

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING (BSN) STUDENTS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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Keywords

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Abstract

Background:

Nursing students encounter diverse academic challenges that affect their learning experiences, performance, and professional development. Despite the growing number of nursing institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), limited research has explored the academic difficulties faced by BSN students in this region.

Aim:

To identify the academic challenges faced by Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Methodology:

A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 212 BSN students from 20 nursing colleges in KPK. Data were collected through a self-structured, close-ended questionnaire consisting of 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire assessed four main areas: teaching practices, resource availability, curriculum strengths and weaknesses, and educational outcomes.

Results:

Findings revealed that most students (73%) reported a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical practice. Over half (68%) agreed that teachers still follow traditional teaching methods, and 52% indicated favoritism in grading and examinations. However, 70% agreed that teaching aids were adequately available in their institutions.

Conclusion:

The study concluded that BSN students in KPK face multiple academic challenges, primarily related to outdated teaching methods, theory-practice gaps, and perceived bias in assessment. Addressing these issues through curriculum revision, faculty development, and equitable evaluation policies could enhance the academic environment and student success in nursing education.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing institutions have an ethical duty to produce highly knowledgeable and proficient nurses capable of making patient-oriented decisions within diverse healthcare systems (Beeman and Waterhouse, 2001) [1]. This responsibility falls under nursing education, which involves structured learning and training in nursing principles.

The goal is to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to become proficient nursing professionals, expanding their expertise in patient care and support. To excel in this field, students require a conducive learning environment, up-to-date information, and timely guidance to develop their abilities and achieve success in their chosen area. However, unfortunately, the current conditions are unsatisfactory, leading students to face challenges throughout their academic journey (Gouifrane et al., 2020) [2].

Nursing education programs globally face numerous challenges, and nursing students encounter various academic obstacles throughout their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) studies. Some of the academic challenges faced by Nursing students at bachelor of sciences in Nursing are highlighted here.

undergraduate nursing students encountered various challenges during their studies, which stemmed from multiple levels of context, including internal, family, school, social, economic, and policy-related factors [3]. Several studies have identified factors like the student's profile, academic performance, psychological and emotional aspects, as well as family background and economics, affecting the academic performance of nursing students [4,5,6,7,8,9]. Furthermore, school-related factors, such as the integration of professional knowledge and the teaching and learning environment, along with social, economic, and policy-related aspects, also played a significant role in influencing the academic performance of nursing students [10].

In a study nursing students were found to face challenges related to their living conditions, part-time employment, curriculum structure, academic and clinical support, and the educational environment [11].

According to the Pakistan Nursing Council, In 2022, there are a total of 510 nursing institutes in Pakistan, with approximately 150 of them located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). This means that around 30% of the nursing colleges are situated in KPK.

Pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a significant undertaking for many aspiring nursing professionals. However, this journey often comes with various academic challenges that can negatively impact students' learning experiences, academic performance, and overall success.

While there have been few studies conducted on this topic in Pakistan, particularly in Lahore and Sindh, some valuable insights have been gained. Fajar et al. conducted a study in Lahore in 2019, which highlighted factors such as teachers' approach, student-related issues, home environment, and school-related factors that can have a negative effect on students' academic performance. Similarly, another study conducted in Lahore by Fatima et al. in 2019 found that there is a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application experienced by nursing students. Traditional teaching methods used by teachers were identified as hindrances to students' academic performance.

Soomro et al. conducted a study in Sindh with the same title in 2021, but it only included female students. It's important to note that the studies conducted in Pakistan so far have primarily focused on Lahore and Sindh, and their sample sizes were limited. There is a lack of research conducted in KPK, necessitating the need for a comprehensive study in the region that includes both genders and encompasses a larger sample size.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the academic challenges faced by both male and female nursing students across multiple colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). By conducting this study, researchers hope to address the existing gap in research on this subject in KPK and provide valuable insights to improve the nursing education system and support the academic success of nursing students in the region.

Research Question.

What are the academic challenges faced by Students at BSN in kpk?

Objective

To identify the academic challenges faced by nursing students at BSN in kpk.

Significance of Study

- The study findings proved instrumental in aiding the organization to enhance student performance. As policy makers, the organization took decisive steps to minimize factors that negatively impacted nursing students' academic achievements. Following the completion of this study, the organization actively conducted seminars and workshops aimed at refining teaching strategies to further boost the students' academic performance
- After conducting this study, students showed noticeable improvement in the quality of education and learning, leading to potential enhancements in their CGPA.
- Moreover, the findings of this study empower parents to better comprehend and support their children in dealing with school-related challenges and provide encouragement.
- The significance of this research lies in its potential to benefit students by enabling them to grasp the factors that can influence their academic performance.

Literature Review

The relationship between clinical and educational training holds a distinct significance within the nursing profession. A study conducted in Iran found that the clinical skills and specialty of newly graduated nurses are not up to the mark when it comes to ideal clinical practice. The results obtained from students at the Iranian Medical University indicated that crucial theoretical and clinical aspects (88.9%) related to academics are not being implemented in clinical settings, and theoretical aspects of nursing procedures (85.6%) are not being put into practice. Additionally, it was

observed that teachers lack the necessary knowledge and professionalism as educators (81.1%), and they do not adhere to traditional routine-oriented approaches in their nursing care (75.6%) [12].

According to the author's study, the factors that significantly impact students' low academic achievement are as follows: 79.3% of the factors are related to the learners themselves, including absenteeism from classes, older age learners, mental illness, lack of academic motivation, and personality disorders. In a study it was found that 92.3% of students use smartphones, 90.1% use computers and laptops, 97.8% have access to the internet, and 12.6% use personal internet. Additionally, 77.5% of students consume meals before examinations. These factors have a notable influence on the educational performance of the students [13].

Studies in Iran highlighted that nursing students faced issues related to clinical skills, specialty, and the gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical practice. Teachers were found lacking in knowledge and professionalism, and traditional teaching methods hindered the development of positive attitudes towards clinical training [12,14,15]. Nursing students faced a lack of adequate support in both theoretical and practical components of their program. Students expressed concerns about nurse educators not being fully prepared for class and receiving insufficient learning materials [11].

Many challenges in nursing practices arise due to the insufficient implementation of nursing theoretical concepts into clinical practice. This gap is mainly attributed to the lack of understanding and application of nursing theories at the clinical site, leading to a disconnect between theory and practice [16].

The study highlights various factors influencing the academic performance of nursing learners, categorized into Teacher related, School related, and Home related factors. According to the research findings, these factors play a significant role in shaping the educational performance of students at three distinct levels. Specifically, Teacher related factors have a profound impact on the academic performance of nursing learners. Similarly, School related factors also exert a

considerable influence on the educational outcomes of nursing students. On the other hand, Home related factors are found to have a relatively lower impact on the academic performance of nursing students, though they still contribute to shaping their educational achievements [17]. School-related factors encompassed inadequate and ineffective qualified instructors, deficient facilities, and a lack of instructional resources. On the other hand, Non-school issues included poverty, low educational achievement, and the absence of education among parents, as well as inadequate nutrition [17].

A study highlighted the significance of various teacher-related factors that influenced academic achievement. These factors included the provision of personalized attention to struggling students, the regularity of teachers' assessments of their students, the timely completion of the syllabus, the establishment of performance goals by teachers, the qualifications of the teachers themselves, and the effectiveness of their teaching methods. These aspects were found to have a substantial impact on academic success [18].

Another study identified internal and external factors that affected the academic performance of nursing students, such as curriculum mismatch, socio-economic factors, lack of library and internet services utilization, lack of motivation and learning facilities at home, and strict disciplinary measures [19].

according to a study the multifarious obstacles encountered by nursing students during the course of their academic pursuits, encompassing issues such as deficient knowledge-practice integration, suboptimal application of theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, and a lack of adherence to nursing process and scientific principles in the clinical milieu [14].

traditional teaching methods lead to subpar clinical practices among nursing students. These traditional approaches do not actively contribute to the learning process and negatively impact the application of clinical skills. Moreover, there is a lack of integration and cooperation between nursing schools and clinical settings. As a result, these conventional practices fail to foster a positive attitude towards enhancing clinical training [15].

Regarding emotional well-being, a qualitative study revealing that the learning environment, teaching approach, unrealistic scheduling, assessment demands, and lack of resources had a significant impact on nursing students' emotional well-being. They reported anxiety related to teaching styles, lack of positive feedback, and demanding schedules, which contributed to feelings of being treated as machines rather than humans. The absence of resources, such as a common room and computer facilities, further hindered students' academic performance and emotional health [20].

A study conducted on disruptive faculty behaviors in nursing education, it revealed that more than 50% of faculty considered certain behaviors disruptive, which was similarly perceived by nursing students, with the exception of leaving scheduled activities early (44.7%). Common uncivil faculty behaviors reported included taunting or disrespect towards other faculty and nursing students, as well as challenging their knowledge or credibility [21].

Despite being most commonly observed in clinical contexts evidence suggests that bullying is also prevalent within academic settings [22]. Studies reveal that nursing students who experience bullying face a wide array of adverse effects encompassing psychological, emotional, physical, professional, and spiritual realms [23,24].

These consequences encompass attrition, anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, illness, poor academic attendance, and compromised clinical performance. The impact of bullying can extend far beyond the academic realm, significantly influencing students' professional roles and personal lives [25]. Tragically, there have been reports of self-harm and suicide resulting from severe bullying incidents [26].

In conclusion, these studies shed light on the challenges faced by nursing students in various aspects of their education, including theoretical and practical components, as well as emotional well-being. Factors such as teaching methods (teacher related), learning environments (school related), and socio-economic conditions (home related) have been identified as crucial influencers of academic performance and overall well-being among nursing students. Addressing these

challenges could significantly improve the nursing education experience and ultimately benefit the future healthcare workforce.

Methods

Research design

To complete this study a quantitative descriptive Cross-sectional design was used.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Elizabeth Rani College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences Mardan,kpk.

study population

The population for this study was BS Nursing Students from 20 selected nursing colleges in kpk. the total population was 3000 Generic BSN students, including Students from semester 1st to 8th.

inclusion criteria

Those Students who were fulfilled the inclusion criteria were included in the study.the inclusion criteria for this study was; Students of Generic BSN who were currently attending the classes and were willing to be participants in the study were included in this study.

exclusion criteria

Nursing Students who were on clinical duties or on long leave and students who were not willing to participate have excluded from the study.

Sampling technique

A convenience sample of selected nursing colleges in kpk were used

Data Collection Tools

A self-structured 10 items close-ended questionnaire (with some modifications) was used which was copied from soomro et al (2021). The questionnaire was consisted of two parts; the first part of the questionnaire related to demographic variable and The second part of the questionnaire contained 10-questions related to the Educational environment. The demographic characteristics of the participants were mentioned as (Gender, age group, institutional status, institute name,

semester) while The educational environment-related items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, showing 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= neutral, 4= disagree and 5= strongly disagree.The second part of the questionnaire was further classified into 4 sections. Section 1st was related to teaching and composed up of two questions.The 2nd section was consisted of one question which was related to Educational environment related to resources availability. The section 3rd consisted of four questions while the sections 4th were consisted of three questions, which were related to curriculum strengths & weaknesses and Educational outcomes respectively.

procedure

A Google form of the questionnaire was created with clearly mentioned informed consent. The Link of the questionnaire was send to the WhatsApp group of the selected 20 Nursing colleges official groups after the permissions of the principals of those colleges.The details description of informed consent were given like; "you can leave the study at any phase without any threats, your data will be saved anonymously". The total time took by filling of the questionnaire was 3-4 minutes.

Ethical Consideration

Approval for this study was gotten from IRB of Elizabeth Rani College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences Mardan. Permission was obtained from participant institute for data collection and informed consent was given to participants after full descriptions of study purposes, benefits and risk involved.

Study Duration

The duration of this study was 4 months (July,2023-October, 2023).

Result

Demographic Information

Most of the respondents n=162 (76%) of this study were from Private institutes. Majority n= 172 (81 %,) of the participants were male, while n=40 (19 % were female. More than third-fourth (76%) of the participants placed in age group of 21-25, followed by age group 18-20 (22%). Majority (75 %) of the students belonged to Private Sector

College, in which most of them (40 %) were in third

year Generic BSN, followed by fourth year (26%), and first year 21%.

Section 1: Challenges of Educational environment related to teaching

More than fourscore (81%) of the participants responded with strong agree and agree regarding teachers are willing to give them feedback on time. merely (10%) of the participants were not agreed toward teacher timely response on student performance. Most of the participants (68%) were agreed and strongly agreed for the statement, teacher follow the traditional ways of teaching during regular classes, while some participants (11%) were disagree to the statement.

Section 2: the challenges of Educational environment related to resources availability.

98 Students (46%) were agreed with the statement, teaching aids are present in the institute while 26 Students (12%) were remained disagreed.

Section 3: the challenges of Educational environment related to curriculum strengths and weaknesses.

134 participants (63%) were agreed and strongly agreed to the statements, teacher mostly focus on completing lengthy contents, but on other hand 38 Students (18%) were neutral and 36 Students (17%) were disagreed to the statement. Nearly third-fourth respondents 155 (73%) were agreed and strongly agreed whereas 34 respondents (16%) were disagreed to the statement; there is a gap between education and practice. Nearly half of the participants 101 (48%) were agreed with the statement that, the amount of time devoted to teaching nursing-specific knowledge, followed by 40 respondents (19%) and 38 respondents (18%) were strongly agreed and neutral respectively. For the statement, relevance of theoretical course contents for clinical needs; 138 Students (65%) were agreed and strongly agreed while 38 Students (18%) were disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Section 4: displays the challenges of the educational environment related to the educational outcomes.

The number of students who agreed with the statement that, teacher use problem methods to track Students learning, were 95 (45 %) while about 40 Students (19%) showed disagree. 89 Students (42%), responded with agreed while 42 Students (20%), didn't agree followed by 15 Students (7%) strongly disagreed regarding the statement of, institution favors particular students in grades in the final examinations. Most of the students 110 (52%) responded with agreed followed by 59 Students (28%) responded with strongly agreed regarding last statement (10th), Teaching the theoretical subjects based on specific knowledge of nursing.

Discussion

Nursing students encounter a multitude of hurdles throughout their educational journey, with academic challenges prominently featured among them. These challenges significantly impact students' performance and their overall competency levels. To attain proficiency as a nurse, addressing and surmounting these challenges is imperative. This research aims to pinpoint the specific academic challenges faced by nursing students across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa colleges. The study illuminates some prevalent challenges shared by nursing students in this region.

This research identifies a primary issue as the fusion of theoretical understanding with practical application in nursing education. Theory plays a pivotal role in nursing education, but without its application in practice, it becomes ineffective. Conversely, optimal nursing practice relies on a solid theoretical foundation. However, the insufficient integration of theoretical knowledge into nursing practice is a notable concern. The study's results indicate a noticeable disconnect between theoretical knowledge and actual nursing procedures. These findings align closely with earlier researches, which also highlighted a substantial gap between theory and practice. According to statistics, 96% of students acknowledge the existence of this theory-practice gap [27,28,29,30]. Furthermore, another study

suggested that students encounter several challenges, including the struggle to integrate their knowledge into clinical settings and apply theoretical concepts practically [14]. Many difficulties in nursing practice stem from the inadequate implementation of theoretical nursing concepts in real-world scenarios. This gap primarily arises from a lack of comprehension and application of nursing theories in clinical settings, resulting in a disconnection between theory and practice [16].

Another significant issue highlighted in this study is the reliance of teachers on outdated teaching methods instead of embracing modern approaches. Many studies share a strong correlation with the findings of this research. Approximately 54% of students expressed their concern that teachers were not incorporating contemporary methods in their lectures. These findings are consistent with a study conducted in Lahore, Pakistan [27,28]. Qualitative research also aligns with these findings, indicating that students are anxious about one-way teaching methods [31]. Furthermore, another study suggested that traditional teaching approaches contribute to subpar clinical practices among nursing students. These conventional methods fail to actively engage students in the learning process and have a detrimental effect on the application of clinical skills [15]. Therefore, this study provides additional support to previous researches by corroborating their findings.

This study has brought attention to another issue: favoritism among students in terms of exams and grades. According to the findings, more than 50% of the students agree that the institution shows favoritism when it comes to grading and exams. A similar study conducted in Pakistan had somewhat similar results, with 29% of students supporting this claim and a majority of students (52%) remaining neutral on this matter [27]. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region, the examination policy in nursing institutes differs slightly. According to the Khyber Medical University, which most of these institutes are affiliated with, 30% of the subject marks are allocated as internal marks by the institutes themselves. This means that specific students receive favorable treatment in terms of these

internal marks, as it is at the discretion of the institutes.

The results of the present study provide evidence supporting the sufficiency of teaching aids in educational institutions, as 70% of the participants expressed their agreement with this statement. Conversely, the majority of previous researches have contradicted these findings. For instance, one study revealed that 87% of students were dissatisfied with the idea that colleges have the necessary facilities to assist teachers in delivering lectures effectively [27]. These recent findings align with the outcomes of a comprehensive research endeavor that employed a sequential exploratory mixed-method approach. This research aimed to uncover the perspectives of nurse educators regarding their clinical and academic teaching practices. Within this investigation, several obstacles to effective classroom teaching were identified, including inadequate resources such as subpar skill and simulation laboratories, an underdeveloped curriculum, and a high teacher-student ratio [32]. It is essential to note that the current research diverges from previous studies due to its specific context. This study was conducted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region of Pakistan, and the majority of respondents were from affiliated institutes (affiliated with Khyber Medical University). These affiliated institutions benefit from stringent oversight by the parent university, ensuring the availability of essential supporting resources.

In this study, over 50% of students agreed that teachers cover extensive content in nursing schools. This finding goes against what other studies have discovered. Another study found that most students (80%) disagreed with this idea [27]. Nursing faculty often encounter difficulties when they have to cover a lot of material in their classes. To address this, strategies have been developed to improve students' reading experiences or offer meaningful alternatives to ensure they engage with assigned readings [33]. However, this current study contradicts that notion. The reason for this difference can likely be attributed to the use of multimedia systems, specifically PowerPoint presentations, in the participating institutes. Teachers often deliver lectures using multimedia,

which saves time compared to other methods like reading from books or writing on whiteboards. Consequently, these differing teaching methods lead to different research results.

This study also revealed that teachers provide timely feedback for classroom activities. However, this contradicts a study conducted in Sindh, Pakistan, which found that teachers there often delay feedback, therefore; according to the study, more than 60% of students disagreed with the statement about teacher feedback [27]. feedback is crucial for the growth of nursing students and is highly appreciated by both learners and instructors. It plays a significant role in their professional development [34].

Conclusion

Objective of this study was To identify the academic challenges faced by nursing students at BSN in kpk. This study highlighted various challenges which are faced by Nursing students in kpk Nursing colleges. These challenges are related to teaching, resources availability, curriculum strengths and weaknesses, and Educational outcomes. Some prominent challenges are as, Most of the students revealed that they faced gap when applying theoretical knowledge into practice, some Students showed that teachers do not following modern methods of teaching. Finally some Students described as institutes favor particular Students in examination and grades. The results of this study will help the nursing staff, nursing students and nursing administration to understand these challenges and to develop strategies to address these challenges. That will be a good step towards preparing Students to be competent, skillful and professionally developed nurse.

Recommendations

The Study recommended that; Firstly, a thorough curriculum review and update are needed to bridge the theory-practice gap effectively. Students should be taught in a way that allows them to apply what they learn immediately in labs or clinical settings. Instructors should adopt learner-centered approaches, encourage interactive sessions, and diversify teaching methods. Institutions should also organize workshops for faculty members to

enhance their professional development and introduce contemporary teaching techniques. Lastly, institutions should ensure fairness in grading, offering equal opportunities to all students

Limitations

This study has some limitations, it's essential to acknowledge those limitations. First, it focused on the KPK region, so the findings may not be generalize across the country. Second, the study used a non-probability sampling method (convenience sampling), potentially introducing bias and limiting generalizability. Additionally, data collection through online questionnaires via WhatsApp groups may have hindered students' full comprehension of the questions. To address these limitations, future research should encompass other provinces and employ probability-based sampling methods for more robust and representative results.

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