Program Outcome Competencies of Nursing Interns of a Higher Education Institution in Tuguegarao City

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Abstract—**This study aimed to evaluate the program outcome competencies of nursing interns of the university. This quantitative study was conducted among 150 third and fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing interns, who had recent clinical exposure in various hospital departments. The researchers used a 57-item self-assessment questionnaire based on CHED Memorandum Order No. 15 Article 4 Section 7's Competency Standards. The data was analyzed using frequency and percentage distribution to identify the different specified nursing program outcomes and mean for the level of competence. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to detect significant differences in the competency levels when grouped according to the interns' profile characteristics. Results showed that the nursing interns have a high level of competency on all the 14 program outcome competencies assessed. Moreover, the nursing interns are most competent in accurately documenting and reporting client care. However, the interns were found to be least competent in application of knowledge from diverse fields in nursing practice and effectiveness in collaborating within varied teams. It was further determined that year level and clinical placement duration influenced specific outcomes. Interns with placements exceeding a year showcased higher competency than those with shorter durations. In can be concluded that despite the curriculum changes, nursing interns displayed high overall competency across program outcomes. This may also imply the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies implemented by the program. However, certain areas may need to be further strengthened to ensure higher level of competencies of the nursing interns before graduation.**

Keywords— *Nursing interns, online education, program outcome competencies, nursing program*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the CHED Memorandum Order No. 14, nursing competence encompasses the growth of psycho-motor skills, the learning of pertinent knowledge, and the capacity to use the knowledge and skills appropriately in a particular situation. When recovery is not feasible, nurses take on the compassionate responsibility of promoting and restoring health, preventing illnesses, easing pain, and assisting individuals toward a dignified death. To offer excellent medical treatment, the nurse works with a variety of members of the medical team as well as people from other areas. She/he also ensures active engagement in the provision of holistic healthcare by interacting with an individual, family, population, community, and societal level. The nurse should utilize all her/his knowledge and skills to be competent in giving service and care to the identified patient.

The ability to provide the highest caliber of healthcare services is a requirement for student nurses who aspire to become registered nurses. Students pursuing Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree must be able to use critical and analytical thinking abilities in their nursing practice. Nursing education must meet core competence standards and indicators, according to the most recent CHED Memorandum Order No. 15. Students must be aware of the 14 competency-centered approaches and fundamental competencies in the curriculum. Program outcomes and performance indicators that students must develop in order to achieve a specific program result could be adopted.

Clinical practice competency is defined as the ability to integrate cognitive, emotional, and psycho-motor abilities successfully throughout the delivery of health services. Despite its relevance in providing care, nursing interns' clinical practice ability was insufficient to offer quality, safe, and satisfying patient care. This may not address the holistic needs of patients and may even cause fear, worry, anxiety, and avoidable blunders by students in hospital settings. (Amsalu et al, 2020). The competence level of nursing students was also further questioned as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in which education was resorted to online set up in an attempt to cope with the situation and continue the learning process. Materials regarding the key competencies of nursing were given and taught online. The

assessment of their competency during this period was unreliable. Due to this, unprecedented changes in higher education and the health sector have established a strong framework for reforming nurse education (Zasadny & Bull, 2015).

Many higher education institutions switched from traditional face-to-face teaching and learning modes to virtual modes in order to continue educating and studying during the COVID-19 pandemic while complying with COVID-19 preventative policies (Natarajan et al., 2021). USL, like other nursing schools, was forced to use this method. Content offered in a mix of face-to-face and online lecture formats became entirely online, and learning became altogether online. It was critical to adapt information previously taught only "face-to-face," and instructors were trained to execute "virtual classroom sessions" as needed. This system, however, limited how students might improve their skills and be put in clinical situations, which is the standard tactic in the traditional nursing program. The delivery of the course material online was made mandatory for teachers to study (Agu et al., 2021).

Despite playing a crucial role in determining whether a person is prepared to attend the nursing profession, competence assessments are marked by ambiguity and inconsistency (Zasadny & Bull, 2015). Before designing and developing a nursing program, it is imperative to evaluate the present nursing program to determine whether and exactly how it delivers education and the current competency of nursing interns to cultivate the best possible nursing competency. Hence, it is crucial to assess how well these competencies are taught in current nursing programs and what teaching techniques are employed (Lee et al., 2015).

Multiple types of research have previously been conducted to evaluate the competencies of student nurses. However, the researchers recognized the change of nursing education as an opportunity to conduct their study. They find the need to assess the core competencies of student nurses as products of online lectures. This study will fill in all the stated gaps and address the researchers' questions.
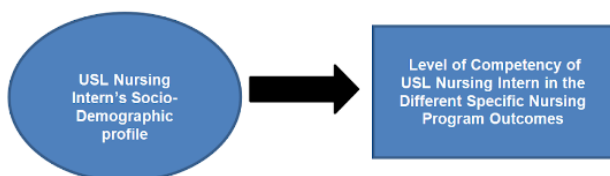

Fig. 1. Level of competency of the USL nursing interns in the different specific nursing program outcomes and the profile of the respondents.

The figure above depicts the study's primary goal, which was to assess the competency of USL Nursing interns in the different nursing program outcomes and their socio-demographic profile. The socio-demographic profile served as the independent variable in the study, which contains the gender, ID Number, year level, and duration of clinical placement and online classes received. On the other hand, the respondent's level of competency functioned as the dependent variable in the said research.

II. METHODS

P. Research Design

The research is a quantitative study, specifically a descriptive quantitative study.

Q. Locale and Respondents

The study was undertaken at the University of Saint Louis-Tuguegarao, specifically in the School of Health and Allied Sciences- Nursing Department. The study's respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. The respondents consisted of 3rd and 4th year Bachelor of Science in Nursing interns that are currently enrolled in the University of Saint Louis- Tuguegarao and had the most and recent clinical experience in the different hospital areas. The total sample size was 150 interns in which 93 of whom came from the 3rd year interns while the other 57 participants were 4th year interns.

R. Instrument

The researchers used one tool which comprises the profile of the respondents and a 57-item questionnaire based on the Competency standards of CHED Memorandum Order No. 15 Article 4 Section 7. The demographic profile of the respondents consists of the gender, ID Number, year level, duration of online classes received, and clinical placement. The 57- item questionnaire asks about the competency of nursing interns in the 14 program outcomes such as: :Utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice; Utilize the nursing process to provide people, families, demographic groups, and communities with safe, appropriate, and holistic care; Use evidence-based practice standards and principles in the delivery of care; Conduct nursing practice in compliance with current legislation, legal, ethical, and moral considerations; Use culturally appropriate vocabulary to communicate effectively when speaking, writing, and presenting; Document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care; Collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team; Practice beginning management and leadership skills in the delivery of client care using a systems approach; Conduct the study with the assistance of an experienced researcher; Participate in lifelong learning with a strong desire to stay current on national and global trends in general, as well as nursing healthcare developments in particular; Exhibit responsible citizenship and pride in being Filipino; Use technologically advanced care systems and methods in health care delivery; Use the nursing fundamental values in your professional practice and; Utilize entrepreneurial skills in nursing care delivery.

The response set included answers such as "very low," "low," "average," "high," and "very high" on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was also subjected to a reliability test to ensure its usefulness and validity.

S. Data Analysis

The statistical software SPSS version 26.0 was used for data analysis. Data from the researchers were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using frequency and percentage

distribution to identify the various specified nursing program outcomes and mean for the level of competence. The characteristics of the respondents were expressed using frequency count percentages. To investigate the variations in competence, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used. The Tukey HSD test was used when the ANOVA test finds a significant difference. The significance level for all analyses was set at 0.05. The total mean of every competency is described using a set of ranges and descriptions as shown in the table below:

TABLE I. QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION FOR MEAN SCORE VALUES

Mean Score	Qualitative Interpretation
4.49 – 5.00	Very High
3.50 – 4.49	High
2.50 – 3.49	Average
1.50 – 2.49	Low
1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

T. Ethical Considerations

Ethics Clearance from University of Saint Louis Research Ethics Board (USLREB) was obtained prior to the implementation of the data collection procedure of this research to ensure that it is carried out in a responsible and ethically accountable manner.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE II. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n=150)	Percentage
Sex	Female	120	80.0
	Male	30	20.0
Year Level	4th Year	57	39.2
	3rd Year	93	60.8
Duration of Clinical Placement	More than 1 year	57	39.2
	4-8 months	93	60.8

The total respondents who participated in the study were 150 nursing interns. Majority of them are female (n=120). Most of the participants came from the 3rd years interns with a 4 to 8 months' duration of clinical placement.

TABLE III. LEVELS OF COMPETENCY OF THE RESPONDENTS

Categories	Mean	Qualitative Description
Utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice.	3.92	High
Utilize the nursing process to provide people, families, demographic groups, and communities with safe, appropriate, and holistic care.	3.96	High
Use evidence-based practice standards and principles in the delivery of care.	3.99	High
Conduct nursing practice in	4.15	High

Categories	Mean	Qualitative Description
compliance with current legislation, legal, ethical, and moral considerations.		
Use culturally appropriate vocabulary to communicate effectively when speaking, writing, and presenting.	4.23	High
Document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care.	4.26	High
Collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team.	3.92	High
Practice beginning management and leadership skills in the delivery of client care using a systems approach.	3.94	High
Conduct the study with the assistance of an experienced researcher.	4.06	High
Participate in lifelong learning with a strong desire to stay current on national and global trends in general, as well as nursing healthcare developments in particular.	4.04	High
Exhibit responsible citizenship and pride in being Filipino.	4.03	High
Use technologically advanced care systems and methods in health care delivery.	4.02	High
Use the nursing fundamental values in your professional practice.	4.24	High
Utilize entrepreneurial skills in nursing care delivery.	4.02	High

As shown in the table above (Table III), the nursing interns had a high competency level in all the specified program outcomes. Despite their satisfactory level, program outcome 1 (utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice) and 7 (collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team) had the least with the total mean of 3.92. On the other hand, program outcome 6 (document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care) had the highest computed competency with a total mean of 4. 26.

The results also imply that nursing interns in their 3rd and 4th years exhibit high competency across all specified nursing program outcomes. This underscores the effectiveness of the re-calibrated curriculum in adequately preparing interns with the necessary knowledge and skills applicable to their practical work. The accomplishment of successful online learning, particularly in this scenario, can be attributed to the adept implementation of school policies. It remains imperative for curriculum implementers to pioneer inventive methods in shaping an imaginative nursing education system, consistently generating nursing graduates that align with industry demands (Jainurakhma et al., 2022). Moreover, the efficacy of virtual classes during the height of

the pandemic can also be credited to the resolute endeavors and inventive techniques employed by instructors. Activities such as personalized video call demonstrations, on-camera recitations, comprehensive quizzes and exams, and other interactive methodologies have substantially enhanced students' educational journeys, bridging the geographical gap. Research substantiates that active learning strategies cultivate critical thinking and yield more advantages than passive learning, which typically falls short in promoting higher-order cognitive skills (Kim et al., 2022; Oducado & Estoque, 2021). To maximize the benefits, educators should evaluate learners' readiness for online learning and create an optimal learning environment through well-structured educational planning, design, development, and evaluation methods. Additionally, the curriculum re-calibration seems to have played a role in facilitating effective learning. In accordance with CHED Memorandum Number 4 Series of 2020, the Nursing Department of USL has embraced flexible learning approaches. To adapt, they have shifted minor subjects to an online format, allowing students to access theoretical knowledge remotely. Meanwhile, the focus for face-to-face sessions is on skill-based subjects, providing students with valuable hands-on practice and real-world experience in a physical setting. This blended approach ensures that students receive both theoretical and practical learning opportunities to enhance their education effectively. Overall, it is evident that the combination of the re-calibrated curriculum and the implementation of effective online teaching practices has contributed to the interns' high competency and ability to apply their knowledge and skills in their nursing practice.

Based on the results, program outcome 6. (document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care) had the highest computed competency with a total mean of 4.26 while program outcome 1. (utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice) and 7. (collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team) had the least with the total mean of 3.92. The decreased competency in collaborating with a team can be attributed to the students' anxiety of not having an adequate knowledge due to the fact that they have received online education. As the study of Oducado and Estoque (2021) suggests, students had decreased satisfaction with their academic performance as they received their learning through online classes during COVID-19 pandemic (Kaviani et al., 2021). Although the interns' self-assessed competency level remains high, there is a need for educational reinforcement in the areas where their competency is comparatively lower. The study conducted by Kang et al. (2021) presented a similar outcome, indicating that while students' overall competency was deemed good, there was a need for a continuous or intensified curriculum specifically focused on developing communicative competencies. This includes skills such as actively listening to patients' needs and establishing successful interpersonal connections with peers and superiors, particularly for students in their third and fourth years. Additionally, the research carried out by Cruz et. al. (2017) determined that although there is a satisfactory level of cultural competency in nursing care, there are areas that require further

enhancement. One study also suggests that the clinical practice competence of nursing interns was inadequate to provide quality, safe and satisfying nursing care (Amsalu et al., 2020).

TABLE IV.   DIFFERENCE IN LEVEL OF NURSING COMPETENCIES ACCORDING TO SEX

Competency	T-value	p-value	Decision
1	0.04	0.97	Do not reject Ho
2	-0.28	0.78	Do not reject Ho
3	-0.13	0.90	Do not reject Ho
4	-0.26	0.79	Do not reject Ho
5	1.56	0.12	Do not reject Ho
6	- 0.59	0.56	Do not reject Ho
7	0.20	0.84	Do not reject Ho
8	-0.27	0.79	Do not reject Ho
9	-0.52	0.61	Do not reject Ho
10	-1.92	0.06	Do not reject Ho
11	-0.01	0.99	Do not reject Ho
12	-0.13	0.90	Do not reject Ho
13	1.42	0.16	Do not reject Ho
14	1.28	0.20	Do not reject Ho

There is no significant difference between the different nursing competencies of female and male interns. This indicates that gender has no relation to the level of competency of nursing interns in the different specific nursing program outcomes.

Furthermore, the results also present that there is no significant difference in the interns' competency in the different nursing program outcomes when grouped according to gender. However, the competency of nursing interns in nursing programs 1. (utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice), 3. (use evidence-based practice standards and principles in the delivery of care.), 5. (use culturally appropriate vocabulary to communicate effectively when speaking, writing, and presenting), 6. (document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care), 7. (collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team) and 8. (practice beginning management and leadership skills in the delivery of client care using a systems approach) had a significant difference in relation to the respondents' year level. Moreover, the intern's duration of clinical placement affected the aforementioned program outcomes as well as the program outcome 4 (conduct nursing practice in compliance with current legislation, legal, ethical, and moral considerations). A comparable study demonstrated that interns in higher academic years displayed greater competency compared to

those in lower years (Alquwez et al., 2019). Moreover, graduating nursing interns assessed themselves as having good competence in their field (Kajander-Unkuri et al., 2014). Kılıç et al. (2023) concurred with these findings, reporting that nurse competency in patient care improves with each advancing academic year. These findings suggest that increased educational experience corresponds to higher levels of competency in the nursing domain.

TABLE V.   DIFFERENCE IN LEVEL OF NURSING COMPETENCIES ACCORDING TO YEAR LEVEL

Competency	T-value	p-value	Decision
1	2.71	0.01*	Reject Ho
2	0.66	0.51	Do not reject Ho
3	2.95	0.00*	Reject Ho
4	2.36	0.02*	Reject Ho
5	3.76	0.00*	Reject Ho
6	2.92	0.00*	Reject Ho
7	2.22	0.03*	Reject Ho
8	2.26	0.02*	Reject Ho
9	1.76	0.08	Do not reject Ho
10	0.14	0.89	Do not reject Ho
11	0.34	0.73	Do not reject Ho
12	1.25	0.21	Do not reject Ho
13	1.74	0.08	Do not reject Ho
14	0.85	0.40	Do not reject Ho

*significant at 0.05 level

The respondents of this study were the 3rd and 4th year nursing interns of University of Saint Louis (USL). As the figure presents, some of respondent's competency in the different nursing program outcome has a significant difference when grouped according to year level. Compared to 3rd year nursing interns, 4th year nursing interns had the highest competency in the different nursing programs such as 1. (utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice), 3. (use evidence-based practice standards and principles in the delivery of care), 4. (conduct nursing practice in compliance with current legislation, legal, ethical, and moral considerations), 5. (use culturally appropriate vocabulary to communicate effectively when speaking, writing, and presenting), 6. (document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care.), 7. (collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team) and 8. (practice beginning management and leadership skills in the delivery of client care using a systems approach), implies that year level has an effect on the level of competency of the nursing interns. Subsequently, there was no significant difference in the competency of nursing interns in the other nursing program outcomes on relation to their year level.

TABLE VI.   DIFFERENCE IN LEVEL OF NURSING COMPETENCIES ACCORDING TO DURATION OF CLINICAL PLACEMENT

Competency	T-value	p-value	Decision
1	2.45	0.02*	Reject Ho
2	0.42	0.67	Do not reject Ho
3	2.63	0.01*	Reject Ho
4	1.99	0.05	Do not reject Ho
5	3.51	0.00*	Reject Ho
6	2.54	0.01*	Reject Ho
7	1.81	0.04*	Reject Ho
8	2.05	0.04*	Reject Ho
9	1.42	0.16	Do not reject Ho
10	0.35	0.73	Do not reject Ho
11	0.01	0.99	Do not reject Ho
12	1.13	0.26	Do not reject Ho
13	1.74	0.08	Do not reject Ho
14	9.74	0.46	Do not reject Ho

*significant at 0.05 level

The respondent's responses with regard to their clinical duration were greater than 1 year for 4th year interns while the 3rd year interns responded that their clinical placement is within the range of 4 to 8 months. Based on the table, it presents that the level of competency of nursing interns has a significant difference when grouped according to duration of clinical placement. Compared to 3rd year nursing interns, 4th year nursing interns had the highest competency in the different nursing outcomes such as 1. (utilize knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice), 3. (use evidence-based practice standards and principles in the delivery of care), 5. (use culturally appropriate vocabulary to communicate effectively when speaking, writing, and presenting), 6. (document must provide accurate and full reporting of current client care.), 7. (collaborate effectively with an inter-, intra-, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team) and 8. (practice beginning management and leadership skills in the delivery of client care using a systems approach), implies that the duration of clinical placement has an effect on the level of competency of the nursing interns. On the other hand, the remaining specific nursing program suggest otherwise.

On the contrary, the competency of nursing interns has no significant difference in program outcomes 2 (Utilize the nursing process to provide people, families, demographic groups, and communities with safe, appropriate, and holistic care), 9 (Conduct the study with the assistance of an experienced researcher),10 (Participate in lifelong learning with a strong desire to stay current on national and global trends in general, as well as nursing healthcare developments in particular), 11 (Exhibit responsible citizenship and pride in being Filipino), 12 (Use technologically advanced care systems and methods in health care delivery) , 13 (Use the nursing fundamental values in your professional practice) and 14 (Utilize entrepreneurial skills in nursing care delivery) despite their differences in year level and duration of clinical placement. This implies that amidst the longer duration of clinical placement and a higher year level, the 4th year interns

had a similar competency level with the 3rd year interns in those specified program outcomes. The observed results can be attributed to the fact that the nursing subjects pertaining to these areas were completed through online education, whereas the 3rd year interns received these subjects through face-to-face instruction. The mode of education, whether online or face-to-face, can have an impact on interns' learning experiences and competencies. Online education may present challenges in terms of hands-on practice, direct interaction with instructors and peers, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings (Kim et al., 2022; Oducado & Estoque, 2021). In the case of community health nursing duty being conducted online for 4th year interns, this could have affected their ability to effectively deal and collaborate with clients in a community setting, which is a critical aspect of the competency in that area.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, despite the use of online learning method and re-calibration made in the current nursing curriculum of 3rd and 4th USL nursing interns, they still demonstrated a high level of competency in various specific nursing program outcomes. This indicates that the re-calibrated curriculum was effective in equipping the interns with sufficient knowledge and skills that they can apply in their practice. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that gender did not significantly influence the level of competency among nursing interns. However, the year level and duration of clinical placement impacted certain specific nursing program outcomes. Specifically, 4th-year interns demonstrated higher competency in utilizing knowledge, evidence-based practice, practicing nursing in accordance with legal and ethical norms, effective communication, documentation, cooperation, and developing management and leadership abilities than 3rd-year interns. Additionally, nursing interns with clinical placements exceeding one year exhibited higher competency in these areas than those with shorter clinical placements. On the contrary, the competency level between 3rd and 4th year interns in the other specified area posed no significant difference despite the differences in year level and duration of clinical placement.

Recommendations

The researchers recommended the following:

- Nursing programs must continue providing comprehensive education and training that promote and enhance the competencies identified as high among nursing interns.
- Nursing programs should give thoughtful consideration to integrating interventions or strategies that address areas where competency levels may be lower among interns. Specifically, there is a need to focus on enhancing the following skills:
  - Utilizing knowledge of physical, social, natural, and health sciences, as well as humanities, in nursing practice: This involves bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in patient care. By incorporating

real-world case studies, simulation exercises, and practical scenarios, nursing interns can better understand how to apply scientific and humanities knowledge effectively in various clinical situations.
  - Collaborating effectively with an inter, intra, and multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural team: Nursing is a collaborative profession that often requires working with diverse teams of healthcare professionals and patients from different cultural backgrounds. Implementing team-based learning activities and communication skill-building exercises can help interns develop strong teamwork and cultural competence, which are crucial for providing holistic patient care.
- Nursing program should consider reinforcing the education of higher years on the areas where no significant difference was seen despite the difference in clinical duration placement and year level. These areas encompass:
  - Implementing the nursing process to provide safe, appropriate, and holistic care to individuals, families, demographic groups, and communities.
  - Engaging in research with the guidance of experienced researchers to enhance research skills and promote evidence-based nursing practice.
  - Emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning, with a focus on staying updated on national and global trends in healthcare, especially in the nursing field.
  - Cultivating responsible citizenship and instilling a sense of pride in Filipino identity, contributing to culturally competent and patient-centered care.
  - Integrating the use of technologically advanced care systems and methods into healthcare delivery, fostering adaptability and efficiency in nursing practice.
  - Incorporating nursing fundamental values, such as compassion, integrity, and respect, into professional practice, serving as the foundation for ethical and empathetic care.
  - Developing entrepreneurial skills in nursing care delivery to encourage innovation, leadership, and effective problem-solving in healthcare.
- Further research can be conducted to explore the factors contributing to the observed similarity in competency levels despite the difference on year level and duration of clinical placement.
- Future researchers can include clinical instructors as study respondents to compare the results with the interns and confirm their accuracy.
- Future researchers interested in conducting related future studies should widen the scope of the respondents for more accurate data.

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