficial for nursing students to understand nursing as a wide profession and learn its flexibility and variability. This can encourage them to discover their interest in venturing into various nursing fields such as midwifery or critical care nursing in the future.

Finally, this study will be useful to nursing students. The findings can help nursing students comprehend the importance of preparation for entering the transition period. An advanced introduction to the transition shock phenomenon among newly graduated nurses may also encourage them to equip themselves with a strong nursing foundation. This is to allow them to adapt quickly and accommodate themselves to the realities of nursing careers. As a result, they will be less anxious and bewildered as well as reducing the possibility of them leaving the profession.

1.6 Definition of terms

a) **Transition:** A movement and adaptation to change rather than return to existing conditions (Kralik et al., 2006). In this study, the transition is defined as the role changes from a nursing student to a registered nurse.

b) **Readiness:** The state of being ready or ready for something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In this study, readiness is defined as the final-year nursing students' preparedness to function fully as registered nurses.

c) **Nursing practice:** Direct and/or indirect patient care, work experience in clinical practice, care management, teaching, research, or professional consulting (Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation, 2021). In this study, nursing practice refers to the application of nursing knowledge and skills in clinical settings.

1.7 Summary

This chapter concludes the importance of exploring the final-year nursing students' readiness towards their transition to nursing practice. Exploring the problem statements in this research through their anticipations, experiences and challenges encountered may bring a new body of knowledge in nursing.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the critical reviews of past research related to the topic of nursing students' readiness to enter the workforce. To explore the preparation of nursing students towards nursing practice, it is important to understand the perspectives, experiences and challenges faced by them to identify their correspondence. The literature search for this research study was conducted through online databases Google Scholar, Sci-hub, and ResearchGate. "Nursing students", "transition process", and "preparation to enter the workforce" were used as keywords for this literature review. The articles used ranged from 2015 to 2022. The literature review is divided into three sections: (1) Nursing students' readiness towards the transition to nursing practice, (2) the challenges encountered by newly graduated nurses during the transition period and (3) strategies to prepare newly graduated nurses for the transition period.

2.1 Nursing students' readiness towards the transition to nursing practice

Transitioning to nursing practice is undeniably a tough and demanding period, particularly for newly graduated nurses. The expectations may be varied and exclusive among the individuals. Based on a study done by Khailanen et al. (2016) on nursing students in Southern Finland, there is both positive and negative response from them regarding the transition process. Some of them claimed to be afraid and stressed because they need to involve themselves autonomously despite their lack of knowledge and limited experience. Simultaneously, they need to prioritise the clients' safety and meet the expectations of the employer. However, some also reckoned this process optimistically

whereby they looked forward to graduation. They were enthusiastic about finally being independent as they can provide nursing care in the way they consider the best. They also viewed the transition process as part of continuing their education to venture into their field of interest. Another research by Saber et al. (2016) also found that there are diverse expectations of working among senior nursing students in a university in the southeastern USA. Most described changes of roles lead to high levels of stress and anxiety due to unpreparedness. This experience was exacerbated by the high working demands and pressure of maintaining good relationships with colleagues, particularly in unsupportive working cultures. They also expressed fear of contagion and violence from the work environment such as exposure to infectious diseases as well as emotional, verbal or even physical abuse from physicians, coworkers, patients or patients' family members.

2.2 The challenges encountered by the newly graduated nurses during the transition period

According to Jarvinen and Salminen (2018) in their study on new nursing graduates in a local educational institute in Hong Kong, one of the challenges that they encountered was a heavy workload. They mentioned the piling of responsibilities that were required to be completed at the same time such as documentation, providing care after the physicians' ward rounds and precepting the student nurses. This scenario intensified with the presence of understaffing issues and inadequate resources which further increased their stress level. Sudden changes in roles from nursing students to registered nurses also forced them to deliver high-quality nursing performance to meet their coworkers' expectations and to fit themselves into the team. Lack of knowledge and limited clinical experiences prevails as concerns, whereby the new nurses perceive their

knowledge and skills from nursing schools, are inadequate and superficial. They were hesitant to ask for guidance or to clarify any uncertainties from the seniors as they expressed fear of being criticised. Therefore, they claimed the need to receive advanced knowledge and skills such as training on Basic Life Support (BLS) or advanced cardiovascular life support (ACLS) to handle emergencies for instance.

2.3 Strategies to prepare newly graduated nurses for the transition period

Further, Regan et al. (2017) examined the factors that facilitate newly graduated nurses and nurse leaders throughout the transition process. Both parties agreed on a similar factor which is to provide a comprehensive orientation regarding the organisation and specific units. This is to permit the new nurses to understand the policies, procedures, and explicit anticipations of newly graduated nurses of respective units and transitioning experience. Besides, they also suggested preceptorship programmes. A mentor may act as a role model and foster good relationships with the junior nurses to learn professional roles and instil self-confidence. Constructive feedback from the mentor or coworkers also may further encourage them to learn from mistakes and keep improving themselves. A supportive working environment is critical to facilitate newly graduated nurses and their transition to a professional role. In addition, a study by Baharum et al. (2022) has presented other strategies to prepare newly graduated nurses which involves nursing education. This research suggested the nursing programmes be revised to consider courses related to working preparation to be included in. The teaching of self-discipline, adherence to rules and policies or caring values may also be beneficial to instil positive attitudes among nursing students to help them adapt quickly to their working environment in the future. Baharum et al. (2022) also stated that the new nurses themselves also must be proactive

in preparing themselves. For example, they may find information related to the transition process and its adaptation strategies or ask for senior nurses' experiences.

2.4 Summary

The experiences of newly graduated nurses can impact their decision to sustain themselves in the profession. The ability to cope with the transition shock differs among individuals thus it is crucial to dive into this issue from the roots and learn the adaptation strategies. However, the literature search shows that there is a lack of revelation of nursing students' preparation to enter the workforce. Therefore, this study is important to explore the final-year nursing students' readiness towards their transition phase.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and setting, inclusion and exclusion criteria, sampling method and sample size, study instrument, ethical consideration, data collection procedure and data analysis method.

3.1 Research design

This research utilised a descriptive qualitative approach to study the final-year nursing students' readiness towards their transition to the nursing profession at UNIMAS. Qualitative description research studies concentrate on the characteristics of the phenomenon (Bradshaw, 2017). According to Nassaji (2015), this research design aims to describe the phenomenon by involving naturalistic data which studies the natural occurrences without intervening or changing the variables. These elements are essential to extract authentic information from the participants. Qualitative research is also used to collect comprehensive information for a greater understanding of the participants' experiences by interviewing them. From the interview, the researcher explored the data for recurrent themes or patterns (Austin & Suttin, 2014; Nassaji, 2015). The interview session also established connections between the researcher and the participants which then lead to a productive and satisfying experience. Generally, this method allowed the researcher to discover unknown circumstances, rationalised the participants' experiences and compared them with the existing literature. Any emerging new themes from this qualitative study have been used to widen the base of knowledge of a particular field

(Peterson, 2019). Therefore, a descriptive qualitative method is suitable and appropriate to discover the nursing students' readiness towards their transition to the nursing profession through their experiences as nursing students.

3.2 Research setting

The research setting is one of the major components of research. The nature, context and logistics of the research may determine the study process and manipulate the findings (Majid & Umair, 2018). This research study was conducted in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) which is located at Kota Samarahan, Sarawak. The venue of the interview was selected based on mutual agreement from both the researcher and the participants according to their convenience.

3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

3.3.1 Inclusion criteria

i. Final-year undergraduate nursing students from UNIMAS who are in their final semester.

3.3.2 Exclusion criteria

i. First, second and third-year UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students. ii. Post-registration nursing students or already graduated nursing students from UNIMAS.

3.4 Sampling method and sample size

Purposive sampling was used to select the UNIMAS final-year nursing students to participate in this research study. This method was chosen as it is commonly used in