

Exploring the Relationship between Perceived Professional Benefits and Self-Efficacy Among Nursing Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

Background: As global healthcare demand rises, the nursing profession faces critical challenges like staff shortages and high turnover, threatening service quality and team stability. Recent focus on positive psychology has highlighted Perceived Professional Benefits (PPB) - nurses' positive gains and personal growth through work, enhancing professional identity and self-worth.

Simultaneously, self-efficacy - one's belief in successfully performing tasks - significantly influences nursing interns' performance and career decisions. Those with higher self-efficacy manage workplace stress better, leading to greater job satisfaction and retention.

Objective: Through the investigation of the current situation of the sense of occupational benefit and self-efficacy of nursing interns, the data were analyzed to explore the relationship, to provide reference for self-efficacy of nursing interns.

Methods: 175 intern nursing students were selected as the research subjects through convenience sampling method, and relevant scales were used for investigation.

Results: The results of the study show that the intern nursing students scored (114.21±13.18) points in the sense of professional gain and (27.48±4.85) points in the sense of self-efficacy. There was a statistical significance in the scores of their academic qualifications, reasons for choosing nursing, degree of liking nursing, thought of engaging in nursing industry after graduation, and the sense of professional gain of interns who were satisfied with their teachers ($P<0.05$). The results showed that there was a positive correlation between the sense of occupational benefit and self-efficacy of nursing interns ($P<0.05$).

Conclusions: The study found that the sense of occupational benefit and self-efficacy of nursing interns are at a medium level and in direct proportion. Therefore, colleges and hospitals can take targeted measures to improve the sense of professional benefit of nursing interns, so as to enhance the level of self-efficacy and stabilize the nursing team.

Key words: Nursing student; Professional sense of benefit; Self-efficacy; Job satisfaction

Introduction

At present, the nursing workforce in China is inadequate and excessive turnover is common, a situation that is not unique to China but is also prevalent in the global nursing industry ^[1]. In recent years, positive psychology has gradually gained attention, and the concept of career access for professionals is one of its key components. This refers to the ability of nursing staff to recognize the benefits and advantages associated with their positions, realizing that working in the nursing profession can contribute to their overall development ^[2]. The concept of occupational benefit applies equally to both practicing nurses and nursing interns. The clinical internship represents a formative period for nursing students' professional development ^[3]. However, the intense clinical environment often generates significant stress that can weaken interns' confidence and reduce their work motivation ^[4], potentially leading to early career attrition. Research indicates that positive professional experiences help strengthen interns' emotional connection to nursing, reinforce their professional identity, and promote career commitment ^[5].

Self-efficacy is about whether someone believes they can do something using their own skills and abilities ^[6]. It is defined as the capacity to cope with life's stressors through a sense of self-confidence ^[7]. Nursing interns' psychological experiences in the clinical environment directly impact their self-efficacy. Successful task performance and positive work attitudes consistently correlate with higher self-efficacy levels ^[8]. A strong sense of occupational benefit serves as a positive psychological resource, helping nursing interns better manage work frustrations, stressful situations, and negative emotions while boosting their self-efficacy. As self-efficacy grows, interns develop greater confidence in handling clinical challenges. This increased confidence motivates more active professional engagement, enabling them to effectively apply their knowledge and skills to solve practical problems.

This study investigates the current status of occupational benefits and self-efficacy among nursing interns. By analyzing the data, it aims to explore the relationship between these two factors and provide a reference for improving the self-efficacy of nursing interns. The findings may serve as a basis for universities and hospitals to implement measures that enhance the self-efficacy of nursing interns, thereby improving their motivation and contributing to the stability of the nursing workforce in the future.

Objects and Methods

Subjects of the Study

A convenience sampling method was used to conduct a survey in December 2022 among 175 nursing interns at a tertiary hospital in a specific region.

This study used convenience sampling to recruit participants from a tertiary hospital in a specific region, ensuring easy access to potential subjects. Internship nursing students who met the inclusion criteria were sequentially numbered (1 to 175) and invited to complete the questionnaire. Factors such as educational background, gender, and family environment were not controlled during selection. Sampling continued until 175 valid responses were collected, forming the final sample. While this method enabled efficient data collection given time and resource constraints, its non-random nature may limit the generalizability of the findings.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: ① Nursing students graduating in 2023; ② Internship duration of ≥ 3 months; ③ Voluntary participation.

The exclusion criterion were nursing interns who were not on duty at the time of the survey.

Research Instruments

General Information Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on a review of relevant literature. It included items such as gender, age, reasons for choosing the

nursing profession, personality traits, whether they had served as student cadres, whether they intended to pursue a career in nursing after graduation, and their satisfaction with clinical instructors.

Career Benefit Scale for Nursing Interns

The scale, revised by Hu Chuanjiao and et al. [9], consists of 29 items across 5 dimensions. It uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” (5 points) to “strongly disagree” (1 point). Higher total scores indicate a stronger sense of career benefit. The scale demonstrated good reliability and validity, with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.944.

General Self-Efficacy Scale

The scale was developed by Schwarzer et al. [10] and later translated and adapted into Chinese by Wang Caikang et al. [11]. It comprises 10 items rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from “completely incorrect” (1 point) to “completely correct” (4 points). The total score ranges from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating a higher level of self-efficacy. The scale showed good reliability and validity, with a Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.87.

Survey Method

The questionnaire for this study was created using the Questionnaire Star platform. After obtaining consent from the nursing interns, electronic questionnaires were distributed with standardized instructions to ensure consistency. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, and 175 valid responses were collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 97.2%.

Statistical Methods

Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analysis were employed for data analysis.

Results

Scores of Nursing Interns’ Sense of Career Benefit

The total score of the nursing interns’ sense of career benefit was 114.21 ± 13.18 . The scores for each dimension are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Scores on the perceived career benefits of trainee nursing students (n=175)

dimension	Mean score ($\pm s$)	Maximum value	Minimum value
Good nurse-patient relationship	4.16 \pm 0.90	5.00	1.00
Family and Friends Recognition	3.99 \pm 0.92	5.00	1.00
Self-growth	3.99 \pm 0.87	5.00	1.00
Team belonging	3.93 \pm 0.91	5.00	1.00
Positive career perception	3.71 \pm 0.85	5.00	1.00
Total Career Benefit Score	114.21 \pm 13.18		

Comparison of Career Benefit Scores Among Nursing Interns with Different Characteristics

The analysis revealed statistically significant differences ($P < 0.05$) in the career benefit scores of the 175 nursing interns based on their academic

qualifications, reasons for choosing nursing, level of interest in nursing, intention to pursue nursing after graduation, and satisfaction with clinical instructors. Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of scores on perceived career benefits among trainee nurses with different characteristics (n=175)

Project	Number of people (%)	Score ($\bar{x} \pm s$)	t/F	P
Gender				
Female	151 (86.3)	113.83±15.80	-0.788	0.432
Male	24 (13.7)	116.63±18.30		
Whether the child is an only child				
Yes	41 (23.4)	112.31±12.94	0.825	0.410
No	134 (76.6)	114.77±16.99		
Academic qualifications				
Speciality	26 (14.9)	109.69±13.20	2.259	0.025
Undergraduate	149 (85.1)	115.35±16.37		
Place of birth				
Cities	75 (42.9)	114.11±17.27	1.073	0.929
Town	23 (13.1)	113.17±16.14		
Rural	77 (44.0)	114.62±17.08		
Reasons for choosing care				
Personal preference	71 (40.6)	118.15±15.17	3.672	0.013
Parents' reasons	35 (20.0)	107.54±19.51		
Transfer	34 (19.4)	112.68±17.35		
Employment	35 (20.0)	114.37±10.24		
How much do you like nursing				
Very much	39 (22.3)	118.79±13.16	8.138	0.000
Not at all	116 (66.3)	114.80±15.47		
Dislikes	20 (11.4)	101.85±19.60		
Personality				
Introverted	20 (11.4)	113.00±13.80	0.096	0.984
Introverted	54 (30.9)	114.91±13.66		
Neutral	56 (32.0)	114.66±16.64		
Extraverted	10 (5.7)	113.80±13.14		
Extraverted	35 (20.0)	113.23±11.59		
Being a student leader in school				
yes	68 (38.9)	115.35±16.26	-0.745	0.457
No	107 (61.1)	113.49±16.09		
Think about nursing after graduation				
Never	22 (12.6)	109.35±16.07	3.559	0.031
Occasionally	104 (59.4)	115.54±16.49		

Continue....

Often	49 (28.0)	118.77±12.13		
Satisfaction with teachers				
Satisfied	103 (58.9)	118.57±15.67	13.294	0.000
Satisfied	67 (28.3)	109.13±13.21		
Dissatisfied	5 (2.9)	105.40±11.67		

Self-Efficacy Scores of Nursing Interns

The total self-efficacy score of the 175 nursing interns was 27.48 ± 4.85 . The scores were categorized as follows:

- High level (31–40): 21 (12.0%) interns.
- Medium level (21–30): 78 (44.6%) interns.
- Low level (10–20): 76 (43.4%) interns.

Correlation Between Nursing Interns' Sense of Career Benefit and Self-Efficacy

The total score of the nursing interns' sense of career benefit, as well as the scores for each dimension, showed a significant positive correlation with their self-efficacy scores ($P < 0.01$). Detailed results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between nursing interns' sense of career benefits and self-efficacy (r , $n = 175$).

Table 3. Correlation between perceived career benefits and self-efficacy of nursing interns (r , $n=175$)

Project	Good Patient Relationship	Family and Friends Recognition	Self-growth	Sense of belonging to the team	Positive career perception	Total Career Benefit Score
Self-efficacy	.312**	.296**	.203**	.338**	.348**	.297**

Note: ** indicates significant correlation at $P < 0.01$.

Discussion

Nursing Interns' Sense of Career Benefit is at a Moderately Low Level

The total score of the 175 nursing interns' sense of career benefit was 114.21 ± 13.18 , indicating a moderately low level. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Chen Lili et al. [12]. The reasons for this may include the following: during the internship period, students not only face the complexities of clinical work but also experience pressure related to academics, employment, and graduation. Nursing interns demonstrate significantly lower career benefit perceptions than licensed nurses, as evidenced by Zhuo Rongxin et al. 's research [13]. This disparity stems from two primary factors. Professionally, interns lack the clinical autonomy of registered nurses while performing similarly

demanding tasks, limiting their sense of professional accomplishment. Additionally, the absence of financial remuneration during training - coupled with existing economic pressures - frequently creates a perceived imbalance between effort expended and rewards gained [14].

The positive nurse-patient relationship dimension emerged as the highest-scoring aspect of career benefit, consistent with Wang Qianqian et al.'s research [15]. These findings indicate that nursing interns actively cultivate rapport with patients through open communication and trust-building, while demonstrating commitment to holistic patient care. Patients typically reciprocate this professional dedication with cooperation, encouragement, and positive feedback. This mutually beneficial dynamic creates an optimal environment for developing therapeutic nurse-patient relationships.

The positive career perception dimension scored the lowest among nursing interns, consistent with Bai Xiangwei's findings ^[16]. This can be attributed to three key factors: first, the transition to unfamiliar clinical environments often leads to difficulties in adaptation, resulting in anxiety and tension; second, the challenge of integrating theoretical knowledge with practical clinical work, coupled with limited experience and problem-solving skills, frequently lowers self-expectations and triggers negative emotions ^[17]; and finally, direct exposure to real-world nursing practice often leads to significant shifts in students' professional expectations and attitudes. These combined factors contribute to the observed deficit in positive career perception during the internship period.

These factors contribute to a relatively low level of positive career perception among nursing interns. To address this, schools and hospitals should emphasize career guidance to enhance interns' sense of professional fulfillment. Institutions can promote positive nursing values through regular career counseling sessions and specialized lectures, helping interns develop a balanced perspective on the profession's challenges and rewards, thereby strengthening their professional identity ^[18]. Additionally, educators should provide constructive career guidance to highlight the advantages of nursing while actively monitoring students' psychological well-being and implementing timely interventions when necessary.

Comparative Analysis of Career Benefit Scores Among Nursing Interns with Different Characteristics

Undergraduate Nursing Interns Report a Higher Sense of Career Benefit

As shown in Table 2, undergraduate nursing interns reported higher career benefit than diploma-level interns. This disparity stems from two main factors. First, undergraduates receive longer, more comprehensive training with stronger theoretical foundations, developing better critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These competencies earn them greater clinical recognition and professional fulfillment. Second, most hospitals (particularly

tertiary centers) now require bachelor's degrees for nursing positions, creating employment uncertainties for diploma interns that undermine their motivation and perceived career benefits.

Higher Sense of Career Benefits Among Those Who Voluntarily Chose Nursing

Nursing interns who self-selected their career path reported greater professional satisfaction than those motivated by external factors like academic transfers, job security, or family influence. This disparity likely stems from intrinsically motivated students possessing clearer professional understanding and better alignment between personal values and nursing principles. Additionally, most interns who chose nursing based on their own preferences did so because they genuinely liked the profession, identified more strongly with its values, and maintained a more positive work motivation and mindset ^[14]. As a result, these individuals are more likely to experience a sense of achievement and career benefit during their clinical practice.

Higher Levels of Perceived Career Benefits Among Interns Who Strongly Enjoy Nursing

Table 2 demonstrates that nursing interns with strong professional enthusiasm reported greater career satisfaction than less interested peers. This difference stems from engaged interns' tendency to actively pursue knowledge, demonstrate initiative, and show resilience during challenges. Their positive approach enhances patient interactions, building trust through willing assistance. Moreover, these interns fundamentally appreciate nursing's value - recognizing its noble purpose in preserving life and prioritizing patient care. Such intrinsic motivation predicts their successful transition to competent practitioners.

Higher Sense of Career Benefit Among Interns Intending to Pursue Nursing After Graduation

The survey results indicate that nursing interns who expressed an intention to pursue nursing after graduation reported a higher sense of career benefit. This may be attributed to the fact that these individuals have a stronger commitment to the profession,

motivating them to actively acquire professional knowledge and skills during their internship. By enhancing their professional competence, they aim to better prepare themselves for future employment in the nursing field.

Higher Perceived Career Benefits Among Interns Satisfied with Their Clinical Instructors

Nursing interns' perceived career benefits show a positive correlation with their satisfaction with clinical instructors. As practice-based educators, instructors critically shape students' professional development through knowledge transfer and skill demonstration. Their teaching approach, professional demeanor, and interpersonal skills substantially impact interns' career perceptions^[19].

A supportive and effective instructor can help nursing interns gain valuable experience, boost their confidence, and foster a more proactive approach to their work. For nursing interns, higher satisfaction with their instructors often leads to more positive interactions, a greater willingness to assist their instructors, and increased motivation to work diligently. These factors collectively contribute to a stronger sense of professional fulfillment. Therefore, hospitals should prioritize the selection of clinical instructors, ensuring that only highly qualified and experienced nurses are appointed to this role.

Self-Efficacy of Nursing Interns at a Medium Level

The total self-efficacy score of the nursing interns was 27.48 ± 4.85 . Among the participants, 12.0% ($n = 21$) had a high level of self-efficacy, 44.6% ($n = 78$) had a medium level, and 43.4% ($n = 76$) had a low level of self-efficacy, indicating an overall medium level of self-efficacy. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Wang Shumin et al.^[20] and Wang Shikun et al.^[21], suggesting that the self-efficacy of nursing interns still requires further improvement.

Several underlying factors contribute to this phenomenon. First, the challenging transition from classroom to clinical settings proves difficult for many nursing interns, with the complex hospital environment potentially undermining both their learning capacity and motivation during this critical

period. Second, numerous interns experience significant self-doubt regarding their clinical competencies, fostering perceptions of inadequate preparation for effective nursing practice.

Therefore, Nursing educators, administrators, and clinical instructors should focus on developing nursing interns' self-efficacy through personalized support strategies that account for individual differences in personality and confidence levels. This can be achieved by implementing regular mental health workshops to address clinical stress, organizing structured recreational activities to enhance well-being, and conducting thematic career lectures to cultivate professional optimism. Such targeted interventions are essential for building clinical confidence and resilience during training, ultimately fostering interns' professional growth and competence.

Positive Correlation Between Nursing Interns' Sense of Occupational Benefit and Self-Efficacy

As shown in Table 3, nursing interns' self-efficacy is significantly influenced by their sense of occupational benefit, with a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($P < 0.01$). This finding corroborates previous research by Li Feng et al.^[22] and Zhang Zhen et al.^[23], indicating that interns who perceive greater professional rewards in nursing tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy. These students typically exhibit more proactive work attitudes, stronger professional confidence, and deeper identification with the nursing profession, all of which contribute to enhanced self-efficacy in clinical practice.

A multi-level approach is essential for optimizing nursing interns' professional development. Educational institutions should embed nursing's professional value throughout curricula using integrated methods, including regular career guidance, professional lectures, and Nurses' Day events^[24]. These initiatives promote balanced career perspectives by helping interns objectively assess nursing's rewards and demands.

Hospitals must actively collaborate with academic partners to create structured clinical

programs. Through rigorous instructor selection, standardized training protocols, and well-designed internship experiences, healthcare institutions can ensure consistent, high-quality clinical education that facilitates interns' rapid adaptation to practice environments.

Clinical instructors serve as pivotal mentors by maintaining dual focus on psychological support and professional development. Establishing open communication, providing constructive feedback, and acknowledging achievements fosters supportive learning atmospheres. When combined with modeling of exemplary clinical practice, these strategies significantly boost interns' confidence and competence.

Ultimately, interns themselves must engage actively in their professional formation. This requires dedicated theoretical review, deliberate skills practice, and proactive communication with both preceptors and patients. Cultivating a growth mindset and evidence-based career perspective enables interns to strengthen professional identity, enhance occupational satisfaction, and develop robust clinical self-efficacy.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the level of self-efficacy among nursing interns is influenced by their sense of career benefits, with the two showing a positive correlation. However, both aspects require further improvement. Therefore, educational institutions and hospitals should collaborate to implement targeted measures aimed at enhancing the sense of occupational benefit among nursing interns. By helping interns recognize the value and rewards of their profession, these efforts can increase their job satisfaction and professional identity. Ultimately, this will contribute to higher self-efficacy levels and greater stability within the nursing workforce.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was drawn exclusively from a single tertiary hospital in one region, which may limit the representatives of

the sample and the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data were primarily collected through self-report measures, which may introduce biases such as social desirability bias or recall bias. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study precludes the establishment of causal relationships between perceived career benefits and self-efficacy. To address these limitations, future research could expand the sample to include multiple hospitals across diverse regions, employ a combination of data collection methods (e.g., observational or interview-based approaches), and adopt a longitudinal design to better understand the dynamic relationship between these variables over time.

Ethical Clearance: This study adhered to ethical guidelines approved by the School of nursing, Pingdingshan University, Henan 467000, China. All participants provided informed consent, and their anonymity was rigorously protected.

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