

Lived Experience of Generation Z Clinical Instructors in Tabaco City During Clinical Rotation

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors in Tabaco City, guided by Benner's Novice to Expert Theory, with a focus on their dual roles as nurse–educators during clinical rotations. Using purposive sampling, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed via Colaizzi's method with NVivo support. Six themes emerged: dual role embodiment, complexity of clinical teaching, facilitation of student growth, emotional ambivalence, transformative development, and meaning-making in instruction. Findings revealed challenges in balancing patient care and teaching responsibilities in high-pressure environments while managing student needs. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability, shaping their professional identities and highlighting the need for institutional support, mentorship, and wellness programs.

Keywords: *Generation Z, clinical instructors, lived experiences, phenomenology, nursing education.*

INTRODUCTION

Clinical instructors play an important role in shaping nursing students' clinical competence, professional values, and clinical judgment, yet they work in challenging healthcare settings in the Philippines marked by limited resources, staffing shortages, and combined teaching and clinical duties. The rise of Generation Z clinical instructors (born 1995–2012) introduces a new group of educators shaped by digital exposure, a preference for flexibility, a need for psychological safety, and a desire for meaningful work, as well as heightened sensitivity to stress and concerns about job stability. However, there is still limited research on this group, especially in local settings such as Tabaco City, where institutional and cultural factors may differ from those in urban areas. This study aims to address this gap by exploring their lived experiences to better understand how they manage dual roles and to guide the development of appropriate policies, support systems, and strategies in nursing education.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain and communicate a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors in Tabaco City during their clinical rotations. This study sought to explore how these clinical instructors experience, interpret, and adapt to the demands of clinical teaching and practice.

Specifically, this study aims to address the following inquiries:

Central Question:

1. What are the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors in Tabaco City during their clinical rotations?

Probing Questions:

1. What challenges do Generation Z clinical instructors encounter during their clinical rotations, and how do they cope with these challenges?
2. How do Generation Z clinical instructors perceive their roles and contributions to student learning and patient care during clinical rotations?

Scope and Delimitations

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors in Tabaco City, Albay, particularly their challenges in balancing teaching and clinical responsibilities, their coping strategies, and their views on their contributions to student learning and patient care. The study was limited to selected health institutions and used purposive sampling, which may affect the extent to which the findings can be applied. It also relied on participants' own accounts, which may be subject to some subjectivity. Even so, the study still offers meaningful insights into their experiences and can help inform improvements in nursing education and institutional support.

Review of Related Literature

The literature shows that clinical instructors and Generation Z nurses often face significant challenges arising from demanding healthcare settings, dual teaching–clinical roles, and constantly changing educational and clinical expectations, especially in the post-pandemic period. Even with these pressures, studies suggest that they gradually build resilience, adaptability, and leadership skills through experience, institutional support, and coping strategies such as time management, teamwork, and self-care. In the end, the literature highlights the need for strong leadership development, emotional support, and flexible teaching approaches to better support clinical instructors and Generation Z nurse educators.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Benner's Novice to Expert Theory (1984), which explains nursing competence as a gradual process developed through experience, practice, and reflection across five stages. Using this framework, Generation Z clinical instructors in Tabaco City were viewed as emerging educators who may still be at the novice or advanced beginner stage in clinical teaching roles. It also helps in understanding how they develop teaching competence, manage dual responsibilities, and adapt to the challenges of clinical instruction.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors and how they understand and give meaning to their roles as nurse–educators. A descriptive phenomenological approach was applied to systematically capture participants' narratives and translate them into meaningful statements while remaining close to their original accounts. This design was considered appropriate for revealing the essence of their experiences, particularly the challenges they face, the coping strategies they use, and their perceived contributions in real clinical rotation settings.

Research Steps

This study employed a systematic qualitative process that began with ethical approval, then recruitment through gatekeepers, informed consent, and purposive sampling of Generation Z clinical instructors. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted through recorded phone calls. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and translated when needed, then organized and analyzed using NVivo until data saturation was reached, while ensuring confidentiality, secure data handling, and adherence to a six-week data collection period.

Data Analysis Methods

The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method, which involved carefully identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and grouping these into themes and subthemes to build a rich description of participants' lived experiences. NVivo software supported the coding and organization of the data, helping ensure a more structured, transparent, and consistent analysis process. To strengthen trustworthiness, the findings were validated through member checking and interpreted in line with the study objectives and Benner's Novice-to-Expert Theory, thereby maintaining accuracy and theoretical coherence.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study was limited by a small sample size and its focus on a specific group of Generation Z clinical instructors, which may limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to other settings. Ethical standards were carefully upheld, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and secure data handling to protect participants' rights and dignity. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection, and member checking was conducted to help ensure the accuracy, credibility, and integrity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that Generation Z clinical instructors take on a dual role as nurse–educators, balancing clinical duties with teaching responsibilities while ensuring patient safety and managing role-related pressures. They support students in applying theory to practice in demanding clinical settings, often addressing anxiety and skill gaps through close supervision and guided instruction. In doing so, they help build students' competence, confidence, and professional values such as compassion, accountability, and humility through mentorship and hands-on learning.

The study also highlights both the rewarding and challenging aspects of clinical teaching, where satisfaction from student growth is often accompanied by stress, fatigue, and self-doubt due to heavy workloads. Despite these challenges, the role fosters patience, resilience, leadership, communication skills, and empathy, shaped by their own experiences as former students. Overall, they continue to reflect and learn, finding meaning in teaching as a way to shape future nurses and contribute to the profession through supportive and ethical mentorship.

SUMMARY

The study examined the lived experiences of Generation Z clinical instructors through Husserlian phenomenological analysis, revealing six key themes that capture the essence of

their role in clinical education. The findings show that they consistently manage the dual responsibilities of being both a nurse and an educator in demanding clinical settings, while still guiding students, ensuring patient safety, and supporting professional growth. Overall, the study suggests that clinical teaching is both challenging and meaningful, shaping their emotional well-being, professional development, and sense of purpose in nursing education.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that Generation Z clinical instructors experience a complex dual role as nurses and educators, requiring them to balance patient care with student supervision in demanding clinical settings. Their experiences reflect adaptability, responsibility, and resilience as they deal with role strain, emotional pressures, and diverse student needs while upholding professional standards. Overall, clinical teaching is a meaningful yet challenging process that supports both personal and professional growth, strengthening reflective practice and sense of purpose in shaping future nurses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, institutions are encouraged to strengthen clinical instructor development through training, mentorship, and reflective practice, and to strengthen support systems to reduce burnout and promote well-being. Improving clinical teaching conditions, using simulation-based learning, and fostering supportive environments can enhance both student learning and instructor performance. There was also a need for policies that recognize the dual role of clinical instructors, while future research should explore generational differences and long-term strategies to improve clinical teaching practice.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools were used to improve the grammar and structure of this article. However, the data collection, analysis, and interpretation were done entirely by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the content and overall work.

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