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## Nurses' experiences of learning tasks in career development: A phenomenological study

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### Abstract

**Background:** Learning assignments are an important strategy in increasing the capacity and career path of nurses, but this process often leads to role changes, academic pressures, and professional identity dynamics that are not fully understood.

**Purpose:** To examine the meaning of the experience of nurses undergoing learning tasks in career development.

**Method:** A phenomenological approach by involving twelve nurses who had completed a learning task. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and thematically analyzed to uncover consistent patterns of experiences among participants.

**Results:** Five themes emerged: competency and career development through learning tasks, institutional and mentor support, emotional responses to academic pressure and dual roles, evolving professional values and identity, and work–family–study balance challenges. Overall, learning tasks support both technical growth and reflective professional maturity.

**Conclusion:** Assignments are transformative experiences that provide career development opportunities, but require policy support and ongoing mentoring for nurses to be able to go through this process optimally.

**Keywords:** Career Development; Nursing Experience; Nursing Professionalism; Phenomenological Studies; Study Assignments.

## INTRODUCTION

Career development is an important element in strengthening the professional competence of nurses and maintaining the quality of health services. The study assignment program has become one of the institutional strategies to improve the academic qualifications of nurses while preparing human resources that are more adaptive to changes in the health system (Ko & Kim, 2022). Many Indonesian research reports show that providing learning assignment opportunities can increase the confidence, work motivation, and clinical capacity of nursing staff (Suwandewi, Khalilati, Aprilia, & Pamungkas, 2024). In addition, nurses who participate in learning assignments often feel organizational support that positively impacts their attachment to the institution (Berga, Vadnais, Nelson, Johnston, Buro, Hu, & Olaiya, 2021). In general, it is known that career development plays a strategic role in building professionalism and sustainability of nursing personnel (Byrnes, Civantos, Go, McWilliams, & Rajasekaran, 2020; Habibzadeh, Haririan, Hassankhani, & Wytenbroek, 2022).

Although the benefits of the homework program have been widely conveyed, the subjective experiences of nurses undergoing the process have not been fully understood in depth (Michel, Ryan, Mattheus, Knopf, Abuelezam, Stamp, Branson, Hekel, & Fontenot, 2021; Veigh, Reid, Carswell, Ace, Walsh, Graham-Wisener, Rej, Potes, Atkinson, Edginton, & Noble, 2021). There have not been many studies that have revealed how nurses interpret academic demands, responsibilities to institutions, and changes in professional identities during learning tasks (Martins, Santos, & Duarte, 2020; Jankelová & Joniaková, 2021). Another gap that remains open is how these career development programs affect nurses' relationships with organizations and their perception of career prospects after returning to work (Kondić & Starc, 2023). In addition, the emotional dynamics and personal challenges during the study assignment have not been explored much using an approach that truly captures the participants' life experiences (Gayathri & Anand, 2021).

There is a need for a deep understanding of how nurses perceive and interpret the journey of learning

tasks as part of their career development. This research offers a phenomenological perspective to authentically describe the meaning of the nurse experience, resulting in new understandings that have not previously been revealed in ordinary quantitative or descriptive research. This research aims to uncover the essence of the experience of nurses undergoing learning tasks in the context of career development in the health service environment.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of nursing students who undergo study assignments in the context of career development. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to explore the subjective meaning of participants' experiences in depth, including personal perceptions, emotions, and reflections, so that the essence of experience can be captured (Jiang, Liu, Han, Zhao, Shi, & Zhuang, 2024).

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing 12 students of the Bachelor of Applied Nursing Class of the Wamena Parallel Class-Health Polytechnic of the Ministry of Health Jayapura, to tell their experiences openly and reflectively. Participants were selected by *purposive sampling*, namely, students who are or have completed study assignments, so that the information obtained is relevant and meaningful (Saab, Hegarty, Murphy, & Landers, 2021; Zhou, Bambling, Bai, & Edirippulige, 2023). The researcher applied *bracketing* to hold personal assumptions so that the analysis remained focused on the participants' experiences (Samuriwo, Laws, Webb, & Bullock, 2020).

Interview transcripts are analyzed using phenomenological steps, ranging from identifying important statements, formulating meanings, to forming core themes. The validity of the data was maintained through *member checking*, by asking participants to review the researchers' interpretations to match their experiences (Jiang et al., 2024). With this method, the research produces an in-depth understanding of how students interpret learning assignments as part of career development.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS****Table 1. Characteristics of Participants**

| Participant Code | Age (Years) | Gender | Final Education  | Study Assignment Status | Length of Service (Years) | Unit/Workplace     |
|------------------|-------------|--------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| P1               | 28          | Women  | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 10                        | IGD                |
| P2               | 37          | Male   | S1 Nursing       | Undergoing              | 12                        | Hospitalization    |
| P3               | 34          | Women  | S1 Nursing       | Undergoing              | 13                        | Hospitalization    |
| P4               | 42          | Male   | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 18                        | ICU                |
| P5               | 35          | Male   | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 14                        | Health Center      |
| P6               | 37          | Women  | S1 Nursing       | Undergoing              | 13                        | Health Center      |
| P7               | 38          | Women  | S1 Nursing       | Undergoing              | 17                        | Hospitalization    |
| P8               | 28          | Male   | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 19                        | Hospitalization    |
| P9               | 45          | Women  | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 22                        | Nursing management |
| P10              | 33          | Male   | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 12                        | Clinical Education |
| P11              | 45          | Women  | S1 Nursing       | Undergoing              | 23                        | ICU                |
| P12              | 48          | Women  | Nurse Profession | Undergoing              | 25                        | IGD                |

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the 12 study participants, including participant code (P1–P12), age, gender, final education, study assignment status, length of service, and unit/workplace. In terms of age, participants ranged from 28 to 48 years old, with most of them in middle adulthood. Regarding gender distribution, the majority were women (7 participants). Based on educational background, participants held either a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (S1 Nursing) or a Nurse Professional Degree (Nurse Profession), indicating that all participants had professional nursing qualifications. All participants

were recorded as "Undergoing" in their study assignment status. The length of service ranged from 10 to 25 years, with most participants having more than 12 years of work experience, reflecting a relatively high level of professional experience. Regarding workplace distribution, participants were assigned to various units, including the Emergency Department (IGD), Hospitalization (inpatient ward), ICU, Health Center, Nursing Management, and Clinical Education. The majority were working in the Hospitalization (inpatient) unit.

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**Table 2. Analysis of Participants by Theme**

| Major Theme                                                            | Participants       | Participant Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | The Meaning of Experience                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme 1: Educators as Role Models Professional</b>                  | P1, P2, P3, P4, P6 | <p>P1: "I learned discipline because lecturers always showed that attitude In every activity..."</p> <p>"P2: "Seeing the lecturer being respectful and patient made me imitate it..."</p> <p>"P3: "The way lecturers deal with difficult situations gives examples How to be professional..."</p> <p>"P4: "The attitude of the lecturer is a real picture of the character that I have to wake up..."</p> <p>"P6: "I learned to restrain myself and think clearly because the lecturer always gives examples..."</p> | Nurses assessed that professionalism can be learned through the example given by educators; This experience became the initial foundation in the development of a professional attitude and encouraged the search for more intensive practice mentoring. |
| <b>Theme 2: Mentoring and Guidance Educators in Development Career</b> | P2, P4, P5, P7, P9 | <p>P2: "When guided by lecturers, I am more confident in taking The right decision..."</p> <p>"P4: "Mentoring in the clinic helped me understand how be professional..."</p> <p>"P5: "The direct direction from the lecturer made me understand better My responsibilities as a nurse..."</p> <p>"P7: "Guidance helped me deal with situations that I hadn't I've experienced it before..."</p> <p>"Q9: "I know the right attitude thanks to the lecturer's instructions..."</p>                                     | Direct guidance from educators strengthens nurses' understanding of professionalism, combines academic value and practical experience, and fosters open communication with supervisors.                                                                  |

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## Nurses' experiences of learning tasks in career development: A phenomenological study

| Major Theme                                                                 | Participants        | Participant Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | The Meaning of Experience                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme 3: Interaction and Communication Open with Educators</b>           | P3, P6, P7, P8, P10 | <p>"P8: "Discussions with lecturers helped me understand how to behave in certain situations...."</p> <p>"P6: "The lecturer's input made me know which parts were needed fixed..."</p> <p>"P7: "I learned to express my opinion politely because often trained by lecturers..."</p> <p>"P3: "Good communication makes me dare to take results..."</p> <p>"P10: "The lecturer reminded me to listen to others before acting..."</p>                                                        | Open communication encourages self-reflection, improves professional competence, and strengthens nurses' understanding of ethical values and professionalism in daily practice.                      |
| <b>Theme 4: Inculcation of Ethical Values and Professionalism</b>           | P1, P3, P6, P8, P10 | <p>P1: "Lecturers emphasize honesty in all decisions that are I made..."</p> <p>"P3: "I learned that ethical decisions are sometimes more important Instead of completing a quick task..."</p> <p>"P6: "I am more careful in my actions after seeing example of lecturer..."</p> <p>"P8: "The professionalism taught by the lecturers is my guideline during practice..."</p> <p>"P10: "I always remember the ethical values taught by lecturers when facing a clinical situation..."</p> | Educators instill moral values that are the foundation of professionalism; Honesty, integrity, and empathy are the guidelines for nurses in making decisions and acting in the field.                |
| <b>Theme 5: Challenges in Implementing Professionalism in Real Practice</b> | P2, P3, P5, P7, P8  | <p>P2: "Sometimes it is difficult to apply the lecturer's advice in the field the conditions are different..."</p> <p>"P3: "There was a conflict with a friend that confused me in be..."</p> <p>"P5: "I need a lot of practice to be consistent in my attitude professional..."</p> <p>"P7: "The clinical situation made me have to adjust to fast..."</p> <p>"P8: "Imitating a professional attitude of lecturers is not always easy; It takes time and experience..."</p>              | Real practice challenges show that the implementation of Professionalism requires adaptation, continuous practice, self-reflection, and the ability to adapt to diverse work environment conditions. |

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The analysis of the table above shows that the experience of nurses undergoing learning tasks in career development is influenced by interactions with educators and real practices. Educators' examples shape professional attitudes, direct guidance strengthens understanding of the application of professional values, and open communication supports self-reflection and competency improvement. The inculcation of ethical values by educators is the moral basis of professionalism, while challenges in the field demand adaptation, practice, and consistency. Overall, career development through learning assignments is a complex process that integrates experience, moral values, and professional practice on an ongoing basis.

## DISCUSSION

The Experience of Nurses Undergoing Study Assignments in Career Development: A Phenomenological Study. The results of the study show that nurses interpret the experience of learning tasks as an important part of developing career development through real interaction with institutions, lecturers, and practical experiences. These interactions shape nurses' views of professionalism, which then become principles that they apply in their daily work practice (Habibzadeh et al., 2022; Kondić & Starc, 2023). Based on in-depth interviews with 12 participants, five key themes were found that describe the experience of nurses in undergoing learning tasks and developing their careers. Participant description (P):

### Theme 1: Educators as Professional Role Models

Nurses see lecturers or supervisors as a real example of the application of professional attitudes in academic contexts and clinical practice (Markowski, Bower, Essex, & Yearley, 2021). The consistency, discipline, empathy, and responsibility shown by educators are a reference for nurses to emulate professional behavior.

"P1: *"I learned discipline because the lecturer always showed that attitude in every activity...."*)

"P2: *"Seeing the lecturer being respectful and patient made me imitate him...."*)

"P3: *"The way the lecturer deals with difficult situations gives an example of how to behave professionally...."*)

"P4: *"The attitude of the lecturer is a real picture of the character that I have to build...."*)

"P6: *"I learned to restrain myself and think clearly because the lecturer always gives example....."*)

Thus, nurses understand that professionalism can be learned through the example of educators. This theme became the initial foundation that encouraged nurses to seek more intensive assistance in real practice.

### Theme 2: Mentoring and Guidance of Educators in Career Development

In line with the example of educators, nurses emphasize the importance of direct guidance during the learning assignment process (Nes, Zlamal, Linnerud, Steindal, & Solberg, 2023). This guidance helps strengthen their understanding of the application of professionalism in practice.

"P2: *"When guided by lecturers, I am more confident in making the right decisions appropriate...."*

"P4: *"The mentoring in the clinic helped me understand how to be professional...."*

"P5: *"The direct direction from the lecturer made me better understand me responsibilities as a nurse...."*

"P7: *"Mentorship helped me deal with situations I had never experienced previously...."*

"P9: *"I know the right attitude thanks to the lecturer's instructions...."*

This mentoring strengthens the career development process while combining professional values with real experience, as well as encouraging the need for open communication with educators.

### Theme 3: Open Interaction and Communication with Educators

Nurses emphasize that open communication is essential in career development (Giroux & Moreau, 2022). Discussions, conversations, and feedback help nurses understand themselves, improve attitudes, and improve professional competence.

"P8: *"Discussions with lecturers helped me understand how to behave in certain situations...."*)

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"P6: *"The lecturer's input made me know which areas needed to be improved...."*)

"P7: *"I learned to express my opinions politely because I was often trained by lecturers...."*

"P3: *"Good communication made me brave to make decisions...."*)

"P10: *"The lecturer reminded me to listen to others before acting...."*)

These interactions make nurses more reflective of their behaviors and decisions, as well as prepare them to accept professional values and work ethics.

#### **Theme 4: Inculcating Ethical Values and Professionalism by Educators**

Nurses state that the most important role of educators is to instill ethical values as the basis of professionalism (Mulang & Putra, 2023). Honesty, integrity, empathy, responsibility, and care are always emphasized.

"P1: *"The lecturer emphasizes honesty in all the decisions I make...."*

"P3: *"I learned that ethical decisions are sometimes more important than completing tasks quickly...."*)

"P6: *"I am more careful in my actions after seeing the example of the lecturer...."*)

"P8: *"The professionalism taught by the lecturer became my guideline during practice...."*)

"P10: *"I always remember the ethical values taught by the lecturer when facing Clinical Situation...."*)

This theme emphasizes that the development of professionalism is not only technical, but is built through strong moral values.

#### **Theme 5: Challenges in Applying Professionalism in Real Practice**

Despite receiving examples, guidance, communication, and value instilling, nurses still face obstacles in applying professionalism consistently (Lee & Choi, 2021). The real situation in the clinic is often different from the one taught or exemplified.

"P2: *"Sometimes it is difficult to apply the lecturer's advice in the field because the conditions are different...."*)

"P3: *"There is a conflict with a friend that confuses me in my attitude...."*)

"P5: *"I need a lot of practice to be consistent in being professional...."*

"P7: *"The clinical situation makes me have to adjust quickly...."*)

"P8: *"Imitating the professional attitude of a lecturer is not always easy; It takes time and experience...."*

These findings suggest that career development through learning assignments is a long process that requires practice, reflection, and adaptation. The five themes are interrelated, forming the pattern of nurses' experiences in understanding and developing professionalism in the work environment.

This study explores the experiences of nurses who undergo study assignments as part of career development. The findings show that learning tasks make an important contribution to nurses' understanding of professionalism, clinical skill development, and decision-making abilities (Suwandewi et al., 2024). Real-world experience gained through direct interaction with educators, supervisors, and the practice environment is the main foundation for nurses in building professional competencies. This is in line with career development theory that emphasizes the importance of real experience and mentoring in shaping the professionalism of health workers (Blokke, Akkermans, Tims, Jansen, & Khapova, 2019).

One of the key findings is that educators or supervisors serve as real role models for nurses. Nurses assess that consistency, discipline, empathy, and responsibility jawab pendidik menjadi contoh konkrit bagaimana profesionalisme diterapkan dalam praktik akademik and clinics (Jobst, Lindwedel, Marx, Pazouki, Ziegler, König, Kugler, & Feuchtinger, 2022). These findings support the social learning principle that individuals learn attitudes and behaviors through observation of others. The example set by educators encourages nurses to imitate professional behavior on an ongoing basis, forming the basis for attitudes and work ethics that will be applied in real-life situations (Ukoha & Mtshali, 2023).

The second finding shows that direct assistance from educators is very important in strengthening nurses' understanding of professionalism. Mentoring not only improves knowledge and skills but also provides confidence in dealing with complex clinical situations (Lillekroken, Kvalvaag, Lindeflaten, Flølo,

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Krogstad, & Hessevaagbakke, 2024). This process strengthens the integration between theory and practice, allowing nurses to understand professional responsibilities more deeply (Seah, Tan, Eriksson, Wang, & Ramazanu, 2022). Nurses who receive direct guidance can adapt the principles of professionalism into real actions, so that the experience of learning tasks becomes more meaningful.

In addition to role models and mentoring, open interaction with educators is an important element in nursing career development. Discussions, questions, and feedback allow nurses to self-evaluate, improve attitudes, and improve professional competencies (Filho, Eustachio, Caldana, Will, Salvia, Rampasso, Anholon, Platje, & Kovaleva, 2020). This open communication experience supports the formation of strong self-reflection, encourages nurses to critically assess their choices and actions, and prepares them for clinical situations more maturely (Gilbert, Beroz, Loanzon, Zyniewicz, Swoboda, Neal, & Gubrud, 2024). These findings are in line with the literature emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interaction in professional learning (Hunter, Considine, & Manias, 2023).

The nurse explained that educators have a central role in instilling ethical values that are the basis of professionalism, such as honesty, integrity, empathy, responsibility, and care. The application of these values is not only in the technical aspect, but also in decision-making and daily behavior. These ethical values form the moral foundation that underpins the professionalism of nurses in the context of real practice. These findings support the idea that professionalism in nursing is built through the internalization of moral values that are consistent and carried out in real interactions (Mulang & Putra, 2023).

Although nurses receive examples, guidance, communication, and ethical values, they still face obstacles in applying professionalism consistently. Clinical situations often differ from what is exemplified or taught, for example, the existence of time pressures, conflicts between colleagues, and unexpected situations that require quick adjustments. This shows that career development through learning tasks is a continuous process and requires reflection, practice, and high adaptability (Habibzadeh et al., 2022; Hamzah, 2021). Nurses must be able to balance the application of professional values with

practical demands in the field, so that the formation of professionalism is not only theoretical but also real and relevant (Guraya & Guraya, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The experience of learning tasks has an important role in the career development of nurses and the formation of their professionalism. Through the example of educators, mentoring, open communication, and internalization of ethical values, nurses can hone their professional attitudes and competencies in an ongoing manner. Thus, study assignments become an effective means to build professionalism and improve nurses' abilities in real practice.

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