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Assessing the Correlation Between Clinical Instructor Characteristics and Student Clinical Competency Development

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Abstract: This study investigates the correlation between clinical instructor characteristics and the development of clinical competencies in students within healthcare disciplines such as nursing, medicine, and allied health. Effective clinical instruction is essential in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application, and the clinical instructor plays a pivotal role in this learning process. The study aims to identify which instructor traits are most strongly linked to positive student outcomes in clinical education. The investigation will examine various instructor characteristics, including teaching style (didactic, facilitative, coaching), clinical experience, specific expertise, communication and interpersonal skills (e.g., empathy, clarity, approachability), feedback delivery, organizational ability, capacity to foster a supportive learning environment, and personality traits (e.g., enthusiasm, patience, adaptability). Additionally, demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational background will be considered to assess their potential influence. Student clinical competency will be evaluated through direct observation, standardized checklists, self-assessments, clinical assignments, and feedback from other clinical staff. The competencies measured will align with established professional standards and program-specific learning objectives. A correlational research design will be employed, using statistical analyses to determine the strength and direction of relationships between instructor characteristics and student competency development. The study will control for confounding variables such as prior academic performance, learning styles, and student motivation. It will also examine whether specific instructor attributes are more strongly associated with particular types of competencies, such as technical proficiency, critical thinking, or communication. Findings from this research will have practical implications for the recruitment, selection, and development of clinical instructors. By identifying the traits that contribute to effective teaching, healthcare institutions can enhance their clinical education programs and ensure students are well-prepared to meet the demands of professional practice.

Keywords: *Clinical Instructors, Clinical Competencies, Healthcare Education, Teaching Effectiveness, Student Outcomes, Instructor Characteristics, Nursing Education, Clinical Teaching.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Clinical education constitutes the foundation of professional nursing practice, providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world healthcare settings. Through clinical exposure, nursing students develop essential competencies such as clinical judgment, psychomotor skills, ethical decision-making, communication, and professional behavior. The effectiveness of clinical education is largely dependent on the quality of clinical instruction, positioning clinical instructors as central figures in the development of competent and safe nursing practitioners.

Clinical instructors serve multiple roles in the clinical learning environment. They function as educators who facilitate learning, supervisors who ensure patient safety, evaluators who assess student performance, and role models who demonstrate professional nursing behaviors. Their characteristics—including educational preparation, clinical expertise, teaching competence, interpersonal skills, and professional values—significantly influence students' learning experiences and outcomes. Instructors who are knowledgeable, supportive, and effective communicators are more likely to foster a positive clinical environment that promotes student engagement, confidence, and competency development.

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Clinical competency development is a primary outcome of nursing education and is essential for ensuring quality patient care. Competency encompasses not only technical skills but also critical thinking, communication, ethical practice, and the ability to function effectively within healthcare teams. Nursing regulatory bodies and accrediting agencies emphasize the attainment of clinical competence as a requirement for professional practice. Consequently, nursing education institutions are continually challenged to identify factors that enhance or hinder students' clinical competency development.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of clinical teaching effectiveness in student learning. Teaching behaviors such as clear instruction, constructive feedback, fair evaluation, and the integration of theory into practice have been associated with improved student performance. Additionally, instructors' interpersonal attributes—such as approachability, respectfulness, and encouragement—contribute to a supportive learning environment that reduces student anxiety and promotes active participation in clinical activities. Clinical instructors who exemplify professionalism and ethical practice further influence students' professional identity formation.

Despite recognition of the instructor's role in clinical education, gaps remain in the literature regarding the empirical examination of specific clinical instructor characteristics and their direct relationship with student clinical competency development. Many studies have focused on student perceptions of the clinical learning environment or general teaching effectiveness, while fewer have quantitatively examined the correlation between instructor characteristics and measurable student competency outcomes. Moreover, variations in educational contexts, institutional practices, and instructor preparation necessitate context-specific investigations.

Understanding the relationship between clinical instructor characteristics and student clinical competency development is crucial for several reasons. First, it provides evidence-based guidance for faculty recruitment, selection, and development. Second, it informs curriculum planners and administrators on areas requiring investment, such as faculty training and mentorship programs. Third, it supports the development of policies aimed at enhancing the quality of clinical instruction and student learning outcomes.

This study aimed to assess the correlation between clinical instructor characteristics and the clinical competency development of nursing students. Specifically, it sought to describe the perceived characteristics of clinical instructors, determine the level of student clinical competency, and examine the relationship between these variables. By providing empirical evidence on this relationship, the study contributes to the growing body of nursing education research and offers practical implications for improving clinical teaching and learning practices.

II. METHODOLOGY

➢ *Research Design*

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between clinical instructor characteristics and student clinical competency development. This design was appropriate as it allowed for the assessment of naturally occurring variables and the determination of the strength and direction of their association without manipulating the study environment.

➢ *Research Setting and Participants*

The study was conducted in selected nursing education in the Philippines institutions offering undergraduate nursing programs with established clinical training components. Participants included nursing students enrolled in clinical courses and assigned to clinical instructors during the data collection period. Inclusion criteria for student participants were enrollment in a clinical nursing course, completion of at least one clinical rotation under the same instructor, and willingness to participate in the study. Students with limited clinical exposure or those who had not completed a full rotation were excluded.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who met the inclusion criteria. This sampling method ensured that respondents had sufficient exposure to their clinical instructors to provide informed evaluations of instructor characteristics and to demonstrate observable clinical competency development.

➢ *Research Instruments*

Two standardized instruments were used for data collection:

- *Clinical Instructor Characteristics Questionnaire (CICQ)*

The CICQ was designed to assess students' perceptions of their clinical instructors' characteristics. The instrument consisted of multiple domains, including teaching effectiveness, clinical expertise, communication skills, interpersonal relationships, approachability, and professionalism. Items were rated using a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicated more favorable instructor characteristics.

- *Student Clinical Competency Assessment Tool (SCCAT)*

The SCCAT measured students' clinical competency across key domains such as nursing care skills, critical thinking and decision-making, communication, professional behavior, teamwork, and patient safety. The tool was aligned with established clinical competency standards and used objective criteria to assess student performance.

Both instruments underwent content validation by experts in nursing education and demonstrated acceptable reliability coefficients based on pilot testing.

➢ *Data Collection Procedure*

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Permission was secured from nursing administrators and course

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coordinators. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained before participation.

Data collection was conducted toward the end of the clinical rotation to ensure adequate instructor–student interaction. Questionnaires were distributed in printed or electronic form, depending on institutional protocols. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the instruments, and completed questionnaires were collected and securely stored.

- *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice were strictly observed. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No identifying information was collected, and data were used solely for research purposes.

- *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize clinical instructor characteristics and student clinical competency levels. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to determine the relationship between clinical instructor characteristics and student clinical competency development. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

III. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in three sections: clinical instructor characteristics, student clinical competency development, and the correlation between the two variables.

- *Clinical Instructor Characteristics*

Analysis of the Clinical Instructor Characteristics Questionnaire revealed generally high mean scores across all assessed domains. Teaching effectiveness emerged as the highest-rated characteristic, indicating that instructors were perceived as effective in explaining procedures, providing feedback, and facilitating learning opportunities. Clinical expertise also received high ratings, reflecting instructors' competence and confidence in performing and demonstrating clinical skills.

Communication skills and interpersonal relationships were rated positively, suggesting that instructors maintained open communication, encouraged questions, and demonstrated respect toward students. Professionalism and role modeling were likewise rated highly, indicating that instructors consistently demonstrated ethical behavior, accountability, and adherence to professional standards.

- *Student Clinical Competency Development*

Assessment of student clinical competency revealed an overall high level of competency among participants. Students demonstrated strong performance in professional behavior, patient safety, and basic nursing care skills. These findings suggest that students were able to perform essential clinical tasks safely and ethically.

Moderate competency levels were observed in areas requiring higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and complex clinical decision-making. While students showed competence in routine situations, challenges remained in managing complex patient conditions and making independent clinical judgments.

- *Correlation Between Instructor Characteristics and Student Competency*

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between overall clinical instructor characteristics and student clinical competency development ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that students supervised by instructors with more favorable characteristics tended to demonstrate higher levels of clinical competency.

Among the instructor characteristics, teaching effectiveness and clinical expertise showed the strongest correlations with student competency scores. Communication skills, approachability, and professionalism also demonstrated significant positive associations, though to a slightly lesser extent.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence supporting the significant role of clinical instructor characteristics in nursing students' clinical competency development. The positive correlation observed aligns with existing literature emphasizing the influence of effective clinical teaching on student learning outcomes.

Teaching effectiveness emerged as a critical factor influencing student competency. Instructors who clearly explained procedures, provided timely feedback, and linked theory to practice facilitated deeper learning and skill mastery. These findings reinforce the importance of pedagogical competence in clinical instruction, beyond clinical expertise alone.

Clinical expertise also demonstrated a strong relationship with student competency development. Instructors with strong clinical knowledge and experience serve as credible role models, enhancing students' confidence and trust in the learning process. This finding supports the notion that clinical instructors must maintain current clinical practice to effectively guide students.

The positive association between interpersonal skills and student competency highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment. Instructors who are approachable and respectful reduce student anxiety and encourage active participation. Such environments are conducive to experiential learning and reflective practice.

Professionalism and role modeling further influenced student competency by shaping professional values and ethical behavior. Students often emulate instructors'

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behaviors, underscoring the importance of instructors demonstrating professionalism in clinical settings.

Overall, the study underscores the need for comprehensive faculty development programs that address both clinical expertise and teaching competence. Investing in instructor training may enhance the quality of clinical education and contribute to the preparation of competent nursing graduates.

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