

PERCEPTIONS OF CLINICAL PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE AMONG DIPLOMA NURSING STUDENTS

Leong Sui Wan¹ & Chan Siok Gim^{2*}

¹Kolej Kejururawatan Kubang Kerian

²Open University Malaysia, Kelantan

*Corresponding Author Email: siokgimchan@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Clinical practice is an essential component of the nursing student's training. The practice allows nursing students the opportunity to relate theory into practice during nursing care to the patients. The aim of this project was to determine perceptions of clinical placement experience with respect to clinical practice, enhancement of learning and hindrance among nursing students. A total 254 participants undergoing training at Nursing College Kubang Kerian participated in this project. They were selected using the Raosoft sample size calculator. Survey questionnaires were distributed to 80 participants from first year, 88 from second year and 86 participants from third year. The questionnaire consisting of 25 items with 5-point Likert Scale responses was used to measure nursing students' perceptions towards nurses during their clinical placement experience. In addition, demographic factors such as age groups, ethnicity, educational levels and years of training were examined. The items were pilot-tested and the Cronbach Alpha values obtained for clinical practice, enhancement of learning and hindrance consisting of 0.80, 0.80 and 0.83 respectively. The final data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Non-parametric Kruskal Wallis was used to make comparisons where sub samples were imbalanced. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The results indicate that nursing students perceived their clinical placement positively. Perceptions towards clinical practice were significantly different between nurses based on their residential areas and years of training. The results of this study revealed that there were challenges for the nursing educators, clinical instructors and other health providers in achieving a supportive clinical environment for the nursing students.

Key words: *Nursing, Clinical Placement, Clinical Practice, Enhancement or Hindrance in learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Within the ambit of nursing training in Malaysia, within the three years of nursing education programme, clinical experiences for nursing student are an integral element and an important aspect of their professional education. The nursing practicum forms the integrative strand of the nursing curriculum (Teacher's guide, 2006). The clinical placement posting for the Year 1 is eleven weeks; nineteen weeks for Year 2 and twenty three weeks for Year 3. The activities allocated for clinical experience is six hours continuously for two

weeks. Nursing students are expected to develop relevant knowledge, skills and competence during their clinical placement (Hathorn, Machtmes and Tillman, 2009). Clinical experience helps and prepares the nursing student to be skilful and knowledgeable regarding their duties towards their patients in the clinical areas. They believe that learning in the clinical setting provides the real world context and stimulation for nursing students to use their critical thinking skills in problem solving situations. In addition, such

experience assists the nursing students to relate theory with the practice of caring for patients in the clinical areas.

A qualitative study of nursing student experiences of clinical practice indicated that nursing students were not satisfied with the clinical components of their education (Sharif and Masoumi, 2005). They experienced anxiety resulting from a feeling of incompetence and lack in professional nursing skills and knowledge to take care of various patients in the clinical setting. Lack of clinical experience, unfamiliarity with clinical areas, coping with difficult patients, fear of making mistakes and being evaluated by faculty members were expressed by the students as anxiety-producing situations during their clinical experience. Nursing students experience anxiety when they began their clinical practice in the second year. It is anticipated that a study of the nursing students' views on their clinical experience can help in the development of an effective clinical teaching and supervision strategy in nursing education in Malaysia. This study aims to determine the perceptions of clinical placement experiences among diploma nursing students in terms of clinical practice, enhancement of learning and its hindrance. In addition, this study will highlight associations between certain socio-demographic factors and their perceptions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study design was used to investigate the diploma nursing students' perceptions of clinical placement experiences at Hospital Raja Perempuan Zainab II, Kota Bharu in May 2012. Using the Raosoft sample size calculator, 80 Year 1, 88 Year 2 and 86 Year 3 diploma nursing students from Kubang Kerian Nursing College were used as the sample.

The questionnaires were constructed based on several published questionnaires comprising of four sections; A, B, C and D. Demographic data was

measured by items in Section A, while a total of 25 items were used to measure perceptions and the responses (given in the form of a 5-point Likert scale) ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Eight items in Section B were on their perceptions with regard to their clinical practice, eight items in Section C regarding enhancement of learning and nine items in Section D focused on the hindrance they encountered during that period of clinical placement. The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into the Malay language and was validated using the back-translation method by language teachers. Both the English and Malay language versions were checked by three nursing lecturers from the school to ensure the validity of the items. The Malay language version was pilot tested using a sample of 30 nursing students on a non-studied setting to measure the reliability of the questionnaire items. The time to complete the questionnaire was approximately 20 – 30 minutes. The results recorded Cronbach Alpha values of 0.796 for eight items measuring Clinical Practice, 0.803 for eight items measuring Enhancement of Learning and 0.829 for nine items measuring Hindrance. The values were higher than 0.7 and were deemed reliable enough for the study.

Frequencies and percentages of responses for each item in the questionnaire were analysed. Scores of each item measuring aspects of their clinical placement were added up to give the measures for Clinical Practice, Enhancement of Learning and Hindrance. Hypotheses testing were carried out to determine significant differences in clinical practice, enhancement of learning and hindrance during clinical placement according to students' demographic factors. The significant level was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The frequencies and percentages of responses for each item in the questionnaire on their clinical placement were analysed and shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Responses

No.	Clinical Practice Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Clinical practice is an essential component of my learning process	2 0.8	1 0.4	31 12.2	137 53.9	83 32.7
2	Clinical practice allows me to have direct exposure to and experience the real situation	2 0.8	0 0.0	27 10.6	104 40.9	121 47.6
3	Clinical practice provides the opportunity to develop interpersonal interaction with others	2 0.8	2 0.8	32 12.6	131 51.6	87 34.3
4	I am very nervous because I do not know what to expect from the Clinical practice	9 3.5	35 13.8	137 53.9	55 21.7	18 7.1
5	Clinical practices assist me to relate classroom knowledge to practical	1 0.4	3 1.2	41 16.1	126 49.6	83 32.7
6	Clinical practice is enjoyable, interesting and provide an exciting environment for me	0 0.0	5 2.0	62 24.4	126 49.6	61 24.0
7	I have learned different areas of responsibility that a nurse should be during Clinical practice	1 0.4	0 0.0	37 14.6	142 55.9	74 29.1
8	Clinical practice develop critical thinking during nursing care	2 0.8	3 1.2	34 13.4	128 50.4	87 34.3
	Enhancement of Learning Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	The clinical environment create a congenial atmosphere, makes me happy to work.	5 2.0	14 5.5	138 54.3	84 33.1	13 5.1
2	Clinical experience enables me to develop skills through practice	4 1.6	6 2.4	44 17.3	139 54.7	61 24.0
3	Clinical instructor are knowledgeable and able to share with me	0 0.0	5 2.0	52 20.5	142 55.9	55 27.1
4	Clinical supervision provides opportunity to develop expertise, to find new ways of learning	1 0.4	3 1.2	58 22.8	149 58.7	43 16.9
5	The clinical instructor showed commitment and organize new learning activities	1 0.4	7 2.8	69 27.2	137 53.9	40 15.7
6	The clinical instructor encourage student comments, participation and questions	1 0.4	6 2.0	85 33.5	117 46.1	46 18.1
7	The willingness of the staff to communicate and provide regular feedback on student progress.	0 0.4	10 2.0	112 33.5	111 46.1	21 18.1
8	Clinical instructor clarifies task with appropriate examples and demonstration	0 0.0	4 1.6	73 28.7	141 55.5	36 14.2
	Hindrance Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	There too many admissions for one day	1 0.4	17 6.7	107 42.1	87 34.3	42 16.5
2	Lack of practicing exercise	13 5.1	29 11.4	103 40.6	84 33.1	25 9.8
3	No positive attitude towards student	16 6.3	49 19.3	106 41.7	64 25.2	19 7.5
4	What we learn in the classroom do not equate in practice	12 4.7	51 20.1	85 33.5	78 30.7	28 11.0
5	There is no enthusiasm for teaching	6 2.4	44 17.3	126 49.6	68 26.8	10 3.9
6	I feel I do not have previous experience on the procedure	16 6.3	69 27.2	99 39.0	62 24.4	8 3.1
7	Time being with patient is not sufficient	11 4.3	14 17.3	143 56.3	50 19.7	6 2.4
8	Lack of feedback and support for practice	8 3.1	49 19.3	102 40.2	79 31.1	16 6.3
9	The clinical instructor was too busy to answer question or provide rationale for practice	23 9.1	78 30.7	94 37.0	49 19.3	10 3.9

Perceptions on Clinical Practice during clinical placement had a distribution with mean 32.23 and standard deviation 4.13. The mean was higher than the median of 32.00 and the distribution was negatively skewed indicating high scores. Perceptions on Enhancement of learning during clinical placement followed roughly a normal distribution with mean 30.19 and standard deviation 3.91. Perceptions on Hindrance during clinical placement followed quite a normal distribution with mean 28.21 and standard deviation 5.48. Table 2 shows the distribution of mean perception scores on Clinical Practice, Enhancement of

Learning and Hindrance during clinical placement of respondents.

Table 3 shows the differences in their perceptions towards Clinical Practice according to their demographic factors. There was significant difference in perceptions on Clinical Practice between nurses based on location. Perceptions towards Clinical Practice between different years of training were compared using ANOVA statistics. There were significant differences between different years of training and their perceptions of Clinical Practice. Post hoc analyses show significant differences between Year 1 and Year 2, and Year 2 and Year 3. However, there was no significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 students. There was no significant difference in perceptions on Clinical Practice between age groups, educational levels and ethnic groups.

Table 2: Distribution of Mean Perception Scores

Perceptions on	Mean	Standard Deviation
Clinical Practice	32.23	4.13
Enhancement of Learning	30.19	3.19
Hinderance	28.21	5.48

Table 3 : Associations between Demographic Factors and Clinical Practice scores

Demographic Factors	N	Mean	Median (IqR)	p
Location				
Rural	121	32.91		0.012*
Urban	133	31.61		
Year of training Post hoc				
1	80	33.18		0.000*
2	88	30.81		
1	80	33.18		0.821
3	86	32.80		
2	88	30.81		0.003*
3	86			
Age Groups				
18 - 20 years	143		32.0 (5.00)	0.360
21 - 23 years	97		32.0 (5.00)	
23 - 25 years	14		34.0 (4.50)	
Educational Level				
SPM	219		32.0 (5.00)	0.681
STPM	26		32.0 (6.25)	
Others	9		34.0 (4.50)	
Ethnicity				
Malay	237			0.180
Chinese	1		32.0 (5.00)	
Indians	16		-	
			34.0 (4.00)	

*Significantly different at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows differences in perceptions on Enhancement of Learning according to their demographic factors. There was significant difference in Enhancement of Learning between years of training. Post hoc analyses show significant differences between Year 1 and Year 2 students, and Year 2 and Year 3

students. However, there was no significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 students. There was no significant difference in perceptions on Enhancement of Learning between nurses of different locations, age groups, educational levels and ethnic groups.

Table 4: Associations between Demographic Factors and Enhancement of Learning scores

Demographic Factors	N	Mean	Median (IqR)	<i>p</i>
Location				
Rural	121	30.92		0.418
Urban	133	30.28		
Year of training				
Post hoc				
1	80	31.36		0.027*
2	88	28.90		
1	80	31.36		0.971
3	86	31.58		
2	88	28.90		
3	86	31.58		0.012*
Age Groups				
18 - 20 years	143		30.0 (5.00)	0.069
21 - 23 years	97		31.0 (5.00)	
23 - 25 years	14		32.5 (5.50)	
Educational Level				
SPM	219		30.0 (4.00)	0.222
STPM	26		31.5 (7.50)	
Others	9		31.0 (5.00)	
Ethnicity				
Malay	237		30.0 (5.50)	0.200
Chinese	1		-	
Indians	16		31.5 (4.00)	

*Significantly different at $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows no significant difference in perceptions on Hindrance according to their demographic factors.

Table 5: Associations between Demographic Factors and Hindrance scores

Demographic Factors	N	Mean	Median (IqR)	<i>p</i>
Location				
Rural	121	28.94		0.621
Urban	133	28.52		
Year of training				
1	80	28.06		0.197
2	88	28.26		
3	86	29.80		
Age Groups				
18 - 20 years	143		28.0(8.00)	0.178
21 - 23 years	97		29.0(6.00)	
23 - 25 years	14		26.5(10.75)	
Educational Level				
SPM	219		28.0(7.00)	0.580
STPM	26		27.0(6.25)	
Others	9		15.0(8.49)	
Ethnicity				
Malay	237		28.0(7.00)	0.204
Chinese	1		-	
Indians	16		27.0(11.50)	

DISCUSSION

Perceptions on Clinical Practice in Clinical Placement

Based on their responses in Table 1, majority of the participants (53.9%) agreed that clinical practice is one of the important components in their nursing education. This may be due to the fact that clinical practice was able to help the students to strengthen their knowledge and skills; by getting hands on experiences and practice of the theory learnt in the clinical areas. As many as 40.9% of the participants agreed that clinical practice allows them to have direct exposure to and experience the real situation, while 47.6% strongly agreed with it. This is so because they felt that clinical area is the only place where they can see their clients for themselves, observing their progress, making the opportunity to have direct contact and to building relationships. Exposure to clinical experience was able to provide

nursing students the opportunity to work with real problems (Reiley and Oermann, 1992). In addition, 51.6% participants agreed that clinical practice provides them the opportunity to develop interpersonal interaction with others. Nursing students were able to increase their communication skills when dealing with people of different ethnicity and cultural diversity. Thus students who were exposed to patient care can promote human interaction with unintentional learning (Bevis and Watson, 1989).

But majority (53.9%) of the participants were neutral as they were nervous because they were unaware of the actual situation in the clinical practice. The participants felt that it depends on the ward situation, with 21.7% agreeing and 35% disagreeing. They felt that their work was not professional as they were confused between their learning in the class and

the actual behaviour expected in practice. Nursing students had some level of anxiety during clinical placement (Bell and Ruth, 2002). On the other hand, 49.6% agreed and 32.7% strongly agreed that clinical practice helped them to relate classroom knowledge with actual practice. Most of the participants (49.6%) agreed that clinical practice was enjoyable, interesting and provide them an exciting environment. This is so because they were able to experience real life situation and learned the operation of a ward, know the nursing routines including general nursing responsibilities. In addition, 55.9% of the total participants think that clinical practice allowed them to learn different areas of responsibility of a nurse. The clinical experience was an opportunity for students to experience and understand the real situation which in turn increase their knowledge and confidence in carrying out nursing care (Andrew *et al.*, 2005). Practical experiences provide real situations that allow nursing students to improve implement and appraise their own understanding (Nolan, 1998).

A total of 50.4% of the participants agreed that they were able to develop critical thinking when delivering nursing care to their patients. The fact is that these nursing students were not just working in the ward doing a procedure but they also learn to recognise typical cases, detect anomalies and make fine discriminations. Such learning allows them to improve and develop critical thinking which may contribute to problem solving. Clinical experience improved student nurses' critical thinking in relating to classroom teaching (Callister, 1993). Clinical practice stimulates nursing students to use their critical thinking skills for problem solving (Dunn and Burnett, 1995).

Perceptions on Enhancement of Learning in Clinical Placement

From the present data it was evident that 53.9% participants agreed that the clinical instructors had shown commitment and organized new learning activities during their clinical practice placement. Analyses indicated that 33.1% participants agreed that clinical environment created a congenial atmosphere to work properly. The participants felt welcomed and were appreciated by the staff and patients. Clinical learning experience was considered positive when the nursing students were welcomed, appreciated and included in the ward team. However, 54.3% of the participants were in the neutral zone as they felt that it

still depend on the ward situation and the staff working.

As enhancement was always perceived as an important aspect of facilitating learning, data revealed that 54.7% of the participants agreed that clinical experience enables them to develop skills through practice. Through clinical experience they were able to develop their clinical skills and relate theory into practice. The clinical placement had provided them with a positive learning experience at the ward.

The majority 55.9% of the participants agreed that their clinical instructors were knowledgeable and were able to share their ideas with them during clinical placement. The participants believed that the role of the clinical instructor was to teach and guide them from making mistakes. Clinical environment was defined as an interactive network forces that influenced nursing students learning outcomes (Dunn and Burnet, 1995). Nursing students' learning process was supported in the clinical experience placement (Robinson and Fassett, 2007).

As for clinical supervision providing the opportunity to develop expertise and to find new ways of learning, 58.7% of the participants agreed that the clinical instructors were willing to give the support and guidance which encouraged them to seek new ways of learning in the clinical placement. This also allows them to build up their confidence. The clinical education setting was identified as the most influential in the development of nursing skills, knowledge and professional socialization that stresses the importance of the learning within the clinical education (Edwards *et al.*, 2004). Nursing students and healthcare provider need a clinical placement that provide quality learning experience (Clare and White, 2002). As many as 57.9% participants agreed that the instructors had shown commitment and organized new learning activities. As the instructors were working with a group of challenging nursing students, they were able to debrief and develop strategies to support nursing students appropriately. This will also reduce their sense of frustration, promotes nursing students' attitudes that lead to successful outcomes.

Further more, 46.1% of the participants agreed that nursing students are given the opportunity to present their comments and participate in clinical ward discussion. The nursing students perceived that their clinical instructors were responsible for supervising them and work with them during clinical conferences and discussion. A reliable instructor was capable of

providing directions by promoting an environment of mutual trust, respect and support for the student nurses to deliver their ideas to their colleagues (Andrews and Brodie, 2006). As for the clinical instructor, 55.5% of the participants agreed with the fact that the clinical instructor encouraged independence which promotes their confidence in managing patient care. Clinical instructors or mentors played a key role in assisting nursing students reach professional excellence and promote role socializing which leads to clinical competency (Drexler, 2009). This will also promote critical thinking and ways of creating therapeutic measures for their patients. The role of a clinical instructor was to assist and encourage nursing students in understanding and applying knowledge, skills and appropriate techniques in management of patient care (Earnshaw, 1995).

Perceptions on Hindrance in Clinical Placement

Hindrance in the clinical placement takes into consideration the procedure for perceiving problems encountered during their clinical placement by the nursing students. Based on the data analysis, the findings showed that the participants were at the neutral level. This indicates that the nursing students were not expressing any strong feelings on problems they encountered during their clinical placement. However, 56.3% of the participants mentioned that time spent with patient were not sufficient. This was the case because the nursing students felt that the rotation period

for clinical placement in one ward was too short for them; before they could get acquainted with the patient, they had to change over to another ward.

A total of 49.6% of the participants viewed that hindrance was due to lack of enthusiasm for teaching; although they acknowledged that some clinical instructors provided them positive support. But there is a shortage of time as most of the time, the clinical instructors had to supervise students from different years of training. Thus, they may not fulfill the needs of each student completely.

CONCLUSION

The analyses showed that there were no significant difference between age groups, ethnicity and educational levels with regards to perceptions towards Clinical Practice, Enhancement of Learning and Hindrance among the nursing students during clinical placement. The overall results indicated that the majority of the participants were satisfied and perceived positively towards their enhancement in learning during clinical placement. The results of this study revealed that there were challenges for the nursing educators, clinical instructors and other health providers in achieving a supportive clinical experience environment for the nursing students. The school of nursing should provide clinical instructors to allow clear instructions and collaborates with the ward staff in evaluation of nursing students learning.

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