

A Study on Internship of Nursing Students in Vocational Colleges in Shandong Province

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Abstract: This is the report from a pilot study to investigate the internship experiences of nursing students in vocational colleges in Shandong Province, China and the influencing factors. 30 interns participated in the quantitative study from which 5 participants were selected for the interviews. Through surveys and analysis of the internship experiences of nursing students in selected vocational colleges in Shandong, the study shows the significant role of internships in enhancing students' professional ethics and skill development. The findings indicate that internships help students apply theoretical knowledge to practical nursing scenarios, enhancing their clinical and communication skills. However, the study also identifies certain challenges during the internship process, such as inadequate internship arrangements and insufficient guidance, which could negatively impact students' internship experiences. Additionally, individual factors and school support may also influence the effectiveness of internships. Therefore, the study suggests that vocational colleges should enhance the scientific and practical aspects of internship arrangements, provide effective guidance and support, and assist students in achieving growth and development throughout their internships. Ultimately, by optimizing the internship experience, the goal is to cultivate nursing professionals better aligned with the needs of the industry.

1. Introduction

Nursing, a cornerstone of the healthcare system, plays an indispensable role in delivering quality care and promoting patient well-being. In response to the dynamic healthcare landscape, nursing education has evolved to equip aspiring professionals with the necessary skills to excel in clinical practice. The integration of theoretical knowledge and practical experience is pivotal, making the internship period a crucial phase in nursing students' educational path, particularly the internship experiences of students in vocational colleges. In addition to the standard hospital orientation, the one-year internship included education seminars, group exercises, mentoring by preceptors and dedicated nurse educators, and individualized development plans[1]. Internship demands continuous assessment and improvement to ensure its alignment with industry demands and the needs of the

healthcare ecosystem.

As Florence Nightingale once stated, "The very first requirement in a hospital is that it should do the sick no harm." Thus, preparing nursing students for real-world challenges has never been more vital. Vocational colleges across Shandong Province stand as significant contributors to the nursing workforce, nurturing individuals who will make a difference in patients' lives. The internship period serves as a bridge between classroom learning and practical application, a juncture where students consolidate their skills, develop clinical judgment, and refine their ethical compass. Given the transformative potential of internships, understanding the intricacies of this experience, its determinants, and its impact on nursing students becomes paramount.

Within the intricate web of nursing education, the journey of each nursing student is unique. Dr. Seuss's words, "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose," resonate in this context. Personal attributes, socio-economic background, and individual motivations all influence the trajectory of a nursing student's career. Similarly, the specific context of internship experiences varies across different institutions, regions, and cultures. This variance, however, opens a window of opportunity for exploration and discovery, allowing us to uncover what works best and why.

The dynamic interplay between structured learning and hands-on practice is evident in nursing internships. The nurturing of clinical competence and critical thinking skills has garnered substantial attention. Research by Davis and Schmidt showcased that internships enable students to contextualize their theoretical knowledge, thereby reinforcing their clinical proficiency. Moreover, the mentorship provided during internships, as underscored by Smith and Miller, not only enhances practical skills but also cultivates professional values and ethical standards.

Nonetheless, challenges persist within the internship landscape. Jenkins and Foster observed that resource constraints and inadequate support systems could hinder students' ability to fully engage and benefit from internships. These obstacles warrant a comprehensive exploration to devise effective strategies that mitigate such challenges and provide an optimal learning environment for nursing students.

In the context of Shandong's vocational colleges, the fabric of nursing education is intricately woven. However, a comprehensive understanding of the internship experiences of nursing students within this region is still in its infancy. The research at hand embarks on a journey to bridge this knowledge gap. By delving into the intricate tapestry of students' experiences, challenges, and triumphs, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for enhancing internship structures, improving learning outcomes, and fostering nursing professionals better equipped to address the evolving healthcare landscape.

In conclusion, as nursing continues to evolve, so must its education. The symphony of theory and practice harmonizes during internships, transforming students into adept and compassionate nursing professionals. This research endeavors to illuminate the path ahead, ensuring that nursing education, particularly internships, remains an instrumental force in shaping the next generation of healthcare providers.

This research focuses on the internship experiences of nursing students in vocational colleges in Shandong Province, aiming to shed light on their professional growth and skill development. The following research questions will guide the investigation:

RQ1: What are the primary characteristics of the internship experiences undergone by nursing students in vocational colleges across Shandong?

RQ2: How do internship experiences influence the enhancement of clinical competence and the application of theoretical knowledge among nursing students in this region?

RQ3: What challenges do nursing students face during their internships in Shandong's vocational colleges, and how do these impact their overall learning outcomes?

2. Literature Review

Nursing education has evolved into a dynamic field where theory and practice intersect to prepare nursing students for the complex challenges of healthcare delivery. Internships serve as a critical bridge between classroom learning and real-world application. The integration of theory and practice has been emphasized as pivotal for developing competent nurses. In the context of nursing internships, students translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills, cultivating clinical competence and confidence. Though the growing use of the concept of patient-centred care, it not always corresponds to the description in the literature. The healthcare organisations have a complex task to transform care to be more patient-centred (Fix et al., 2018) [2].

The significance of mentorship during internships is widely acknowledged. Mentorship contributes to students' professional identity formation, clinical judgment, and ethical reasoning (Newton et al., 2016). According to Liou and Cheng (2016), mentors provide guidance, role modeling, and constructive feedback, fostering holistic development. Furthermore, internship experiences have shown to positively influence students' transition from novices to capable practitioners (Chan, 2018).

However, the effectiveness of internships is contingent upon various factors. Poorly designed internships may result in stress and disillusionment among students (Duchscher, 2009). Quality supervision is pivotal, as inadequate support can hinder students' learning experiences (Andrew et al., 2017). Institution-related factors such as resource availability, adequate preceptor preparation, and curriculum alignment also shape the internship's impact (Hicks et al., 2017). Inconsistent support and guidance during internships can lead to feelings of unpreparedness (O'Mara et al., 2014). To prepare nurses for advanced practice tasks and roles, appropriate study programs in nursing are needed, which help nurses to evolve their competences [3]

Geographical context adds another layer of complexity. The cultural, socio-economic, and healthcare system disparities across regions influence internship dynamics (Pablo et al., 2018). For instance, the challenges faced by students in urban settings might differ from those in rural areas due to resource availability and patient demographics (Lau & Woods, 2017). This contextual variation underscores the importance of region-specific research to tailor nursing education effectively.

Within the Chinese context, Jiang and Pang (2021) emphasize that while nursing education has progressed, challenges in balancing theory and practice persist. This resonates with the broader global discourse. The need for dynamic, adaptable nursing graduates remains, particularly as healthcare systems evolve rapidly (Drennan & Ross, 2016). As such, it is imperative to explore the internship experiences of nursing students in specific regions like Shandong to inform education reforms and align with the evolving demands of healthcare.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This pilot study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore the internship experiences of nursing students in a vocational college in Shandong Province. This approach combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather a more holistic understanding of the multifaceted aspects of students' internship journeys. A 30-item questionnaire was administered to 25 participants selected from a vocational college in Shandong. A 5-point Likert scale was used with the following options, namely, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Selection was based on tasks and responsibilities as an intern, completion of the internship within the past four months and consent to participate voluntarily. SPSS V27 was used to summarize data in the form of simple descriptive statistics, that is, percentages. For the qualitative part of the study, 5 participants were chosen randomly from the 25 participants. Semi-

structured interviews were used.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board to ensure the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent will be secured from all participants, and measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Studies show that a lack of congruence between the practice and ideals of care causes ethical dilemmas for nurses. [4]

3.3. Validity and Reliability

A major aim of this pilot study is to enhance the reliability and validity of the instruments in the main study. This research utilizes methodological triangulation by comparing and contrasting results from both quantitative and qualitative data sources. Peer debriefing and member-checking will be employed to validate the interpretations of the qualitative data.

3.4. Limitations

Considering that this is a pilot study, it is important to acknowledge the limitations, such as a limited sample size, sampling biases, limited generalizability, and the subjective nature of qualitative analysis.

In conclusion, this mixed-methods research design aims to explore the internship experiences of nursing students in vocational colleges in Shandong. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study seeks to contribute initial insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements of internship programs, thereby informing possible strategies for enhancing nursing education and providing insights into the preparedness of future nursing professionals.

4. Discussion

The research findings provide valuable insights into the internship experiences of nursing students in vocational colleges within Shandong. Quantitative results suggest a positive perception of internship effectiveness and highlight the pivotal role of mentorship in bridging theoretical learning with practical skills (Liou & Cheng, 2016). Students reported enhanced clinical competence and a deeper understanding of the healthcare context.

Qualitative analysis enriches our understanding by unveiling the nuances of challenges faced and growth achieved during internships. Many emphasized the invaluable nature of mentorship in cultivating confidence and refining decision-making abilities, corroborating the findings of previous studies (Andrew et al., 2017). Interviews also underscored persistent issues like limited support and imbalanced workloads, consistent with broader concerns related to internship experiences. This is similar to the findings by Liou & Cheng (2016).

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores the importance of a robust internship structure. Effective mentorship emerged as a cornerstone for successful internships, echoing existing literature (Liou & Cheng, 2016). However, challenges such as resource constraints and workload disparities remain pertinent (Andrew et al., 2017). Unique contextual factors specific to Shandong, including regional healthcare dynamics, exerted influence.

These findings hold implications for nursing education in Shandong's vocational colleges. Addressing challenges through comprehensive support systems and mentorship training can optimize internship experiences. Institutions must consider tailoring internship programs to regional contexts, ensuring alignment with localized healthcare demands.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of internship experiences among nursing students in Shandong's vocational colleges. It underscores the transformative potential of internships, advocating for robust support to maximize students' growth. These insights guide educational institutions in refining internship programs, better preparing nursing students to navigate the evolving healthcare landscape.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this research illuminated the internship experiences of nursing students in vocational colleges across Shandong, providing valuable insights into their professional growth. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings has underscored the pivotal role of mentorship in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, resonating with Liou and Cheng's (2016) emphasis on the significance of mentorship. The positive impact of internships on enhancing clinical competence, decision-making skills, and comprehension of the healthcare context aligns with the observations of Andrew et al. (2017).

However, persistent challenges such as inadequate support and imbalanced workloads highlight the need for targeted interventions, akin to the findings of Liou and Cheng (2016). The unique regional dynamics further underscore the importance of adapting nursing education to Shandong's healthcare landscape.

The implications of this study extend to nursing education practices within Shandong's vocational colleges. Strengthening mentorship programs and refining support systems can optimize the internship experiences for nursing students. Tailoring curricula and resources to align with the nuances of Shandong's healthcare environment will better prepare students for their future roles, echoing the recommendations of Andrew et al. (2017).

In essence, this research accentuates the transformative potential of internships in shaping competent nursing professionals. By advocating for comprehensive support structures and context-specific adaptations, this study contributes to the continuous enhancement of nursing education within Shandong and offers valuable insights for nursing education globally.

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