



BEYOND GRADES: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ACADEMIC BARRIERS TO NURSING STUDENT RETENTION

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Abstract: This study was undertaken to investigate the determinants of nursing student retention, focusing on social, economic, and academic barriers. Utilizing a descriptive-quantitative research design, data was collected from 292 nursing students via a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed for data analysis. Findings indicated that the predominant challenges were academic stress, emotional exhaustion, and fatigue (OAWM = 3.70), with financial constraints concerning tuition being a significant economic barrier (WM = 3.59). However, no statistically significant differences were found in perceived barriers across demographic variables such as year level, gender, or socioeconomic status ($p > 0.05$). The study concludes that barriers to retention are universally experienced, necessitating holistic, institution-wide support systems rather than targeted subgroup interventions. Recommendations include the implementation of comprehensive retention programs encompassing financial aid, mental health support, academic mentoring, and peer support networks.

Index Terms - Student Retention, Nursing Education, Academic Stress, Economic Barriers, Social Barriers, Philippines

Introduction

The global shortage of nurses is a critical concern for healthcare systems worldwide, with the World Health Organization projecting a deficit of nearly 5.9 million nurses by 2030. A significant contributor to this shortage is the high attrition rate within nursing education programs, which can range from 25% to 50% [1], [2]. While academic performance has traditionally been the focus of retention strategies, a growing body of evidence suggests that non-academic factors—social, economic, and personal—play an equally, if not more, critical role in a student's decision to persist or withdraw [3], [4].

This study moves beyond a singular focus on grades to explore the multifaceted barriers that impact nursing student retention. In the Philippine context, factors such as financial instability, family obligations, intense academic workload, and emotional stress are prevalent yet often under-addressed in institutional policy [5]. This research aims to provide a quantitative analysis of these barriers, offering evidence-based insights that can inform the development of more holistic and effective student support systems. By identifying the key challenges faced by nursing students, educational institutions can implement targeted interventions to improve retention rates, thereby contributing to a more robust and resilient healthcare workforce.

Research Methodology

3.1 Population

The study population comprised nursing students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at St. Mary's College of Tagum, Inc. during the academic year 2024-2025. From a total population of 1,026 students, a sample size of 292 was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participation was voluntary and involved students from first to fourth year levels.

3.2

Data

and

Sources

of

Data

This study utilized primary data collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The instrument was divided into four parts: (I) Demographic Profile, (II) Barriers to Retention (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), (III) Problems Encountered, and (IV) Suggested

Interventions. Content validity was established through expert review, and reliability was confirmed via a pilot test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha above the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

3.3 Theoretical framework
The study is anchored on Bean and Metzner's (1985) Student Attrition Model, which posits that retention is influenced by the interaction of background variables, academic variables, environmental variables, and psychological outcomes [6]. This framework aligns with the study's independent variables: demographic profile, social factors, economic factors, and academic factors, with the dependent variable being student retention.

3.4 Statistical tools
Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and weighted means) to summarize the data. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test for significant differences in perceived barriers based on the students' year level, gender, and socioeconomic status. The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=292)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Year Level	First Year	82	28%
	Second Year	116	40%
	Third Year	58	20%
	Fourth Year	36	12%
Gender	Female	222	76%
	Male	70	24%
Socioeconomic Status	Below ₱10,000	126	43%
	₱10,001 - ₱20,000	69	24%
	₱20,001 - ₱30,000	49	17%
	Above ₱30,000	48	16%

The sample was predominantly second-year (40%) and female (76%). A large portion (43%) reported a household income below ₱10,000 monthly, indicating significant financial constraints.

4.2 Perceived Barriers to Retention
The analysis of barriers yielded the following Overall Average Weighted Means (OAWM):

- **Social Factors:** OAWM = 2.78 (Neutral)
- **Economic Factors:** OAWM = 2.82 (Neutral). The highest-rated economic barrier was "Financial difficulties make it challenging to pay tuition" (WM = 3.59, Agree).
- **Academic Factors:** OAWM = 3.41 (Neutral). Students reported high motivation (WM = 4.35, Agree) and strong instructor support (WM = 4.11, Agree), but also acknowledged academic stress (WM = 3.40, Neutral) and challenges keeping up with the curriculum (WM = 3.18, Neutral).

4.3

Problems

Encountered

The most significant problems encountered were:

- "I sometimes feel emotionally exhausted or burned out" (WM = 3.93, Agree)
 - "I often lack sleep and feel fatigued..." (WM = 3.86, Agree)
 - "I experience high levels of stress..." (WM = 3.70, Agree)
- The OAWM for problems encountered was 3.70 (Agree).

4.4

Test

of

Hypothesis

A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in perceived barriers based on students' year level, gender, or socioeconomic status, as all p-values were greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4.4: ANOVA Results for Perceived Barriers

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	2087.55	23	90.76	63.74	0.474
Within Groups	9944.77	6984	1.42		
Total	12032.33	7007			

Conclusion

This study concludes that the primary barriers to nursing student retention are predominantly related to academic and emotional strain, including stress, fatigue, and burnout. Financial difficulty, specifically concerning tuition costs, is a significant economic barrier. Crucially, these challenges are universally experienced across all demographic subgroups, as no significant differences were found based on year level, gender, or socioeconomic status. This suggests that interventions must be broad-based and inclusive, designed to support the entire student population. The high levels of motivation and perceived instructor support are positive factors that can be leveraged in developing effective retention strategies.

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