Tracer Study of the Nursing Graduates: Basis for Improvement of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract:

It is most certain that in any academic institution like St. Mary's College, Inc., factors to consider for the graduates are the quality of education and trainings received from the school of their formation to ensure the highest rate of employability, increased satisfaction on the performance of the graduates and stakeholders. This relevant information can be made available through conducting a tracer study to obtain accurate data to probe on the professional competency of the graduates for the purpose of revising the nursing curriculum for further improvement and satisfaction of the stakeholders. Thus, this tracer study aimed at conveying a positive attitude of concern by getting in touch with the BSN graduates to express interest for social communication and evaluate their present life's works and conditions. For this study, a total of one hundred ninety (190) graduates from Batch 2007 to 2022 participated through a structured online survey questionnaire formulated by the author, as many of the respondents are working overseas. Based on the results of the data, almost 100% are currently employed in their respective fields of interest both locally and abroad. The graduates' early phase of experience at work covered a period of waiting for almost 3 to 6 months after passing the board examination before being hired to different hospitals in the locality and overseas either as permanent or probationary employees. Future research on this topic would focus on other variables related to tracer study of graduates in other fields. The data of the study was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The results revealed that out of the 190 respondents, 146 (68.42%) got employed as nurses and 39 (20.53%) to non-nursing jobs whereas 14 (7.37%) abstained from revealing their current jobs. At the time of the study, 69 (36.32 %) were employed overseas and 121 (63.68%) were working temporarily in the country while waiting for the processing of papers for employment abroad.

Keywords: *Tracer study, BSN Program, employability, nursing competencies and skills, curriculum enhancement.*

Introduction

St. Mary's College, Inc., being the first Catholic school and the only ISO 9001:2015 certified educational institution in Baliwag City, aims at creating a milestone in her 111 years of existence by painstakingly pursuing PAASCU Accreditation for its Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Program. This is meant to further improve its high standard of quality education with excellent training both in nursing theories and skills. Through an enriched curriculum, nursing graduates will be more relevant as they make a difference in the world by giving quality care for all people with love, competency, and compassion. Its objective for accreditation is to give an honor and recognition to the institution in the journey towards quality improvement that is grounded in the RVM educational philosophy and its unique vision and

mission. The data presented from 2007 to 2022 signified a successful career of the graduates both in the local and international workplace. Majority of them landed on their specialized fields of training as soon as they became registered nurses.

Consequently, it is a big challenge for higher education to respond to the demand of producing quality and highly competitive nursing graduates. This graduate tracer study is an acid test to appropriately evaluate the results of education and training provided in nursing institutions. It gives basic information concerning the level of efficiency of the nurse educators, the graduates' locations, and employment status. Results of tracer study can provide proper direction in terms of quality education and training for the satisfaction of the graduates and future employers. (Cuadra et al., 2019; Brosola, 2020; Austria et al., 2023)

St. Mary's College, Inc. as a Catholic Institution has its own sets of graduate attributes called EIMGAS or Expected Ignacian Marian Graduate Attributes that are integrated in their nursing education and training. In fact, the first quality observed by the employers from the graduates was the demonstration of these values of faith, excellence, and service in their fields of work and responsibilities. Whatever terminologies it may be, it all referred to graduate attributes as claimed by some authors like Tempone et. al (2012), Barrie, Kavanagh, Segal & Hancock) as they described the ideal characteristics of the nursing students as loving and caring attitudes upon graduation.

The graduates also recognized that immersion program during the On-the-Job Training (OJT) provided by the school, including seminars and training greatly helped them to become more confident, focused and determined for success.

While educational institutions want to give the best education to their students with much needed knowledge, skills and attitude as essential requisites for employment (Boud, 2001) as it is also claimed by authors like (Lapkin, Fernandez, Levett-Jones & Bellchambers, 2010) that applying advanced technology in the form of high fidelity simulations in the nursing classroom

will satisfy the technological needs of well-equipped students which can contribute to the improvement of their clinical judgement and skills.

Furthermore, based on the result of the study conducted by Dela Cruz, (2020) the respondents have a very high employability rate. It resulted from his study that the graduates were clamoring further enrichment of the nursing curriculum by improving the school's facilities and services. According to them there is a great need that a periodic review and evaluation of the BSN curriculum is critical to make it more responsive and relevant to the demands of the work.

As claimed by (Bussard, 2015), beside of improving the nursing curriculum, there is also a need to enrich the clinical teaching methodology to enhance the clinical reasoning and critical thinking abilities of the students to ensure delivery of safe and effective nursing care.

Therefore, any higher education institution offering nursing program should face the international demands of the nursing profession by producing nurses who are both professional and competent (De Guzman & De Costa, 2008).

In the study of Cuadra & Aure (2019), it was revealed that most of the graduates selected in the study were recently graduated from the university and at the early stage of early adulthood. Furthermore, they got employment through referrals from friends and their jobs are related to their respective degree programs. Those nursing schools which are members of the ASEAN higher education system should focus on student mobility, credit transfers, quality assurance and research clusters as the four main priorities with the ASEAN education system.

In response to the Quality Objectives of SMCB to deliver quality transformative Ignacian Marian Education responsive to local industry demands as well as global professional standards through research, this Tracer Study of the nursing graduates from 2007-2022 was undertaken for accreditation purposes. Based on the Registrar's data of graduates, the Bachelor of Science in

Nursing graduates totaled to 285 by which 190 participated in the study.

The tracer study conducted by Pentang, J. et al. (2022), revealed that higher education institutions are profited by tracer studies because they can profile their graduates while discovering the quality of education they provide. Results of this study showed that graduates in teacher education program showed strong passion in teaching profession. Although difficulties and problems were encountered by the graduates, recommendations were offered that may serve as baseline data for curriculum review for improvement.

Graduates' employability bears strong impact on the realization of the higher education's vision statement aiming on what the graduates would become in the future with its mission focuses on the present and what an organization does to achieve it to help the graduates find a decent job upon graduation.

The tracer study of Ulanday, L. (2021), examined into the employability skills acquisition of the graduates in Cavite State University from the Teacher Education Program. Utilizing descriptive-correlational design, the result yielded that majority of the graduates achieved a high rate of employment which were highly acquired from the university where they graduated. In terms of the sex and employability skills variables, sex has no significant bearing in employment acquisition.
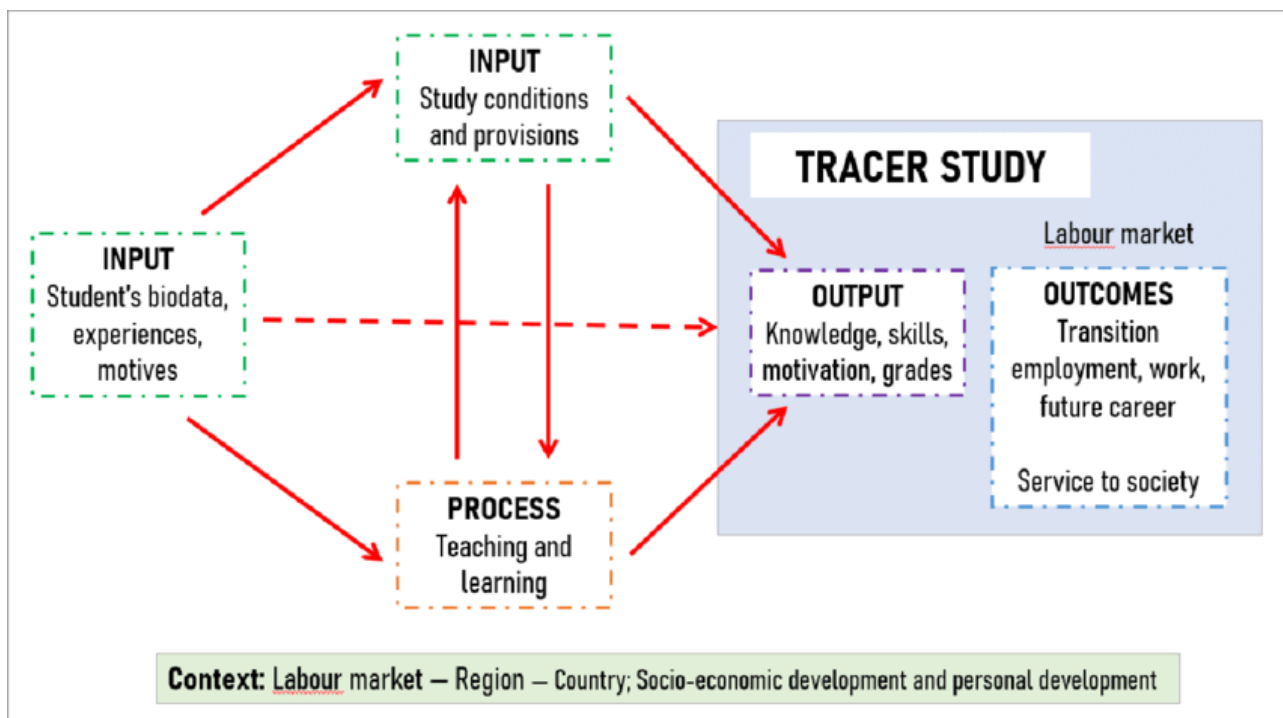
Framework

Figure 1. Schema of the Theoretical Framework of the Study
Source: Schomburg, 2010

As shown in Figure 1 the schema of the theoretical framework of the study adapted from Schomburg (2010) found valuable by the author in the present study to establish the different factors in terms of the inputs received by the graduates. At SMCB which is a Catholic institution, the inputs received by the students are not limited to academic, but it also includes holistic formation in consideration of experiences and motivations contributing to positive outputs of additional knowledge, skills, and incentives contributing to secure

employment and successful future career of the graduates. HEIs schools define holistic development as the mental, social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth of a person. Undertaking a holistic approach to education means focusing on all aspects of a person's growth, not just the academic advancements.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study aimed to ascertain the employment status and job experiences of the graduates from 2007 until 2022 and to identify strategies and recommendations for the improvement of the nursing curriculum.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions.

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of the following:

1.1 gender;

1.2 year of graduation?

2. What is the employment profile of the respondents in terms of the following:

2.1 employment status;

2.2 graduates present position;

2.3 nature of industry?

3. What are the suggestions to improve the BSN curriculum in terms of:

3.1 communication skills;

3.2 competency skills;

3.3 intercultural adjustments;

3.4 coping with overseas job demands?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design with mixed methods covering the employment status, job experiences of the graduates and suggestions for the improvement of the nursing curriculum. The author created a systematic survey questionnaire that the counseling staff used to collect the necessary data, which they used to find out where the BSN graduates of St. Mary's College of Baliuag, Inc. had been employed since 2007 through 2022.

Research Site

This study was conducted in St. Mary's College of Baliuag, Inc., a privately owned Catholic school founded by the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM) in 1912. This was done to specifically benefit the College of Nursing for further improvement of its curriculum to produce God-fearing nurses who will be both locally and globally competitive in terms of rendering quality care imbibed with Ignacian Marian values of faith, excellence, and humble service at all times and in all places.

Respondents

The study involved the 281 graduates in Bachelor of Science in Nursing from 2007 until

2022 but only 190 or 66.67 % participated in the online survey. They were employed locally and overseas during the conduct of the study and had painstakingly responded to the online survey questionnaire.

Instrumentation

In the study designed by the researcher, the research instrument made available online was used to collect crucial data to address the study's research objectives.

Research Ethics Protocol

Permission from the school authorities and the respondents was obtained prior to the start of the study reassuring the strict privacy of information for the sole purpose of accreditation. Fundamental ethical principles in conducting the research study were applied in the process of collecting information from the respondents of the study, respecting confidentiality, obtaining the informed consent, citation, and integrity of data.

Results and Discussion

As an important piece of evidence for accreditation, this tracer study was conducted,

and the data gathered were presented as shown on subsequent tables.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Graduates in Terms of Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	60	31.58
Female	130	68.42
Total	**190**	**100**

Observed from the table that less than one-third or 31.58 percent were male graduates while more than two-thirds or 68.42 percent were females. It is a fact that the nursing profession is a popular choice of career for women as they are known by nature to be nurturing and caring. The apparent assertion of Florence Nightingale that "every woman is a nurse by nature" could have a part to play why Nursing is a popular career for women more than men as claimed by some scholars.

More women flock to the nursing profession than men because of their natural capacity to care and nourish another human being. The innate nature of women as compassionate, caring, patient and understanding can make them succeed as nurses. Shift Med. Com (2023)

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Graduates in Terms of Year of Graduation

Year Graduated	Frequency	Percentage (%)
2022	7	2.49
2021	2	0.71
2019	5	1.78
2018	12	4.27
2016	2	0.71
2015	6	2.14
2014	10	3.56
2013	9	3.20
2012	24	8.54
2011	37	13.17
2010	46	16.37
2009	49	17.44
2008	44	15.66
2007	28	9.96
Total	**281**	**100**

Table 2 reveals that from 2008-2011 there were more than 30 graduates, but the succeeding years revealed a decline in the enrollment. In fact, the Philstar Global (2022) reported that there were fewer enrollees in nursing that resulted to fewer graduates. There were 101,574 enrollees in nursing programs but consequently only 5,871 graduated in 2021 compared with 165,598 enrollees in 2012 but only 58,677 graduated. It was commended by some authors that nursing institutions should, therefore, select students with higher-level entry qualifications, early detection of at-risk students, employ academically qualified and competent nurse educators and upgrade the facilities of the nursing laboratories to maintain consistently the high level of nursing graduates.

Table 3. Employment Profile in Terms of Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nurse	146	76.84
Not Related in Nursing	25	13.16
Business Owner/ Self- Employed	5	2.63
No Answer	14	7.37
Total	**190**	**100**

As shown in Table 3, only 76.84 % of nursing graduates landed in nursing career and about 23.16% were engaged in business or other jobs not related to nursing. The probable reason why fresh graduates from nursing schools could not find employment was because of requirement for specialization of nurses. Upon graduation, the newly graduated licensed nurses have not yet acquired any specialization that could become an impediment for employment in hospitals requiring specialized care. A career in nursing is an experience of challenges and excitement as declared by Madison, K. (2023). Nevertheless, it is the great responsibility of the nursing schools to prepare new nurses from radical transition of being a student to professional registered nurse. This experience could be fearful and overwhelming for a neophyte graduate nurse.

Table 4. Employment Profile in Terms of Present Position

Rank/Position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Staff Nurse	155	81.58
Private Duty Nurse	3	1.58
Public Health Nurse	21	11.05
Office/Medical Staff	5	2.63
Caregiver	6	3.16
Total	190	100

Table 4 reflected that 100 percent of the nursing graduates landed on a nursing job from being a staff nurse to being a caregiver. As reported by Flynn, J. (2022) that it is very important for any business to remain productive by encouraging retention to reduce turnover of employees.

Nursing practice in the 21st century is facing numerous demands to adapt to advancing healthcare settings. Among these challenges were the regular assessment of the relevance of the nursing curricula, the innovative teaching-learning strategies and effective clinical immersion program of nurse educators. (Fawaz et al., 2018)

Table 5. Employment Profile in Terms of Nature of Industry

Nature Of Industry	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hospital	79	41.58
Government Institution	21	11.05
School	2	1.05
Private	19	10.00
International	69	36.32
Total	190	100

Table 5 reveals that about 63.68 % of the nursing graduates work in the country while 36.32 % are working overseas at the time of the survey. Nurses leaving the country to work abroad are predominantly female, young (in their early twenties), single, and come from middle income backgrounds. While a few of the migrant nurses have acquired their master's degree, the majority have only basic university education. Many, however, have specialization in ICU, ER, and OR, and they have rendered between 1 and 10 years of service before they migrated (Lorenzo et al. 2005). New place, new friends, new workplace, different country. Working overseas require a whole lot of adjustment and it could be quite challenging. Most nurses are forced to leave their families and their comfort zone for increased salary. Being in an unfamiliar environment, without support system, it could be somewhat difficult to settle at first. (Clores, L. (2015). Studies have shown that foreign-trained nurses have trouble adjusting to a new work environment in a foreign

country. Language and cultural differences are often reported as sources of difficulty for migrant nurses. The current job factors confronting the new graduate nurses are being influenced by numerable factors such as the health challenges brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. Even with the shortage of nurses in America jobs may not be that easy because of increase in qualification demands. Even with these attempts, getting a job may take months, but it is still possible to be successful "The future of work" is a phrase that is often associated with instant, evolutionary change—in work itself, who does the work, and where work is done. (Johnson, S. 2020)

Table 6. Suggestions and Recommendations of Graduates for the Improvement of the BSN Curriculum

Themes	Graduates' Recommendations
Communication Skills	The English language need to be enhanced through class activities to encourage further communication with others. Students should be encouraged to ask more questions for them to better express their thoughts. Various teaching techniques may be used in tasks like essays, focus group discussions, interactive dialogues, debates, and podcasts. The art of listening is also important to come up with a

	sound judgment before speaking. Likewise, feedbacking through periodic evaluation is advised.
Competency skills	Teachers should continuously guide the students and gauge their students' competence by recognizing and enhancing their skills, talents, and knowledge. As future nurses, it would help improve their skills in decision making and critical thinking through activities like situational case analysis, formulating alternative solutions, and selecting a practical course of action. Essential also to nursing profession, is flexibility to change as well as teamwork.
Intercultural adjustments	Let students show respect for different cultures and teach different types of coping mechanisms for survival. Diversity and uniqueness to appreciate others should be part of the student-nurses' training.
Coping with overseas job demands	Fruitful learning experiences on anxiety and stress mechanisms, ethical and professional obligations in the workplace may equip students as well as cultural awareness may help equip student-nurses as to the real world of the nursing profession.

As indicated in Table 6, the invaluable suggestions of the graduates for the improvement of the BSN Curriculum for the better if not for the best, need to be considered in the revision of the curriculum. It is a fact that Filipino nurses are fascinated to work overseas for greener pasture and that nurse educators should prepare them in terms of competencies in communication skills, nursing care skills, intercultural adjustments and coping with overseas job demands.

As Philstar, (2023) stated that Filipino nurses are motivated to seek employment abroad because of higher pay and mutual benefits. It is also an opportunity to gain more experiences and professional enrichment. On the other hand, Migrant Workers Secretary Susan Ople said that there is a "huge" demand for Filipino nurses abroad, especially in countries like Singapore, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Canada, and the United States because they are "the best in the world." (Inquirer.net, 2023).

Filipino nurses are well known to possess good qualities such as commitment to work, quality, tender loving care and professional expertise and dedication possessing good work ethics which are highly acknowledged by health care systems globally. These innate qualities of Filipino nurses make them a hot commodity and sought after professionals in the health care industry. (Growinc.Net, 2023)

Conclusion

This tracer study aimed to determine the distribution of Nursing graduates of St. Mary's

College of Baliuag, Inc. since 2007 in terms of employment. A total of 190 were surveyed. Majority of the respondents were female. Most of them were working as regular employees for almost two years in their present jobs. 155 or 81.58 % were working as staff nurses while the rest were employed in other nursing-related jobs like private duty nurse or caregivers. The graduates took almost a year to get employed as they waited to become licensed.

Conducting tracer studies connects the Alma Mater and the graduates to one another. The graduates were able to provide their evaluation on the curriculum, learning experiences, and employment status. This helps the institution assess their provision on quality education in producing competent and productive graduates. Tracer studies aim to find out the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum and the learning experiences of the students and how these affect their employment after graduation. This also assesses the employment status of the graduates and how far they have become after earning the knowledge and skills in college (Palomeno, 2014).

Furthermore, in the study of Cuadra et. al., (2019) the results revealed that the respondents were young, just graduated from the university who got employment through referrals from friends and jobs related to respective degree programs. As suggested by the graduates the

school should focus on the four main priorities of ASEAN higher education systems such as credit transfers, research, students' mobility, and quality assurance.

Whereas in the tracer study conducted by Pia, M., et. al (2016), the participants were employed as staff nurses on regular status. They attributed good trainings received from school in terms of communication skills, human relations, critical thinking, and problem solving as the qualities they developed which facilitated their job acquisition upon graduation.

In the study of Deblois (2021), the data obtained from the graduates and the employers,

revealed that majority were employed that are highly related to school training, but measures should be employed further to improve the curriculum as well as the skills of the students.

Recommendations

Resulting from the data gathered in this study, the following suggestions and recommendations were drawn from the responses of the graduates in terms of improving the BSN curriculum to become it more relevant and effective:

1. communication skills by enhancing the use of English through learning.

and using it more by encouraging further communication with others.

2. competency skills by continuously updating and innovating the teaching approaches of teachers and utilize various strategies to deepen the nursing knowledge and skills with constant monitoring from the clinical instructors.

3. intercultural adjustments by respecting the multiple intelligence of students and plans

varied teaching modalities responding to varied emotional and psychological make-up of clientele.

4. coping with overseas job demands by continuously exposing the students to cultural

interactions with other nationalities by attending webinars, teleconferencing, benchmarking

locally and abroad, learning foreign language and engage in dialogues with foreign students to better equip and prepare for future exposure in global employment armed with sufficient knowledge, skills, and good attitudes.

Translational Research

Aside from providing research evidence for accreditation, this study will serve as invaluable information to school administrators and curriculum developer to keep an eye on constant changes in nursing curriculum to become it more adaptable, flexible, and relevant to the present types of illnesses, patients with corresponding treatment and healing modalities.

(Cuadra et al., 2019; Brosola, 2020; Austria et al., 2023). This will assure quality graduates who can hurdle the difficulty of passing competitive board exams in the first attempt, pass it with flying colors and get an instant employment, ready to meet the demands and challenges of the growing society both in normal and critical situations like the worldwide COVID-pandemic.

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