CLINICAL EXPERIENCES OF UNIMAS NURSING STUDENTS

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Nursing with Honours

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The purpose of this study was to explore the clinical experiences of nursing students, particularly the second, third and fourth year of UNIMAS nursing students. Overall, there were twelve participants involved in this study. The researcher used qualitative approach with purposive sampling to explore the perspectives and views of local population on their clinical practices. The obtained data were manually analyzed based on the research questions and the research objectives. The emerged themes acquired from the interview includes the beginning clinical exposure in Clinical Skills Developments Laboratory (CSDL), initial experiences in clinical areas which touched on the mixture of feeling, later experiences in clinical areas which highlighting the feeling of 'gradually improving' in clinical performances, inter-relationship between nursing students and staffs, clinical teachers, colleagues and patients, and last but not least was the existence of theory practice gap in the clinical areas. From the findings, it is hoped to improve and enhance the learning and teaching system of nursing education, in the future.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my utmost gratitude and thankfulness to ALLAH The Almighty for giving me chances, opportunities, times and meeting me with helpful and magnificent supervisor, family members and friends. Without His guidance, I would not be able to accomplish such a challenging and tough task in order to complete my final year project.

An infinity appreciation I would like to convey to my supportive supervisor, Dr. Zabidah Putit for giving me guidance, help and motivating advice in continuing and completing this challenging task. Without your help and guidance, I am sure that I cannot finish this task on my own.

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A special thanks to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UNIMAS and the ethical committee for giving approval to conduct this study. I would also like to thank to all my supportive and sporting colleagues and juniors who volunteered to be my participants. Thank you so much!

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thankfulness and appreciation to everyone who have either directly or indirectly contributing to my research. May ALLAH bless all of you.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .................................................................................. ii
KEY TO TRANSCRIPTIONS ........................................................................... vii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 1
   My Own Experience ..................................................................................... 1
   Background of Study .................................................................................. 2
   Statements of Problem ............................................................................... 3
   Research Questions ................................................................................... 5
   Research Objectives .................................................................................. 5
   Purpose of Study ....................................................................................... 5
   Significance of Research ......................................................................... 5
   Definition of Terms .................................................................................. 7

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................. 8
   Introduction ................................................................................................ 8
   The emergence of issues in relation to clinical experiences ....................... 9
      Anxiety and Stress .................................................................................. 9
      Interpersonal Relationships .................................................................. 10
   Theory-practice gap in nursing ................................................................. 12
Issue of dilemma........................................................................................................14

Summary of Literature Review.............................................................................16

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY..............................................................................17

Research Design....................................................................................................17
Population and Sampling.......................................................................................18
Instruments............................................................................................................19
Ethical Considerations..........................................................................................20
Data Collection......................................................................................................21
Data Analysis..........................................................................................................21

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.........................................................................................23

Beginning clinical learning exposure in CSDL.......................................................24
Useful exposure.......................................................................................................24
Inadequate equipments..........................................................................................25
Feeling safe............................................................................................................26
Initial experience in clinical areas.........................................................................28
Anxiety...................................................................................................................28
Scare of causing harm...........................................................................................30
Less confidence.......................................................................................................32
Later experience in clinical areas...........................................................................33
Gradually improving.............................................................................................33
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction.................................................................46

CSDL.................................................................46

Importance of clinical exposure in CSDL.................................46

The needs for conducive environment....................................47

Interpersonal relationship: Facilitating clinical learning of nursing students.........48
In dilemma.................................................................49
Limitations of study..........................................................50
Implications of study...........................................................50

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS..................................................52
Recommendations to UNIMAS nursing department..........................52
  Enhancing the clinical teaching and learning process....................52
  CSDL.................................................................52
  Adequate staffing..........................................................52
  Minimizing the theory-practice gap...........................................53
Recommendation for future research..............................................54
  Another approach of study..................................................54
  Involve multi nursing colleges in the study...............................54

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.............................................................55

LIST OF REFERENCES......................................................................56

APPENDICES....................................................................................62
### KEY OF TRANSCRIPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keys or symbols</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Pseudonyms are used throughout this study to protect participants’ confidentiality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Excerpts (s)”</td>
<td>All excerpts written in italic and indented represent the interview data from the study participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..//..</td>
<td>This symbol in the excerpts indicates the participants’ story that are stated in different time but said by the same participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>A pause during the participants’ story.</td>
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*(Adopted from: Zabidah, 2010)*
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My Own Experience

The idea to explore clinical experiences among nursing students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) came out as I went through years of clinical experiences, which started when I was in Year One. A lot of good and challenges I faced as I go along the journey as a nursing student, and, these questions always popped out in my head: Did my friends experienced the same thing like I did? When I was burnt out and felt discourage upon dealing with difficult tasks during the clinical posting, I was thinking whether my colleagues/seniors/juniors feel the same way? Or was I alone? I once managed to indirectly discuss with few colleagues on their clinical experiences. I found out that some of them shared similar feelings and perceptions while some had different views on clinical experiences. Therefore, I took this opportunity to learn more on clinical experiences, in which the result may/may not be vary among the UNIMAS nursing students.
Background of Study

Clinical placement or practicum session is one of the compulsory elements integrated in the nursing programs. Ministry of Higher Learning (MoHL) had come out with the standard guidelines for the nursing program; as such: 55-65% is allocated for the theory part, while another 45-50% is for practicum part (Nursing Student Guide Book, 2011/2012). According to Sharif and Masoumi (2005), clinical experience has always been an integral part of nursing education as it prepares students to be able to do as well as to know the clinical principles in practice. Following the MoHL guideline, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), under Bachelor of Nursing program had appointed 45.2% for the practicum session. The nursing practicum is included as one of the courses that should be enroll by students of every year of studies, and it is started as early as in the second semester until at the end of the eighth semester. Throughout the clinical placement, the students are expected to maximally utilize the blend of theory and skills that had been learnt in the class, as well as to be able to practice professional standard, develop positive and ethical attitude and values in nursing practice (Nursing Student Guide Book, 2011/2012).

However, despite of highlighting the needs to enroll and participate in the clinical practices, many studies reported on the negative experiences, experienced by the nursing students. In a study ran by Chapman and Orb (2000) for example, revealed that many nursing students experienced problems and difficulties throughout their clinical practice. This was supported by other various literatures which discussed on issues circulating nursing students during clinical placement (Mlek, 2011; Wilson, 2008; Sharif & Masoumi, 2005; Ellis & Hartley, 2004; Noureddine, 2001). Some of the issues discussed include the issues of stress, anxiety, the
initial clinical experience, dilemma and the existence of theory-practice gap, and how much it affects the clinical practices. The other studies also revealed how the relationships among the nursing students and the staff in the hospitals, clinical teachers, colleagues and patients affect their clinical learning (Levett-Jones, Lathlean, Higgins & McMillan, 2009; Suikkala, 2007; Mikkonen, 2005; Gillespie, 2002).

**Statements of Problem**

Clinical practices are one of the compulsory elements that need to be attended by nursing students worldwide. Similarly, in UNIMAS, every nursing student is expected to attend the practicum courses in order to accomplish a bachelor in nursing program. It is no doubt that the clinical practices is vital in exposing the students into the real clinical setting and keeping them in track once applying the theoretical knowledge into clinical practices. Elliot (2002) stated that the clinical environment was perceived as a source of stress and anxiety producing to nursing students. Likewise, a study by Mlek (2011) also reported that nursing students experienced stress and anxiety during clinical placement. They were anxious and feel stress to be in the new environment and being evaluated by the clinical teachers. However, despite of mentioning on the needs for clinical practicum, many researches revealed that nursing students were facing difficulties and problems while completing their practicum sessions.

In addition, other literatures show that nursing students were also reported of having dilemma. Dilemma is when a person involved in a situation that put him/her to a difficult period of choosing between two or more options, which seems to be equally unfavourable (Oxford Dictionary). Having own experienced of dilemma in the clinical area put researcher to reflect
back the idea mentioned by Sletteboe (1997, cited in in Nasae, Chaowalit, Suttharangsee and Ray, 2008) in which he mentioned that dilemmas in nursing context happened in three conditions: (i) two or more options to choose between; (ii) a wanted options leads to unwanted consequence and; (iii) a choice where one does not know what is the right thing to do. A study by Nasae et al. (2008) shows that nursing students in Southern Thailand experienced ethical dilemmas while protecting patients’ right and from getting harm.

Besides, relationship between the students and staffs, teachers, colleagues and patients was also been discussed as an issue circulating nursing students. Mikkonen (2005) proposed that the relationship on practical placements was identified to be a great importance for students as it will develops clinical learning. Mlek (2011) summarized in his/her study that majority of the students perceived their relationship with clinical teachers as a positive relationship though some of them claiming of having conflictual relationship with their teachers.

By having recognizing the issues circulating nursing students and having own experience in clinical areas has made the researcher to view these issues as serious matters that may linger on the life of nursing students as well as nurses if no appropriate measures are taken. Thus, the researcher is hoping to explore as much as possible on the clinical experiences, issues and challenges behind it which circulate the nursing students, particularly the UNIMAS nursing students.
Research Questions

The following is the research questions:

- What are the clinical experiences of UNIMAS nursing students during clinical practicum?

Research Objectives

This research aim to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore the clinical experiences of UNIMAS nursing students regarding their clinical attachment
- To explore the feeling of UNIMAS nursing students during the initial and later clinical posting
- To study the challenges faced by UNIMAS nursing students during clinical attachment

Purpose of the Study

This research is carried out to explore the clinical experience of UNIMAS nursing students by looking into their initial and later experience of feeling, views and perception towards clinical practices.

Significance of Research

Clinical practice is described as a compulsory element of nursing education in which, each of the nursing students should go through. Many researchers in the worldwide took opportunity to learn and explore the clinical experiences of nursing students (Mlek, 2011; Levett-Jones,
Lathlean, Higgins & McMillan, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Suikkala, 2007; Mikkonen, 2005; Sharif & Masoumi, 2005; Ellis & Hartley, 2004; Gillespie, 2002; Noureddine, 2001). Some of them had demonstrated through findings, that nursing students encountered difficulties and challenges when undergo the clinical practice. As a result, their performances in the clinical areas can be affected.

This study was carried out to explore the issues experienced by UNIMAS nursing students throughout their clinical practice. It involved the exploration of their feeling during the initial and later part of clinical practice and the challenges they met along the practicum.

The researcher views this study as an important tool, with regards to the following:

- to improve clinical learning and performances of nursing students
- to minimize the theory-practice gap in the nursing care

Thus, it is hope that this study is able to contribute to nursing education in the nursing colleges, particularly, UNIMAS by efficiently improving the teaching-learning process.
### Definition of Terms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clinical attachment</td>
<td>A significant learning component within the nursing curriculum, in which in UNIMAS, it started in Year 1, Semester 2 until Year 4, Semester 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinical experience</td>
<td>Any planned situation in which students interact with patients to apply the nursing process. The clinical experience is inclusive of simulation and must involve variables that are unknown to students during preparation activities, eg. a case study in which all information is available would not be considered clinical experience (Kube, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical learning</td>
<td>A process that is able to be known to learners and allows students to use what has been learned in a clinical experience in subsequent experiences (Kube, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical teaching</td>
<td>Actions, activities, and verbalizations of the clinical instructor which facilitate student learning in the clinical setting (Kube, 2010).</td>
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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Clinical practice has been the vital part of nursing education in the nursing colleges, worldwide. It is the time where the nursing students will have the opportunity to link and practically apply the learnt theory in the clinical areas, as much as possible. However, despite of mentioning on the needs for clinical practice, many literatures revealed that nursing students experienced problems or difficulties while going through their clinical practices. Of all the aroused issues circulating the nursing students in the clinical areas, it was reported that stress and anxiety were the most likely to be the common finding and been discussed by the researchers (Baker, 2012; Mlek, 2011; Sharif & Masoumi, 2005; Elliot, 2002; Chapman & Orb, 2000). Apart from that, the other highlighted issues in the clinical practices include the issue of dilemma, the existence of the theory-practice gap and the relationship between students and staffs in the hospitals, teachers, colleagues and patients (Levett-Jones, Lathlean, Higgins & McMillan, 2009; Nasae, Chaowalit, Suttharangsee & Ray, 2008; Suikkala, 2007; Mikkonen, 2005; Gillespie, 2002). All of these issues will be discussed further by looking in-depth on the related literatures.
The emergence of issues in relation to clinical experience

i. Anxiety and Stress

Sharif and Masoumi (2005) reported in their research that initial clinical anxiety was one of the issues circulating the nursing students in Iran. Ninety participants in their study had clearly identified that the initial clinical experience was an anxiety-producing event and very stressful. It was reported that the second year students were found to have more anxiety feeling when they were being exposed to the clinical areas for the first time. On the other hand, the final year nursing students felt less anxious as they were being exposed more in the clinical areas. In addition, the students also expressed that they felt fear of making mistake and fear of being evaluated once they were starting their clinical practices, and it triggers them to be more anxious and stress.

Likewise in the earlier study carried out by Beck and Srivastava in 1991, their participants (nursing students) perceived clinical experience as the most stressful part of the nursing program. The students agreed that lacking clinical experience and knowledge to accomplish task, being in unfamiliar environment and handling difficult patients, were aggravating their anxiety and thus putting them into stress. In one of the nursing schools in Greece, their students had identified that lacking of clinical competence and practical skills were the common clinical sources of stress (Papazisis, Tsiga, Papanikolaou, Vlasiadis & Sapountzi-Krepi, 2008).
In addition, Mlek (2011) mentioned that there were many factors contribute to the nursing students' clinical anxiety and stress. Some of them were the interpersonal relationships with other health care staffs, constant assessment and evaluation by teachers, fear of making mistake or harming patients, lack of knowledge to accomplish task and unrealistic expectation by staffs or teachers. Though there were many literatures discussing on the anxiety and stress experienced by most of the nursing students, it was reported that they (stress and anxiety) were not affecting their ability to perform clinical skills. In facts, the students felt that stress actually helped them to be more focus on the task given (Mlek, 2011).

ii. Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are inherent in interaction among individual and maybe personal and professional. In the context of health care, interpersonal relationships is important as it is one of the elements of the situatedness in clinical learning. As a nursing student involved in the clinical practices, one is expected to have self-staffs, self-teachers, self-colleagues and self-patients relationships. These relationships aided the nursing students in clinical learning (Mikkonen, 2005).

Learning in the clinical environment has been importantly emphasized in nursing. In order for the students to learn, they are required to work under the supervision of a registered nurse and rely on the nurse clinician to facilitate and teach them. Valentine (1997) stated that staff nurses play a vital and key role in the learning process for
nursing students. Therefore, it is important for the students to have a good relationship with the staff. A study done by Mlek (2011) on Nursing Students’ Learning Experiences in Clinical Settings discovered that during the clinical attachments, the students were having dilemma on the way to communicate and develop relationship with nurses and other medical staff. They found out that it was difficult and stressful to build rapport with the staff, and as students, they felt they did not belong to the team.

Meanwhile, Vallant and Neville (2010) carried out a research on the relationship between students nurse and the nurse clinician. They suggested that both negative attitudes of staff and a negative atmosphere created in the clinical learning environment cause feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy in student nurses. The interaction between student nurses and staff nurses have a critical influence on the students learning. This study shows the nursing students felt enhancement in their learning when they were engaged in a good relationship with the staff nurses. Additionally, another study shows that a good staff-student relationships stimulate the students’ motivation and capacity to learn and improve their self-concept and confident during clinical practices (Levett-Jones et al., 2009).

The relationship between the students and teachers has been discussed to contribute in nursing education. There were several studies done to explore the effectiveness of clinical teaching (Mlek, 2011; Kube, 2010; Mikkonen, 2005; Gillespie, 2002). The interaction between the teacher and student can either be facilitating or hindering the students’ learning. In Mlek’s study for example, the students valued their teachers as
a support person, advocate, expert, and evaluator. The students felt that they have positive relationships and communication with their teachers. On the other hand, few students felt that their teachers could be somehow judging harshly, and thus, they were keeping a distance with their teachers. Mikkonen (2005) mentioned that there are several positive influences been highlighted to influence the student-staff relationships which include the attitude of teachers, the pedagogical skills of teachers and the way teachers giving feedback to students.

iii. Theory-practice gap in nursing

According to Wilson (2008), as cited from Rafferty et al. (1996), the gap between theory and practice has long been identified as a problem in nursing and midwifery. Nowadays, the gap is seems to not only pressing but also increasing in level (Spouse 2001; Landers 2000).

A study done by Cheraghi, Salsali and Safari (2010) revealed that there was theory-practice gap existed in the clinical areas as mentioned by the participants (nursing students) in Tehran University. The students verbalized that the nurses were practicing the old-hospital based program in which the procedures were done in the wrong way and it was different from what they had learnt in clinical lab. From the finding of this study, it was found that the clinical teaching climate and lacking of qualified teachers were affecting the integration of theory and practice. As a result, students tend to follow the routine of the wards without looking at the learnt theory.
One of the participants mentioned:

"Our clinical experience was all about obeying the staff nurses to do their duties, division of the patients among students; you have to do their routine works."

Additionally, Sharif and Masoumi (2005) in their study found that theory-practice gap was one of the elements faced by nursing students during clinical attachment. Almost every student described that there was lack of integration of theory into clinical practice. The students had been given chances to learn many things (procedures) in the class, but then, they had less chance to practice in the real hospital settings, as they have to compete with other students. The students claimed that the theory they learnt was sometimes could not be related to the real condition. They received instructions that were different to what they had been taught in the class. Thus, they found themselves having dilemma in fulfilling their tutor’s demand and practicing correct nursing care in the real clinical areas.

There are other literatures showing the similar result on the existence of gap between theory and practice. Wilson (2008) in his study entitled ‘Bridging the Theory Practice Gap’ mentioned that there was theory-practice gap as perceived by nursing and midwifery students and was considered to be a debated contemporary issue in nursing. To bridge the gap, it needs interdependent role among students, universities and the clinician. The universities are responsible for the theoretical input and should provide accurate evidence based teaching which reflect the current clinical
environment. The students must be taught on how to apply the learnt theory into the clinical practice (real situation).

iv. Issue of dilemma

Another issue circulating amongst nursing students in the clinical area is dilemma. Dilemma is a situation that put one in difficulty of making choice between two or more alternatives that seems to be equally unfavorable or mutually exclusive. There were many issues that may put students into a state of dilemma. As mentioned earlier, the students were in dilemma in initializing the communication with the nursing and medical staffs. As a student, they felt that they were not belong to the team (Mlek, 2011). Another issue of dilemma was reported by Sharif and Masoumi (2005). The students were having difficulties in linking the learnt theories into practical. They were unsure about the right way of doing procedures as they found that there were different from what had been learnt in class.

Ethical dilemma has been discussed in several literatures as one of the issues circulating in the context of nursing (Sletteboe, 1997, as cited in Nasae et al., 2008). Ethics refers to the practices, beliefs, and standard of behavior of a certain group (Fitzpatrick, Glasgow & Young, 2003). Ethical dilemma happens when a situation involving conflicting moral resulting to such questions: ‘What am I going to do?’, ‘If I did that, will it give benefit or cause more harm?’ and ‘What is the right decision for
this patient?’ However, up to researcher’s knowledge, there was not much study done to explore the ethical dilemma in nursing students.

From another literature reviewed, as cited from Noureddine, (2001), it was found that nurses were constantly exposing to new ethical dilemmas resulting from the global changes in health care. The nurses are challenged in providing a better care. This is true as this profession is dealing with the most personal and private aspects of patients. Today’s patients are much different with the old-time’s patients. Currently, we are living in a dynamically changing social and health care environment, with the advances of technologies. Everyone seems to be more knowledgeable and alert with their health needs.

Hendry (2011) stated that the today’s patients know more about their own condition. With the advances in technologies, they will do simple researches through internet about the respective health care issues. They are aware of the new treatment options and what possible risks and side effects they may get. This will produce dilemma to the health care workers such nurses in meeting the needs of quality care to the patients.

A qualitative study of Nasae et al. (2008) was done to study the ethical dilemmas and ethical decision-making in nursing administration. They had pointed out few themes of ethical dilemmas, which include obligation to manage/improve quality of care for the benefit of patients versus obligation to the organization/colleagues and whether or not to follow policies/commands, which result in negative consequences for some