A BILINGUAL NURSING PROGRAM: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

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Received: September 15, 2014
Revised: October 6, 2014
Accepted: October 11, 2014
Published: December 1, 2014

ABSTRACT

Background: Thai business and academic leaders have agreed that “Education and English proficiency” hold the keys to the ASEAN Economic Community’s (AEC) success. At the Faculty of Nursing Science, Rangsit University, Thailand, the AEC challenges have been realized and accepted. In 2010, a new Double Degree (Bilingual) Nursing Program was launched in collaboration with the School of Health Care and Social Welfare at Mälardalen University, Sweden. The aim of the program is for the students to become qualified and competent in order to provide quality care to the people they serve.

Objectives: To investigate the lived experiences of nursing students in the Double Degree (Bilingual) Nursing Program.

Methods: Using a phenomenological research design, purposeful samples of 5 nursing students in the program were invited to participate in this study. Open unstructured interviews were conducted by a seasoned interviewer who was not related to or involved with the program. Data were collected to the point of sufficient saturation. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological analysis method. The analyzed data were returned to the students twice during the study period to ensure trustworthiness.

Results: Three major themes that emerged from the interview describe a trajectory of lived experiences that the students encountered during their first three years of study in the program. Emerging themes were family support, individual characteristics/skills, and teaching strategies.

Conclusions: The selection process and a well-planned orientation program are the crucial first steps for students to be successful in the bilingual nursing program.

Keywords: bilingual education, nursing program, double degree nursing program.
BACKGROUND

Since the declaration of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) to establish the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), many Thai business and academic leaders have agreed that “Education and English proficiency” holds the key to the AEC’s success. Adding to the present stress of providing linguistically competent healthcare providers is the AEC Blueprint, for the “free flow of investment”. This means an increase in healthcare business shares held by foreign investors (from the present 15% up to 70%). Furthermore, the AEC 2015 will bring opportunities for Thai business and academic leaders in the form of both opportunities for higher investments in health service industries and greater movement of skilled healthcare professionals within the region (Amornvivat, 2012).

In addition, the free flow of skilled labor means freer mobility of healthcare professionals (especially physicians and nurses) who are the key providers. Indeed, it will be critical that Thailand positions itself to meet this potentially rapidly growing market’s needs through bilingual nursing education, taking into account that nursing is the largest healthcare profession in the healthcare industry.

At the Faculty of Nursing Science, Rangsit University, the AEC’s forthcoming challenges have been realized and accepted. In 2010, marking its 25th anniversary, a new Double Degree (Bilingual) Nursing Program was launched in collaboration with the School of Health Care and Social Welfare at Mälardalen University in Sweden. The program aims to prepare nursing students to be able to perform at an international standard of nursing care and practice. It is the ultimate goal that the students become qualified and competent in providing quality care to the people they serve; to nationals and non-nationals alike. Lessons learned from bilingual nursing programs from around the globe were also considered.

Several studies focused on the negative learning process and outcomes of the students in the bilingual nursing programs. In the United States, for instance, nursing students in bilingual nursing programs were often found to have low learning performance (Colosimo & Xu, 2006; Evans & Stevenson, 2009; Sanner & Wilson, 2008) and a low professional self-concept (Angel, Craven, & Denson, 2012; McDermott-Levy, 2011). In China, relatively few of the students were successful in the program due to the fact that they were not proficient enough in
English (He, et al., 2011) to comprehend what had been taught. The significant role of nursing instructors was addressed. In Saudi Arabia, the emphasis was also on the role of nursing educators and their teaching strategies as a means to the success of the programs (Suliman & Tadros, 2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of nursing students in the Nursing (Bilingual) Program so as to identify critical success factors.

**METHOD**

The major interest of this study was to understand and interpret the meaning of the lived worldview through the eyes of the nursing students in the bilingual program. In addition, it is the firm belief of the researcher that the students hold “the truth about the reality of their experiences.” Hence, a phenomenological research design was used.

A purposeful sample was used for this study. The inclusion criteria were 1) participants who were in the third year of their study in the bilingual program at Rangsit University, Thailand, 2) GPA 3.00 or higher, and 3) an English proficiency level at 500 or higher.

With the approval of the Rangsit University Institutional Review Board, the selected 5 participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. No incentive was offered for their participation. The participants were advised of the anonymity and confidentiality of the interview data and their right to refuse to participate without any negative consequences. Informed consents were then signed prior to the interviews.

Open unstructured interviews were conducted by a seasoned interviewer who was not related to nor involved with the program. Aimed at entering the students’ worlds and gain a better understanding from their point of view, no research questions were deliberately formulated. However, a prompt sheet was used, not in the form of actual questions, but rather as a broad guide to the issues relating to the study and to ensure a certain level of consistency across all of the interview sessions. Each participant selected an off-campus location for their interview. All interviews, were audiotaped, lasted approximately 1 hour and were guided by the process of saturation, i.e., when the interviewed data became repetitive. The tapes were transcribed verbatim after the completion of each
interview. The audiotapes and transcriptions were coded to ensure anonymity. The transcriptions were then sent back to the students for verification.

The interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological analysis. Following Colaizzi’s method the interview data were reviewed in order to gain a sense of the whole. Following that, significant statements were extracted, meanings formulated, and themes organized from those meanings. Themes were then integrated into the study findings and the essential description of the phenomenon was formulated. Finally the students were asked to evaluate the results of the analysis for validation.

RESULTS

At the final step of data analysis three themes emerged that reflected the students’ experiences during their three years studying in the program. The themes followed a trajectory of experiences which the students described as (1) family support, (2) individual characteristics/skills, and (3) teaching strategies.

Family Support

Every participant, at least once, referred to “mom” or “dad” as the person the students turned to for advice and support. One participant spoke of her parents thusly: “After graduating from high school I didn’t know what I wanted to do. The bilingual nursing program at Rangsit University sounded good, although expensive, and my parents were completely supporting of me in my decision…. I am very close to my dad. He’s able to teach and support me in many ways”.

Another participant spoke about her mother: “Even though I’m apprehensive regarding the use of English my mom loves everything that has to do with English. I think my mom’s very wise and will always look after me…. throughout my three years of study, mom has always encouraged me to perform well in school; sometimes I need money and ask my mom; she complained about my spending but always gave me it when I needed it”.

Individual characteristics/skills

When asked to reflect on the learning experience during their three years of study in the program, participants identified several characteristics/skills i.e., “force myself to work harder and read more”, “have to be more diligent”, “have to try
harder to get through each period”, “have to accept the change and deal with it one day at a time”, “my reading skills are developing and so I know how to read and understand what I read more effectively”

Teaching strategies
Participants reflected on their learning activities during studying in the program. Learning activities i.e. self-directed learning and discussion forums were identified as a new way to learn and sometimes caused frustration but the students were able to discuss with the instructors. One participant stated thus: “The faculty tried to assist us to improve on our English, like English camp, homeroom sessions (using only English), class presentations, etc”. Another student spoke about the learning activities: “Using English nursing textbooks forced us to try harder to read and understand the content…..the way the teacher guided us to think and discuss the subject in class helped me to understand the content better”.

DISCUSSION
The Double Degree (Bilingual) Nursing Program at Rangsit University was established as a part of a sustainable solution to Thailand's healthcare situation. To mitigate the impact of the nursing shortage the school needs to be able to effectively and efficiently lower the attrition rate in the bilingual nursing program and increase the enrollment number. To be able to assist the students is to understand “What does it take to be successful in the program?” from their lived experiences. The findings of this study provide an insight into the uniqueness of the students in the bilingual nursing program in Thailand. These students, as Guhde (2003) emphasized, not only have to be proficient in academic English but also in nursing terminology and content which of course is in a second language for them. The impact of non-traditional teaching/learning activities on the students’ performance identified in this study are similar to those found by Mattila, L., Pitkäjärvi, M., & Eriksson, E. (2010), Sanner, S., & Wilson, A. (2008), and Starr, K., (2009). Furthermore, considering culture and family values/support, some of the findings may be considered to be unique to Thai students.
CONCLUSION

Bilingual nursing education is believed to be the best way to prepare students for a globalized healthcare system. The success of the bilingual nursing students is dependent on innovative teaching strategies, student support systems and screening for the right students. By understanding the unique characteristics of students who are attracted to the program and the key success factors that facilitate their learning in the program the school will be able to select the most qualified students (or students most likely to succeed) and provide them with the most effective teaching strategies starting with a comprehensive orientation program.

REFERENCES


