

Development of a training program for foreign nurses candidate based on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA): The significance of training experience in Japan for nurses candidate in the Philippines

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Abstract

Purpose & Subjects: To interview foreign nurse candidates who visited Japan from the Philippines in 2009 based on the EPA in order to reveal the significance of their training experience in Japan and obtain feedback for developing an effective training system.

Methods: We intervened regarding the training program for nurse candidates and analyzed subsequent interviews with them using a qualitative inductive approach.

Results: The nurse candidates sustained {inconvenience} from [unanticipated geographical conditions] and {loneliness} from [being separated from family and friends]. Before the intervention, they experienced {feelings of isolation} because they [could not say what they wanted], {unjustness} concerning [lack of their desired medical department despite it having been shown] and [a training program completely different from what they wanted], and {anguish} at [bewilderment at being made to work as a helper] and [unanticipated training program]. {Complaint} was derived from the candidates' thoughts, such as that they [complained to the

researchers even though they would get in trouble because they could not endure].

After the intervention, {change} was seen in the training system and the candidates' feelings due to [positive change of the support system], [themselves making efforts], and [determination of new study methods]; they began to show {hope} from a [change of the training program to duties fitting of nurses] and a [shift and change in feelings].

The results of this study pointed to the importance of providing a training program that prevents loss of hope and pride in candidates who had been very proud of nursing experience until then.

Introduction

Based on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), nurse and care worker candidates have been coming to Japan from Indonesia since August 2008 and from the Philippines since 2009. The policy at that moment based on the EPA had strict requirements, requiring nurse candidates (hereafter referred to simply as "candidates") to return to their home

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country if they do not pass the national examinations within three years of arriving in Japan [1].

The Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare had stated that various concrete measures would be implemented to make the examinations easier for nurses and care workers coming to Japan based on these EPAs [2]. Despite these measures, the pass rate for nurse candidates has been extremely low over the past few years, at 0% in 2009, 1.18% in 2010, and 4.02% in 2011.

In an attempt to assist two candidates from the Philippines who came to Japan with the first group, our team of researchers and others helped develop the training program at Training Hospital C. Study sessions were held for the national examinations once a month on Japanese laws and culture that influence the exams for nurses. We learned that, while the candidates were grateful for their sincere study support from the training hospital, the training program in clinical practice leaned towards a nursing assistant's duties rather than what was needed for the national nursing examinations. Other concerns were that the learning method for the national examinations was not paced with the candidates' understanding of Japanese and that they became lonely and anxious at the end of the day when training ended. Therefore the team discussed some adjustments with the training hospital.

As a result, the hospital agreed to revise the program so that the training in clinical practice would be more similar to the actual practical training of nursing student interns and study sessions on national examination problems would be paced with the candidates' understanding of Japanese. They also agreed to create as many opportunities as possible for the candidates to be exposed to Japanese culture. After these changes were implemented, the aforementioned problems were resolved and the candidates' insecurity largely disappeared.

In previous studies as well, the results indicated

the need to educate foreign nurse candidates on the language, culture, and social system of Japan as well as the nature of nursing in Japan [3].

In our research, we attempted to revise the structure of the entire hospital training program (including language studies) for candidates based on the EPA and create a program for effective training.

In an attempt to uncover measures for establishing an effective training system, we interviewed the two candidates from the Philippines to clarify the current state of the training system, the candidates' thoughts on the training system, and the significance of their experience living in Japan.

The present study was financed by Niigata University of Health and Welfare.

Purpose & Significance

The purpose of this study was to interview candidates who came to Japan from the Philippines based on the EPA in order to reveal the significance of their training experience in Japan and receive feedback for developing an effective training system.

The significance of this study is to link its results to the development of a better training program and help increase of the national examination pass rate by enabling all candidates to participate in high quality training.

Methods

1. The study used an intervention and qualitative inductive approach.
2. The subjects were two female candidates ("A" and "B") who came to Japan with the first group and received training at Hospital C. Both had received the researcher's guidance of nurses national examination.
3. The selection criteria was based on participants' background such as; ①Both A and B were registered as nurses based on similar educational experiences ②Both A and

- B grew up in similar economic conditions ③ Both A and B were receiving training programs in same conditions.
4. The following intervention methods and data collection methods were used.
- A) Intervention methods: Our team of researchers and others met with the Head of the Nursing Department and the candidates' advisors and coordinated the following adjustments in the training for clinical practice and national examination preparation.
- (1) Revisions would be made in the clinical practice portion of the training program to make it more similar to the actual practical training of nursing student interns.
 - (2) Answers to national examination problems and their explanations would be paced with the candidates' understanding of Japanese.
 - (3) Employees of Training Hospital C would create opportunities for the candidates to learn about Japanese culture and lifestyle habits.
- B) Data collection: After adjusting between the nurse candidates and hospital, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in both English and Japanese. Questions were about the current state of the training system, the candidates' thoughts on the training system, and the significance of their experience living in Japan.
5. For analysis, four researchers carefully read the data and derived [subcategories] from the <raw data> that were made into more abstract {categories}. Repeated discussion on the participants' thoughts were held regarding the training.
6. The study period was from October to December, 2010.
7. To keep the study valid; ①The four researchers had discussions until they reached the consent and agreement ②Participants' agreement was obtained that the interpretation of the research was valid.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Niigata University of Health and Welfare. It was also approved by the director of the training hospital and the head of its nursing department. After receiving oral and written explanations of the voluntary nature of the study and being assured that they would not experience any repercussions should they decline to participate, both subjects gave their consent to participate. In addition, the researchers increased the likelihood of voluntary participation based on free will by considering how to approach the participants so as to prevent coercion. Because the study participants were not sufficiently accustomed to the Japanese language, a written explanation of the study and a consent form in both English and Japanese were English.

Results

1. Personal attributes of the study participants, reason for coming to Japan, and hopes for the future (Table 1)

Participant A was a female in her 30's who had her husband and children. She had worked at a surgical department at a hospital in Saudi Arabia for seven years. A hoped to live in Japan with her family if she passed the national examination.

Participant B was a single female in her 20's, having experiences of the nursing in ICU and obstetrics and gynecology department. B hoped to reside permanently in Japan as well.

2. Method for selecting training location (Table 2)

Both A and B looked for a training hospital by the agency of company D. There were few options presented, and company D made a final decision. The only information they could get the name of the hospital.

3. Training program at the training hospital (Table 3)

A and B learned Japanese language outside the hospital on Wednesdays. Four days in a week they received clinical training all morning, and

Table 1. Personal attributes of the study participants, reason for coming to Japan, and hopes for the future

	A	B
Arrival in Japan	2009	2008
Age	30s	20s
Academic background	The Philippines Nursing College (Private)	The Philippines Nursing College (Private)
Family	Husband, two children, father and mother (all staying in the Philippines)	Father and mother (staying in Japan)
Employment history Area of specialization	The Philippines: Hospital (Surgical Department) Saudi Arabia: Hospital (7 years) (Surgical Department)	The Philippines (ICU, obstetrics and gynecology)
Training location	Psychiatric hospital (dementia ward)	Psychiatric hospital (dementia ward)
Reason for coming to Japan Future hopes	To live in Japan with her husband, children, and parents.	To live with her parents in Japan.

Table 2. Method for selecting training location

Category	Subcategory	Data
Lack of freedom in selection	Selection with lack of freedom due to few options and little information	- Only 10 options available - Only 5 clicks allowed - Choice is made by Company D - Only given the hospital's name

Table 3. Training program schedule at the training hospital

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	“Clinical training”	“Clinical training”	Japanese lesson	“Clinical training”	“Clinical training”
PM	Study session for national examinations	Study session for national examinations	Japanese lesson	Study session for national examinations	Study session for national examinations

studied for national examination all afternoon.

4. Thoughts before and after the intervention (Tables 4 and 5)

The following words noted in brackets { }

mean “categories”, brackets [] means “subcategories”, and brackets < > means raw data.

The candidates sustained {inconvenience}

Table 4. Candidates' thoughts prior to the intervention

{Category}	[Subcategory]	<Raw data>
Inconvenience	Unanticipated geographical conditions	- Pitch-darkness at night - I had thought all of Japan was like Tokyo
	Lifestyle inconvenience	- Saudi Arabia is also surrounded by mountains, but everything was available - It takes 25 minutes by bike to get to the station or go shopping
Loneliness	Being separated from family and friends	- The large house (provided by the training location) is a dream, but it is lonely being there alone - I lived with my husband and children in Saudi Arabia - In Saudi Arabia, many Filipino people lived near the hospital
Feelings of isolation	Unbreakable isolation from coworkers	- The people at the training hospital were so nice and friendly that I couldn't ask about it - Hospital staff told me it must be nice to have a big house (but I am actually lonely)
	Could not say what they wanted	- I can't say what I want because everyone at the training hospital is kind - I would get in trouble if I complained
Unjustness	Lack of their desired medical department despite it having been shown	- I thought the hospital was a good location because I specialize in surgery. - (However,) the hospital lacked the department it was stated to have
	Training program that is completely different from what they wanted	- I had only ever visited a psychiatric hospital as a student - I was very nervous (when I found out it was a psychiatric hospital) and thought, Oh my God!
Anguish	Bewilderment at being made to do the work of a helper (even though I was a nurse candidate)	- This is the first time (since becoming a nurse) that I've done duties like cleaning toilets and mopping floors - I worked together with helpers (nurse's assistants). This made me feel down
	Unanticipated training program	- It is hard to even think about it - I always cried when I talked about it (about doing the work of a helper) - I mostly just put up with it
Complaint	Complained to the researchers even though they thought they would get in trouble because they could not hold back	- I kept quiet because I thought I would get in trouble if I complained - However, I told OO (a researcher) because A was not feeling well (The researcher went to talk with the Head of the Nursing Department at the training location)

Table 5. Candidates' thoughts after the intervention

{Category}	[Subcategory]	<Raw data>
Change	Positive change of the support system	- I think the Head of Nursing and my advisor want (me) to become a nurse soon - My current level of support is fantastic
	Themselves making efforts	- I worked very hard
	Determination of new study methods	- The style now (of studying slowly while checking the meaning of words) is good - It is not good to place the reading and the translation together - (The studying) progressed very quickly before - I have just now (finally) determined study methods
Hope	Change of training program to duties fitting of a nurse	- Taking vital signs and assisting in bathing - Bed baths - Occasionally make assessments
	Shift and change in feelings	- I strongly feel that I want to become a nurse - I will study as hard as I can

from [unanticipated geographical conditions] and {loneliness} from [being separated from families and friends]. Before the intervention, they experienced {feelings of isolation} because they [could not say what they wanted], {unjustness} concerning [lack of their desired medical department despite it having been shown] and [a training program that was completely different from what they expected], and {anguish} at [bewilderment at being made to do the work of a helper] and [unanticipated training program]. {Complaint} was derived from the candidates' thoughts and they [complained to the researchers even though they thought they would get in trouble because they could not hold back].

After the intervention, {change} was seen in the training system and the candidates' feelings due to [a positive change in the support system], [themselves making efforts], and [determination of new study methods], and they began to show {hope} from [a change of the training program to duties fitting of a nurse] and [a shift and change

in feelings].

Discussion

1. Bewilderment of the candidates

A) Bewilderment about selected training location

At the start of the interview, the candidates expressed their surprise at the [lack of their desired medical department despite it having been shown]. One candidate specialized in surgery and the other specialized in intensive care (Table 1). Both were proud of being an expert in their respective fields. However, the method for selecting the training location while in the Philippines was simply clicking on five places displayed on a computer screen. As a result, the candidates selected Hospital C under the limitations such as complete lack of knowledge about the characteristics of the training hospital or of the training program.

Regarding their experience after actually arriving in Japan, they gave such comments as, <The hospital did not have the department

(surgical department) it was stated to have>, <I had only ever visited a psychiatric hospital as a student>, and <I was very nervous (when I found out it was a psychiatric hospital) and thought, Oh my God!>, showing that the candidates were bewildered from the very start of their training.

To help remove these discrepancies felt by the candidates, it is important for Japan to urge the company mediating the program in the Philippines to make improvements more strongly. Specifically, the information disclosure about the training locations in Japan should be more detailed and accurate, and include the geographical conditions of the training locations.

B) Bewilderment about the training program

For the first several months of their training, the candidates were surprised that the training program included nonclinical housekeeping duties they had not anticipated, as shown by comments such as <This is the first time (since becoming a nurse) that I've done duties like cleaning toilets and mopping floors> and <I worked together with helpers (nurse's assistants). This made me feel down.>. However, they couldn't bring themselves to ask about the training program, saying <The people at the training hospital were so nice and friendly that I couldn't ask about it>.

By the candidates talking about these unacceptable and distressful matters to the research team, the training program was revised and [positive change of the support system] led to [determination of new study methods]. The candidates thus found [themselves making efforts] and felt a {changes} in their feelings. Moreover, the [changes of the training program aiming at nurse duties] led to a [shift and change in feelings] that resulted in {hope} regarding the training and national examinations.

The training program for candidates based on the EPA is stipulated to have content that appropriately takes into account the fact that the

candidates will take the national examinations for nurses [4]. The researchers presented the interview at the training location with an employee by the officer from the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare and found it to be intended to simply check the progress of the candidates' Japanese studies. It did not verify the actual content of the training program. This indicated the necessity of a third party who assessed whether the training program for the EPA-related candidates were appropriately prepared for taking the national examinations.

2. Inconvenience and feelings of isolation

Furukawa et al. stated that "according to interview investigations, none of the people felt any significant difficulties concerning relationships with patients and co-workers and their lives in Japan [5]. Furthermore, Fukutake *et al.* claimed that foreign nurses did not feel any particular difficulties despite differences in language and culture between Japan and their home countries [3].

However, the <pitch-darkness at night> environment of their training location and their places of residence were unexpected by the candidates who had lived in large cities in the Philippines or Saudi Arabia. The candidates who said <I had thought all of Japan was like Tokyo> had to bike (25 minutes) even on rainy or snowy days because there was no transportation system going to the station and thus felt inconvenience. The candidates also said everyone was kind at Training Hospital C because they accompanied candidates shopping and to clinics to combat this inconvenience. However, this actually led to feelings of isolation, because the candidates [could not say what they wanted], to the co-workers, as mentioned above.

In addition, the candidates experienced loneliness from being separated from their families and friends. As indicated by the comments, <the large house (provided by the

training location) is a dream, but it is lonely being there alone>, the candidates may have experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness due to living alone in a foreign country, while they had previously been surrounded by family with whom they had strong bonds [7].

In the Philippines, many people go away to work in foreign countries to support their families [8]. Candidate A is no exception and wants to become a licensed nurse in Japan and raise her children in a safe and secure country like Japan to fulfill the hopes of her entire family (Table 1). It is therefore Japan's responsibility, as long as having accepted the EPA program, to sufficiently verify the characteristics of the training programs and their locations.

2. Limitation of this study and future issues

Participants of this study were two candidate nurses from the Philippines. They had training only in a dementia ward and psychiatric ward. Therefore, actual training conditions of every other candidate could not be described. Furthermore, this study did not refer to those from Indonesia which had different educational system and economic conditions.

In the future, more and more research should be about training conditions in which the candidates are placed. In addition, characteristics of Indonesian candidates should be researched because more Indonesian candidates have passed the national examination than those from the Philippines.

Proposals for improving the training system for nurse candidates based on the EPA and conclusions

The results of this study suggested that in reality, several difficulties exist for candidates who were trying to acquire a license while working in Japan, away from their home countries. The followings are some proposals for resolving those difficulties:

1. Japan should ask the mediating institutions to provide as detailed information as possible to assist candidates in selecting training hospitals.
2. During the course which candidates take when arriving in Japan, they should be given a chance to meet a key person from the training location in the early stage.
3. A more detailed training program that respects the cultural aspects of the candidates' home countries and the candidates' experiences as a nurse, and considers the various difficulties candidates may encounter in Japan must be developed.
4. A third party should assess the appropriateness of the training program at the training location.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deepest thanks to the candidates who kindly agreed to be interviewed and to everyone involved at the training hospital. We would also like to offer our sincere congratulations to one of the candidates who were able to pass the national examinations for nurses in fiscal 2011.

We will continue to strive to help as many nurse candidates as possible pass the examinations.

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