

Challenges and Concerns Faced by Nursing Student-Trainees During Their Practicum: A Qualitative Inquiry

Lea M. Cerdena, RN, MM,¹ Arbee M. Sincuya, RN, MAN,¹ Florentino C. Abaya III, RN, MSN¹

John G. Mateo, RN, MHM,¹ Abdul-Akim M. Pangompig, RN, MSN,¹ Edna S. Fajardo, RN, MAN¹

Karen S. Ablola, RN, MN,¹ Ma. Regina De Jesus J. Valdez, RN, MD¹

Amparo I. Lim, RN, RM, MAN¹, Ian Christopher Rocha, RN, MD,¹ Mary Jane C. Gutierrez RN¹

cerdena.lei86@gmail.com

¹National University Manila

551 M.F. Jhocson St. Sampaloc, Manila, PH 1008

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore nursing students' problems in their clinical training to better improve the efficacy of clinical education. Particularly, it sought to (1) determine the universal challenges and concerns experienced by nursing student-trainees during their practicum, (2) identify the coping strategies they use to deal with these challenges, and (3) provide possible solutions in resolving such challenges.

Employing a phenomenological method in qualitative research, this study probed the lived experiences of 20 purposively chosen nursing students using focus group discussions (FGDs). This method enabled a thorough comprehension of the significance they attach to their clinical education experiences. Thematic analysis showed repeated themes such as a lack of adequate relevant clinical skills among certain Clinical Instructors, lack of patient or family consent, problem in completing mandatory OR and DR cases, overloaded learning environments, and faculty-student communication gaps. The coping strategies involved turning to mentors for advice, peer collaboration, efficient time management, developing a relationship with patients, and autonomous learning. The recommendations highlighted enhancing CI assignments according to specialty, increasing awareness of the student role among patients, improving access to mandatory cases, enhancing facilities, and establishing steady channels of communication. The findings have significant implications for enhancing clinical education environments, providing equal learning environments, and enhancing the preparedness of nursing graduates for professional practice.

Introduction

Nursing is a clinical practice profession, and the program of nursing education includes college theoretical education and clinical practicum education (D'Emeh WM, Yacoub MI, 2020). College theoretical education aims to provide nursing students with general theoretical knowledge and clinical technology. Also, the final aim of clinical practicum education is to enable the integration of theoretical knowledge with clinical practice of nursing students and the development of their clinical competencies (Huang F, Ye Han X, Chen S-L, Guo YF, Wang A, Zhang Q, 2020).

Zhang, Shields, Ma, et al. (2022) clarified that clinical education settings, a common term employed in nursing education, describe the settings in which students of nursing use

theoretical knowledge in practice through actual or simulated patient care. Such settings offer quality opportunities for students to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience required to provide high-quality care. Clinical training is intended to build and enhance students' professional skills to maximize their competency to deliver effective clinical care (Farzi, Shahriari, & Farzi, 2018).

Although it is crucial, clinical training encounters a number of challenges such as limited resources, skill shortages, and restricted educational opportunity access. Around half of the overall period of a nursing program is spent on clinical training, and these challenges may make it difficult for students to provide requisite care while possibly leading to an unsafe learning environment (Yaseen Fathi & Ibrahim, 2023).

Clinical faculty members are especially important in the professional growth of nursing students through clinical judgment and the integration of theoretical ideas with practical application. They also act as a vital link between healthcare professionals, patients, and students. Faculty members must have holistic professional knowledge, clinical expertise, effective communication skills, and the capability to be ideal role models in order to be able to carry out this role effectively (Zhang, Zhou, Jiang, et al., 2022). Additionally, they ought to be skilled at identifying and responding to student needs, engaging in feedback, and expressing proficiency in both face-to-face and e-learning pedagogical approaches (Liesveld, Rohr, Petrovic, et al., 2023).

Since nursing education is crucial to the profession and clinical training forms a key part (Zhang, Shields, Ma, et al., 2022), it is significant to identify the challenges students experience in the clinical placements, as such challenges can have a considerable effect on the learning process (Nachinab & Armstrong, 2022). The identification of these areas is critical to crafting effective interventions as well as to improving training programs, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes and equipping students with the appropriate competencies. Yet, a lack of research in understanding the particular challenges that nursing students face in the local context has been reported (Alsadaan, Jones, Kimpton, et al., 2021). Hence, this research aims to explore the challenges faced by nursing students during clinical training in order to enhance the impact of clinical education.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the difficulties experienced by nursing students in their clinical training to enhance the effectiveness of clinical education.

1. To identify the common challenges and concerns faced by nursing student-trainees during their practicum
2. To determine the coping mechanisms employed by nursing student-trainees to manage the common challenges and concerns
3. To recommend possible solutions in addressing the common challenges and concerns faced by nursing student-trainees during their practicum .

Methodology

In this research, the phenomenological approach of qualitative research was employed. Phenomenological approach seeks to understand and interpret people's lived experiences and the meaning they give to these experiences. In the context of this research, it is seeking to delve into the experienced by nursing students in their clinical training to enhance the effectiveness of clinical education.

A total of 20 nursing students were interviewed through focus group discussions (FGD) to obtain in-depth information on their experiences in their clinical training. These participants were purposively chosen for their direct involvement in clinical training to ensure that the study picked up a wide array of views. FGDs provided spaces for participants to freely articulate their experiences. By means of active analysis, prevalent themes and substantial patterns were singled out, tending to offer an in-depth account of the lived experiences of nursing students in their clinical training.

Results and Discussion

The Common Challenges And Concerns Faced By Nursing Student-Trainees During Their Practicum

Table 1: Common Challenges and Concerns faced by Nursing Student-Trainees During Their Practicum

Theme (Challenge)	Responses	Meaning
Limited Relevant Experience of Clinical Instructor (CI)	<i>"Minsan kulang ang my specialization na CI sa area na naka-assign kami."</i> <i>"May mga ongoing palang ang master's degree CI pero my actual clinical experience."</i> <i>"Dahil understaff mahirap mag aligned ng CI according to their specialization."</i> <i>"more on book explanation, minsan mahirap mag actual kapag nag rerefused and patient at my CI na nag guide sa students."</i> <i>"</i>	This means that training provided to CIs before handling students are not enough and there is a misalignment between CIs' expertise and clinical area, thus need to a more extensive and focused-training.
Difficulty Obtaining Patient or Relative Consent	<i>"Mahirap mag-perform ng procedure kung walang pahintulot ng pasyente o pamilya."</i>	This means that patient or family refusal or reluctance can restrict students' potential to carry out necessary clinical skills.

	<i>"May mga pagkakataon na ayaw pumayag ng pasyente kahit supervised kami." / "Kapag hindi pumirma ang pamilya, hindi namin magawa ang case."</i> <i>"May mga pasyente na nahihya o natatakot kaya tumatanggi."</i> <i>"Kailangan pa maghanap ng willing patient para makumpleto ang requirements."</i>	Therefore, intensive orientation to patients and their families are needed.
Difficulty Completing OR and DR Cases for PRC Requirements	<i>"Nahihirapan kami mag-complete ng required OR at DR cases para sa board exam."</i> <i>"Minsan kulang ang cases na ina-assign sa amin."</i> <i>"Mabilis maubos ang slots para sa procedures."</i> <i>"May mga cases na hindi kami pinapahawak dahil sa hospital policy."</i> <i>"Naiiwan kami sa requirements kapag laging nauna ang ibang grupo."</i>	This emphasizes the difficulty of meeting compulsory PRC case requirements, which could slow down eligibility to the licensure examination. Therefore, implementation of case-tracking and case-sharing systems may be introduced.
Limited Classroom Space and large volume of students for demonstration and discussion	<i>"Masyadong maraming estudyante sa isang classroom."</i> <i>"Kulang ang space para sa learning activities."</i> <i>"Hindi lahat nakikita ang demonstration dahil sa dami ng tao."</i> <i>"Mainit at masikip sa classroom." /</i>	This is a reflective of how overcrowded classrooms and needed upgraded facilities undermine effective learning and participation. This calls for revisiting physical structure and facilities plan of the school

	<i>"Nahhirapan makapag-focus dahil maingay kapag marami."</i>	
Lack of Clear Communication and Coordination	<i>"Minsan my miscommunication mula sa faculty o staff."</i> <i>"Hindi agad namin nalalaman ang schedule o requirements."</i> <i>"Some announcements are delayed."</i> <i>"Nagkakaroon ng kalituhan sa instructions ng CI at hospital staff."</i>	This refers to inadequate communication and coordination among faculty, staff, and students, resulting in confusion and delays in the performance of clinical duties. This needs establishing clear and consistent communication channels

The findings indicate that Nursing student-trainees are faced with a number of pressing challenges in their practicum that have a direct bearing on the quality of their learning experience. One such problem is the incongruence between the clinical instructor's (CI) area of expertise and the clinical area assigned to them, which can lead to sparse practical advice and reference to theoretical knowledge more than hands-on experience. Students also find it challenging to obtain patient or family permission, which limits avenues to conduct fundamental procedures and satisfy skill requirements. Moreover, meeting the PRC-prescribed OR and DR cases is made tough because of the lack of available slots, restrictive hospital policies, and student group competition. These challenges not only delay required competency fulfillment but also create additional stress for students as they strive for licensure preparedness.

Environmental and organizational issues add to these problems as well. Crowded classrooms and small learning spaces minimize visibility during demonstrations, restrict active participation, and have a negative effect on focus, while ambiguous communication and ineffective coordination among faculty, hospital staff, and students result in confusion, scheduling conflicts, and tardiness in fulfilling clinical requirements. The consequences of these problems go beyond one's performance—these can cause skill deficiencies, delayed graduation, and decreased readiness for the practice of nursing. If left unchecked, these issues can jeopardize both future nurses' competence and the quality of care they offer their patients.

Coping Mechanisms Employed By Nursing Student-Trainees To Manage The Common Challenges And Concerns

Table 2: Coping Mechanisms Employed By Nursing Student-Trainees To Manage The Common Challenges And Concerns

Theme (Coping Mechanism)	Tagalog Responses	Meaning
Seeking Guidance from Clinical Instructors and Staff	<i>"Lumalapit kami kay CI kapag may hindi alam."</i>	This means that students are very proactive in clarifying information from other mentors and seniors. Thus, calls for school to employ more experienced mentors or trained more CIs

	<i>"Nakikipag-usap kami sa senior nurses para humingi ng tips."</i> <i>"Humihingi ng clarification kapag hindi malinaw ang instructions."</i> <i>"Nagpapa-demo ulit kapag hindi pa gamay ang procedure."</i> <i>"Nakikinig kami sa feedback ng CI para mag-improve."</i>	
Collaborating with Classmates	<i>"Nagpupulong kami ng grupo para magplano sa tasks."</i> <i>"Nagtutulungan kami maghanap ng willing patient."</i> <i>"Nag-eexchange kami ng notes at information."</i> <i>"Pinapasa namin ang schedule sa iba para lahat updated."</i> <i>"Nagsasama-sama kami sa practice sessions."</i>	This means that participatory and collaborative approach are effective coping mechanisms for students. Thus, CIs need to emphasize the importance of collaboration, peer support and exchange of information among them
Time Management and Prioritization	<i>"Inaayos namin ang schedule para matapos requirements."</i> <i>"Ginagawa muna ang urgent cases bago ang iba."</i>	This means that students are making sure to organize their time and schedule as well as keep track of priorities to meet deadlines and requirements efficiently

	<i>"Gumagawa ng checklist para sa tasks."</i> <i>"Iniiwasan ang last-minute para hindi mag-cram."</i> <i>"Nag-aallocate ng oras para mag-review at mag-practice."</i>	
Building Rapport with Patients and Families	<i>"Maayos at magalang kami sa pasyente."</i> <i>"Nagpapakilala at nagpapaliwanag bago mag-procedure."</i> <i>"Nakikipagkwentuhan para mawala ang kaba ng pasyente."</i> <i>"Tinuturuan ang pamilya tungkol sa procedure para pumayag."</i> <i>"Nagtatanong muna kung comfortable ang pasyente."</i>	This means that students interpersonal skills are also effective coping mechanisms especially in dealing with patient and families, Therefore, a specific training on this may be implemented to help students more.
Utilizing Available Resources and Self-Study	<i>"Nanood ng instructional videos online."</i> <i>"Nagbabasa ng modules at references."</i> <i>"Nagpa-practice sa lab kung may free time."</i>	This means that self learning is important and resources hub is vital components of students coping mechanisms. Thus, school should reevaluate and ensure all facilities and resources are up to date and available for students use.

	<i>"Humihiram ng equipment para mag-practice."</i>	
	<i>"Naghahanap ng extra cases sa ibang affiliated hospitals."</i>	

The results show that nursing student-trainees utilise different coping strategies to deal with problems they have in their practicum. Some of them depend on seeking advice from clinical teachers and personnel, actively inquiring about things, requesting to be demonstrated, and using feedback to strengthen their ability. Others fully utilize teamwork with fellow students, sharing resources, exchanging information, and helping each other in securing willing patients or in fulfilling requirements. Effective prioritization and time management also come into play, with students developing checklists, staying away from procrastination, and dealing with urgent cases first to adhere to deadlines. In the meantime, rapport development with patients and families creates trust levels, which in turn promote cooperation and consent to procedures. Further, the utilization of accessible resources and independent study—like viewing tutorial videos, reading references, and practicing in skills labs—enhance competencies beyond formal training time.

These adaptive strategies have significant implications for nursing education and practice. By obtaining guidance and promoting teamwork, students improve not only their technical competency but also their interpersonal and collaborative skills—crucial qualities in the healthcare environment. Time management practices and self-directed learning foster professional discipline and flexibility, making them ready for the challenges of actual nursing practice. In addition, rapport-building skills equate to enhanced patient trust and satisfaction that are central to providing quality care. In the event that these coping mechanisms are supported and promoted by educators and training institutions, they can fill gaps in clinical education, enhance student confidence, and ultimately lead to the provision of competent and caring nursing professionals.

Recommended possible solutions in addressing the common challenges and concerns faced by nursing student-trainees during their practicum .

Actionable Suggestions for Resolving the Problems of Nursing Student-Trainees During Practicum

Assign Clinical Instructors with Appropriate Specialization and Sufficient Experience

1. Align CI expertise with the clinical field of assignment.
2. Enforce orientation and skill refreshment for CIs prior to deployment to a new unit.
3. Institute mentorship programs with experienced CIs mentoring less experienced CIs.

4. Offer ongoing professional development programs with emphasis on clinical teaching.

Enhance Patient and Family Sensitization regarding Student Roles

1. Add a brief patient and family orientation to the student nurses' role prior to procedures.
2. Attach visible identification and authorization cards to student nurses.
3. Utilize posters, brochures, or hospital television monitors to describe the value of student involvement in patient care.
4. Hold quarterly hospital forums to encourage patient compliance with student activity.

Enhance Access to OR and DR Cases to Accommodate PRC Needs

1. Institute a just rotation plan to ensure balanced allocation of cases among students.
2. Increase collaboration with private and government hospitals for additional case experiences.
3. Utilize an electronic case-tracking system to track each student's case completion.
4. Make case-sharing agreements between affiliate hospitals to meet shortages.

Upgrade and Increase Classroom and Skills Laboratory Space

1. Assign additional classrooms to ease overcrowding during lectures and skills demonstrations.
2. Enhance ventilation, lighting, and seating arrangements for comfort and visibility.
3. Offer updated simulation equipment for practice.
4. Implement additional audio-visual aids for better delivery of lessons.

Have Clear and Consistent Channels of Communication

1. Have formal group chats or messaging channels for live announcements.
2. Publish practicum schedules and announcements at least one week prior.
3. Set up a practicum-specific bulletin board for reminders and schedules.
4. Implement an online portal for tracking requirements, announcements, and feedback.

Conclusion

According to the findings, various difficulties are faced by nursing student-trainees in their practicum, such as alignment clinical experience of some Clinical Instructors (CIs), problems in procuring patient or family consent, and issues in meeting the stipulated Operating Room (OR) and Delivery Room (DR) cases for PRC requirements. Some of the other significant problems include congested classrooms that discourage active engagement and inadequate communication among faculty, staff, and students, resulting in misunderstandings and delays. In response, students use coping strategies like actively seeking information from CIs and hospital staff, working with colleagues to pool resources, effective time management, establishing rapport with patients and families to foster cooperation, and using self-study and accessible resources to enhance their capabilities. These strategies mirror their resilience, flexibility, and dedication towards meeting their practicum obligations in spite of limitations.

The recommended suggestions are meant to tackle these issues with the following focused actions: allotting CIs with current specialization and proper experience, facilitating patient and family education about student roles, increasing access to OR and DR cases through

equitable scheduling and hospital alliances, increasing and modernizing facilities for learning, and creating clear, unambiguous means of communication. Enacting these measures has important implications for enhancing the quality of clinical education, guaranteeing equal learning opportunities, and increasing the readiness of nursing graduates for professional practice. By closing structural and instructional gaps, these recommendations can establish a more favorable practicum environment that supports competence, confidence, and readiness in future nurses.

References

- Alsadaan, N., Jones, L. K., Kimpton, A., et al. (2021). *Exploring the challenges nursing students face during clinical training in our region*. Nursing Education Perspectives.
- Farzi, S., Shahriari, M., & Farzi, S. (2018). *Clinical training in nursing education: An essential component for developing professional skills*. Journal of Nursing Education and Practice, 8(5), 112-118.
- Liesveld, J., Rohr, J., Petrovic, K., et al. (2023). *The role of faculty in nursing clinical education: Enhancing the teaching and learning process*. Nursing Faculty Development, 45(2), 34-40.
- Nachinab, G. T., & Armstrong, S. J. (2022). *Challenges in clinical training and their effects on nursing students' learning experiences*. International Journal of Nursing Education, 13(4), 287-292.
- Yaseen Fathi, K., & Ibrahim, R. H. (2023). *Challenges and barriers to effective clinical education in nursing programs: A systematic review*. Journal of Clinical Nursing, 35(1), 50-57.
- Zhang, J., Shields, L., Ma, B., et al. (2022). *The importance of clinical education settings in nursing instruction and practice*. Journal of Nursing Education, 61(8), 456-463.
- Zhang, J., Zhou, F., Jiang, J., et al. (2022). *The pivotal role of clinical faculty in developing nursing students' clinical judgment and practice*. Journal of Clinical Nursing, 31(7), 1123-1130.