

Lived Experiences of Newly Graduated Nurses Transitioned into Professional Nursing Practice as Staff Nurses

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of newly graduated nurses transitioning from student nurses to professional staff nurses by examining the challenges they faced, the support systems that influenced their adaptation, and the transition's effect on their professional identity and confidence. This study was conducted using the qualitative research design of Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology with ten newly graduated registered nurses with less than two years of clinical experience from public and private healthcare institutions in Laguna, Philippines. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling. The narratives were analyzed using the phenomenological method of Colaizzi, from which significant statements, formulated meanings, and thematic clusters were extracted. Results: Data analysis identified six common themes: transition shock and overwhelmed responsibility; adjustment to time management and workload; self-doubt and emotional distress; disjunction between academic preparation and clinical reality; mentorship and support systems; and slow development of professional identity. Results showed that newly graduated nurses experience uncertainty, stress, and professional insecurity at the beginning of their practice, but that mentorship, peer support, and experiential learning are important for successful adaptation and confidence-building. Despite the small sample size and the choice of healthcare institutions, the study provides valuable insights into the transition experiences of novice nurses and highlights areas for future research involving larger, more diverse populations. Findings point to the necessity of well-structured orientation programs, good mentorship, and improved clinical preparation in nursing education. The study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge in nursing by raising awareness of the transition process and guiding the development of strategies to enhance professional development, retention, and the quality of patient care among newly graduated nurses.

Keywords: Newly graduated nurses, transition to practice, professional identity, mentorship; interpretive phenomenology.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from student to staff nurse is both tough and important. Newly graduated nurses are expected to provide comprehensive patient care in a complex and rapidly changing clinical environment. These differences between academic training and professional nursing practice create insecurities among newbie nurses (Baharum et al., 2023; Gadin, 2024). Although there is significant research on transition-to-practice experiences from abroad, little is known about the lives of new nurse graduates in Philippine health care settings. Becoming a

nurse at the beginning of work was understood through Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962). It considers personal difficulties, support systems, and the influence of change on their professional identity and confidence.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to offer insights that could help nursing educators, administrators, and policymakers to design effective systems to support new nurses. The particular research questions this study aimed to address were the central question of:

1. What are the experiences of newly graduated nurses in an independent transition into professional practice as a nurse?

Scope and Delimitations

This study explored the lived experiences of newly graduated registered nurses with less than two years of clinical experience employed in selected public and private healthcare institutions in highly industrialized areas of Laguna, Philippines on their transition into professional nursing practice. The qualitative design, purposive sampling and small sample size of ten participants limited the findings, which may not be generalizable to all newly graduated nurses but offer an in-depth understanding of their transition experiences within the specific study context.

Review of Related Literature

A lot of research shows that newly graduated nurses feel lost, less confident, and stressed out when they enter the real world of nursing in a hospital setting. This is mostly due to the theory-practice gap (Chen et al., 2021; Kim & Yeo, 2020). Additionally, studies show that novices often have trouble adapting and adjusting to their new roles as staff nurses during their first few months to years of practice, which affects their job satisfaction, leading them to decide to leave their company (Narbonara-Galvez et al., 2024; Baharum et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Patricia Benner's Novice to Expert Theory (1984) states that *nursing competence develops progressively through experience*, allowing newly graduated nurses to mature from novice practitioners to a higher level of clinical proficiency as they gain knowledge through exposure and experience. **National Core Competency Standards (NIHHS)** on the other hand sets the national standard in the Philippines for what competent practice should look like at each stage of their growth.

Conceptual Framework

The professional journey of the newly graduated nurses in Laguna was presented using the Input-Process-Output Model.

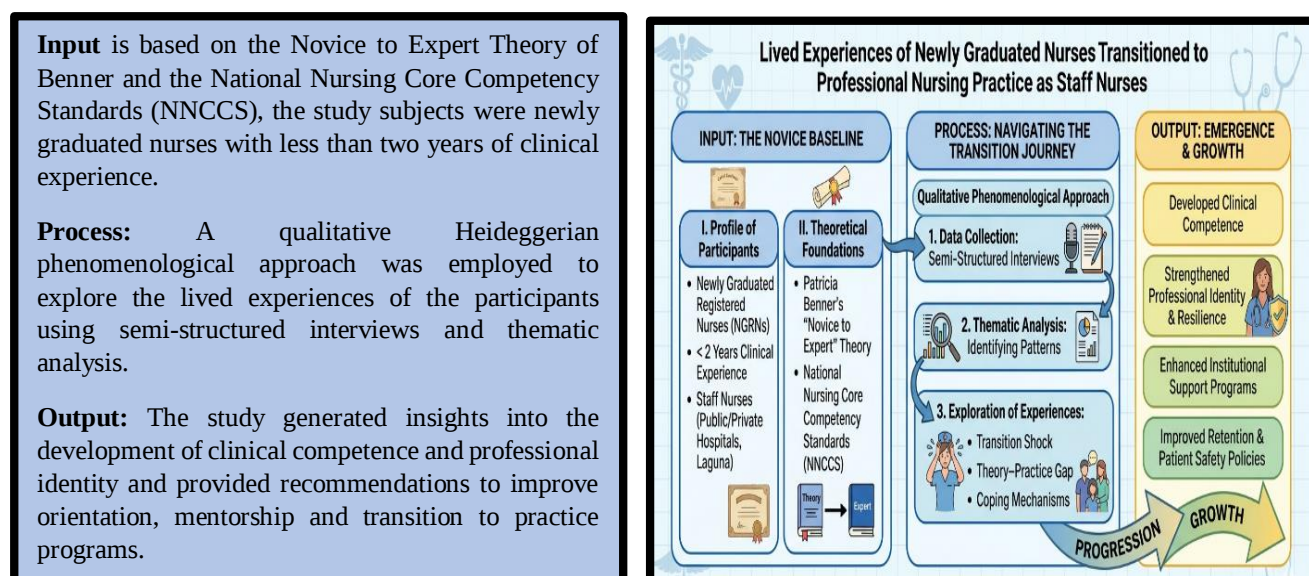


Figure A. The Lacsina Bridge: An IPO model of Novice to Expert Transition

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs an interpretative/hermeneutic phenomenological design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of newly graduated nurses during their transition from newly graduated nurses to professional staff nurses (Kaihlanen et al., 2018).

Research Steps

A qualitative Heideggerian phenomenological design was used in this study. A purposive sample of ten newly graduated nurses participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their lived experiences during the transition to professional nursing practice (Heidegger, 1962; Cypress, 2018). Data were transcribed, coded and analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method to identify significant statements, formulate meanings and generate thematic clusters that described the transition experiences of the participants.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

The participants were purposively sampled and comprised 10 newly graduated registered nurses with less than 2 years of clinical experience from selected public and private healthcare institutions in Laguna, Philippines (Polit & Beck, 2021; Ahmed, 2025). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect data, which allowed participants to voice their lived experiences, challenges, and adaptations during the transition into professional nursing practice (Cypress, 2018; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method to ensure a rigorous understanding of the participants' experiences (Colaizzi, 1978).

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach involving multiple readings of the interview transcripts to achieve an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences. Key statements were identified from the narratives, and meanings were formulated and clustered into themes to discover common patterns and experiences shared by participants (Cypress, 2018). These themes were applied to interpret the meaning and essence of the transition of newly graduated nurses into professional nursing practice within the framework of Heideggerian phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; Dodgson, 2023).

Validation

The validity of the research was maintained through member checking, reflexive journaling, audit trail documentation, and the systematic application of Colaizzi's phenomenological method to ensure the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings (Colaizzi, 1978; Darawsheh, 2014; McKim, 2023).

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The study included ten newly graduated nurses from public and private healthcare institutions around Laguna, Philippines. Informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and adherence to ethical guidelines were maintained throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Study found that newly graduated individuals face many problems, including: 1. Transition shock and Overwhelming responsibility, 2. Struggles in time management, 3. Self-doubt, Emotional Strain and Professional Insecurity, 4. Theory-Practice Gap. Participants reported feeling uncertain and insecure as they moved toward caring for patients and making decisions on their own in more complex health care situations. Despite their problems, learning by doing, clinical experience, having a mentor, and support from their coworkers gave them confidence, skills, and resilience (Baharum et al., 2023; Hookmani, 2021).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The qualitative research conducted to explore the lived experiences of newly graduated nurses entering the professional world of nursing revealed the struggles they often encounter. Despite these issues, the presence of mentorship, peer support, and a clinical work environment contributed to the development of their confidence, sense of professional identity, skills, and resilience, resulting in successful adaptation in nursing practice (Baharum et al., 2023; Hookmani et al., 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Healthcare institutions and academic bodies must develop structured residency programs and formalize roles of trained mentorship to support the transition of newly graduated nurses and strengthen high-pressure clinical simulations. In addition, longitudinal empirical studies are needed to assess the impact of these interventions on nurse retention rates and patient safety indicators.

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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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