

The Impact of Internships on the Skill Acquisition Among Nursing Students in Vocational Colleges of Shandong Province

Shugang Wang^{1,2*}, Hariharan N Krishnasamy³

¹Faculty of Education, City University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 56000, Malaysia

²Binzhou Polytechnic, Binzhou 256603, Shandong Province, China

³Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts (FELA), INTI International University, Kuala Lumpur 56000, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: Shugang Wang, wsg6667@163.com

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Abstract: This research investigates the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges in Shandong Province. By employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the study reveals the positive influence of internships on students' clinical competencies, professional qualities, and readiness for the workforce. Survey findings indicate heightened practical capabilities and increased confidence among students. Interviews emphasize the pivotal role of mentors in guiding skills development and professional growth. However, challenges such as resource constraints and workload imbalances during internships are also highlighted. These insights contribute to the enhancement of nursing education and the preparation of competent nursing professionals in the region.

Keywords: Internship; Nursing students; Skill acquisition; Vocational colleges; Shandong

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1. Introduction

In nursing education, the acquisition of practical skills stands as a cornerstone, facilitating the transition from theoretical knowledge to proficient clinical practice. Internship programs, recognized as pivotal components of nursing education, provide a platform for students to translate classroom learning into hands-on patient care experiences. This introduction seeks to delineate the significant impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students within the vocational colleges of Shandong Province. By identifying the research gap and articulating the research objectives, this section aims to emphasize the importance of investigating the role of internships in enhancing students' clinical competencies. Internships represent a vital conduit for nursing students to apply theoretical concepts in practical settings. The experiential learning garnered from internships significantly contributes to the development of clinical skills, thus bolstering students' capacity to offer effective patient care. The transition period from student nurse to novice nurse is a stressful time. Patient

outcomes, healthcare organizations, the new nurses, and the nursing profession can be negatively affected if the transition from nursing student to novice nurse is not a positive and successful experience ^[1].

The evolution from nursing student to competent healthcare professional necessitates a harmonious amalgamation of theoretical knowledge and hands-on exposure. Benner's *From Novice to Expert* paradigm emphasizes the significance of experiential learning facilitated by internships in propelling novice nurses towards expertise. The immersive nature of internships expedites this transition, empowering students to extrapolate theoretical constructs to real-life patient scenarios. Mentorship within internships serves as a linchpin for skills development and professional growth. Mentors play a role in sharing clinical insights, guiding students through complex healthcare scenarios, and nurturing their holistic development. Effective mentorship not only hones technical proficiencies but also cultivates professionalism, ethics, and teamwork, which are essential facets of nursing practice. Due to the differences in professional background, knowledge, and work expertise, different roles were formed between doctors and nurses. Nurses expected doctors to be proficient and responsible, to support and respect nurses and their work ^[2]. While internships offer substantial opportunities, challenges such as uneven workload distribution and resource limitations within clinical settings can impede optimal learning experiences. Addressing these challenges is pivotal to ensure internships provide multifaceted and comprehensive skills development avenues.

Although the pivotal role of internships in nursing education is widely acknowledged, there is limited research specifically scrutinizing the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students within the vocational colleges of Shandong Province. This study seeks to bridge this gap by dissecting the extent to which internships augment clinical competencies and overall readiness for professional nursing practice. This introduction has illuminated the indispensable role of internships in nurturing skill acquisition among nursing students enrolled in vocational colleges within Shandong Province. Subsequent sections will delve into the research methodology, findings, and implications. By meticulously investigating the nuanced influence of internships on skill acquisition, this study aims to contribute to the enrichment of nursing education and the preparation of adept nursing professionals in the regional context.

2. Literature review

The acquisition of practical skills is an indispensable component of nursing education, enabling students to translate theoretical knowledge into effective clinical practice. This literature review aims to explore the existing body of research on the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges within Shandong Province.

Internship programs have emerged as vital mechanisms for enhancing skill acquisition among nursing students. Through experiential learning in clinical settings, students can consolidate theoretical knowledge, hone practical skills, and develop critical thinking skills. This practical engagement bridges the gap between theory and practice, thus nurturing well-rounded nursing professionals. Internships contribute significantly to the development of clinical competencies. Exposure to real patient care scenarios empowers students with technical proficiencies crucial for providing quality care. Additionally, internships foster the acquisition of decision-making skills, hence enabling students to apply evidence-based practices and adapt to dynamic healthcare environments. This preparation aids students in transitioning from the classroom to clinical settings. Benner's *From Novice to Expert* framework underlines the transformative journey experienced by nursing students through internships. Between student placements, these teachers could offer education and training in student supervision for registered nurses and collaborate with staff to identify and develop learning activities that are

appropriate for students' learning objectives^[3]. The immersive nature of internships expedites the development of clinical intuition and the ability to manage complex patient situations.

Mentorship within internships plays a pivotal role in skill acquisition. Mentors offer guidance, share practical insights, and facilitate students' skills development. Effective mentorship extends beyond technical skills, it also nurtures attributes like communication, empathy, and ethical conduct. Mentorship enhances holistic skill acquisition, thus shaping nursing professionals with a comprehensive skill set. While internships offer immense opportunities, challenges still exist. Uneven workload distribution and limited resources in clinical settings can impact the quality of skill acquisition experiences. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure equitable skills development opportunities for all students. This literature review emphasizes the critical role of internships in shaping skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges of Shandong Province. The subsequent sections will delve into the research methodology, findings, and implications.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the research design, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods employed in the study investigating the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges within Shandong Province.

3.1. Research design

A mixed-methods approach was utilized to comprehensively explore the influence of internships on skill acquisition. Quantitative data provided statistical insights, while qualitative data offered nuanced perspectives.

3.2. Participants

The study involved a purposive sample of nursing students from multiple vocational colleges within Shandong Province. The sample size was determined through saturation to ensure data richness.

3.3. Data collection

Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys to gauge students' self-assessment of skill acquisition before and after internships. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with nursing students, internship coordinators, and clinical mentors. Interviews delved into the perceived impact of internships on skills development and the overall learning experience.

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to ascertain changes in self-reported skill levels before and after internships. Qualitative data from interviews were treated with thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, allowing for the extraction of key themes related to skill acquisition and internship experiences.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the institutional review board of the involved vocational colleges. Informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure their confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study at any point.

3.6. Validity and reliability

To enhance the validity of findings, triangulation will be employed by comparing quantitative and qualitative

results. Member checking was used to verify the accuracy of qualitative data interpretations. A pilot study was conducted to refine survey questions and interview protocols for clarity and relevance.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study that explored the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges within Shandong Province. The results are organized according to quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between internships and skill acquisition.

4.1. Quantitative findings

The quantitative analysis of pre-internship and post-internship surveys revealed notable changes in self-assessed skill levels among participating nursing students. Before internships, students reported moderate levels of confidence in various nursing skills. However, after completing their internships, there was a statistically significant increase in self-assessed skill levels across all assessed competencies ($P < 0.05$). This change indicates that internships contribute positively to the enhancement of students' practical skills.

4.2. Qualitative findings

The qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews yielded rich insights into the perceived impact of internships on skill acquisition. Participants, including nursing students, internship coordinators, and clinical mentors, consistently highlighted the role of internships in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Students expressed increased confidence in performing clinical tasks and managing patient care. They emphasized that hands-on experiences during internships enabled them to consolidate classroom learning and adapt to real-life healthcare scenarios. Furthermore, participants unanimously identified mentorship as a pivotal factor in skills development. Mentors' guidance, feedback, and experiential insights were instrumental in shaping students' clinical competence and professionalism.

4.3. Cross-validation and convergence

A cross-validation approach was employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of findings. The alignment of quantitative data with qualitative narratives reinforced the consistency and trustworthiness of the results. The convergence between self-assessed skill improvement in quantitative data and students' accounts in qualitative interviews substantiates the positive impact of internships on skill acquisition.

4.4. Implications

The findings highlight the substantial influence of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students. The significant increase in self-assessed skill levels emphasizes the practical benefits of internships in enhancing clinical competencies. Moreover, the qualitative insights emphasize the vital role of mentorship during internships, suggesting that structured mentorship programs can further optimize skills development.

4.5. Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-assessment surveys may entail a subjective bias in reporting skill levels. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific region may limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

5. Discussion

The discussion section delves into the interpretation of the findings on the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges within Shandong Province. It seeks to contextualize the results, compare them with existing literature, and elucidate the implications for nursing education and practice.

The study's quantitative findings reveal a significant improvement in self-assessed skill levels among nursing students after completing internships. This outcome aligns with previous research that emphasized the transformative impact of hands-on experiences on skill development. The immersion in clinical settings enables students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, thus fostering the acquisition of clinical competencies.

The qualitative insights further illuminate the mechanisms underlying skill acquisition during internships. Participants' narratives emphasize the pivotal role of experiential learning in enhancing confidence and competence. Engaging with real patients, managing complex cases, and making decisions in clinical environments facilitate the transition from theoretical learners to proficient practitioners. Nurses have a focus on cocreating relationships with patients and their loved ones, and partners with them to plan, coordinate, and transition their care based on the values and beliefs of those served ^[4].

The qualitative findings highlight mentorship as a catalyst for skills development. Contribution of mentorship extends beyond imparting technical knowledge, mentors provide guidance, share insights, and model professionalism. Participants' unanimous recognition of the significance of mentorship resonates with the broader literature that emphasizes mentors' role in shaping holistic nursing practice. The results reaffirm the effectiveness of internships in bridging the theory-practice gap in nursing education. Benner's *From Novice to Expert* model aptly captures this evolution. Internships act as a conduit through which students transition from novices to more competent practitioners, thus consolidating their theoretical foundation through practical experiences.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study has provided valuable insights into the impact of internships on skill acquisition among nursing students in vocational colleges across Shandong Province. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings strongly supports the notion that internships play a crucial role in enhancing students' clinical competencies and preparing them for real-life nursing practice. The quantitative analysis emphasizes a significant improvement in self-assessed skill levels following internships, suggesting that practical experiences contribute to heightened confidence and proficiency. These quantitative results are complemented by qualitative narratives that highlight the transformational journey undergone by students during internships, evolving from novices to skilled practitioners.

Mentorship emerges as a linchpin in skills development, as mentors guide students through complex healthcare scenarios and instill qualities that extend beyond technical prowess. The implications for nursing education are clear, structured internship programs that prioritize experiential learning and mentorship can equip students with the practical skills and insights necessary for effective nursing practice. The broader implications for healthcare practice are equally profound. Nursing graduates with robust internship experiences are better positioned to deliver patient-centered care that integrates clinical competence with empathy and ethical conduct.

In essence, this study highlights how internships serve as dynamic platforms for skills development, thereby aligning nursing education with the evolving demands of healthcare. By fostering practical proficiency and a deep understanding of patient care, internships contribute significantly to shaping the next generation of

competent and compassionate nursing professionals.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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