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# **Satisfaction of Clinical Placement for Nursing Learners: Empirical Evidence from Open University Malaysia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to determine the satisfaction of clinical placement that the nursing learners experienced during clinical placement in Open University Malaysia (OUM). Face to face data collection methodology using convenience sampling was used to enhance the response rate. A total of 192 usable questionnaires were used in the data analysis procedure. The distribution of data in this study is normal evident by (Kurtosis < 3.00; Skewness < 2.00). Validity (KMO = .95) and reliability of the constructs (Cronbach alpha > .90) have been reported in this paper indicating the credibility of the data. Factor analysis for the independent variable converged into two factors, namely preliminary learning experience and learning opportunities. Factor analysis performed is a novel contribution in view of narrowing the methodological gap in this area of study. There is a significant relationship is found when preliminary learning experience was regressed against clinical placement satisfaction ( $p = .86$ ). This study also highlighted variety of issues that should be addressed in relation to satisfaction of clinical placement for nursing learners in OUM, so that identifying different learning opportunity will help the nursing learners to be satisfied with the theoretical education.

**Keyword:** distance learning, open-distance learning, nursing education, clinical placement, satisfaction

## **INTRODUCTION**

It cannot be denied that clinical placement is an important element in nursing education. The principle of nursing education is to equip nurses with the necessary knowledge, skill, attitude, and values needed in professional practice and perform their duties efficiently (Nolan, 1998; Budgen & Gamroth, 2008; Karimi et al., 2010).

Few studies also investigated the impact of a collaborative clinical education model on students' perception of the psychosocial learning environment was the key strategy to improve students' clinical practice satisfaction (Handerson, 2006; Salamonson et al., 2011).

Apart from that, role of preceptors, unit management, student readiness, and assessment play significant role in enhancing student learning in clinical practice (Nehring, 1990; Yuen, 1991; Newton & Smith, 1998; Omansky, 2010; Esmaeili et al., 2014). Karimi et al. (2011) conducted a study from Iran which revealed the significant role of mentors in providing effective educational and clinical experiences.

Despite all the challenges, clinical placement is a fundamental that holds great importance of nursing education. Unfortunately, clinical settings are endlessly changing. Therefore, effective orientation program and preceptorship play a major role in helping students to attain proper learning in the clinical placement.

There is a scantiness of publication pertaining to issues of online professional nursing education and clinical experience for students. Any accredited nursing programs require a clinical component in the curriculum. This is regardless whether the program is brick and mortar or online (Mitchell & Delgado, 2014). Therefore, limited research is available, especially, in the area of students' satisfaction with clinical nursing placement, in relation to open distance learning (ODL). Prior research in experience and satisfaction of clinical placement mostly happened in the Western setting. For this reason, satisfaction of clinical placement for ODL Bachelor of Nursing Sciences (BNS) program in Open University Malaysia (OUM) should be identified.

## **BACKGROUND**

In nursing education, there are unsettling challenges such as shortage of academicians, quality of the program outcomes, research and scholarship priorities, and not to mention computer savvy and adaptation to the new technologies. Separately, with distance learning in nursing education is arriving with extraordinary speed, educators are facing much uncertainty (Gruendemann, 2007). Budgen and Gamroth (2008) clearly articulated that to warrant that students' real life clinical practice experience is the principal task in professional practice-based of nursing education. In order to prepare the students to be competent in applying academic preparation (Budgen & Gamroth, 2008), graduates with "real grasp" of nursing experiences arising from clinical education which provide opportunities for the application, analysis, and synthesis of ideas (Massarweh, 1999). More precisely, few studies highlighted students' perceptions of ideal clinical education included their participation in learning and recognized as a team (Henderson et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2011), being familiar with task-orientated roles, being creative and exclusive learning (Brown et al., 2011), and empowerment and being valued (Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2011) as being core in clinical education.

Abundance search indicating that nursing profession still having high desire and is struggling to provide high quality of clinical placement for the learners. Courtney-Pratt et al. (2012) highlighted that there are three key stake holders in clinical placement: (1) the university perspective, (2) the facilitators' roles, and (3) the perspective of nursing undergraduate. Few nurse scholars argued that the central role of clinical education is the bridge used to consolidate the knowledge from university into the various settings of real clinical environment (De Witte, Labeau, & De Keyzer, 2011). Thus, this clinical placement

experience occurred because of the relationship and learning environment of the learners with the ward staffs (Paton, Thompson-Isherwood, & Thirsk, 2009). As consequences, the role of preceptor has emerged to bridge the gap of 'professional model of nursing' by the faculty and the 'bureaucratic model' of clinical settings (Ainsley & Chapman, 2010; Henderson & Tyler, 2011). However, orientation program and preceptorship also needed in a distance or online learning component as suggested by Gruendemann (2007).

Rice (2016) argued that even newly hired nursing clinical adjunct should be provided with proper orientation program because they were primarily responsible in clinical education. Proper orientation such like introduce to the staff, felt welcome and accepted to the ward, have felt sense of belonging, able to accomplish learning outcomes, encouraged to be part of the team and learn actively are as vital in positive clinical placement experience (Happell, 2008; Gilbert & Brown, 2011; Coyne & Needham, 2012). This is supported by Moonaghi et al. (2015) in their qualitative exploration study, students who perceived the clinical environment as 'unwelcoming field' will make them felt unrecognized and unappreciated.

Interestingly, comparative study by Lee et al. (2009) highlighted that when Korean nursing students were only allowed to observe more than direct patient care, they tend to experience less satisfaction levels in contrast to USA nursing students who were permitted to perform direct patient care during their clinical placement. In relation to psychometric testing, Salamonsen et al. (2011) and Skaalvik et al. (2011) also clearly articulates that Clinical Learning Environment Inventory-19 provides beneficial tool to explore satisfaction of clinical placement in term of preceptor support and effective clinical learning environment.

It is undeniable that preceptorship is an essential element of orienting new registered nurses into clinical environment. An instructor is a person who understands the teaching-learning process as well as learners needs. In order to enhance the learners' needs, the preceptor reviews online information and then assists in applying the concepts and skills in the "real" clinical environment (Gruendemann, 2007). Therefore, the preceptors must be the knowledge transfer experts. Concurrently, the preceptors integrate adult learning principles into their teaching and promote critical thinking (Ammon-Gaberson, 1987) and both preceptors and learners are partners in patient care during the orientation phase of their nursing practice (Gruendemann, 2007). Biggs and Schriener (2010) had examined the important of relationships between undergraduate and clinical preceptors. Separately, Smedley, Morey and Race (2010) believed to foster growth and learning in clinical education, preceptor must be motivation to undertake the role, have current clinical knowledge and ability to embrace teaching opportunities.

In addition, study of tool in clinical placement have been done to identify learners perspectives (Hisar, Karadag, & Kan, 2010), the learning environment (Ip, & Chan, 2005; Henderson et al., 2010) and also both preceptors and students perspectives (Courtney-Pratt et al., 2012). However, little work has been undertaken to understand the learners' perspectives especially in ODL. In addition, surveys to assess satisfaction in clinical placement are often based on full time nursing program and only undertaken in the West, except few Asia countries. The opportunity arises to determine the satisfaction in clinical placement among nursing learners in ODL Malaysia. As ODL is a new phenomenon in Malaysia, this study will offer benefits in ease of faculty within the nursing program.

In Malaysia, context clinical placement for undergraduate nurses is guided by the Malaysia Nursing Board. Accredited Bachelor of Nursing courses provide total clinical placement

experiences for 96 hours or equivalent to 12 days. The importance of clinical experience during undergraduate nursing degrees is unquestionable.

OUM is a pioneer for ODL in post-registration nursing program, with 16 centres offering BNS program to various states of Malaysia. Every clinical placement will be guided by individual course kit that was uploaded online into my virtual learning environment (myVLE). The course kit consists of introduction of the general or specific practicum, objectives of the clinical placement, assessment methods and student's evaluation of the clinical practice. However, the student's evaluation only contains six simple statements. The whole course kit will be submitted to respective preceptors for verification at the end of their clinical placement. Majority of the nursing learners stated that they satisfied with their clinical placement, yet there are concerns that factors of learning environment, namely preceptor's influence and orientation program may have a different effect on the satisfaction of their clinical placements. In this study, we argue that the satisfaction of clinical placements among the nursing learners should emphasize more on orientation program rather than preceptor's influence. The purpose of this study is to indentify factors in their learning environment and to determine their satisfaction of clinical placements.

In other words, there should be a study in Malaysia to determine the important of orientation program and preceptor's influences in relation to satisfaction of clinical placement for these distance nursing learners.

## METHODS

### Design and Participants

This study utilized a quantitative approach whereby printed survey questionnaires were distributed face-to-face in different centres of May semester 2015 nursing undergraduates. The return of the completed surveys were collected within three weeks and mailed by designated staffs from individual learning centres. The totals of 250 questionnaires were sent out for this study. Out of that number, only 192 complete surveys were received, giving an overall respond rate of 76.8%. This is relatively acceptable response rate as compared to 95% by Happell (2008) and 41.6% by Skaalvik et al. (2011).

### The questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by focus group discussion among academics to review content validity of the instrument, before the questionnaires were given out to the final sample. The questionnaire consists of demographic variables (5 items). Furthermore, the questionnaire consists of 29 statements regarding two subject areas, namely learning environment (16 items) and clinical placement satisfaction (13 items). The respondents answered the statements using a five-step Likert type scale with the following alternatives: (1) *strongly disagree*; (2) *disagree*; (3) *neutral*; (4) *agree*; and (5) *strongly agree*. The questionnaire also contains background variables for the respondents' current professional post in their work place, highest professional qualification, and their duration of experience in the service. A survey was conducted across five learning centers: Petaling Jaya, Alor Setar, Batu Pahat, Negeri Sembilan and Kuching. Those five learning centers were selected due to high registration of nursing undergraduates.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data were transported from Excel to SPSS. This research write-up only reports the data collected from five learning centres pertaining to the nursing undergraduates of Faculty of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences (FONAS), giving a total of 192 respondents. Table 1 reported the age and ethnicity profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were between 36-40 years old (n= 60 or 31.3%). Malay nursing learners comprised the majority of the respondents (n= 121 or 63%).

**Table 1: Sociodemographic data of respondent (n=192)**

Demographic data	N	%
<b>Age:</b>		
Below 25	1	0.5
25-30	47	24.5
31-35	54	28.1
36-40	60	31.3
46-50	19	9.9
above 50	11	5.7
<b>Ethnicity Profile of Respondents:</b>		
Malay	121	63.0
Chinese	23	12.0
Indian	23	12.0
Others	25	13.0
<b>Professional qualification:</b>		
Diploma	81	42.2
Post basic	97	50.5
Advance diploma	13	6.8
Others	1	0.5
<b>Current post profile:</b>		
Staff nurse	133	69.3
Head nurse	44	22.9
Matron/director	4	2.1
Clinical instructor	6	3.1
Others	5	2.6
<b>Years of experiences:</b>		
3-5	30	15.6
6-10	53	27.6
More than 10	109	56.8

Analysis according to professional qualification in Table 1 indicates that more than 80 respondents with Diploma and Post-Basic qualification. The sample is well educated because most of the respondents have Diploma (81%) and Post-Basic (97%). This suggests that the nursing learners with either Diploma or Post-Basic are an important group to seek higher education to advance their career pathway.

Analysis of respondents by their current posts in their work place as seen in Table 1 indicates that the majority of the nursing learners (133) are staff nurses and their experiences are more than 10 years. This suggests that the staff nurses have chosen OUM as a relevant pathway for their lifelong learning experience.

Based on data obtained from the survey, Factor Analysis was run to explore the validity of the items in the instrument. The 29-item Learning Environment-Satisfaction scale was subjected to Principal Component Analysis (PCA) which implemented Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. KMO using Rotated Component Matrix revealed that the KMO index was 0.95 which indicated high construct validity for the whole model of the study undertaken. High value KMO index, close to 1.0, generally indicated that a factor analysis was useful for the data collected (Karse, 1960). On the other hand, small value of Bartlett's Test for Sphericity (less than 0.05) indicated the significance level of related variables and that the factor analysis was useful for the data collected.

Upon examining the internal consistency of the items, it was found that the Cronbach alpha value for Learning Environment factor one and factor two dimensions were 0.903 and 0.948 respectively, and for the Clinical Placement Satisfaction was 0.956. All these alpha values indicated that as a whole, the Clinical Placement Satisfaction and Learning Environment scale has reasonably very good internal consistency, whereby the higher the coefficient, the more accurate the measure. For basic research, Nunnally (1978) in Panayides (2013) recommended reliability of .70 or better, but not greater than .80.

**Table 2: Dimension, number of items and Reliability of Questionnaire**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Clinical Placement Satisfaction	13	0.956
Learning Environment: Factor Two	6	0.903
Learning Environment: Factor One	10	0.948

**Table 3: ANOVA test to predict p-value**

<b>Model</b>		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1	Regression	36.998	2	18.499	132.402	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	26.407	189	.140		
	Total	63.405	191			

A standard regression was performed to assess the influence of factor one and factor two to predict clinical placement satisfaction. An analysis for regression was calculated to predict participants' Clinical Placement Satisfaction based upon factor one and factor two in their Learning Environment. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumption of normality. A significant regression equation was found in ANOVA ( $F(2, 189) = 132.402, p = .000$ ), which indicated the p-value is very significance for this study.

**Factor one consists of ten items as follow:**

**Table 4: Items for factor one in Learning Environment**

	<b>Factor One – Role of Preceptors</b>
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The preceptor had an understanding of my learning.</li> <li>• When asked, the preceptor assessed my skills effectively</li> <li>• I felt positive about working with my preceptor.</li> <li>• I received constructive feedback from my preceptor.</li> <li>• The preceptor actively looked for opportunities to optimise my learning.</li> <li>• The preceptor assisted me to make decisions about my learning objectives.</li> <li>• I am more competent in nursing practice.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am more confident about my nursing practice.</li> <li>• I received adequate information regarding hospital policy during my clinical placement.</li> <li>• My prior experience was acknowledged during my learning opportunities.</li> </ul>

**Table 5: Items for factor two in Learning Environment**

	<b>Factor two – orientation program</b>
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I felt accepted to the unit.</li> <li>• I was introduced to the staff.</li> <li>• I was welcomed to the unit.</li> <li>• The staff had an understanding of my learning needs.</li> <li>• I accomplished my learning objectives during this practice experiences.</li> <li>• I was encouraged to be active learner.</li> </ul>



**Table 7: coefficient****Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.988	.187		5.294	.000
	Factorone (preceptor's role)	-.014	.077	-.015	-.181	.857
	Factortwo (orientation program)	.741	.077	.776	9.571	.000

A preliminary t-test was performed to ensure the significance level of the factor one and factor two in Learning Environment. Factor one shown t-test of -0.181 ( $p = .857$ ) and factor two reported t-test of 9.571 ( $p = .000$ ). These results indicate that factor two was significant in Learning Environment in relation to Clinical Placement Satisfaction among nursing learners. However, factor one was not significantly influenced the Clinical Placement Satisfaction. Concurrently, factor one was related to roles of preceptors in clinical placement for the nursing learners. Therefore, there was no relationship between preceptor influence and Clinical Placement Satisfaction with  $p = 0.857$ . This is probably explained being adult learners in Open and Distance Learning environment, the nursing learners did not really required the preceptor in their clinical placement.

**DISCUSSION**

This preliminary result found that a good foundation for ODL exists in Malaysia, especially in nursing program and Open University Malaysia is the pioneer for nursing for the whole country.

**Roles of orientation program for nursing learners in open distance learning**

As far as nursing education is concerned, learning through clinical experience is paramount. A review of evidence on the benefits of orientation to clinical placement will anchor clinical learning because it assists the student to 'fit in' the wards, be motivated to learn, less anxiety (Moore, 2013) in the complex clinical settings. Few studies offered practical suggestions of placement pack in clinical practice, which included orientation booklet and induction

program to the eager learners when the preceptors were occupied in the clinical placement (Channel, 2002; Moore, 2013). The main reasons for orientation are to enhance skills and knowledge, to facilitate the integration of theory and practice and to ease transition from university life to the clinical setting.

Therefore, being post-registration undergraduate nursing learners in OUM, proper orientation program was seemed very significance in this study. This is perhaps due to the reason that being away from formal nursing education for certain duration of time, they were more eager to re-learn and re-visit the clinical practice.

### **Roles of preceptors for nursing learners in open distance learning**

In the effort to determine the extent of nursing learners' satisfaction towards their preceptors during their clinical placement, results of this preliminary study revealed that role of preceptors was not significance in this study. As clearly articulated by few scholars, regarding distance learning for health care workers, the learners are better able to be self-directed and more adequately prepared because of their work experience (Nartker et al., 2010; Houghton et al., 2012; Moore, 2013). Nartker et al. (2010) went on to argue that given the life-and-death nature of health care workers, the hands-on, and practical skills orientation in the training, pure distance learning is appropriate modality for post-service training. Thus, this precisely explains the reasons why preceptor role was not significance in this study. Since their prior learning experience was acknowledged during their learning opportunity, the respondents believed that the clinical placement made them felt more confident about their existing nursing practice, and also they felt more competent in their existing nursing practice; hence, satisfaction in clinical placement for these nursing learners were not dictated solely by the function of the clinical preceptor.

Our findings contrast with discussion and findings by few scholars. Mitchell and Delgado (2014) mentioned that 'meaningful clinical experience at a distance' should be guided by preceptor, even for online MSN programs. On the other hand, Gruendemann (2007) argued that important of preceptor role for perioperative nursing in distance learning.

Reid-Searl and Dwyer (2005) in Courtney-Pratt (2013) suggested that to ensure that the aims of the placement from a university perspective are met; preceptors would provide a link between universities and clinical sites. This in turn, assists the transition of students into the professional role. However, being post-registration undergraduate nursing learners in OUM, roles of preceptors were seemed less significance in this study.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Overall, clinical components to graduate courses provide an important meaning by allowing students to apply newly acquired skills into practice. Therefore, requirement to provide clinical experiences in ODL programs are equally significance. Identifying and securing satisfaction of clinical placement may require innovative orientation program, minimal roles of preceptors for adult nursing learners to anchor successful learning experience and student satisfaction.

In Malaysia, open distance learning (ODL) is a new phenomenon. However, satisfaction of clinical placement for nursing learners was not studied. This article provides an overview of

clinical placement satisfaction and its implication in post registration nursing undergraduate distance learning. In view of OUM nursing learners are post-register candidates with matured characters, present of preceptors play little roles in contrast with pre-registration nursing learners. Like any other clinical placements, beside the role of preceptors, orientation program still remain as a dominant factor in clinical placements satisfaction. Separately, being a distance learning student in OUM BNS program, the learners are independent and responsible for their own learning objectives. This will suits the character for an ODL student across the globe in any disciplines. We also would like to propose to the faculty steps to be taken to sharpen the orientation's programme for future development such as the development of supernumerary guidelines including the type and frequency of available support; specific learning objectives for this period; tools to document learning; a clear and concise communications strategy for this period of attachment and Clinical journaling for students during orientation. This also will help the students in identifying the leaking of the program during orientation.

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