

# Testing the social cognitive career theory in Thai nurses' interest to become nurse educators: A structural equation modeling analysis



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## ABSTRACT

A shortage of nurse educators generates a systemic problem in nursing education. A model to develop interventions directed at enhancing graduate nursing student interest in assuming a future faculty role is needed. This study used a social cognitive career theory perspective to examine the effects of past performance in teaching and supervision, social influence, observing others teaching, perceived task demands for nurse educators, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations on Thai graduate nursing students' ( $n = 236$ ) interest to become a nurse educator. Results of structural equation modeling analyses revealed that social influence and past performance in teaching and supervision had significant effects on interest to become a nurse educator when mediated by self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Observing others teaching and perceived task demands for nurse educators did not significantly predict interest in faculty roles. These findings provide new knowledge about factors and their influence on the development of interest to assume faculty roles. Implications for nursing education include the design of feasible graduate curricula that enhance students' abilities in faculty role and increases valuation of teaching careers.

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## 1. Background of the Study

The deficit of nurse educators is a serious concern for healthcare systems around the world (National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice, 2010). In the United States (US), the American Association of Colleges of Nursing conducted a survey to determine the vacancy rate for nursing faculties for the 2012–2013 academic year. In a sample of 584 institutions, there were 14,393 (92.4%) filled positions, while 1181 (7.6%) were vacant (Fang and Yan, 2014). The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (2014) reported that nursing schools in Canada were unable to fill 78 full-time positions, representing a 3.1% vacancy rate. Similarly, a faculty shortage is reported in Thailand. Despite the 1:8–1:4 ratio of nursing instructors to students required for institutional accreditation, the ratio of nursing instructors to students in nursing institutes under the Ministry of Public Health is 1:19 (Abhicharttibutra et al., 2014).

A shortage in faculty members generates a systemic problem in nursing education. Lack of available, qualified nurse educators limits the capacity of nursing programs to admit students. In 2000, a total of 48,430 baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral applications were accepted for entry into nursing programs in 671 universities across the United

States. An additional 5,832 qualified nurse applications were not accepted because of an insufficient number of faculty members. In 2012, 79,659 qualified graduate and undergraduate nursing school applicants were denied entry to nursing programs due to lack of faculty (American Association of College of Nursing, 2013). If the faculty shortage is not reversed, the deleterious effects of increased faculty workloads have the potential to increase stress and burnout among nurse educators (Suozzo, 2015). The quality of nursing programs may suffer from practices such as using more part-time faculty and hiring less qualified instructors (Potempa et al., 2009).

Regardless of the accreditation standard for the nursing education system, a new faculty member can be hired as a registered nurse who has obtained a minimum of a Master's degree in nursing (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing [ACEN], 2015). Graduate nursing students are therefore key persons to pursue new nurse educator positions after graduation. Yet, few graduate nursing students select teaching as a career (Seldomridge, 2004). Brendtro and Hegge (2000) demonstrated that approximately 24% of US nurses with graduate degrees held faculty positions, and the remaining graduated nurses assumed roles as nurse practitioners, managers, or staff nurses. Numerous factors influence interest to become a nurse educator, including salary, encouragement from others whom they trust (Laurencelle, 2013), past performance in faculty activities (Seldomridge, 2004), and observing a faculty role model (Bond, 2011). However, the results of previous studies are limited to explain

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interrelationships among factors to cultivate interest in faculty roles. In the current study, we aimed to test a model informed by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework (Lent et al., 1994, 2000; Lent and Brown, 2008) to examine factors associated with interest to become a nurse educator among current Thai graduate nursing students. Our findings provide guidance to support the design of feasible interventions and strategies to ameliorate the nursing faculty shortage.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

The SCCT framework focuses on the interplay among personal factors, contextual factors and cognitive factors that influence career interest. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations are cognitive concepts in the SCCT framework. The theory of self-efficacy, developed by Bandura (1986), defined self-efficacy as people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute actions required to attain designated types of performance. Self-efficacy is an important influence on career decisions because people form career interests in areas in which they view themselves to be efficacious. Furthermore, during interest formation, outcome expectations will be partly determined by self-efficacy in that people often expect to achieve desirable outcomes in a career when they view themselves as capable performers (Lent et al., 2000). Literature supports the significant relationship between self-efficacy and career exploratory intentions among undergraduate students (Ochs and Roessler, 2001). Watt and Richardson (2007) note that an individual's perceptions of his or her ability to teach is a strong motivational factor for choose a teaching career. A survey study by Bond (2011) reported that baccalaureate nursing students with greater self-perceived capability to perform faculty roles were more likely to take an interest in the activities of a faculty role.

Outcome expectations are theorized to influence career interest. SCCT proposes that people behave in ways that gain valued outcomes and avoid behaviors that produce negative consequences (Lent et al., 2000). Outcome expectations refer to an individual's beliefs regarding the long term consequences of a career (Lent et al., 2000). In nursing academia, nurses choose faculty careers based on an expectation of positive outcomes from a teaching and research career. Teaching provides opportunities for nurses to make a contribution to the nursing profession, share their love of learning (Seldomridge, 2004), earn respect from others, receive an increased sense of self-worth and earn an attractive salary (Bond, 2011). One of the strongest motivators for nurses to enter the academic setting is that they can share their clinical expertise and influence student success by teaching (Gazza, 2009).

The SCCT framework emphasizes personal and contextual factors that influence career interest and are partially mediated by cognitive mechanisms (self-efficacy and outcome expectations). SCCT proposes that people exposed to certain career environments later pursue relevant career possibilities. They also observe or hear about others who perform various occupational tasks. Not only are they exposed directly or vicariously to relevant work activities, but they are also reinforced by others to pursue certain activities in order to achieve satisfaction in their future career. Through repeated activity engagement, modeling and feedback from persons they trust, people refine their skills, develop personal performance standards, form a sense of their efficacy in particular tasks and acquire certain expectations about outcomes of their performance (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). Empirical studies indicate that strong past performance in faculty activities serves as authentic experience that generates interest in a future faculty role (Bond, 2011; Gazza, 2009; Seldomridge, 2004; Yordy, 2006). Observing a faculty role model is a vicarious learning experience that significantly influences intentions to pursue a faculty career (Bond, 2011). Encouragement from parents, teachers and peers whom students trust can maintain their belief in their academic capabilities (Laurencelle, 2013). Although the heavy workload and high emotional demands of a teaching career might deter people from pursuing this career, it might also serve as an

incentive for individuals who seek to develop expertise in challenging environments (Richardson and Watt, 2006; Watt and Richardson, 2007).

Using the SCCT framework and existing literature, we developed a theoretical model of nurses' interests to become nurse educators (Fig. 1). The theoretical model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) and hypothesizes that (a) cognitive factors (self-efficacy to perform in a nurse educator role and outcome expectations to become a nurse educator) have a direct effect on interest to become nurse educator, and (b) personal factors (past performance in teaching and supervision) and contextual factors (social influence, observing others teaching, and task demand for nurse educators) have indirect effects on interest to become a nurse educator through the mediating effect of cognitive factors.

## 3. Methods

A cross sectional, predictive correlational research design was used to investigate the relationships among personal, contextual and cognitive factors with nurses' interest to become nurse educators.

### 3.1. Sample and Setting

The study sample included nursing students enrolled in a master's of nursing program. Potential participants were excluded if they were already a nurse educator in any university or college. Sample size estimation was based on Schreiber et al.'s (2006) recommendation for a ratio of 10 respondents per parameter estimated. The minimum sample size was based on 23 estimated parameters, for a final sample size of 230. Twenty percent of 230 was added to ensure complete data for analysis; therefore, 276 questionnaires were distributed. This study employed a multi-stage random sampling process to select a representative sample of current graduate nursing students. The students were selected through a two-stage sampling process. Stage one involved a selection of four schools of nursing in Northern, Central, North Eastern and Southern Thailand to serve as representative of the 25 nursing schools providing a master's degree in nursing. The final stage was a systematic random selection of graduate nursing students from each selected nursing school.

### 3.2. Procedure

Following receipt of ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University and the three Universities where data were collected, we sent a questionnaire to 276 potential participants. The questionnaire included a stamped envelope addressed to the principal investigator, and students were asked to

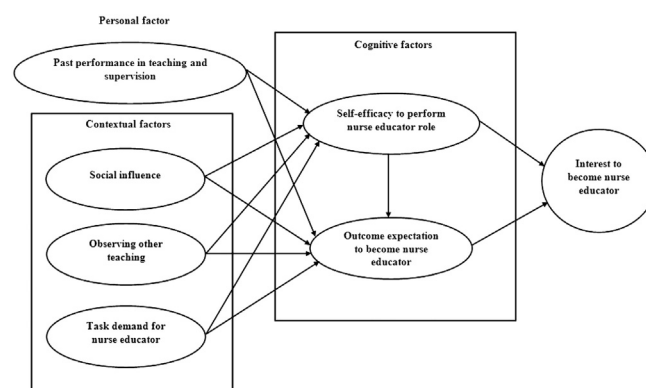


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of nurses' interest to become a nurse educator.

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