



Opportunities in Higher Education Amidst Health Crisis: A Mixed Method Approach

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Abstract

The world confronts significant hurdles in the event of a pandemic such as the COVID-19. The purpose of this research was to investigate the opportunities that nursing administrators faced in the Philippines' nursing education system. These findings were obtained via the use of an exploratory sequential mixed technique. Attendees included college of nursing administrators such as deans of nursing and clinical coordinators, RLE coordinators, and level coordinators of nursing education programs. This study used a questionnaire to determine the opportunities of nursing administrators and coordinators. Likewise, a semi-structured interview guide to acquire information from key informants on the pandemic's educational opportunities. During the COVID-19 epidemic, a survey was utilized to explore the many possibilities available to the respondents. Furthermore, a different approach was used to examine key informants' perspectives on nursing education opportunities qualitatively. The research made extensive use of theme analysis to uncover patterns in the ideas and emotions of the key informants. The study revealed that the three themes with the greatest frequency were professional growth, participation in webinars, research publishing, and learning. Nursing entrepreneurship was the other topic with the greatest frequency. Despite the widespread COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted everyone, several educational possibilities have been discovered. The fundamental ideas demonstrate that the ongoing health scenario does, in fact, have some favorable aspects.

Keywords: Nursing Education, Nursing Administrators, Thematic Analysis, Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Design, COVID-19



INTRODUCTION

During a pandemic, the globe is confronted with unprecedented problems. Clearly, academic nursing programs took the tough decision to eliminate practical practicums for their students (Dewart et al., 2020). Students who were exposed to COVID-19 in a clinical setting put not only their own health at risk, but also the health of their families. More significantly, the financial impact of being isolated without a source of income on employees of various organizations affected everyone (Ismail et al., 2021).

Nursing education has a major influence on nurses' knowledge and competences, as well as the knowledge and competencies of other health care professionals (Fawaz et al., 2018). Similarly, nursing degrees enable nurses to address a variety of patient demands, serve as leaders, and promote knowledge that improves patients and health professionals' ability to provide safe, high-quality patient care (Al-Dossary, 2017). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has several ramifications in terms of curricular implementation (Daniel, 2020). It provided a significant threat to global education systems, prompting several countries to temporarily suspend educational institutions, including the College of Nursing (Li, et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the emergence of the pandemic provides other unwritten benefits among nurses. There are positive outcomes of the pandemic, and this has been the focus of the study. While difficulties abounded across the discipline of nursing, these challenges created new opportunities for visioning anew in thinking beyond the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Yancey, 2020). Leaders in the nursing profession may benefit from digital learning as well, allowing them to reach a larger audience both domestically and abroad (Korolkov et al., 2020).

Continuity of learning is essential in nursing education. Despite the pandemic, there is a need to enhance learning to train new nurses to provide nursing services. This is significant since there are nurses who are infected with COVID-19, and so their services are critical. Nonetheless, to protect students from the pandemic, face-to-face teaching and learning were changed to virtual remote learning, and clinical encounters were halted (Agu et al., 2021).

Several studies have discussed the opportunities of professionals and other organizations amid COVID-19 pandemic (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021); however, there are limited data in the literature regarding nurses' perception on the opportunities towards this sudden and unexpected shift in nursing education. The researchers believed that the conduct of the research will result in planning future strategies towards improving their practices toward quality nursing education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. Exploratory sequential mixed method research methodology was adopted in this study (Berman, 2017; Dawadi et al., 2021; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This was used by the researchers in following up qualitative findings with quantitative analysis. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2017), this research design uses the first phase's qualitative (exploratory) results to assist in testing the second phase (quantitative).



Participants. The participants of the study were nursing administrators such as Deans, Clinical Coordinators, RLE Coordinators and Level Coordinators of the College of Nursing in higher education institutions. Purposive sampling was used with identified inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria include full time nursing administrators or coordinators in Colleges of Nursing, with at least five years of nursing education experience, and signed the informed consent. A total of 42 participants accepted and signed the informed consent to be respondents.

Instruments. The study used a semi-structured interview guide to gather the key informants' responses on the opportunities in nursing education during the pandemic as to their concepts and feelings. The instrument underwent validity with three experts in mixed method research and obtained an Aiken's validity index of 4.84. Moreover, the data were gathered through online interview using Google Forms and focus group discussion (FGD) after consent was obtained. On the other hand, a survey was used to gather the list of opportunities of nursing administrators and coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Gathering Procedures. After validation of the instrument, the researchers secured permission to conduct the study. After obtaining informed consent data were gathered using a questionnaire and a focus group discussion, in three batches. The data gathered were checked, tallied, interpreted, and analyzed.

Data Analysis. On the qualitative part, the study used thematic analysis to closely examine the collected data to identify the common patterns of concepts and feeling of the key informants on opportunities in nursing education. The study was guided with Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Moreover, the quantitative domain of the study utilized mean to determine the overall level of respondent's perception on the opportunities related to nursing education during the pandemic. Moreover, rank was also used to express the type of opportunities that gained more responses than the other.

RESULTS

A glimpse of the table resulted in the emergence of three major themes: professional development, attending webinars, research publication, learning, and nursing entrepreneurship.

Table 1. The Emerged Themes

Sample Quotations	Sub-Theme	Major Themes
➤ While the pandemic is ongoing, I am pursuing another master's degree. I was included in the list of scholars sponsored by the institution	Pursuing	Professional Development
➤ I am taking my PhD right now and even if there is pandemic, I am availing this opportunity	Additional Graduate Degrees	
➤ Admittedly, the pandemic provided me an opportunity to accept an online degree course, purely virtual to earn another master's degree.		



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There are free webinars to choose from, I am very excited to participate to get certificates. I choose those with CPD units. ➤ The office sent me link for a free webinar. That is an opportunity for me to grab. ➤ My nursing license needs to be renewed so I must participate in webinars with CPD of course. 	<p>Participating in Webinars for License Renewal</p>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There are many publications that needs paper for publication. I submitted and it was approved for publication 		<p>Publish Research Papers</p>	<p>Research Publication</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I have two papers undergoing review. After I obtain approval, it will be published. 				<p>Reading Books</p>	<p>Learning through Book Reading</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ My paper was approved for publication. I have been doing said paper since the pandemic, and it pays off because I have a lot of time at home to review and improve my paper for publication 	<p>Business Opening</p>					<p>Nursing Entrepreneurship</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I read a lot of e-books, especially because, I am mostly on lockdown. Those moments, I gobble many books to hone my knowledge. 		<p>Online Selling</p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There are free books that are waiting to be read. I have read at least ten so far while I am staying at home with my family. 						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I bought books online for me to read, so far it is great, I read 5 of them already. 		<p>Online Selling</p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I opened a business and I registered at the DTI, Mayor's Office, and the BIR. At least I am earning while the lockdown is happening. 				<p>Online Selling</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Despite the pandemic, I opened a new business that caters to various needs of my clients. 	<p>Online Selling</p>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I opened an online shop to sell a variety of goods. I am earning 5,000 pesos per day since. This is an opportunity to earn despite the pandemic 			<p>Online Selling</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I am selling through an online store I have created, and it pays off during the pandemic. 	<p>Online Selling</p>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There is an opportunity for me to sell, so I grabbed it, anyway, it is online, and I only work at a time of my convenience 			<p>Online Selling</p>			

Professional development would refer to a collection of concepts, ideas, and strategies that empower learners to manage their own learning journeys and professional development. Similarly, professionals from a wide range of occupations take use of professional development opportunities to learn and apply new information and abilities that will improve their job performance. Employees become more effective in their roles because of professional activities (Webb, 2019).



Continuing professional development, often known as CPD, is an essential part of continuous learning for nurses and plays an important role in ensuring that their knowledge and abilities are always up to date. In addition, continuing professional development helps nurse educators and other healthcare professionals strengthen their professional roles, which in turn promotes interprofessional education and cooperation. In a similar vein, they become advocates of scientific inquiry by advocating for the production and sharing of new information as well as the use of evidence to enhance the standard of nursing education and the quality of care provided to patients.

Moreover, the participants actively participated in webinars. Webinars provide a viable method of instruction and education for school personnel interested in strategies for improving a school's wellness environment (Hoke, et al., 2020). This is an important avenue to enhance stock of knowledge and skills to advocate better understanding of issues related to one's employment. On the other hand, nurses need to research to determine the best practices and improve patient care (Schloman, 2017). Similarly, nurses require research because it allows them to develop in their area, keep current, and provide better patient care.

Meanwhile, higher comprehension level, additional knowledge acquisition and understanding are the primary benefits of book reading (McBride, 2017). This was exemplified by the participants as well as its role in improving their craft, hone their skills and make them better decision-makers. The key informants view the time spent on a community lockdown as an opportunity to gain a better grasp of a variety of concerns. Aside from being entertained, the key informants demonstrated their understanding of the importance of reading in making them excellent decision-makers, which was confirmed by the research (Scott & Saaiman, 2017).

Table 2. List of Opportunities of Nursing Administrators and Coordinators

Opportunities	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Attending webinars	40	95.23	1
2. Reading books	38	90.47	2
3. Pursing another masteral degree	31	73.81	3
4. Pursing another doctorate degree	25	59.52	4
5. Getting 18 units of education leading to BS Education	21	50.00	5
6. Online selling	17	40.48	6
7. Opening a new business	14	33.33	7
8. Being with my family	11	26.19	8
9. Publication of a research	9	21.42	9
10. Accepting an invitation as a resource speaker	8	19.04	10
11. Presented my research paper via virtual mode	6	14.28	11
12. Applied for a position in government	3	7.14	12

More significantly, key informants reported their desire to earn additional income through entrepreneurship. During times of economic uncertainty, knowledge about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills can be exploited when health care staff needs to figure out how to do more with



fewer resources (Salminen et al., 2017). Nursing entrepreneurship refers to a professional's capacity to convert ideas into action, which involves creativity, innovation, and risk taking, as well as the ability to organize and manage projects to achieve goals. Furthermore, this helps everyone in their daily lives at home and in society, making workers more aware of the context of their job and better equipped to grab chances, and serves as a basis for entrepreneurs creating a social or commercial activity (Trotte, et al., 2021).

On the quantitative side, the study presents the list of opportunities of the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 12 opportunities ranked from number 1 to 12. Attending webinars was ranked first followed by reading books, pursuing masteral and doctorate degrees, and taking 18 units of education which were ranked second to fifth.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to recognize the opportunities that are available to nursing administrators within the nursing education system of the Philippines. Many businesses and organizations were shut down at the start of the pandemic, and universities were no exception. At the Colleges of Nursing, opportunities have been identified even during a disaster. While the COVID-19 has touched everyone, the key informants have shown that they have diverse opportunities. Three important topics emerged from this research grounded from both quantitative and qualitative strand: professional growth, publication book reading, and nurse entrepreneurship.

Continuing education, such as a master's or doctoral degree, opens new horizons for their professional development (Rodriguez et al., 2020). By implementing professional development programs, it raises the level of classroom teaching, student achievement, and the general well-being of the workforce (Kalinowsky et al., 2019). Webinar participation is a possible avenue for key informants. This was expressed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Webinars are a great way for educators who want to learn about new ways to improve their schools' health environments to get the information they need (Hoke, et al., 2020). Lifelong learning may be gained by attending webinars throughout the outbreak. Nurses who attend free webinars report increased work satisfaction and retention because of their increased happiness and confidence in their nursing roles (White, 2019). As a result, nurses who are committed to lifelong learning are more likely to progress in their jobs and earn more money.

Continuous learning is a key to success in any profession. Despite the epidemic, those in charge of nursing schools have made the most of this time by using the internet and other digital resources. They have also progressed in other areas of nursing education because of this. The ability to deliver top-notch nursing education to students depends on being abreast of the most recent developments in nursing science, which nursing educators can do via continuing education and other forms of professional development. Likewise, it also helps nurses who want to take on more leadership roles develop in their careers.

Meanwhile, nurses must do research to discover the most effective methods of patient care (Schloman, 2017). As with doctors, nurses need research to advance in their fields, stay current, and give better care to their patients. Through the publication of studies, evidence-based nursing may be



use in the real world (Chien, 2019). Since community lockdowns allow for digital data collection, publishing research is an opportunity, as shown by the key informants. "My work got accepted for publication," said the first participant. Having a lot of time at home to evaluate and enhance my manuscript for publication is a benefit of doing so since the epidemic began." Even during a catastrophe, something wonderful might still emerge. Furthermore, another participant's statement, "There are numerous journals that require paper for publishing. "I sent it in, and it was accepted."

Research on safe and good healthcare relies on frontline healthcare professionals functioning safely to their full extent of research practice in the current COVID-19 pandemic environment, according to De Raeve et al., (2021). As a result, nurses must continue to do high-quality research to enhance nursing practice. In the face of a worldwide pandemic, nurses must come together to do excellent research, despite the difficulties they face on a global scale (Ion, et al., 2021).

Consequently, research is necessary for nurse educators because it enables them to progress their profession, remain current, and provide superior care to their patients. Skills in information literacy may help nurse educators make better use of available data, allowing them to draw their own judgments more confidently. Additionally, the modern healthcare system is complicated, and patients' requirements are becoming more diverse all the time. To provide answers to the health concerns faced by a variety of populations, healthcare practitioners need to have many different points of view. Moreover, reading books emerged as one of the opportunities. The key advantages of reading a book are improved comprehension, increased information, and improved understanding (McBride, 2017). The comments of the participants showed that this constructive activity supplied them with ideas and expertise to solve future difficulties. In the words of Westfall (2017), reading books is a great way to stimulate the mind and cultivate effective professionals. The opportunity to read books is also a way for nurse educators to find psychological support and for strengthening psychological well-being. Modern advances in technology and widespread availability of books and other written works through online resources have made reading books a viable and cost-effective replacement for in-person therapy.

Finally, entrepreneurial endeavor is another opportunity that nurse educators have explored during the pandemic, and it is vital to identify best practices and skills that may be transferred from direct care to company leadership (Vannucci & Weinstein, 2017). Entrepreneurs value effectiveness, efficiency, and precision in their job. This is a perfect description of a nurse in the new normal. Taking advantage of the pandemic to earn an income. During the current health crisis, various business concepts have emerged, such as health coaching and mentoring, home health care, patient advocacy legal nurse consulting. These concepts call for the abilities of a nurse educator to be adaptable, skilled, resilient, and persistent, anchored with a touch of a compassionate leader.

Conclusion

The primary problem is the opportunities for nursing education via the eyes of nursing administrators during the COVID-19 epidemic. Despite the possibility of a COVID-19 pandemic, the study demonstrates a range of nursing education choices. The key themes demonstrate that there are some silver linings to the health crisis. The participants used the COVID-19 phenomena to seize



possibilities for career advancement and money generation by reflecting on and transitioning to something that delivers economic success. COVID-19's influence on nursing education in the Philippines and overseas has shown that several options exist. Similarly, strategic, and intentional planning for the future of nurse education beyond the COVID-19 pandemic will require visionary leadership from faculty, administrators, and accreditors willing to embrace limitless possibilities in ensuring that the next generation of nurse's benefits from a teaching-learning environment that places nursing science and art at its core.

Recommendation

The COVID-19 outbreak opened a slew of options for nursing administrators. Post-pandemic, the phenomena may be used as a springboard for altering nursing education and producing strategic initiatives to enhance nursing education by upskilling and retraining nurses and helping them transition their careers utilizing new digital education perspectives. In addition, now is a good time to make improvements to critical infrastructure in preparation for any pandemics in the future. Many teaching and learning techniques may be modernized to be more effective, resilient, and aligned with national interests because of this pandemic.

Conflict of Interest

This study did not receive funding from any individuals or organizations.

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