

COPING WITH
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY
CRISIS AS INTERNATIONAL
NURSING STUDENTS.

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ABSTRACT

Professional identity refers to one's professional self-concept that is based on attributes, beliefs, values, motive, and experiences. In the nursing field, one begins to build their professional identity during their studies and as well as in the clinical placements. However, at times it is difficult for nursing students to transition from student to a professional as well as find their place, especially whilst living in a foreign country.

The aim of the thesis is to understand international students; how they cope during their studies to overcome the challenges they face as nurses within the working environment in Finland. Additionally, the aim is to bring up ideas as to how the schools can provide support for ongoing students as well as future incoming students. This will not only be a helpful tool for future students but also for LUAS to improve the way foreign students are supported and acquire guidance towards the completion of their studies as they venture into the working world.

The findings from this thesis showed that, many international nursing students begin facing professional identity crisis during their first clinical placement which is overwhelming. These students are not only facing a new working environment but also must deal with a different culture. Many of the students said that language was a limitation that hinders their potential to work but also that they had to deal with other professional workers looking down on them. A mutual feeling was shared in what ways LUAS can help international nursing students in building their professional identity.

In addition to interviewing international nursing students from LUAS, information was also gathered from the internet. Search engines such as google, Masto-finna were used to search for articles, journals and books categorized from the years 2008 – 2018 however, other materials from previous years were accessed as well. In addition to the above mentioned, other engines such as ELSEVIER, EBSCO, CINAHL and Helsinki University were used.

Key words: Professional identity crisis, LUAS (Lahti University of Applied Sciences), international nursing students, clinical placements

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1 INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a profession that can be characterised as a calling that demands not only book knowledge, but skills and preparation. More often than not, these practices/internship mold students into the kind of nurses they want to become in the future. (Booth, 2002) Students from all faculties have a share of experiences which either make or break their profession today. There is a vast necessity for nurses, therefore, nursing schools have grown more and more popular. The world health organization (WHO, 2014) estimates that the shortage of health care professionals will be about 12.9 million by 2035. Due to the ageing of the workforce and rapid growth of population with non-communicable diseases therein, students travel from abroad into different new countries to attain a nursing degree, with all sorts of expectations that may or may not be attained by the time they graduate. Finland as a developed country has earned a good reputation in their educational system, in combination to the vast programmes offered in English making international students, choose Finland as number one place of study. (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018) In this thesis we investigate how international nursing students cope with professional identity crisis. Our thesis was based on the international students from Lahti University of Applied Sciences. Their experiences, opinions and thoughts were an essential part of our thesis. Therefore, personal interviews were conducted although their details will not be enclosed. These interviews aimed to answer three questions: How international nursing students describe their experience about nursing education and what feelings are associated with them therein? What coping mechanisms do students use, and finally, what can be done to overcome professional identity crisis in the nursing field?

2 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS

2.1 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Professional identity also known as career, occupational, or vocational identity refers to “one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motive, and experiences. (Bingmei. et al, 2017). In nursing, “professional identity is the professional self or self-concept of nursing that represents how nurses or nursing students perceive the nursing profession; the values and beliefs that guide how nurses or nurse students think, act and interact with patients.” According to Yu-Fng Hao in the article, Measurement of professional identity in Chinese nursing students (Hao. et al, 2014).

The lack of a professional identity may contribute to why nursing students and nurses leave the program or their vocations. Moreover, professional identity is a constant preoccupation when recognizing a well-defined nursing role. Thus, strategies that help create a well-defined role are essential in forming professional identity. (Bingmei 155, 2017).

Professional identity is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and perform their tasks to accomplish their objectives. Previous successful experiences, mediated learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological and psychological states encompass the foundations for professional identity. Emotions, behaviours and motivation in a profession are determined by one's professional identity. Students or nurses who are sure of their identity in their profession can cope with and overcome the pressures of the job whereas those whose identity cannot deal with pressures which then affects their behaviour and their view on things. (Bingmei 155, 2017). Bingmei then suggests that, for students to be able to discover their identity in their career, it is important that schools improve the level of professional self-efficacy. The first stage consists mainly of basic theoretical learning. In the second phase, the students begin to feel able to question what they learn and to

compare information, norms and values. In the third phase, the students must find a model of their professional role that meets both their personal needs and the demands of their profession. In the fourth and final phase, the students feel comfortable with their professional role, which forms part of their self-concept.

2.1.1 Identity crisis in students

The term identity crisis coined by Erik Erikson translates to failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence. According to Erikson, at times individuals came upon obstacles that may prevent the development of a strong identity leaving them struggling to find themselves. To a certain extent, one can withdraw from their normal life, become inactive in their work or school and unable to make choices about their future. (Schultz, 2009)

Identity crisis within students can be brought upon by numerous factors. According to Julie Scholes author of *Coping with the professional identity crisis: is building resilience the answer?* there are four factors that create a strain in the professional identity of nurses: unrealistic expectations about the realities of the job, lack of appropriate skills and knowledge to do the job, lack of emotional preparation and self-understanding to meet the demands of the job and lack of support to facilitate the adaptive demands to meet all the above. Scholes goes on to say how nursing students are drawn to the profession by unrealistic advertisement and media portrayals that differ from the profession itself. The expectations are not met during clinical placements. Students begin to create their professional values within the placements however, the contradiction between expectations and reality cause a role strain and their failure to establish oneself. (Scholes, 2007)

For many students starting college or university is always overwhelming filled with many different emotions and often there is the fear of the unknown. Nursing school is comprised of both learning and practice as well as having to manage the professional and clinical aspects. Failure to balance the two can lead to under-achievement or dropping out. (Shepherd

43, 2008). Young students who come directly from high school and enter nursing school must transition into the college study life. The dynamics change, and many find it difficult, one is no longer studying to pass their examinations rather there are more academic assignments to be written and moreover, one must also have the ability to put into practice what they have learnt. (Shepherd 44, 2008). Students who go directly to a nursing school after high school are between the ages 17- 20. These students may not possess any strong views on their future job meaning that their professional value could be modelled through education and in addition, practice. (Bingmei 154, 2017).

2.2 LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

2.2.1 COMMUNICATION

Communication has been defined in simple terms as a transfer of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Communication is divided to verbal, nonverbal, written and visual. It is said to be successful once the message passed by the sender is understood by the recipient in the way that it was intended. Communication systems face two different pressures, namely: a pressure of transmission efficiency and a pressure of referential efficiency. Transmission efficiency refers to how well a message is being sent whereas the later refers to the best viable way to express an idea to bring out the meaning. (Roberts... et al, 2015.)

According to Casey and Willas, verbal communication is key to effective interaction and that for optimum care to be achieved by nursing staff, they ought to be able to possess proper communication skills (Casey and Willas, 2011). Verbal communications skills have been mentioned as one of the essential nursing skills that a nursing student has to be competent in so as to complete their education and be regarded as a qualified nurse (Nursing and Midwifery council, 2010.).

2.2.2 International Education Program

Due to globalization, students from various parts of the world have gotten an opportunity to study in Finland. In 2001, the Ministry of Education in Finland came up with a strategy for the internalization of the higher education by setting up a target of having up to 15,000 international students which is equal to 4% of total Higher Education students in Finland. (Graham, 2001.)

In the International Nursing Education program, English language is the language of command. During application, the students were required to have a documentation showing that they were proficient in English language. All the lectures, simulations and skills labs were conducted in English. (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018)

2.2.3 Communication in clinical trainings within Finland

According to Raij, clinical trainings are an opportunity for the nursing students to be in an environment where they can put the knowledge gained in theory in schools into practice (Raij, 2000).

For the clinical trainings in Finland, Finnish or Swedish language is required. After studying in an English language program, during practical trainings, international students often have trouble in communicating with the patients as well as their mentors due to a language barrier. Välipakka states that it is more complicated for foreign nurses to completely express themselves in Finnish language and at times foreign nurses are judged by colleagues or even compared to the locals which makes the situation worse for the foreign nurses and in the end leads to an increase in the stress levels. (Välipakka 2013.).

2.3 Registered Nursing Studies in Finland

In Finland to be a registered nurse one must go to university of applied sciences (polytechnics) in order to acquire a degree (Kajander-Unkuri, 2015). Completion of studies, inhere of 210 ECTS credits, lasts about 3.5 years (Finnish nurses association, 2018). The education curriculum is fully guided by the European Union; EU directive 2005/36/EC, European Commission, 2005, Ministry of Education, 2010 and Ministry of Education, 2011 (Ammattikorkeakoulut, 2018)

Furthermore, nurses carry a huge weight of responsibility, so apart from having theoretical knowledge in their field it's also very essential that they broaden their horizon with relevant sciences such as ability to conduct research, acquire information and management. Primarily they are mediators between patient, family and doctors by promoting the population's health, preventing illnesses, treating and rehabilitating. As a matter of fact, nurses are to make self-governing decisions many times in order to solve a problem (Finnish Nurses Association, 2018)

To graduate as a RN, those 210 ECTS credits consists of 115 credits for theoretical studies, 75 credits of clinical placements, 15 credits for thesis writing and 5 credits for elective studies. One credit entails 27 hours of completed clinical training by the student (Ammattikorkeakoulut, 2018). To be a certified RN in Finland, after graduation, one should apply for a license that enables you to practice nursing professionally (Health care professional Act 559/1994) (Lakanmaa et al., 2014)

At Lahti University of applied sciences, the main objective is looking at things critically using evidence-based methods in alleviation of sickness and monitoring long term illnesses, through rehabilitation of the patients and their family. However, in order to reinforce entrepreneurial skills, simulation is being encouraged and practiced strongly so to enhance clinical assessment (Kirwa, & Gakere, 2016). A simulation room is a place you can practice the diversity of social and health care competences in a safe environment with human patient simulator or patient actors. Simulation

excites and triggers the learner, so education becomes fun and student centered whereby increases student's ability to reflect on the registered nurse's competencies (Lahden ammatikorkeakoulu, 2018).

In addition, a major prerequisite to study nursing is to have basic Finnish language skills (level A2). This has been implemented in most of the universities of applied sciences because although the degree program is in English, the clinical practice requires Finnish in order to communicate with health care professionals and patients. Moreover, as of 2017, a tuition fee was introduced in LAMK for students who are none EU/EEA which is about 7.900 per academic year. Likewise, you will have to apply for residence permit and have a healthcare insurance. (Lahden ammatikorkeakoulu, 2018)

3 PURPOSE, AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY.

The purpose of this thesis is to find out experiences of professional identity crisis among international nursing students in LUAS, to find out how international nursing students experience their school and working environment, the coping mechanisms that they use and also to come up with ways to overcome professional identity crisis.

The thesis aims to understand international students during their studies to overcome the challenges they are facing as nurses within the working environment in Finland. Additionally, the aim is to bring up ideas as to how the schools can provide support for current students as well as future incoming students. We believe that, it will not only be a helpful tool for future students but also for LUAS to better the way foreign students are supported and offer a proper guidance towards the completion of their studies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How international nursing students describe their experience and what feelings are associated with them?
2. What coping mechanisms do students use?
3. What can be done to overcome professional identity crisis?

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 Research methodology, data collection and participants

Methodology is a term that refers to the way in which we approach problems and pursue answers according to Steven, Robert and Marjorie in the book "Introduction to qualitative research methods". The research method used is a qualitative method. Qualitative methodology is a research method that provides illustrative data. When using qualitative methods, researchers are interested in the meanings that people attach to things in their lives. They empathize and identify with the people they study to understand how they think, feel, act and see things. (Taylor 2015, 7).

According to Elizabeth et. al, qualitative research process is iterative whereby findings emerge continuously. This means that the interviewer is always in touch with the research process by observing the participants' responses. The researcher and participants form a partnership to explore different social understandings of reality based on trust and mutual understanding of a common goal. Additionally, the analysis does not depend on the completion of data collection but starts in the field. (Tolley 2016, 4)

The data collected was done via interviews whereby the respondents were international nursing students in LUAS. The interviews were carried out individually and at separate times during the month of March 2018. The interviews were conducted face to face using open-ended questions enabling the interviewee to feel comfortable as well as express themselves freely regarding the subject matters. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes and was recorded by taking notes as well as using audio recording devices.

Recording the interviews by note taking and audio recording were options which gave the interviewers an opportunity to refer to the interviews while analyzing. Whichever technology used, one must make sure that they are familiar with how to use them before interviewing (King 2010, 45). The

devices used in recording were mobile phones which the interviewers were familiar with and could operate. While note taking is not the most preferred method of recording in qualitative research process since it cannot capture expressions and gestures, it is often used in case recordings are not available and if permission to record is not granted (king 2010, 47). During the interviews, note taking was used because not all participants were comfortable with being recorded.

The interviews were conducted face to face so that the interviewer could create a comfortable environment with the interviewee as well as observe the non-verbal cues and communication such as facial expression, gestures and body language. (Burgoon 2016, 305). According to Nigel and Christine the writers of *Interviews in qualitative research*, physical comfort during interviews is as important as psychological comfort. During the interviews, the setting was informal where the interviewee felt comfortable and was also assured of confidentiality.

4.2 Data analysis

To analyze the data, inductive content analysis method was used. The inductive approach begun with collecting data that was relevant to the topic. After the data was collected, the researchers investigated the patterns within the data and developed a theory explaining the patterns. (Blackstone 2012, 41).

Content analysis has been found to be time-consuming as it involves re-reading the information gathered, (Holloway 2002, 235). When analyzing the collected data, the written material was re-read several times. The audio recording was also replayed severally, and the important notes were written down. After listening to the recordings and re-reading the material, valuable information was collected using the systematic text condensation. This enabled relevant information to be grouped out from the large data that was previously collected eliminating unnecessary information, (Kirsti 2012, 799).

The relevant information was then gathered and read through by the researchers then put into groupings of: questions, subcategory and response and gathered into a table.

5 RESULTS

From the three research questions mentioned above, valuable information was gathered and categorized into three different segments: question, response and sub-categories. The aim is to find out what factors affect international nursing students regarding their professional identity.

5.1 How do international nursing students describe their experience and what feelings are associated with them?

The responses from the students were based on their individual experiences on how they felt regarding their studies including their practical trainings. The responses were grouped into three sub-categories: studies, practical training and general feelings.

MAIN QUESTION	SUB-CATEGORY	RESPONSE
As a nursing student, how do you describe your experiences as a nursing student?	Studies	I enjoy studying in LAMK, the level of education is satisfactory. They should offer more intense Finnish courses to prepare the international students for the working environment.
	Practical training	Sometimes the experience is good because some people (nurses) are nice and make me feel welcomed and are patient. Wish there were more chances in practice

		and work places in English.
	General feelings	I usually feel nervous, isolated and shy. I do not talk much in my clinical placements. Disappointed with the whole nursing program because insufficient and inadequate language skills.

Table 1: Experiences of international nursing students

Studies

The majority of the students expressed that they were satisfied with the nursing studies offered in school. However, their only concerns were language inadequacy and lack of enough contact lessons in some courses. Students felt that in the beginning of the studies, the school offered in-depth courses into nursing; what nursing is, basic nursing etc. Nonetheless, some responses offered more insight on how language is affecting international students, example of responses include:

“In the beginning of the nursing program, it would be helpful to have intensive Finnish language courses which will be of benefit especially during the first clinical practice”

“Students should be prepared more for the Finnish work environment by providing more intense Finnish language courses”

Practical training

All interviewed students expressed the importance of practical training. Many said that they were essential because they bring you into the real world of nursing where you learn by doing. As important as they are, practical trainings for international students are where professional identity crisis begins while thrown into a world that is fast moving and most of all in a different language. One factor that all interviewed students mentioned was language.

Communication is important and if a student cannot understand their mentor and vice versa, the student ends up not learning what they should. Additionally, how other nurses behave towards these students goes a long way. Here are some examples of responses of international nursing students' experiences during practical training include;

"Language barrier limits my abilities a lot."

"The practical training can be in a very interesting place but because of the language, I end up not learning as much as I would like to and not doing what I should."

"Some supervisors tend to leave you alone if you do not speak Finnish."

General feelings

How a person feels can determine a lot of what they do. In terms of feelings, the students had a lot to say. The students were able to express themselves freely on how they feel about their studies as well as clinical placements. In terms of studies as mentioned before, the students felt satisfied, some even went to say that, *"there was a fun class atmosphere"* and, *"the teachers were informative and available."*

However, there were more negative feelings when the students talked about practical trainings. Some students felt unmotivated and others felt that they were not competent enough.

“It feels like there is no motivation because of the struggle with practical trainings and Finnish language”

“Often I feel stupid and inexperienced”

“Though I will be graduating soon, I feel that I’m not good enough.”

5.2 Coping Mechanisms used by the international nursing students.

The students' responses when asked about how they cope with the professional identity crisis were also divided into three sub-categories. (See table 2 below.).

QUESTION	SUB-CATEGORIES	RESPONSE
What coping mechanisms do you use?	Language	Take extra Finnish courses outside of school. Spend more time studying language.
	General feelings	Sometimes try and suppress my emotions. Talking to my supervising teacher. Talking to peers or other international

		nurses in the work environment.
	Studies	Go back to what we have studied in school and often do more research on my own since not all the info is given during classes.

Table 2: Coping mechanisms for international nursing students

Language

One of the ways in which the students try to cope with the problem of inadequate Finnish language skills is by taking extra Finnish language courses outside the school. As much as this is costly in terms of time and money, ultimately it pays off. Due to added expenses some students would prefer to take their time to study on their own or even online. Some of the responses are listed below;

"Even though we have nursing Finnish courses in school, they are not inclusive of the nursing terminology and I have to study these terminologies before and during my practical training."

"I download study material from the internet and borrow books from the library so as to at least I manage basic communication in the practical environment."

" ... I have had to enrol for a Finnish language course and it costs quite a lot for just two hours a week..."

General Feelings

Our respondents also talked about how they cope with the negative general feelings that they experience. Some of them stated that they try and suppress them to get to the end of the practical training.

" I try and suppress my feelings because I feel like I am alone, and I cannot share with anyone inside the work environment. I am always perceived as shy although am not in real life."

However, some students resolve to talk to their supervising teachers who often encourage them through the process. During these tough times finding someone who will understand your struggle often eases the burden. Hence some students stated that they always found themselves talking to their fellow students in the practice place and other international nurses present as well.

"I try to make friends with other international students who are probably feeling the same way that I am."

"I actually resolve to having conversations with other international nurses in the work place. This makes it easier to cope because most of them are willing to explain something that you did not understand in English."

Studies

As mentioned above, one of the issues that the international nursing students face is the lack of adequate knowledge about a certain topic. The respondents said that some of the courses that they should have been taught in school were merely brushed off. Due to this, students often feel inadequate in their clinical skills and ended up going back to study online to cope with this inadequacy.

“... whatever I do not know, I usually go back to the study materials to understand more.”

“sometimes you are given a task and you realise that you cannot perform, so you end up asking for reading materials in the practical place.”

5.3 What can be done to overcome professional identity crisis?

In addition to finding out which factors affect students' professional identity, we also studied what students do to overcome professional identity crisis. For many of issues, students had a way of dealing with them. Many of them believed that, although times would come when you feel like it is not possible to move forward, there was a way to persevere. Nonetheless, they also had ideas on what the school can do to help future and current international nursing students to avert/overcome this crisis.

QUESTION	SUB-CATEGORIES	RESPONSE
What can be done to overcome professional identity crisis?	Language	Introduce compulsory Language intensive courses before the actual nursing school begins. Nursing terminology to be taught intensively in school.
	Support	Integration between International and Finnish students. Get more support from teachers.

	Studies	<p>More skill labs and more contact lessons.</p> <p>Some online courses were hard to study on our own, if these courses could be turned into contact lessons.</p>
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Table 3: Overcoming professional identity crisis

Language

All the students interviewed seemed to share the same opinions when it comes to language. Many students shared the opinion of the importance of language seeing that the school is in a different country using a different language than that the one they study in. Responses included;

“Having intensive nursing courses in the beginning of the studies would be very beneficial”

“In addition to Finnish course, nursing terminology should also be intensive since the working environment is different and although I can speak basic Finnish, I lack enough knowledge in the field in terms of language.”

Support and studies

Support from the school/teachers turned out to be another factor that students felt is necessary in forming one’s professional identity. Some students had bad experiences from the school/teachers whereas others praised them. Additionally, many felt that integration between international nursing students and Finnish nursing students should be encouraged.

“The school should create forums for international nursing students as well as Finnish nursing students to share about their experiences.”

“Teachers should provide more support for students especially when it comes to practical trainings so that they do not result to too many cancellations.”

Additionally, students felt that the school can also provide more support which can help students in terms of courses. Students felt that the school can, *“Include more skill labs.”* additionally, some students responded by saying that, *“some courses which were major topics were online and were hard to study and understand by ourselves therefore, they should be turned into contact lessons.”*

6 DISCUSSIONS

The thesis focuses on coping with professional identity crisis among international nursing students aiming to understand what causes professional identity crisis for these students and how they are coping with the situation. Professionalism is identified as a competency of education. Professionalism can be divided into three categories professional parameters which include ethical as well as legal issues, professional behaviors entailing knowledge and skills, appropriate relationship with the clients and colleagues, and acceptable appearance and attitude and professional responsibilities which includes responsibilities to the profession and to oneself, clients, employers, and community. Therefore, nurses as well as students must develop a wide range of characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors as well as a lifelong commitment to professionalism, (Bharat & Kiran 23, 2015).

According to Nabolisi et al, an optimal clinical learning environment is when teachers realise their responsibility causes enthusiasm and motivation to students to fill the space of questions. Most students describe their experience as students as good and enjoyable but also feel inadequate during clinical placements and encountered challenges in dealing with clinical learning environment and in interaction with instructors, patients, and department head personnel. Many stated that they had the most communication with the instructors and believed that the way an instructor treated a student affected their knowledge of clinical learning environment. (Jamshidi et al, 2016)

Some students also mentioned that they felt anxious and isolated. These same issues as well as feelings of not being accepted and loneliness according to Spry (2009), influence how international nurses adjust in their work environment.

Some students expressed that at times they felt not fully capable to work as nurses since there were many things they did not know, and they had to go and do research and learn by themselves thus, the school hadn't given

enough information on those matters. One of the aforementioned reasons why nursing students face professional identity crisis is the unrealistic expectations about their profession and what it entails. (Scholes, 2007). Not meeting ones' expectations in the work environment can also lead to leaving the profession during studies or after graduation. A study done by Hanna Salminen author of *Turning the tide: Registered nurses' job withdrawal intentions in a Finnish university hospital*, found out that in Europe every tenth (10%) of nurses had intention of leaving the profession. Moreover, in Finland, nearly half of young registered nurses under the age of 35 years and working in hospitals have frequently reported intentions to leave the profession.

Young nurses' transition from student to registered nurse can be stressful and demanding. (Flinkman, 2013). During nursing school, students are covered by the fact that they are students and are there to learn however, when in the real world working as a nurse whether for the summer or after graduation the rules change and one's expectation start to differ. In addition to unrealistic expectations, imbalance of effort and reward, high psychological demands, and higher job strain influence students' professional identity. Often when students start school they have certain expectations, in some cases these expectations are reached and in other cases, they are not. A study done by Mervi Flinkman et. al. *Young Registered Nurses' Intention to Leave the Profession and Professional Turnover in Early Career: A Qualitative Case Study*, showed that poor practicing environment can be a factor affecting nursing students' experiences and can change how they view the profession. Ion R. et. al. author of *Factors influencing student nurse decisions to report poor practice witnessed while on placement*, in his findings, found that one of the factors that influence poor practice reports is not having a choice but endure what was happening. Not everything is taught in schools and one finds themselves confused or lost. In other circumstances, one must deal with co-workers that are negative toward them although they are students there to learn. According to Cheseer-Smyth's study, acquiring knowledge leads to an increase of confidence levels that reduces anxiety. She goes on to add that

it increases the learning process that depends on the support facilitated in the clinical learning environment. (Cheseer-Smyth, 2005).

Communication has shown to be one of the reasons to cause professional identity crisis within this thesis. Verbal communication requires the use of actual words and this is the part where language comes in (Sarah and Aboyomi, 2010.). Language is a means of communication that leads to relations with other people socially, religiously, politically and economically. Language is often key to a person's self-identity. Speaking a common language with the people around you often leads to having a feeling of belonging whereas being around people who speak a language that we do not understand leads to a feeling of discrimination. (Julie & Deborah, 2010) Language is very important when giving information to patients and when documenting down patients' information. According to Lloyd and Craig, it is very easy to be a victim of a medical error especially when explaining a concept that is relatively new to the patients. The probability of a misunderstanding goes up when either party do not have a common language as their first language and even more when neither speaks the language of communication fluently. The writers emphasized that even when English is spoken fluently, accents, dialects, euphemisms, colloquialisms and acronyms can prevent the understanding of the point to an extent where the patient may be disappointed, alienated or their healthcare compromised. (Lloyd and Craig, 2007.)

All the interviewees in one way or another, talked about language and how it is affecting them. According to Spry (2009) issues such as language, can make integrating difficult for international nurses. Seeing that they are in a new environment, new culture as well as working environment where they are expected to appreciate new cultures and learn to speak a foreign language. The majority of the interviewed students enrolled themselves into extra Finnish language courses that were not offered by the school. However, others chose to take time studying by themselves due to incurred costs of the extra courses. Due to the high cost of extra language courses outside school as well as difficulty in communication during work

placements, the respondents felt like introducing intensive language courses at the beginning of studies would help to eliminate the issue of language barrier.

7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CREDIBILITY

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that addresses the issues of morality. Morality has been defined as standards that are used to explain the concept of good and bad or right and wrong. (Jennings, 2003). Ethics in research are very important in nursing education during research and development of evidence. Due to this, it is necessary for the researchers to understand and put into practice the research ethics when carrying out the research. (Doody & Noonan, 2016).

One of the ethical issues we considered when conducting our research was informed consent. According to Armiger, this means that a person knowingly and voluntarily gives his consent (Georgia, 2018). During our interview, the respondents had the right to choose whether to participate or not and even so, they still had the right to decide whether to answer an interview question or not. The whole interview was entirely out of free will.

The issue of anonymity and confidentiality has been well practiced in our research. Anonymity is said to be protected when there is no direct connection between the respondent and his responses, whereas confidentiality is whereby the respondent's identity or private information is not disclosed (Georgia, 2018) In our work, we have ensured that the responses are anonymous, and all the confidential information is kept confidential.

In Finland, there are guidelines set aside that should be followed during research in order to avoid fabrication, falsification, plagiarism and misappropriation. When conducting a study, the earlier writers must be acknowledged. This is done by rightfully citing the references, quotations and any paraphrases used in the work. Scientific practices like honesty, accuracy and integrity must be adhered to at all times. (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2017.) In our writing, we have ensured that any information that does not originate from us has been accurately referenced throughout the thesis paper.

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincon & Guba 1985) In our selection of participants, our research questions were met. However, interviews were held separately which means that we had one participant at each time to ensure that they felt comfortable to share their own experiences without the influence of others. Another important ethical principal that has been applied is autonomy. Autonomy is defined as an individual free will towards an action or own plan (Sensen, 2013). All participants were respected during interviews and they were well briefed about the topic at hand. The personal opinions of the researcher were not added allowing the participants to share what they wanted. In addition, the main communication language was English since they are all international students ensuring full understanding of the question.

According to Lincon & Guba, findings must have applicability and dependability meaning that the findings are consistent and can be repeated, confirmed thus no biasness. In this thesis study, the participants' background as well as age were not considered which means that our data and findings are broad and are not only applicable in LUAS but also in other Universities of applied sciences throughout Finland. Our findings are related to the experience of the international nursing students in the Finnish education and work environment.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the study shows that many international students face difficulties when it comes to integrating into the profession as a nurse. Initially the students were content with their studies. However, many started facing difficulties when they began their clinical practices. It is clear to see that professional identity crisis is an issue that should not be overlooked but rather addressed in order to ensure that even when these nursing students graduate they are able to fit in the nursing environment. As much as there were other factors causing professional identity crisis, language barrier was the most significant factor since students had to go out of their own way in order to meet up with the demands of the profession.

As earlier mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to understand the challenges faced by international nursing students as well as come up with ideas on how they can cope with them. To deal with this issue, the school should take into considerations some of the matters mentioned to ensure that students get in to the nursing profession prepared and ready. Thus, not taking extra time on other ventures in order to deal with their studies.

The mental well-being of the students is essential especially in the nursing profession. Isolation shouldn't be part of a feeling associated with nursing since it is a field that needs cooperation with others for it to fully function. In recommendation, open discussions should be held for all nursing students not only international, so that they could open up and talk about issues affecting them in their studies together as well as encourage each other.

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