Navigating Academic Challenges: The Lived Experiences of Nursing Students in a Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Academic and clinical demands in nursing education may affect students' academic performance and well-being. This study explored the lived experiences of nursing students facing academic difficulties at a private higher education institution in Cebu, Philippines. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, involving eight purposively selected second-, third-, and fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing students who had experienced at least one academic failure in a nursing-related course during the immediately preceding semester. Data were collected through key informant interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase inductive thematic analysis. Five major themes emerged, represented by the acronym N-U-R-S-E: Navigating the Storm, Uncovering the Roots, Reaching the Breaking Point, Strategic Survival, and Emerging Stronger. The findings revealed that students struggled with heavy academic workloads, clinical responsibilities, stress, anxiety, burnout, and self-doubt. These challenges were influenced by academic demands and external pressures, affecting students' emotional well-being and academic experiences. Despite these difficulties, participants employed coping strategies such as time management, seeking social support, and maintaining positive perspectives. These strategies helped them develop resilience, self-awareness, and personal growth. The study highlights the importance of accessible academic support, faculty guidance, and student-centered interventions to help nursing students manage academic challenges, maintain well-being, and achieve academic success.

Keywords: Academic Difficulties, Nursing Students, Lived Experiences, Academic Stress, Resilience, Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Academic difficulties are common among nursing students due to the demanding nature of their curriculum, which requires mastery of complex theoretical concepts, technical skills, and clinical responsibilities. These academic demands may contribute to stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and fear of failure. Differences in learning abilities, study habits, time management, and access to academic resources may further affect students' ability to meet educational requirements and maintain satisfactory academic performance.

International studies indicate that academic stress and burnout are prevalent among nursing students. A global meta-analysis found that approximately 35% of nursing students experience academic burnout, with the highest prevalence reported in Asian countries at 58% (Hernández-Mariano et al., 2024). Similarly, Prakash et al. (2023) reported that more than 60% of undergraduate nursing students experienced emotional exhaustion. In the

Philippines, Villan (2025) identified high levels of academic stress and burnout among 719 nursing students, with inadequate study facilities, fear of failure, and feelings of personal inadequacy identified as contributing factors.

Despite existing research on academic stress, burnout, and student performance, much of the literature relies on quantitative measurements that may not fully capture students' personal experiences and struggles. Understanding academic difficulties requires exploring not only their causes but also how students experience, interpret, and manage these challenges. This study therefore adopts an inductive phenomenological approach, using semi-structured interviews to identify recurring themes and meanings from participants lived experiences.

The study aims to explore the academic difficulties experienced by nursing students, particularly the factors contributing to their struggles, their coping strategies, and the academic and personal circumstances affecting their studies. It recognizes that academic difficulties extend beyond low grades and may involve emotional exhaustion, ineffective study habits, limited learning resources, and personal or financial challenges. The findings may help educational institutions improve student support services, develop responsive academic interventions, and strengthen educational policies. Furthermore, the study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive and effective learning environments and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by recognizing the importance of students' mental and emotional health.

This study is significant to nursing education and the healthcare sector because addressing students' academic difficulties may improve their well-being, academic progression, and professional preparation. By giving importance to students lived experiences, the research provides a deeper understanding of academic struggles beyond numerical findings. The researchers' familiarity with nursing education and qualitative research methods also supports the conduct of this phenomenological inquiry, with reflexivity maintained to minimize personal biases and ensure meaningful interpretation of participants' accounts.

Statement of the Problem/Research Questions

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of nursing students who encountered academic failure during the preceding semester. It sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how students experienced, perceived, and made sense of their academic struggles within the nursing program. Through their personal narratives, the study intended to uncover the meanings they attached to these experiences, including the challenges they encountered, how they navigated their circumstances, and how these experiences influenced their perspectives and personal development.

This study specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do nursing students describe their lived experiences of academic failure and academic struggles within the nursing program?

2. What personal, academic, clinical, and environmental circumstances do nursing students identify in relation to their experiences?

3. How do nursing students navigate, respond to, and make sense of the academic challenges they encounter?

4. What meanings and realizations do nursing students attribute to these experiences in relation to their academic journey and personal development?

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Research Flow

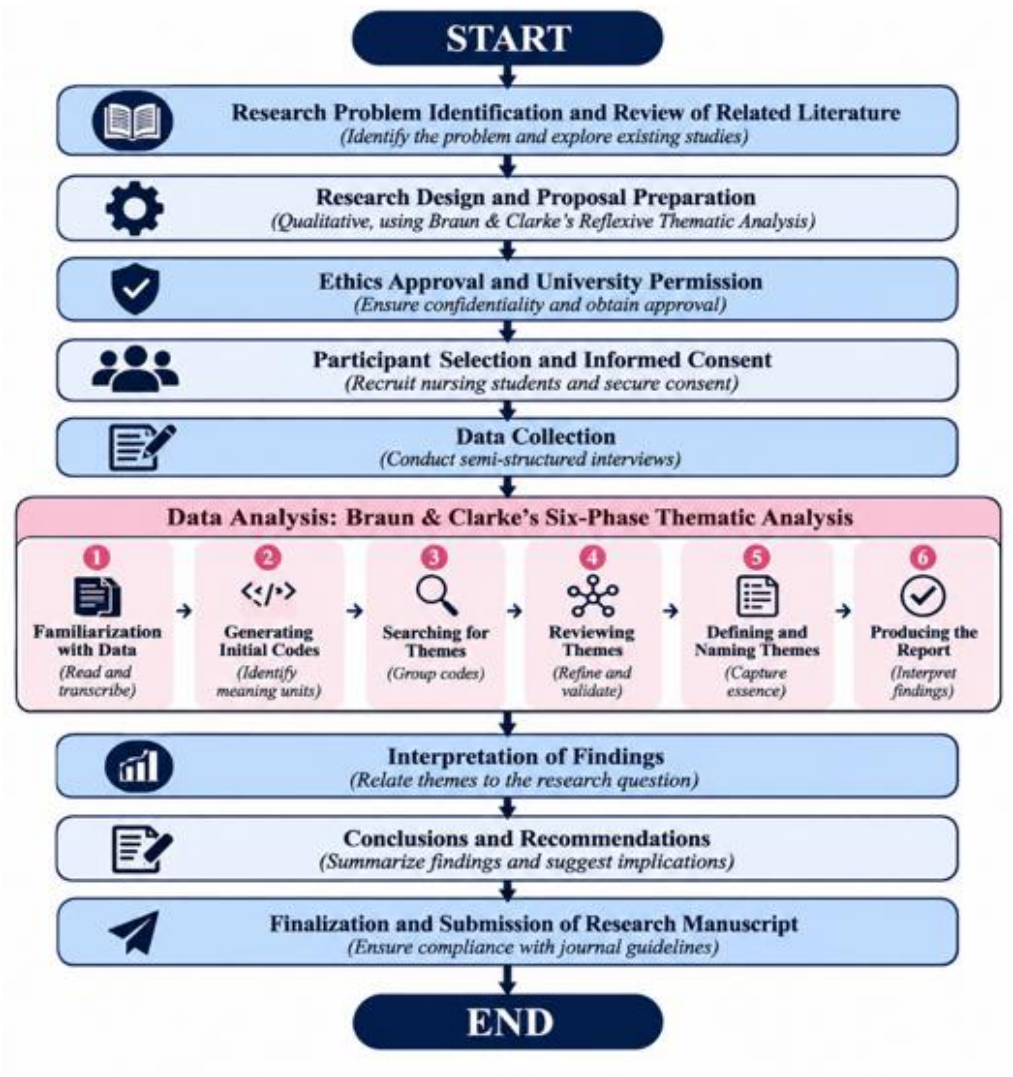


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram

The research flow illustrates the systematic research process of the study, which employs Husserlian Descriptive Phenomenology to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants. The process begins with identifying the research problem and reviewing related literature, followed by the preparation of the research design and proposal. Ethical approval and university permission are then secured before selecting participants and obtaining their informed consent. Subsequently, the researchers prepare and validate the interview guide and practice Epoché (Bracketing) to set aside personal biases and preconceived assumptions. Data are gathered through in-depth interviews supported by audio recordings and field notes, followed by verbatim transcription and data verification. The collected data are analyzed through phenomenological procedures involving the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and development of themes. To ensure research rigor, trustworthiness is established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The emerging themes are then interpreted using Madeleine Leininger's Theory as the theoretical lens, providing a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences within their cultural and social contexts. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are formulated based on the findings, leading to the finalization and submission of the research manuscript. Overall, the diagram presents an organized and rigorous process that ensures the credibility, ethical integrity, and systematic completion of the study.

Significance of the Study

This study provides an understanding of the lived experiences of nursing students who encountered academic failure and related academic challenges. By examining their personal accounts, the study offers insights into the

circumstances they associated with their struggles, the effects they experienced, and the ways they responded to these challenges. The findings may help inform academic support, student guidance, and future research within nursing education. The significance of the study extends to the various stakeholders:

For Student Nurses. This study will help student nurses better understand that academic struggles are common experiences among nursing students. By learning from the lived experiences of their peers, students may gain encouragement, motivation, and practical coping strategies that can help them manage stress, improve resilience, and maintain academic persistence. The study may also promote self-awareness, confidence, and emotional support among students facing similar challenges.

For Nursing Educators and Institutions. The findings of this study will provide nursing educators and academic institutions with a deeper understanding of the academic difficulties encountered by nursing students. This understanding can guide educators in developing more responsive teaching strategies, supportive learning environments, counseling services, and academic interventions that address students' needs. In addition, the study may help institutions strengthen programs that promote student well-being, retention, and academic success.

For Healthcare Providers. This study will benefit healthcare providers by increasing awareness of how the educational experiences of nursing students influence their future professional practice. Understanding the pressures and challenges faced by student nurses may encourage healthcare professionals to provide better mentorship, guidance, and support during clinical exposure. Ultimately, this may contribute to the development of competent, compassionate, and resilient future nurses who can deliver quality patient care and work effectively within healthcare teams.

For Policymakers and Nursing Organizations. The study will provide evidence-based information that can assist policymakers and nursing organizations in creating programs, policies, and initiatives that support nursing students academically and emotionally. The findings may also contribute to improving the quality of nursing education, strengthening student support systems, and ensuring the development of a competent nursing workforce capable of meeting healthcare demands.

For Future Research. The findings of this study will serve as a valuable reference for future researchers who wish to explore related topics concerning nursing students' academic experiences, coping mechanisms, mental well-being, and educational outcomes. This study may also encourage further qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research that can contribute to the continuous improvement of nursing education and student development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presented the research methodology, including the research design, setting, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and ethical considerations. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to explore nursing students' lived experiences of academic challenges, identified common themes, and understand their perceptions, coping strategies, and personal development.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design guided by Husserlian phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of nursing students who had experienced academic failure. This approach enabled the researchers to understand how participants described, interpreted, and made sense of their academic challenges within the nursing program. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews focusing on their experiences, challenges, coping responses, and the meanings they attributed to academic failure. The collected narratives were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase inductive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and develop themes grounded in the participants' accounts. Throughout the research process, the researchers practiced reflexivity and bracketing to recognize and minimize personal biases, ensuring that the participants' experiences remained central to the analysis.

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Research Environment

The study was conducted at a private higher education institution in Cebu City offering a nursing program characterized by rigorous academic coursework, clinical duties, examinations, and high-performance expectations. This setting was relevant to the study because the academic and clinical demands of nursing education shaped students' experiences of academic challenges, stress, coping, and resilience. Furthermore, interactions with peers, faculty members, and clinical instructors influenced students' motivation, emotional well-being, and access to support while facing academic difficulties. Data gathering was conducted in designated quiet rooms or private campus areas to ensure participants' comfort, privacy, and confidentiality during the in-depth phenomenological interviews.

Research Participants

The participants consisted of purposively selected students officially enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at a private higher education institution in Cebu. They were selected based on their direct experiences with academic challenges within the nursing program. Specifically, the inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled BSN students who had experienced at least one academic failure in a nursing-related course during the immediately preceding semester and were willing to participate voluntarily through informed consent. Students who had not experienced academic failure, declined face-to-face interviews, or were unwilling to participate in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were excluded. Data were gathered through individual KIIs with second-, third-, and fourth-year nursing students to obtain in-depth accounts of their academic and clinical experiences at different stages of their nursing education.

Research Instrument

In this phenomenological study, the researchers served as the primary instruments in data collection and interpretation. They conducted the interviews, established rapport, actively listened to participants' narratives, and explored their responses to understand their lived experiences of academic struggles. A semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions aligned with the study's objectives and research questions was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions and probing. This approach enabled participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and experiences. The interview guide was evaluated by qualified experts for clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the study's objectives. Revisions were made based on their recommendations to ensure that the questions effectively captured the participants' lived experiences.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers obtained formal permission from Mrs. Merlyn A. Ouano, Dean of the College of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, at the University of Southern Philippines Foundation, before conducting the study. Upon approval, participants were purposively selected based on the established inclusion criteria. Data were gathered through individual, in-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and audio-recorded with their informed consent. The researchers transcribed and analyzed the interview data using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meaningful insights. Throughout the process, ethical principles were observed to protect participants' privacy, confidentiality, and well-being. The findings aimed to provide a deeper understanding of nursing students' lived experiences of academic failure and serve as a basis for relevant recommendations and support interventions.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the researchers ensured the confidentiality and protection of participants' identities and personal information. Their privacy, dignity, and physical and psychological well-being were prioritized throughout the study. Potential risks, including emotional discomfort, embarrassment, or anxiety when recalling experiences of academic failure, were minimized by allowing participants to skip questions, request a pause, or withdraw without penalty. Although no direct benefits

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were guaranteed, participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences and contribute to a better understanding of academic challenges, which may help inform future academic support programs and interventions.

Before data collection, the researchers explained the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participants' rights through an informed consent form. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before conducting the interviews. Participants also authorized the collection of relevant information, while the researchers ensured that only necessary data were gathered and accessed by authorized individuals. Confidentiality was maintained through participant codes, secure storage of records, restricted access, and proper disposal of identifying information in accordance with institutional data retention policies.

The researchers also acknowledged the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI tools as supplementary resources for grammar checking, language refinement, and manuscript organization. All AI-generated suggestions were reviewed and verified by the researchers, who retained full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and integrity of the study. No identifiable participant information, interview transcripts, or confidential research materials were uploaded to publicly accessible AI platforms.

After the interviews, debriefing was conducted to address participants' questions, clarify the study's purpose, and minimize possible emotional discomfort. Appropriate referrals to relevant support services were considered when necessary. No monetary compensation was provided, although any token of appreciation was not intended to influence participation. The researchers declared no external funding or conflicts of interest, with all research expenses personally shouldered as part of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing requirements. Recruitment was conducted without coercion, intimidation, or undue influence, and participants retained the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without penalty. The researchers also assessed possible participant vulnerabilities and implemented appropriate safeguards. The study was conducted solely by the researchers as an academic requirement, and any publication or presentation required proper acknowledgment and authorship recognition based on actual contributions, including that of the thesis adviser when applicable.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This approach enabled the researchers to identify and interpret recurring patterns and meaningful insights from the participants' narratives. The analysis began with the verbatim transcription of audio-recorded interviews, followed by repeated reading to gain familiarity with the data. Significant statements related to academic struggles were identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were grouped into subthemes and broader themes, which were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure consistency, relevance, and alignment with the participants' experiences. The resulting themes, organized using the N-U-R-S-E acronym, provided an in-depth understanding of the academic challenges, coping experiences, and personal growth of nursing students. These findings served as a basis for identifying potential academic support and student wellness initiatives within the nursing program.

Participants' Profile

The study involved eight purposively selected nursing students, aged 20 to 25, who were officially enrolled in a private institution in Cebu City, and had experienced at least one academic failure in a nursing-related course. The participants consisted of second-, third-, and fourth-year students, providing varied perspectives on academic struggles across different stages of nursing education.

Extracting Meaningful Data and Generating Initial Codes

The researchers carefully read and reread the eight verbatim interview transcripts to understand the participants lived experiences. Significant statements and meaningful responses related to academic challenges were identified and retained in their original wording. These statements were assigned concise initial codes that

captured essential ideas emerging directly from the data. An inductive approach was followed to ensure that the codes reflected the participants' actual experiences rather than predetermined concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Saldaña, 2021).

Developing, Reviewing, and Refining Themes

The initial codes were compared and grouped according to similarities and shared meanings to develop subthemes and broader themes. These themes were organized using the N-U-R-S-E acronym to represent the participants' experiences of academic challenges, pressures, coping, and personal growth. The researchers reviewed and refined the themes against the original transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' narratives, maintained clear distinctions between themes and subthemes, and addressed the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). This process strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2020).

Results And Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion based on interviews with eight second-, third-, and fourth-year nursing students who experienced at least one academic failure in a nursing course during the preceding semester. Through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), the researchers explored their academic and clinical challenges, lived experiences, emotions, and coping strategies. The responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's inductive thematic analysis.

The analysis revealed five major themes describing the lived experiences of nursing students in navigating academic and clinical challenges: (1) Navigating the Storm, (2) Uncovering the Roots, (3) Reaching the Breaking Point, (4) Strategic Survival, and (5) Emerging Stronger. These themes illustrate the challenges students encounter, the factors contributing to their academic struggles, the emotional and psychological consequences of academic difficulties, and the coping strategies they develop to overcome adversity. Collectively, the findings demonstrate a progression from experiencing academic difficulties to developing resilience, self-improvement, and personal growth.

Theme 1: Navigating the Storm: Taking on the Demands and Challenges of Academic and Clinical Life

Participants described heavy coursework, overlapping requirements, frequent assessments, difficulty processing large amounts of information, and the pressure of applying classroom learning in clinical settings. The demands were experienced as cumulative, leaving some students exhausted and with limited time to study.

"Maoverwhelm gani ko pirmi sa gidaghanon sa requirements Naay mga times nga magdungan ang mga subjects maong maglisod kog focus."(Participant 4, third-year student)

English translation: I often felt overwhelmed by the number of requirements. There were times when several subjects had requirements at the same time, making it difficult to focus.

"Ang mga schoolworks gud nako magtapok every day, ug naa pay mga quizzes nga sunod-sunod, nga naka-pressure gyud nako hangtod sa mas pillion na lang nakong matulog ig-abot sa balay kaysa magtuon."(Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: My schoolwork piles up every day, and quizzes come one after another. The pressure becomes so great that when I get home, I sometimes choose to sleep rather than study.

"Lisod kaau siya since first time nako being exposed sa clinical duties unya I also had to balance my academic ug clinical demands." (Participant 3, third-year student)

English translation: It was very difficult because it was my first exposure to clinical duties, and I also had to balance academic and clinical demands.

"Honestly kay lisod siya especially during new exposure to other areas. Magdepende pud sa CI, maglisod ko ug tuon or balance sa akong acads ug duties especially if daghan kaayo ug requirements nga need i-accomplish within the day. Tungod ana kay wala na kaayo koy time para magtuon." (Participant 8, fourth-year student)

English translation: Honestly, it was difficult, especially when I was newly exposed to other clinical areas. Depending on the clinical instructor, I found it hard to study or balance academics and duties, particularly when many requirements had to be completed in one day. Because of this, I had very little time left to study.

"Challenging circumstances nako is combining RLE works and the lecture activities. Naay times na that I don't have time to study because of the assignments from the duty." (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: My challenging circumstances involve combining Related Learning Experience (RLE) work with lecture activities. At times, I do not have enough time to study because of assignments from clinical duty.

These accounts show that academic workload and clinical exposure were not experienced as separate responsibilities. Students described trying to meet both sets of expectations while retaining and applying complex nursing knowledge. The difficulty of balancing these demands contributed to fatigue, reduced study time, and pressure.

Theme 2: Uncovering the Roots: Unveiling the Underlying Circumstances of Students' Struggles

Participants linked their academic struggles to procrastination, inconsistent study habits, distractions, self-doubt, emotional difficulties, limited social connection, and expectations from family members or themselves. These factors did not operate independently; participants described how personal habits and external expectations interacted with the demands of nursing education.

"Procrastinator ko na pagkatao, which means I am a lazy person. So, like, lisod i-control ang pagkaprocrastinator since I let myself doing nothing kaysa buhaton ang mga homeworks, projects, and stuff. Dili pud ko time management type of person." (Participant 1, second-year student)

English translation: I am a procrastinator, and it is difficult to control because I sometimes do nothing instead of completing homework and projects. I am also not good at time management.

"Na-feel ko ug anxiety, overthinking, and nervousness." (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: I experienced anxiety, overthinking, and nervousness.

"Akong ate ang nag-support nako financially, nurse sad siya. Ganahan ko na ma-proud siya also maka-pressure sad since kasagaran sa among family members and mga cousin nako kay nurse." (Participant 4, third-year student)

English translation: My older sister supports me financially, and she is also a nurse. I want to make her proud, but it also creates pressure because many members of our family and cousins are nurses.

"Napugos ra pud ko mokuha ug nursing nga course kay mao ang gusto sa akong mga parents. I think mao na ang rason nganong dili kaayo ko moexcert ug effort." (Participant 8, fourth-year student)

English translation: I felt pressured to take nursing because it was what my parents wanted. I think this contributed to my difficulty in putting much effort into the program.

"Procrastination ug time management gyud ang problema. Mag procrastinate ko unya late nako mag study." (Participant 3, third-year student)

English translation: Procrastination and time management were really the problems. I would put things off and begin studying late.

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The accounts indicate that academic difficulty was shaped by a combination of behavioral, emotional, and relational circumstances. Family expectations could serve as motivation while also creating pressure, particularly when students felt responsible for meeting the expectations of relatives.

Theme 3: Reaching the Breaking Point: Experiencing Emotional, Psychological, and Academic Strain

Participants described how accumulated academic pressure and failure affected their confidence, motivation, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging. Some questioned their ability to become nurses, compared themselves with classmates, or experienced anxiety and discouragement. Others described exhaustion and thoughts of giving up.

“Igo gyud kaayo to sa akong confidence. Nagsugod ko’g ka-insecure ug sige ko’g compare sa akong kaugalingon sa uban nga mas maayo ang performance kaysa nako. Mao tong nagduda pud ko sa akong kaugalingon kung kaya ba gyud nako mahimong nurse.” (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: It affected my confidence greatly. I became insecure and kept comparing myself with classmates who performed better. I began doubting whether I was capable of becoming a nurse.

“Lack of motivation, discouragement, and anxiety. Also I’m always anxious na basin mahitabo na sad ug balik na mahagbong nasad ko.” (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: I experienced a lack of motivation, discouragement, and anxiety. I was always worried that I might fail again.

“Na distant ko ko ato nga time, maulaw ko, dili na kaayo ko motagad sa akong mga friends.” (Participant 8, fourth-year student)

English translation: During that time, I became distant, felt embarrassed, and did not interact much with my friends.

“Nakaapekto gyud siya nako pag-ayo. Like sa academics, ang pagkahagbong sa usa ka major subject maoy nakapaguol nako, kay first time pa gyud to nahitabo unya didto nako nakita akong kalisud sa laing point of view. Sa emotional nga aspect, naulaw ug nadiscourage ko, samot na nga nakita nako akong mga classmate nagpadayon samtang ako nabilin.” (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: It affected me greatly. Failing a major subject was upsetting, especially because it was my first experience of failure. Emotionally, I felt embarrassed and discouraged when I saw my classmates moving forward while I was left behind.

These accounts illustrate that academic failure was not merely a performance outcome. It could affect students’ confidence, relationships, motivation, and emotional well-being. The findings support the need to recognize academic and psychosocial concerns together rather than treating academic difficulty only as a grading issue.

Theme 4: Strategic Survival: Rising to the Challenge

Despite the difficulties, participants described taking steps to regain control of their academic responsibilities. Strategies included planning tasks earlier, changing study habits, using time-management techniques, seeking help from family and peers, accepting their circumstances, and continuing despite setbacks.

“Na-realize nako na that I need to advance study ug mag-try ug implement na effective na study technique pareha anang— for example— Pomodoro for time management.” (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: I realized that I need to study in advance and try effective study techniques, such as the Pomodoro technique for time management.

"Ang gasuporta nako is akong pamilya ug mga miga. Ila kong gi-sige'g encourage bisag feel nako nga I wasn't good enough. Mga classmates pud nako kay nitabang ug review nako and prepare para sa mga quizzes ug exams." (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: My family and close friends supported and encouraged me even when I felt I was not good enough. My classmates also helped me review and prepare for quizzes and examinations.

"Mag review nakog sayo, maghimog notes, ug mag tan-aw ug mga videos para dali ra masabtan ang mga topics." (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: I started reviewing earlier, making notes, and watching videos to understand the topics more easily.

"Akoang strategy 'ron kay dapat i-anad nako ang akoang utok na mag-focus or work na dapat angay unahon na buhatonon. Pareha anang do the things that I need to do first, kaysa magduwa. So, for example, Tuesday is the deadline, so by Saturday or Sunday, dapat buhaton ni nako para malikayan nako ang deadline ug dapat on time ko para makapasar." (Participant 1, second-year student)

English translation: My strategy is to train myself to focus on the tasks that need to be done first instead of playing. If a task is due on Tuesday, I try to complete it by Saturday or Sunday so I can avoid rushing and submit it on time.

"Ang akong gibuhat ato kay akong gi-change akong strategies sa pagka-student kay murag sakto raman nga naning ko sa school pero easily distracted rako mao to nag-search kog mga strategies like kanang Pomodoro technique gud." (Participant 7, fourth-year student)

English translation: I changed my strategies as a student. I was making an effort in school, but I was easily distracted, so I looked for strategies such as the Pomodoro technique.

The coping responses involved both individual adjustments and social support. Participants described changing their routines and study strategies while drawing encouragement and practical assistance from family, friends, and classmates.

Theme 5: Emerging Stronger: Achieving Growth, Resilience, and Personal Transformation

Participants described learning from failure, developing greater self-awareness, rebuilding confidence, and renewing their commitment to nursing. They did not suggest that difficulties had disappeared; rather, they described gaining strategies and perspectives that helped them continue.

"Na-learn ko ug lesson na after I failed sa usa ka-major nursing subject.. it helps me to improve my character." (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: I learned a lesson from failing a major nursing subject; the experience helped me improve my character.

"Dako gd ko ug improvement. Daghan kog na-learn sa akong mga experiences sauna, unya naka-build up siya sa akong confidence and also learned from my own mistake." (Participant 3, third-year student)

English translation: I have improved a lot. I learned from my past experiences, which built my confidence and helped me learn from my mistakes.

"Bisag nahagbong ko aning na subject kay ganahan gihapon ko mopadayon sa Nursing." (Participant 2, second-year student)

English translation: Even though I failed this subject, I still want to continue in Nursing.

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"Sa una sa kay nawad-an kog confidence nya ga doubt kos akong kaugalingon pero ako syang gi-rebuild ug hinay-hinay." (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: At first, I lost confidence and doubted myself, but I gradually tried to rebuild it.

"Ganahan ko na ma human ug ma proud akong parents, bahalag unsa ka dugay. Bahalag pd ug uwaw, ganahan gihapon ko ma achieve akong goal." (Participant 4, third-year student)

English translation: I want to finish and make my parents proud, no matter how long it takes. Even though I felt embarrassed, I still want to achieve my goal.

"Mas nakabalo ko how to manage my time better and take my studies seriously. Mas nitaas akong pasensya sa akong self ug mas determinado nga humanon kung unsa akong nasugdan." (Participant 6, third-year student)

English translation: I learned to manage my time better and take my studies more seriously. I also became more patient with myself and more determined to finish what I started.

These narratives reflect growth through reflection, persistence, and renewed purpose. Participants described viewing failure as part of learning and using previous experiences to guide improvements in their study habits, confidence, and determination.

Comprehensive Description and Interpretation of the Lived Experiences

The findings revealed that nursing students who experience academic difficulties undergo a continuous process of struggle, adjustment, coping, and personal transformation. Their experiences begin with the demanding nature of nursing education, followed by personal and external factors that contribute to academic difficulties. These challenges may result in emotional distress, diminished confidence, and academic exhaustion. However, through effective coping strategies, social support, perseverance, and positive reframing, students gradually develop resilience and improved academic habits.

Collectively, the five themes demonstrate that academic difficulties are not solely experiences of failure but can also become opportunities for self-discovery, personal improvement, and professional growth. The findings emphasize the importance of providing nursing students with academic guidance, accessible psychological support, effective learning strategies, and a supportive clinical environment to strengthen their resilience and promote academic success.

Validation of Findings

Following the validation process, all eight participants reviewed the identified themes and subthemes to determine whether these accurately represented their lived experiences. They confirmed that the findings reflected their academic struggles, emotional experiences, coping strategies, and personal growth. Although minor clarifications were suggested, no substantial changes were necessary. This confirmation strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

Summary of Significant Findings

The findings revealed that nursing students experience interconnected academic, clinical, psychological, and personal challenges throughout their educational journey. Through inductive thematic analysis, five major themes emerged: Navigating the Storm, Uncovering the Roots, Reaching the Breaking Point, Strategic Survival, and Emerging Stronger. Collectively, these themes illustrate how students encounter difficulties, identify their underlying causes, experience emotional consequences, develop coping strategies, and achieve personal and academic growth.

The first theme, Navigating the Storm, revealed that heavy academic workloads, information overload, and demanding clinical responsibilities make it difficult for nursing students to balance their academic and practical

requirements. The fast-paced clinical environment further challenges their ability to apply theoretical knowledge to actual patient care, requiring continuous adjustment and learning.

The second theme, Uncovering the Roots, highlighted the internal and external factors contributing to students' academic difficulties. Procrastination, poor time management, self-doubt, fear of failure, and low self-confidence intensify their struggles. Additionally, expectations from family members and instructors create further pressure, demonstrating that academic challenges arise from multiple interacting factors.

The third theme, Reaching the Breaking Point, demonstrated the psychological and emotional consequences of accumulated academic and clinical stress. Students experience exhaustion, anxiety, loss of motivation, and doubts about their abilities and suitability for the nursing profession. These experiences indicate academic burnout, which can negatively affect their overall well-being and academic performance.

Despite these difficulties, the fourth theme, Strategic Survival, revealed that students actively develop coping mechanisms to manage their challenges. These include improving time management, establishing effective study habits, demonstrating perseverance, seeking support from family and peers, and reframing difficulties as opportunities for learning. These strategies help them regain control and continue pursuing their academic responsibilities.

Finally, the fifth theme, Emerging Stronger, emphasized how overcoming challenges contributes to students' personal and professional development. Through their experiences, students develop greater self-confidence, emotional resilience, self-awareness, and determination. They gradually learn to view failures as opportunities for improvement and become more prepared to face future academic and clinical responsibilities.

Overall, the findings established that nursing students' experiences of academic and clinical challenges involve a continuous process of struggle, adjustment, coping, and personal transformation. Although these challenges may result in emotional exhaustion and academic difficulties, they also provide opportunities for resilience, self-discovery, and professional growth. The findings emphasize the importance of effective academic guidance, accessible psychological support, supportive clinical environments, and institutional interventions to help nursing students manage their responsibilities and develop into competent, confident, and resilient nursing professionals.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that nursing students' experiences of academic and clinical challenges involve a continuous process of demands, struggles, coping, and personal growth. Heavy workloads, clinical responsibilities, personal limitations, and external expectations contribute to stress, emotional exhaustion, and academic burnout. Despite these difficulties, students demonstrate resilience through effective time management, positive reframing, perseverance, and social support. Overcoming these challenges strengthens their self-confidence, self-awareness, and sense of purpose, preparing them for future professional responsibilities. Therefore, nursing education should provide comprehensive academic, psychological, and clinical support to help students manage challenges, maintain well-being, and develop into competent and resilient nursing professionals.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Department of Nursing. The research results indicate that the Department of Nursing needs to develop stronger support systems to help students manage their academic and clinical workloads. The department can offer immediate support through structured academic programs, stress management workshops, and early identification of students at risk of burnout. Additionally, the department may establish a monitoring and tracking system to identify students who are experiencing academic difficulties, particularly those who have failed a subject during the preceding semester. It is also important to recognize students who may have pursued nursing due to family expectations, external pressure, or limited personal choice, as these circumstances may

influence their motivation, engagement, and adjustment to the demands of the program. Through guidance counseling, regular academic monitoring, and appropriate interventions, the department can better understand students' individual needs and provide timely assistance. Overall, the department needs to establish an environment that balances demanding academic requirements with emotional and psychological support, enabling students to achieve their academic goals while maintaining their mental well-being.

Nursing Educators and Clinical Instructors. The study demonstrates that students need to work in educational spaces that offer both support and understanding. Building student confidence requires educators and clinical instructors to use mentorship programs alongside constructive feedback and recognition. The process of open communication, together with reflective practice, enables students to develop the ability to solve problems and build their emotional strength and capacity to adjust to different situations in the classroom and clinical environments.

Nursing Students. The results highlight the need for students to actively engage in strategies that enhance personal and academic growth. Students need to learn time management and study skills, along with social support from peers and family members, while developing the ability to keep going through difficulties. Reframing academic and clinical challenges as growth opportunities can strengthen resilience, self-confidence, and readiness for future professional responsibilities.

Guidance Counselors and Mental Health Services. The research results show that nursing students need mental health support that they can easily access. Mental health experts and counselors need to establish counseling services that include stress management workshops and resilience training programs to meet students' academic and clinical needs. The combination of early intervention and ongoing support will help protect against burnout, reduce emotional distress, and improve overall health.

Future Researchers. The study suggests that further research is needed to explore the experiences and coping strategies of nursing students across different contexts. The study needs mixed-methods, longitudinal research to investigate how academic and clinical stressors affect students over time and to assess the effectiveness of interventions that build resilience and enhance student performance. Future studies will establish evidence-based educational practices that help nursing students develop and succeed, based on their findings.

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