# Perception of and satisfaction with the clinical learning environment among nursing students

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## ARTICLE INFO

## SUMMARY

*Background:* Clinical nursing education provides baccalaureate nursing students an opportunity to combine cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills in the Middle East.
*Objective:* The aim of the paper is to assess the satisfaction with and effectiveness of the clinical learning environment among nursing students in Oman.
*Design:* A cross-sectional descriptive design was used.
*Setting and Participants:* A convenience sample consisting of 310 undergraduate nursing students was selected in a public school of nursing in Oman.
*Methods:* Ethical approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee, College of Nursing in 2011. A standardized, structured, validated and reliable Clinical Learning Environment Supervision Teacher Evaluation instrument was used. Informed consent was obtained from all the students. Data was analyzed with ANOVA and structural equation modeling.
*Results:* Satisfaction with the clinical learning environment (CLE) sub-dimensions was highly significant and had a positive relationship with the total clinical learning environment. In the path model 35% of its total variance of satisfaction with CLE is accounted by leadership style, clinical nurse commitment (variance = 28%), and patient relationships ($R^2 = 27\%$). Higher age, GPA and completion of a number of clinical courses were significant in the satisfaction with the CLE among these students.
*Conclusions:* Nurse educators can improvise clinical learning placements focusing on leadership style, premises of learning and nursing care, nurse teacher, and supervision while integrating student, teacher and environmental factors. Hence the clinical learning environment is integral to students' learning and valuable in providing educational experiences.
*Relevance to Practice:* The CLE model provides information to nurse educators regarding best clinical practices for improving the CLE for BSN students.

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## Introduction

The clinical learning environment (CLE) is an interactive network of forces within the clinical setting, i.e., staff, the patient, the preceptor, and the nurse educator (Papp et al., 2003) that influence the clinical learning outcomes (Dunn and Burnett, 1995) and have impact on student behaviors. Hence, clinical experiences are important for student learning and professional development. Studies (Henderson et al., 2012, Johansson et al., 2010) show that cultural and organizational factors influence students' learning experience and professional socialization (Stockhausen, 2005). The quality of nursing care for clinical learning is analogous with

the roles of students and patients in the context of caring (Ip and Chan, 2005). Hence, the CLE is a significant and vital component of clinical learning, student outcomes (Andrews et al., 2006, Papp et al., 2003), and nursing curriculum and is central to nursing education.

The CLE is a significant component of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program in Oman because it provides opportunities for these students to learn experientially in clinical practice. Omani nursing students perceive the clinical environment as anxiety provoking, stressful, fearful, and vulnerable. Their anxiety and relationship with clinical teachers, staff nurses, and patients are important in building their clinical experience, reducing 'cultural shock' and acclimatization. Socio-economic status, cultural and traditional influence, customs and values can significantly promote or hinder their clinical learning. These students are expected to develop independence, critical thinking, clinical judgment, problem solving skills, ethics, safety practices, and

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sense of responsibility as they progress in clinical practice. Therefore, it is essential to assess the student's satisfaction with and effectiveness of the CLE for enhancing learning in undergraduate nursing students in Oman.

## Background

Clinical supervision (Courtney-Pratt et al., 2012), mentorship (Skaalvik et al., 2011) and preceptorship (Salamonson et al., 2011) strategies have improved student learning in nursing education. In clinical placements nursing students depend upon a supportive atmosphere (Pai et al., 2011) based on psychological and pedagogical aspects for clinical learning (Newton et al., 2010) like staff–student relationships (Newton et al., 2012), peer support (Peyrovi et al., 2005), meaningful learning situations (Papathanasiou et al., 2014), good interpersonal relations, support and feedback (Levett-Jones et al., 2009). There is a reciprocal process of learning between a novice and an experienced nurse through student centered learning (e.g. guided learning, role modeling) leading to 'learning practice' (Billett, 2008).

The premises of nursing on the ward showed that best practices in nursing care were the essential context for successful learning experiences and establishing relationships between students and staff and between patients and staff. Nurse educators need to orient students to the culture or atmosphere of the clinical environment (MacLellan and Lordly, 2008). Students reported belonging, teaching and learning, feedback, confidence and competence as factors influencing the good CLE (Courtney-Pratt et al. 2012). Hence, the quality of the CLE is an essential element for determining the quality of students' clinical experience (Papp et al., 2003, Chan, 2004, Atack et al., 2000) and is vital for the teaching process (Andrews et al., 2005).

## Conceptual Framework

A conceptual model (Saarikoski et al., 2008) of CLE among nursing students was used to evaluate the clinical learning environment in the BSN program of a school of nursing (Fig. 1). All the students in the BSN program are situated in smaller groups of 5–6 and are assigned to an individual nurse teacher in the clinical courses in the specified clinical placements. The students are provided teaching–learning activities based on student learning outcomes, objectives, competencies, and essentials of BSN education. The role of the nurse teacher is to enhance

the clinical knowledge base, engage students in clinical learning, and improve clinical performance while teaching and evaluating students. They role model, supervise, and support clinical learning to meet the individual learning needs. These students encounter various nurse teachers in short periods (2–3 weeks) across 4–5 clinical placements for a total of 15 weeks in a clinical course in the undergraduate nursing program.

In this study the total CLE scores were predicted with the satisfaction with the leadership of the ward manager, student satisfaction, patient relationships, premises of nursing and learning on the ward, hierarchy, staff–student relationships, clinical nurse commitment and role of the clinical teacher. Satisfaction with and effectiveness of the components of the CLE are influenced by cognitive, psychomotor and affective skills, and problem-solving abilities among nursing students and the interaction with the nurse teacher.

## Aim

The aim of the paper is to assess the satisfaction with and effectiveness of the clinical learning environment among nursing students in Oman.

## Methods

### Design

A cross-sectional descriptive design was used to evaluate the Omani nursing students' satisfaction with and effectiveness of the clinical learning environment, supervision, teaching and evaluation using a standardized instrument in a public school of nursing.

### Setting and Participants

The setting was a public school of nursing with a baccalaureate program consisting of four-and-a-half years covering 130 credit units in the BSN program and 67 credit units in the RN-BSN program. The curriculum is organized in a sequential, progressive and logical manner to enable students to progress, ensure student learning outcomes, and produce safe, comprehensive and independent practicing registered nurses. Clinical practice contributes to 50% of the BSN program consisting of fundamentals, health assessment, adult health, critical
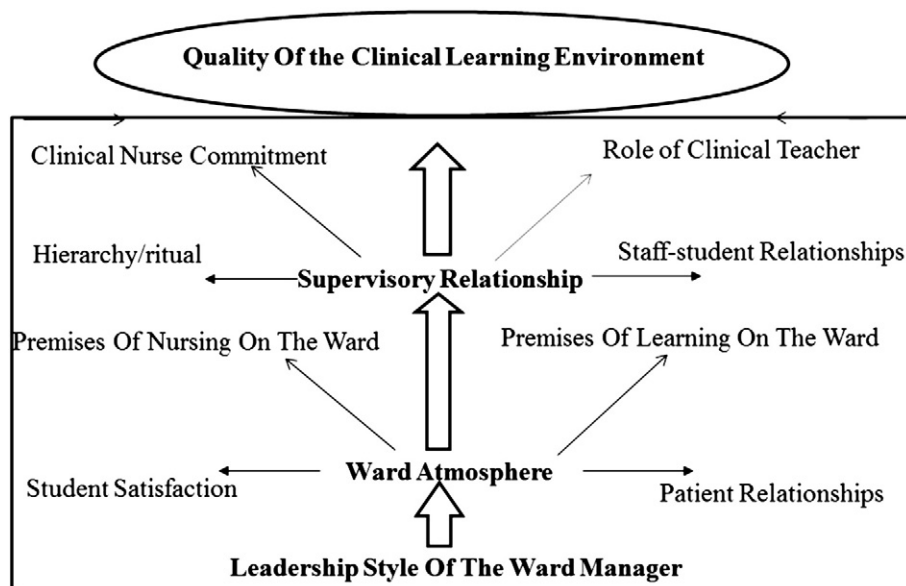


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of clinical learning environment (CLE) among nursing students. The arrow illustrates direct relationship between the CLE sub-dimensions and total CLE.