

Influence of Clinical Exposure and Specialization Preferences of Level IV Nursing Students: A Proposed Clinical Placement Program.

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ABSTRACT

Clinical exposure is a cornerstone of nursing education, shaping student competencies, professional confidence, and future career decisions. Understanding how clinical experience influences specialization preferences is essential for designing clinical placement programs that align educational experiences with workforce demands. This study determined the influence of clinical exposure on the specialization preferences of level IV nursing students and developed a proposed clinical placement program based on the findings. This study will be highly beneficial not only to nursing students but also to other educational institutions offering nursing programs. It will offer valuable insights into how clinical exposure influences the specialization preferences of Level IV nursing students, which can serve as a guide for improving nursing education and clinical training programs.

Keywords: *Clinical Exposure, Mentor Influence, Specialization Preference, learning outcomes, personalized learning experiences, and valuable insights in career-decision making.*

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, the mismatch between student preferences and workforce needs remains a persistent problem. Many countries face shortages in critical areas like geriatric, psychiatric, oncology, and community health nursing, yet these fields attract fewer students (Li et al., 2023). Instead, students often prefer specialties such as pediatrics, emergency care, or obstetrics, which they see as more exciting, prestigious, or socially valued (Anyango et al., 2024). This imbalance leads to uneven workforce distribution and long-term gaps in care, particularly for vulnerable populations. As a result, many students base their preferences only on the specialties they encounter. In the Philippines, clinical exposure and specialization preferences among nursing students are shaped by unique social, economic, and educational factors. Philippine nursing education relies heavily on hospital rotations and community health training, which shape students' familiarity with specific fields. Research shows that Filipino students often prefer medical-surgical, pediatric, and obstetric nursing because these areas are commonly included in their clinical training and seen as pathways to local or overseas employment (Park et al., 2024). In the United States, challenges in clinical exposure and specialization choices reflect long-standing workforce issues. The country needs more nurses in aging care, mental health, and advanced practice roles, yet many new graduates still choose acute-care hospital specialties over those with the greatest shortages (Kandil et al., 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of Level IV nursing student respondents in terms of;

- 1.1 Age.1.2 Gender.1.3 First-semester academic performance (General Weighted Average - GWA).
2. What is the extent of clinical exposure among Level IV nursing students in terms of:
 - 2.1 number of clinical hours completed.2.2 diversity of clinical areas experienced.2.3 perceived quality of clinical experiences, and2.4 frequency of direct interaction with patients?
 - 2.5 exposure to different hospital areas.2.6 influence of family members in the medical field.2.7 guidance from clinical instructors or mentors.
 - 2.8 personal factors (such as interest and passion, values and beliefs, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and mentor influence)?
3. What are the specialization preferences of Level IV nursing students among areas of exposure.
4. What are the challenges met by the Level IV nursing students during clinical exposure that may affect their specialization choices?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the Level IV nursing students and specialization preference?
6. Is there a significant relationship between clinical exposure of the level IV nursing students and specialization preference?
7. Based on the findings of the study, what clinical placement program may be proposed?

Scope and Delimitations

Participants are Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students in private institution who have completed clinical hours & focus on their most recent clinical rotation area. The research will investigate students' demographic profile age, gender, academic performance. It will also evaluate the factors influencing their specialization decisions, and the challenges they encounter when choosing a preferred field.

Review of Related Literature

Clinical exposure plays a fundamental role in shaping the professional development of nursing students (Agomessou, 2020). Studies reveal that early and consistent clinical exposure helps nursing students to bridge the gap between classroom learning and the practical realities of patient care (Aljerian, 2022).

Clinical placements also play a major role in shaping nursing students' perceptions of the profession and their future career paths. When students are exposed to diverse clinical areas such as medical-surgical wards, pediatric units, emergency departments, and community health settings, they gain a broader understanding of nursing roles and responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a theoretical framework explaining how clinical exposure and external influences combine to shape specialization preferences.

David's Kolb's Experiential Theory supports and focuses on how clinical exposure directly contributes to the development of specialization preferences.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory: he says that people learn by observing, imitating, and modeling the behavior of others.

Conceptual Framework

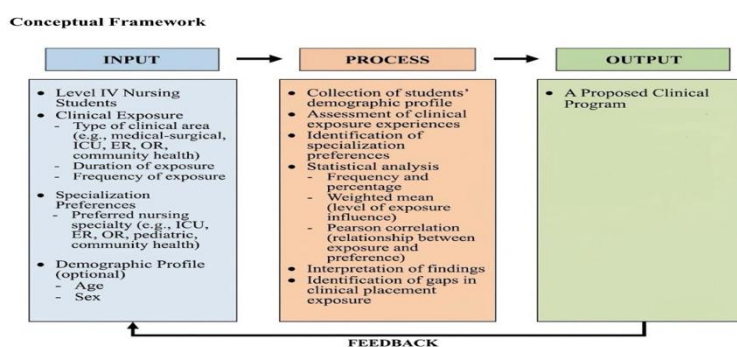


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework showing the relationship Between Input, Process and Outcome

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the study's method, including the research design, locale, population and sampling, instruments, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and statistical tools. These methods are designed to ensure the valid, reliable, and ethical collection and analysis of data on clinical exposure, mentor influence, and specialization preferences among nursing students.

Research Design

A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed among 188 Level IV nursing students.

Research Steps

Data were collected using a validated researcher-developed questionnaire assessing dimensions of clinical exposure, clinical hours completed, diversity and quality of clinical experiences, patient interaction, exposure to different hospital areas, family influence, guidance from clinical instructors, and personal factors. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

The data collection process commenced with a semi-structured online questionnaire administered to level IV nursing students. The purpose of this questionnaire was to investigate the relationship between the demographic profile and specialization preferences of level IV nursing students, and between clinical exposure and areas of specialization choice. It also aimed to answer questions about the diversity of clinical experience, the frequency of interaction with patients, exposure to different hospital areas, the influence of family members in the medical field, guidance from clinical instructors, and lastly, the personal factors affecting their choices of area of specialization.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis employed a thematic approach, in which transcripts from semi-structured online-based questionnaires and focus group discussions of Level IV nursing students' clinical exposure and specialization preferences were analyzed. Researchers cross-checked themes to guarantee the reliability and validity of findings. Using Cronbach's alpha, a

score of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable, indicating that the survey reliably measures the intended topic. This study has an overall score of 0.917, with an excellent result.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

This study aimed to test the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between nursing students' profiles and their specialization preferences. The test of the relationship revealed that the profile is partially associated with their specialization preferences. Specifically, age was significantly related to the preference for becoming an operating room nurse, while academic performance was significantly related to the preference for becoming ICU, ward, and community nurses. Gender showed no significant relationship. This indicates that age and academic performance are influenced by specialization preferences; therefore, the null hypothesis was partially rejected.

The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between clinical exposure and specialization preferences was rejected. There are several dimensions of clinical exposure, like number of clinical hours completed, diversity of clinical area experience, perceived quality of clinical area of experience, frequency of interaction with patients, exposure to different areas of hospitals, influence of family member in the medical field, guidance from clinical instructors, and personal factors, found significantly associated with various nursing specialization preferences therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical protocols by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, ethical issues encompassed the imperative to ensure the respectful portrayal of participants' views in the final analysis and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants demonstrated high levels of clinical exposure ($m=4.11$), with the highest ratings in completed clinical hours ($m=4.57$) and diversity of clinical experiences ($m=4.31$). Operating Room Nursing emerged as the most preferred specialization ($m = 4.51$), followed by Emergency Room ($m = 4.36$) and Delivery Room ($m = 3.92$). Significant positive relationships were identified between several dimensions. Guidance from clinical instructors showed the strongest association with emergency room preferences ($r=.376$, $p < .001$), while personal factors ($r=.376$, $p<.001$) and family influence ($r=.294$, $p < .001$) for NICU preferences also demonstrated significant relationships. Students likewise reported challenges related to limited exposure to specialties, inadequate orientation, insufficient resources, and restricted opportunities for hands-on practice.

SUMMARY

Based on the comprehensive data, the majority of respondents are female and 24 years old and above, with an 80.9% general weighted average, which denotes very good academic performance and a high degree of clinical exposure. These findings suggest that extensive clinical exposure provides nursing students with opportunities to develop competencies, gain confidence, and become familiar with various career choices in nursing specialties.

CONCLUSIONS

Clinical exposure significantly influences nursing students' specialization preferences. The reported challenges related to limited specialty exposure, inadequate orientation, insufficient resources, and restricted opportunities for hands-on practice. These findings support implementing a Clinical Placement Program that improves the learning environment and prepares future nurses for their choice of specialization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher proposed a program to address the specific problems identified by the respondents. **CARE PROGRAM, which stands for (Clinical Advancement & Readiness Enhancement Program)**

To improve the quality of clinical placement and assist the nursing students in making informed specialization choices.

Objectives:	Activities:	Person responsible:	Time Frame:	Expected outcomes:
Improve Orientation	Comprehensive Pre Orientation program before the rotation.	Clinical coordinator Clinical Instructors	Before Every rotation	Students are well prepared and confident before the duty.
Increase the exposure	SPecialty Rotation Enhancement(E nsure rotation in OR/DR/ER /ICU/NICU/Psy chiatric and Community Health	Dean Clinical Coordinator Hospital affiliates	Every Semestral	Students gain balanced exposure to different specialties.
Strengthen the mentorship	Clinical Mentorship Program(OI Instructor or preceptor assigned to small groups)	Clinical Instructor Staff Nurse	Throughout Clinical Duty	Better supervision and increase students' confidence.

Improve the skills	Simulation Based Skills enhancement workshop	Skills lab professor faculty	Monthly	Students become more competent before the hospital exposure.
Guide Specialization	Nursing Career specialization forum featuring special areas OR,ER,DR,ICU, NICU etc	College of Nursing	Once a year	Students make informed specialization choices and decisions..
Monitor the learning(HUDDLE)	Clinical Reflection and feedback session	Clinical Instructors	Every Clinical Rotation	Continuous, improved clinical learning experiences.

It Directly address the research findings

- Students reported limited exposure to specialized areas.
- Students experience lack of orientation exposure before clinical duty.(m=4.35)causes confusion during their clinical rotation. with the finding strongly agree
- Students reported inconsistent supervision and mentorship lowest mean of (m=3.55) with findings agree
- Students identify lack of resources and lack of limited interaction with patients.(m=4.34) agree

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praise and thanks be to Allah for his guidance, strength, and endless blessings throughout this study. To my beloved three children, thank you for being my greatest inspiration and motivation. To everyone who supported me, thank you for your prayers, support, and encouragement. Alhamdulliah.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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