

The transitions of international nursing students



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Abstract

The number of international students in the United States' higher education health professions' classroom grows with each year. These students have diverse needs compared to U.S. students. This qualitative study describes the lived experiences of 10 international nursing students representing 8 countries of origin and prelicensure programs in 5 states. Findings illustrate the need for prelicensure faculty to develop a curriculum structure specific to academic, language, pedagogical, clinical, social, and cultural needs of these students.

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Globalization eases world travel and communication. In the United States (US), cultural diversity is increasing at a rapid pace. As a result, new issues have developed. Across college and university campuses in the US, international students are increasingly diverse. During the 2013–2014 academic year, the number of international students enrolled in US higher education increased by 8.1% over the previous academic year and represents the largest number of international students enrolled in US higher education to date (Institute of International Education, 2014a, 2014b). The academic years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 reported growth of 5.7% and 7.2%, respectively. The number of first-time international student enrollees escalated by 7.7% in 2013–2014 continuing the trend which began in the 2004–2005 academic year. Since academic year 1999/2000, the number of international students studying in the US has increased

72%. The number declaring health professions as their academic focus increased by 5.7% in 2013 over the previous academic year and comprised 3.8% of the health profession majors (Institute of International Education, 2013). Nursing is one of the health professions included in this category, but the actual number of international nursing students was not delineated.

Background

As the diversity of the classroom is changing, literature has shown that international students have additional needs that must be addressed to promote academic success. Many barriers to academic success have been identified in the general international student population. These barriers include cultural differences; communication issues; differences in learning and teaching styles; time perception; understanding of plagiarism; and need for support services (Abu-Saad & Kayser-Jones, 1981; Huang, 2012; Junious, Malecha, Tart, & Young, 2010; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Ladd

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& Ruby, 1999; Martin, Rao, & Sloan, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Purnell, 2014; Shakya & Horsfall, 2000; Wang, Singh, Bird, & Ives, 2008; Ying, 2003). Studies demonstrate the spectrum of challenges international students encounter, but methodological issues limit generalizability. Most studies were limited in regard to the population studied. For example, samples included foreign-born undergraduate nursing students, some of whom were naturalized citizens (Junious et al., 2010), foreign nursing students from various types of nursing programs (Abu-Saad & Kayser-Jones, 1981), nonnursing samples (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Ying, 2003), or studies of only one cultural group (Sanner, Wilson, & Samson, 2002; Shakya & Horsfall, 2000; Wang et al., 2008).

Analysis of the nursing literature revealed few studies using the concept “transition” in reference to the international nursing student population. Current literature focused on “experiences,” “learning experiences,” “difficulties,” “perceived stress,” and faculty support (Abu-Saad & Kayser-Jones, 1981; Junious et al., 2010; Sanner et al., 2002; Shakya & Horsfall, 2000; Wang et al., 2008). While studies examined the educational experiences of foreign nursing students, inclusion criteria were inconsistent or considered students from a single country of origin. The practicality of providing services to international students based upon ethnicity or country of origin is not economically feasible; thus, if similarities exist among all international nursing students, there is greater potential for appropriate services to be provided (McLaughlan & Justice, 2009). In addition to different conceptual approaches, these studies focused on individual aspects of transition but did not seek to capture the full essence of the experience. Finally, no studies utilized transitions theory (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994) as the foundation for the research.

International students have different learning needs, more obstacles to overcome, and require additional coping strategies compared to their noninternational classmates (Martin et al., 2011; Sanner et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2008). Language difficulties, whether actual or perceived, were reported (Abu-Saad & Kayser-Jones, 1981; Huang, 2012; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Shakya & Horsfall, 2000). A recurring theme was the need for faculty support (Abu-Saad & Kayser-Jones, 1981; Junious et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2008). In addition, Junious et al. (2010) reported that international nursing students perceived a lack of cultural competence among faculty. None of the studies located focused on describing the transition experience holistically. The findings gathered pieces of the transition experiences but do not provide a full description of the transition experience of leaving one’s home country to study nursing in the US.

This research study fills a void in the literature by identifying factors that affect student transition to the US, college and nursing school. Because there is no literature

identified that describes the transition experiences of the international nursing student population, it was necessary to employ a descriptive phenomenological methodology. By describing the transitions that affect international nursing students, colleges and universities will have a better insight into needs of this population and can more effectively support these students.

Theoretical Framework

Transitions Theory

Transitions occur when one’s existing reality is disturbed, causing a required or preferred change that results in the need to create a new reality (Kralik, Visentin, & van Loon, 2006). Transitions theory includes six conditions (meanings, expectations, level of knowledge and skills, environment, planning, and emotional/physical well-being) that affect the process and outcome of transitions as situations are navigated (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994).

Transition Conditions

Meaning is a subjective view of how the transition will impact the individual. Expectations are viewed as subjective phenomena that are influenced by past experiences. The person undergoing transition must be aware of what knowledge and skills are required for the transition. Preparation prior to the transition is viewed as beneficial. It is helpful to determine what strategies are requisite to navigate the transition (Meleis, 2010). The environment is seen as both community and society. Community conditions include social support from family, friends, mentors, and/or role models (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). Societal conditions include cultural beliefs and attitudes, socioeconomic status, and awareness of sociocultural context by all involved parties. Therefore, the transition can be effectively managed through teamwork, partnerships, effective communication, and support (Meleis, 2010). Planning involves anticipatory efforts prior to a transition and aids in successful outcomes (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). Identification of possible problems, concerns, and issues that may surface during a transition is part of effective planning. It is important to identify key people involved in the transition, including the person undergoing transition and support persons. Transitions are considered to be stressful and can affect emotional and physical well-being and result in illness (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). While developmental transitions are the type most commonly affiliated with physical changes, environmental issues such as temperature, weather patterns, and allergens can influence well-being during transition.

Patterns of Response or Outcomes

Patterns of response are indicators of healthy transitions (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994) and emphasize the process of transition. The important steps of assessment and evaluation

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