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“Harmony of Sustenance: Integrating Food, Health, and Wellness Across Lifetimes”

JUNE 13-14, 2024

PANYAPIWAT INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT

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The 14th National and the 10th International PIM Conference 2024 “Harmony of Sustenance: Integrating Food, Health, and Wellness Across Lifetimes”

June 13-14, 2024

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Table of Contents

	Page
The 14 th National and 10 th International PIM Conferences	1
Conference Program	8
List of Articles	
National Articles	12
International Articles	22
Full Papers	
National Conference	
N1 - การจัดการ (Management)	56
N2 - การจัดการโลจิสติกส์และโซ่อุปทาน (Logistics)	222
N3 - การพยาบาล (Nursing)	251
N4 - การศึกษา (Education)	271
N5 - บริหารธุรกิจ (Business)	320
N6 - วิทยาศาสตร์การอาหาร (Food Science)	346
N7 - วิศวกรรมศาสตร์และเทคโนโลยี (Engineering and Technology)	379
International Conference	
I1 - Agriculture	467
I2 - Business	510
I3 - Economics	847
I4 - Education	895
I5 - Engineering and Technology	1230
I6 - Food Science	1363
I7 - Health Science	1374
I8 - Liberal Arts	1434
I9 - Management	1540
I10 - Nursing	2167
I11 - Philosophy	2173
Appendixes	
• Announcement of the Administrative Committee of The 14 th National and 10 th International PIM Conferences	A1
• Co-host	A19
• List of Peer Reviewers (National Conference)	A23
• List of Peer Reviewers (International Conference)	A24



MOTIVATION FACTORS AND BARRIERS FOR CONTINUING HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG DIPLOMA-HOLDING NURSES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Background: Continuing higher education is essential for nurses to adapt to the evolving landscape of healthcare. Higher education is the next level in the academic ladder for nurses seeking a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, such as a master's or Ph.D. Nurses pursuing higher education are known to improve educational, research, administrative, and patient outcomes. Furthermore, the need for nurses to pursue further education in order to advance their profession is becoming increasingly pressing due to the rapid advancements in health care and therapies. **Aim:** To explore the motivational factors and barriers for continuing higher education among diploma holding nurses in Malaysia. **Method:** A qualitative study was conducted among 9 diploma-holding nurses in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviewed were used to collect data from August to October 2023. All interviews were recorded, translated, and transcribed. Thematic analysis was applied to the transcriptions for a comprehensive examination of the gathered data. **Result:** Six themes identified related to motivating factors; 1) significant others, 2) self-motivation 3) reputation of the nursing profession, 4) career improvement, 5) sponsorship, and 6) availability of course while five themes associated with barriers; 1) limited opportunity in the nursing system, 2) age and experiences, 3) financial constraint, 4) family responsibility, and 5) limited access to educational resource. **Conclusion:** Nurses are highly motivated to pursue higher education at least to degree level for many reasons but they face some barriers that restrict them from continuing higher education. Therefore, it is important as health treatments and care evolve, the motivation to advance the nursing profession through higher education becomes increasingly important for nurses.

Keyword: Higher education, Motivation, Barriers, Diploma Holding Nurses, Qualitative Research

Introduction

As an essential part of the healthcare system, nursing plays a variety of roles, such as promoting health, preventing illness, and providing care for people with disabilities, mental illnesses, and physical illnesses of all ages in different community settings (Phoon, 2022). The perception of nursing as a dynamic, autonomous professional group that can manage patients and take on more duties and responsibilities is constant. (Courtenay, 2018). These days, registered nurses can proceed to become advanced practitioners, allowing them to handle more complex cases in acute and primary care or move up the corporate ladder to become managers or administrators. Higher education is taken into account for pay increases and other benefits in various nations. (Courtenay, 2018). Additionally, nurses now have more options to weigh, particularly in terms of cost, length of study, number of credits required, residency requirements, financial aid, and a host of other factors, thanks to the seemingly limitless array of online courses and adaptable, multifaceted nursing programmes (Broussard & White, 2014). These serve as excellent incentives for nurses and midwives to seek further education.



In Malaysia, the percentage of registered nurses with diplomas is higher than the percentage of those with degrees. While associate's or bachelor's degrees in nursing are held by the majority of licenced nurses worldwide (Ng, 2015). Ng (2015) emphasises further that Malaysia wants to guarantee that all registered nurses in the country have a nursing degree and are suitably qualified by 2020. A local survey with 792 participants in 2023 found that 76% of RNs had previously obtained a diploma, compared to only 2.3% who had a degree. The study also revealed that none of the participants had a master's or doctoral degree (Ng, 2015). The situation significantly motivates nurses to pursue higher education and at the same time prompting the question of why nurses do not pursue higher education despite the crucial role of nursing in providing care and treatment for the people.

Research Objective (s)

Exploring diploma holding nurses' motivational factors and barriers for continuing higher education.

Literature Review

Influencing Factors Towards Continuing Higher Education Among Nurses

According to Nashwan et al., (2022), most nurses and midwives are eager to pursue a master's degree within two years, focusing on leadership and management. This enthusiasm and willingness to pursue higher education can help the nursing profession advance. Enhancing care quality and ascending in leadership jobs retaining competency, providing high-quality treatment, and expanding future career prospects are the motivational factors that push nurses to pursue higher education. The most insignificant motivator for nurses and midwives to pursue higher education is a pay rise (Nashwan et al., 2022). Other than that, online learning as an alternative may potentially be appropriate for them. Peers and faculty members help develop a sense of community and belonging and techniques for students and professors to cooperate (Nashwan et al., 2022). Alamri and Sharts-Hopko, (2015) mentioned that nurses with more work experience are more motivated to continue their study. Furthermore, in this study male nurses are more motivated to continue higher study compared to female nurses but married male nurses are less motivated to continue higher education compared to married female nurses. The finding raised the question why male nurses' perception of higher education changed after they got married. Participation of friends and support from them tend to motivate more nurses to continue higher education. (Alamri & Sharts-Hopko, 2015).

Barriers Towards Continuing Higher Education Among Nurses

Mbombi and Mothiba, (2020) explored the barriers nurses experience regarding enrolment for postgraduate qualifications in South Africa. According to them, professional nurses with a master's degree have demonstrated proficiency in enhancing quality and continuity of care in areas such as palliative care, mental health, post-transplant care, and central venous care but, there are only a few students enrolled in postgraduate courses, including master's degree courses. They categorize the barriers into three themes; employment-related barriers, barriers related to higher education institutions, and personal barriers (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020; Ng, 2015). Mbombi and Mothiba, (2020) explained that the employment-related barriers were referring to no financial reward of having a postgraduate qualification, thus continuing education at the postgraduate level is considered a waste of time. Other than that, increased nursing care workload due to shortages of staff made the nurses not enroll in postgraduate studies because they did not have enough time to study. Moreover, higher education qualifications such as a master's degree in nursing, are unimportant and not appreciated by the employee (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020).

Mbombi and Mothiba, (2020) further explained that nurses have a lack of information regarding postgraduate study and the requirement to enter postgraduates' study is beyond their capability. It means



that nurse's perception of higher education as an extra burden and a waste of time. Moreover, nurses also had poor finances, lack of family support and self-interest in pursuing higher study. (Mbombi & Mothiba, 2020). This is in line with the finding by Ng (2015), in which most respondents strongly agreed that the course fee for post-registration nursing degree is expensive, and they could not afford to pursue the post-registration nursing degree with their current income.

In the study by Alamri and Sharts-Hopko (2015), most participants were perplexed by the bureaucratic procedures and processes for receiving scholarships, the lack of part-time and online programs and lack of support from nursing administration, either at lower or senior management levels. Nashwan et al., (2022) found that, high cost of course, lack of availability and accessibility of the programs, -busy work schedule, family commitments, reluctant to accept new technology, and age nearing retirement were the barriers faced by the nurses in their study.

Methodology

Design

This study applied a qualitative study design. The utilisation of qualitative research is crucial in investigating inquiries pertaining to human experiences and viewpoints to attain a comprehensive comprehension of intricate events (Tong et al. 2013).

Setting and sampling

This study was conducted among nurses from a few government hospitals in Malaysia. The participants were selected using purposive sampling that fulfil the inclusion criteria: 1) Registered nurse with diploma; 2) at least three years of working experience; 3) able to speak Malay, English or Tamil; and 4) agree to participate in the study.

Material

A topic guide was used during the interview. Examples of the main questions: What makes you to continue higher education? What are the encouragements you have to continue higher education? And for barriers for continuing higher education, why you don't pursue higher education? Meanwhile the interview session was flexibly being conversed in both Malay and English language based on participants choice of words.

Ethical Consideration

The research obtained ethical approval from the Kulliyyah of Nursing Post Graduate Research Committee (KPGNRC) and IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC), ref:IIUM/504/14/11/2/IREC 2023-KON/DOCCN. Following approval, participants were approached during scheduled times, provided with a consent form and personal information sheet. All pertinent details about the study were communicated prior to the interview. Participants were assured of their right to confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

Data Collection

The potential participants were recruited through social media where an advertisement was posted on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for the recruitment. Once the participants contacted to participate in the study, an appointment was arranged for the interview session. All interview was conducted in an informal, semi-structured, face-to-face, and conversational style. The interview sessions were conducted privately to ensure confidentiality, with recordings made using audio-taped with permission and field notes was written during the interview session. The interviews took place at meeting room in every participant's ward. The interview took 45 minutes to 1 hour. The sample size of the study was



determined by data saturation, and interviews were stopped when no additional information emerged, and no new codes could be produced (Guest et al., 2006).

Data Analysis

The tape recording has been transcribed into written form after listening to the recorded audio repeatedly and the results were analysed by using thematic analysis (Caulfield, 2022). The first step involves familiarizing oneself with the data, followed by coding. Next is generating themes, where similarities from the coding are identified and used to construct themes. The fourth step is reviewing the themes to ensure they are useful and accurately represent the collected data, followed by defining the themes to ensure they are selected appropriately and easily understandable. Lastly, the process involves producing a report with a description of the findings and illustrative examples (Caulfield, 2022).

Trustworthiness

Dependability and confirmability in this study can be achieved via an audit trail (Korstjen & Moser, 2017). An audit trail was kept maintaining track of the steps and/or changes throughout the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing up the findings and discussion. Moreover, discussion with the team members as peer reviewers and examine the process of the research as well as the data analysis indirectly improved the rigour of the study.

Results

Throughout the period of data collection nine (9) participants were agreed to participate in this study. The background of the participants is summarised in the table I.

Table I: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Participants (n=9)
Age (years)	32 – 47 (Mean: 37.4)
Race	Iban (2) Bidayuh (1) Malay (4) Indian (2)
Male	3
Female	6
Working Experiences (years)	10 – 22 (Mean: 14.7)

Theme 1: Motivating Factors

There are six (6) subthemes explored for the theme factors encourages which are 1) significant others, 2) self-motivation 3) reputation of the nursing profession, 4) career improvement, 5) sponsorship, and 6) availability of course.

Significant Others

For this sub-theme, respondents express their feelings on both negative and positive effects from others for them to continue higher education.

Sometimes even the doctor looks down on us because I've had a situation like that in my own ward. Like MO (Medical Officer) said to his Houseman 'you want to listen to a nurse who only has a diploma or listen to your MO? ...My family's support is good; my husband is also very supportive(P1)



We need more people who continue to study so that they can help us a lot and if nursing school collaborates with hospitals our practice is not queried, because the doctor likes to query the work of nurses(P2)

Self-Motivation

All participants have their personal reasons that motivate them to continue studying in higher education.

I don't want to stay at one level only... you can't say anything irrelevant, like if people ask something, you will answer with confidence..., we have a very basic and shallow knowledge and skills when we study diploma and also for nursing intervention, it is very basic. With a degree, when we answer with the doctor, we can answer confidently with evidence and confidences and upgrade the nursing interventions(P1)

To increase my knowledge, and another reason is because I'm interested and also wanted to be more competent in my work(P2)

In terms of the nursing sector, like you said earlier there are many nurses who don't have a degree or masters, why not us raise our level from a diploma-holding nurse to a higher level(P8)

Reputation Of Nursing Profession

The participant is driven to study higher education due to her determination to reform the nursing system in Malaysia.

I will have the power to change the nursing system in Malaysia, change it to a better and nurse-friendly system and we can also work together with doctors and nurses and come up with the next research program, or the next audit, to improve what we have services(P7)

Career Improvement

In an effort to enhance their nursing careers, participants are willing to pursue a nursing degree if it leads to recognized qualifications and corresponding professional advancement and redirecting nursing career towards becoming a nursing lecturer or administrator upon obtaining a degree.

If the government says that anyone with a degree can apply for U41, I am doing a degree right now(P3)

I'm planning to divert my nursing career as a clinical nurse maybe in the future I can be a nursing lecturer or nursing administrator. like I said, we will serve for 30 years, so we will not work for 30 years as a clinical nurse which is the thing, I feel stagnant(P9)

Sponsorship

All participants unanimously identify scholarships as the most motivating factor for them to pursue higher education.

But if given a sponsor, definitely I will go for my degree(P3)



Of course, I will go, it's a golden opportunity (gets sponsorship) because we've got an opportunity like that, we have to take it(P6)

So, I think if I have a sponsorship like that, I won't worry about my studies because the sponsor is already there for me to study(P8)

Availability of Course

For a participant, the availability of an online course would serve as an encouragement for her to pursue studies.

That is good (if the course is online), that's good, I can work and study, do locum work, I can take care of my mother, that's good too(P7)

Theme 2: Barriers

There are several sub-themes discovered for this theme such as, 1) limited opportunity in nursing system, 2) age and experiences, 3) financial constraint, 4) family responsibility, and 5) limited access to educational resources.

Limited Opportunity in Nursing System

The participants assert that obtaining a degree is not a prerequisite for promotion, and there is limited availability of positions for degree holders in Malaysia and they emphasize that the nursing system in Malaysia still places a strong emphasis on seniority.

To become a matron with a sister, as we know, you don't even need to have a degree to be able to go up, right... it's not necessary to get a degree to become a sister or a matron, so you can go up whenever you want... now we have u41 it's a bit difficult to get and not a lot and even if you go up you have to move and the scope of work is not much different from clinical u41(P1)

Nursing in Malaysia is still in a controlled phase, not like overseas where there are more nurses who all have master PhDs, we are just starting to go in that direction. Now there are not many posts for u41, many staff have not been able to get the post, it is a pity, it is been 5 or 6 years after they finish doing their degree, the knowledge has been lost and it's like empty again(P2)

Like if I continued my studies, it's not sure that I'll upgrade and if I try, there's not necessarily a post either(P3)

We must wait for our seniors to do a basic post or degree then only we can get an opportunity... because the system is not nurse friendly, that's what makes a lot of government nurses go abroad, there is no motivation to continue studying and working(P7)

Age and Experience

Some participants find accepting new challenges and adapting to a new academic environment is difficult and age as a barrier to continuing higher education.

some more, if we are comfortable in one department and we do the same thing every day quite difficult to accept changes (being a student back) (P1)



I'm 45 now, right, so my memory is getting less and less, yes, it's hard to remember especially studies., hmmm, it's hard(P6)

Financial Constraint

All participants agreed that the cost of pursuing higher educations can be a significant barrier for them.

Hmm..first of all, like now, the budget is high(P3)

There are many responsibilities, housing payment, my personal loan... the main factor that stops me is finances... if I can't arrange my finances, how am I going to arrange for my educations? (P8)

Is either I need to have like unpaid leave or half paid leave to continue my study which I think I can't afford because you know the living cost is expensive in KL (Kuala Lumpur) because I am posting in KL (Kuala Lumpur). Actually, financial is a big issue for the working adult to continue their study(P9)

Family Responsibility

Part of the participants are concerns about their commitment for the family, posing a barrier to pursuing higher education.

Because of my commitment to take care of my sick husband, and my children are still small. The main carer for my husband is me, one day if I go to study, what will he think later, maybe he will think that I don't want to take care him again, one more is burdening my parents, like I'm working now, they do everything for my husband, but if I study later, I'll burden them more(P4)

I have to see my family, I have to send my children to school, like me, I don't have family near here, so it's difficult, if I have to send my children and take them, it's all by myself and also depend on my husband(P5)

The first problem for me now is that I have to take care of mom because she is too much attached to me so it's hard for me to leave her since I'm the only one here, my father is dead, it's hard to leave mom...even if I get all the sponsorships, I don't think I will go(for study), because there is no one to take care of my mother, so I won't go and if I go and then there's no one to take care of mom, I'm not happy and happy either(P7)

Limited Access to Educational Resource

The course's location became a barrier for all three participants as they needed to attend the classes, which proved difficult for them.

If it is near here, I might be able to, if it is outside of my residence, I really can't for example, if the institute is out of Kuching. But if it is like a basic post for 6 months, I think it's possible, but if it is a degree, that took about 2 to 3 years it's like it's not possible there(P4)

If the place(institutions) is close maybe I'll go there, but if it's far away it might be difficult and I have to travel on the weekend so it's difficult(P5)



Sometimes, if the institute is far away, I must travel. Additionally, I have a transport issue, my car is old, so I must use public transport to attend the class is its too far(P8)

Discussion

This study highlights the significant role of encouragement from key individuals in motivating nurses to pursue higher education. Family members and peers, particularly those who have previously engaged in higher education, emerge as pivotal sources of positive influence by sharing their experiences and knowledge. This aligns with the findings of Alamri and Sharts-Hopko (2015), which emphasize the motivating effect of peer support on nurses' educational pursuits. The drive towards higher education among nurses is multifaceted, fueled by a desire for personal growth, a commitment to avoiding professional stagnation, and a keen interest in advancing their nursing competencies. The pursuit of further education is seen as a pathway to career advancement and a strategy to navigate the constraints associated with prolonged clinical nursing roles. Supporting this perspective, Tiliander et al. (2022) highlight that personal development is a significant motivator for nurses seeking higher education. The participants are driven to study higher education due to their determination to reform the nursing system in Malaysia. They aimed to collaborate with other healthcare workers in developing research or audit programs to enhance the quality of service and at the same time enhance the reputation of the nursing career. In a study Nashwan et al., (2022), stated that enthusiasm and willingness to pursue higher education can help the nursing profession advance in many ways.

To enhance their nursing careers, participants feel they need to transition in their career for example becoming a nursing lecturer or nursing administrator, and for that they pursue higher education. Nashwan et al (2022), in their study stated most nurses and midwives are eager to pursue a master's degree focusing on leadership and management. Participants are motivated to pursue higher education by the desire to provide better care, achieved through reducing patient anxiety and establishing good rapport. Maré et al., (2018), in their study, stated as health treatments and care evolve, the motivation to advance the nursing profession through higher education becomes increasingly important for nurses. Most participants unanimously identify scholarships as the most motivating factor for pursuing higher education. They emphasize that receiving a scholarship would significantly assist them in addressing the financial challenges associated with their educational pursuits. A similar finding from Tiliander et al., (2022), where in their study stated financial support by employees has been one of the most encouraging factors for nurses to further study. An online course would encourage participants to pursue further studies. Nashwan et al., (2022) reported, that online learning as an alternative may potentially be appropriate for nurses who have problems in doing physical classes.

A critical barrier identified by most participants in pursuing higher education within the nursing profession is the constrained opportunity landscape in Malaysia's nursing system. A notable concern is the limited number of vacant positions for degree-holding nurses, which results in a lack of promotional opportunities despite advanced qualifications. This situation fosters skepticism among nurses about the tangible benefits of obtaining a degree, particularly regarding promotion prospects. Additionally, participants highlighted the restrictive nature of the system, where nurses have limited autonomy in selecting their posts upon earning a degree. The prevailing emphasis on seniority within the nursing system further complicates the situation, undermining the value of academic advancement. Indeed, the study by Ng (2015) echoes these sentiments, revealing a consensus among respondents that incentives such as study opportunities, staff promotion, empowerment, and a motivating environment provided by hospital management could significantly encourage Registered Nurses (RNs) to seek higher education. They find accepting new challenges and adapting to a new academic environment difficult, their beliefs about experience are sufficient compared to formal educational qualifications, and the age factor becomes a barrier to continuing higher education. Mbombi and Mothiba, (2020) in their studies stated that personal barriers such as intrinsic factors became one of the prominent factors for nurses to not pursuing higher education.

Financial constraints emerge as a principal barrier to further education for nurses, with the prohibitive cost of courses significantly impeding their ability to enroll in higher education programs. Ng (2015) highlights the substantial financial burden posed by post-registration nursing degree fees,



which are often beyond the reach of nurses working with their current income. This challenge is compounded by additional financial responsibilities, including familial obligations and personal loans, alongside the rising cost of living, making the prospect of saving for further education particularly daunting. Family commitments further exacerbate the situation, placing considerable pressure on nurses. Many participants bear the responsibility of caring for dependents, including sick spouses, young children, or elderly parents. These responsibilities, ranging from managing a household as the primary caregiver to the direct care of family members, present significant obstacles to pursuing higher education. Instances where nurses decline scholarships due to caregiving duties underscore the depth of these familial obligations. Mbombi and Mothiba (2020) reinforce this perspective, identifying family responsibilities as a critical factor deterring nurses from furthering their education. Additionally, limited access to educational resources poses another significant barrier. The necessity to attend physical classes, coupled with the scarcity of part-time and online programs, restricts nurses' ability to engage in higher education, especially for those balancing professional duties and personal commitments. Alamri and Sharts-Hopko (2015) corroborate this issue, noting the lack of flexible learning options as a substantial impediment to degree pursuit among nurses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the pursuit of higher education among nurses is influenced by a complex interplay of factors that range from personal ambition to external encouragement. Key individuals, notably family members and peers with prior higher education experience, play a crucial role in motivating nurses through sharing their experiences and insights. While a combination of systemic, personal, and financial issues become the barriers to the pursuit of higher education among nurses in Malaysia.

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