

Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience

Lampa, Jeneica P.¹, Isip, Nicole C.², Lozada, Natazsa Alexia T.³, Epilepsia, Christine B.⁴

¹St. Paul University Iloilo, College of Nursing, Iloilo City, Philippines

²St. Paul University Iloilo, College of Nursing, Iloilo City, Philippines

³St. Paul University Iloilo, College of Nursing, Iloilo City, Philippines

⁴St. Paul University Iloilo, College of Nursing, Iloilo City, Philippines

Email: ¹jeneica.lampa@spuiloilo.edu.ph, ²nicole.isip@spuiloilo.edu.ph, ³natazsa.lozada@spuiloilo.edu.ph, ⁴cepilepsia@spuiloilo.edu.ph

Orchid Id number: ¹0009-0009-9396-1831, ²0009-0000-1633-007X, ³0009-0003-2050-1347,

⁴0000-0002-1849-9554

Corresponding Author*:

ABSTRACT:

This quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive study aimed to determine the level of competence of student nurses in facing real-world clinical experience based on their profiles in terms of sex and nursing school. Stratified random sampling was used to select 310 fourth year student nurses from six nursing schools in Iloilo City. Data were gathered using a validated questionnaire based on the Nursing Student Competence Scale (NSCS), adopted from Huang et al. (2022), assessing six core competencies. The study utilized descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA to analyze the data. Results revealed that the participants, as a whole, demonstrated a high level of competence (mean = 4.12), with basic nursing skills (mean = 4.33) being the highest component and medical-related knowledge (mean = 3.95) the lowest. When grouped by sex, males scored higher (mean = 4.17) than females (mean = 4.11). Among the participating schools, School A had the highest mean competence level (mean = 4.38), while School B had the lowest (mean = 3.98). However, statistical analysis indicated no significant difference in competence levels based on sex or school affiliation ($p = 0.493$). These results indicate that while student nurses generally possess high clinical competencies, targeted improvements particularly in medical knowledge can further enhance their readiness for real-world experience.

KEYWORDS: Student nurse, Nursing competence, Real-world experience, Nursing student competence scale, Clinical readiness

1) Introduction:

One of the most important aspects of nursing education is the competency of student nurses to handle real-world clinical situations effectively. This competence not only guarantees patients' safety and well-being but also equips student nurses for the rigors of their future careers. According to a study by Idrissi et al. (2021) [6] the majority of clinical instructors relied primarily on specialized techniques to assess clinical competence, with a strong emphasis on knowledge testing and technical skill verification. However, these measures frequently lacked the depth required to assess all components of clinical competency, including psychomotor skills and problem-solving ability. The study also noted many problems in the assessment process, such as the limited variety of assessment tools available and the difficulty in developing tools that properly measure all dimensions of clinical competency. Fourth-year student nurses in Iloilo City are meticulously trained to handle real-world clinical situations through comprehensive academic programs and hands-on practicums. At St. Paul University Iloilo, the focus is on ethical practices and leadership, with students undergoing rigorous practicums to hone their clinical skills. University of San Agustin emphasizes community spirit and teamwork, essential for collaborative healthcare. Central Philippine University offers a balanced curriculum of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for complex patient care. Iloilo Doctors' College fosters adaptability and resourcefulness, crucial for unexpected challenges. At West Visayas State University, students are encouraged to dedicate significant time to developing practical skills and engaging in public service initiatives. Lastly, the University of Iloilo's outcome-based curriculum, featuring intensive practicums, ensures graduates are highly competent and skilled professionals. The complexities of patient care necessitate high skill and confidence from nurses, but many student nurses report feeling unprepared for real-world issues, resulting in medication errors and inadequate treatment. Despite the significance of these competencies, there has been no detailed research on the exact skills necessary, emphasizing a gap that this study seeks to fill. By addressing these gaps, nursing education programs can better prepare student nurses for the complexities of real-world experience. This aligns with the ongoing efforts of these schools in Iloilo City to ensure their graduates are well-prepared to provide high-quality, safe, and effective healthcare.

2) Methods and Methodology:

(a) Research Design

This quantitative, descriptive, and non-experimental study was aimed to assess the level of competence of student nurses in the clinical setting. This study specifically has looked into their profiles in terms of sex and nursing school to which they belong, and evaluated their competence levels. Furthermore, it aimed to identify significant differences in competence across various groups of student nurses.

(b) Participants and Source of Data

The target population of the study were the fourth-year student nurses from different schools exposed to clinical duty who are enrolled in the second semester of the Academic Year 2024-2025. The researchers utilized probability sampling technique, used stratified random sampling in selecting the participants in terms of sex and nursing school to which they belong. The recruitment of participants was conducted through a poster advertisement and personal communication. The sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan's Table (1970). The total population of each school, the sample sizes computed are as follows: Central Philippine University (School A) has a population of 220 students with a sample size of 42, Iloilo Doctors' College (School B) has a population of 634 students with a sample size of 122, St. Paul University Iloilo (School C) has a population of 75 students with a sample size of 14 PHINMA University of Iloilo (School D) has a population of 108 students with a sample size of 21, University of San Agustin (School E) has a population of 456 students with a sample size of 87, and West Visayas State University (School F) has a population of 125 students with a sample size of 24.

(c) Research Instrument

The tool used in the research study was adopted from the research tool used by the research team of Huang et al. (2022) [5] on their study entitled, "Psychometric evaluation of a nursing competence assessment tool among nursing students: a development and validation study." Their study used a systematic approach involving reviews, expert evaluations, and pilot testing to develop the tool. To ensure validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and criterion-related validity were used, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and test-retest methods. The results indicated satisfactory fit indexes with values such as chi-square = 860.1, normed chi-square = 2.24, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.94, and TLI = 0.94. High internal consistency was demonstrated with Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales ranging from 0.91 to 0.98, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.515. The study found the Nursing Student Competence Scale (NSCS) to have acceptable psychometric properties, recommending it as a valuable tool for evaluating nursing students' competence.

The tool is composed of two parts. Part I included the socio-demographic characteristics of the student nurses in terms of their sex and nursing school to which they belong. Part II consisted of 30 items in determining student nurses level of competence while facing real-world experiences during their clinical exposure. The items are subdivided into 6 components: Medical Related Knowledge (1-5 items), Basic Nursing Skills (6-10 items), Communication and Cooperation (11-15 items), Life-long Learning (16-20), Global Vision (21-25 items), and Critical Thinking (26-30 items). Each item had a response on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from highly agree, somewhat agree, agree, somewhat agree, to not agree. Positively worded questions will be scored as (5) for highly agree, (4) for somewhat agree, (3) for agree, (2) for somehow agree, and (1) for not agree. Where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest. Negatively worded questions will be scored reversely. This structure ensured a comprehensive assessment of student nurses' competencies in facing real-world clinical experience.

(d) Data Collection

Prior to the collection of data, the researchers sought permission from the author of the tool to be adopted and should pass the pre-oral defense for the initial approval. A formal letter of request was submitted to the St. Paul University Ethics Committee to seek approval for the study and ensure that all ethical standards are met. A formal letter was addressed and sent to the deans and university presidents of the different nursing schools in Iloilo City, asking for permission to conduct the study in their schools. Once approval was secured from the University Ethics Committee, dean and the university president, the researchers proceeded with the study.

Data collection took place during the second semester of the academic year 2024-2025, following the ethical considerations and necessary approvals. The questionnaires were printed and physically distributed to the selected participants from level four of the different nursing schools in Iloilo City and an online option was also made available via Google Forms to accommodate participants who may prefer a digital format, ensuring flexibility and accessibility for all students. Each participant had received an informed consent form along with the research questionnaire. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. The participants were expected to complete the questionnaire within 10-15 minutes. Once the questionnaires were completed and the total population was met. The researchers practiced data confidentiality and anonymity. The results will be carefully tallied, computed, and analyzed to determine the student nurses' level of competence. In addition, the researchers encoded the gathered data in Microsoft Excel. Once completed, they sought the expertise of a statistician for data interpretation and analysis. All data will be kept confidential, ensuring that individual responses remain secured. These findings will then be used to identify gaps and potential areas for improvement in the clinical education of student nurses.

(e) Data Analysis

The researchers used a descriptive statistics research approach, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate and summarize the findings of the study. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted using frequencies and percentages to profile the student nurses according to their sex and nursing institution to which they belong. Descriptive statistics has summarized and presented the characteristics of the sample population, with frequency distributions and percentages calculated to describe the distribution of participants based on sex and year level. Mean scoring was used to determine the level of competence of student nurses in facing real-world experiences. Inferential statistics was used to explore differences between socio-demographic variables, such as sex and nursing schools. To help examine these differences, the t-Test and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used. The t-Test will examine the relationship between continuous variables like competence levels and sex to see if gender influences these levels. ANOVA compares the competence levels of students from different nursing schools to determine if there are significant differences in how well students are prepared for real-world clinical experiences.

(f) Ethical Consideration

Prior to conducting the study, the researchers sought approval from the St. Paul University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through utilizing a probability sampling technique, using stratified random sampling. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which was thoroughly explained to ensure they understood the study's nature, duration, objectives, purpose, and methods.

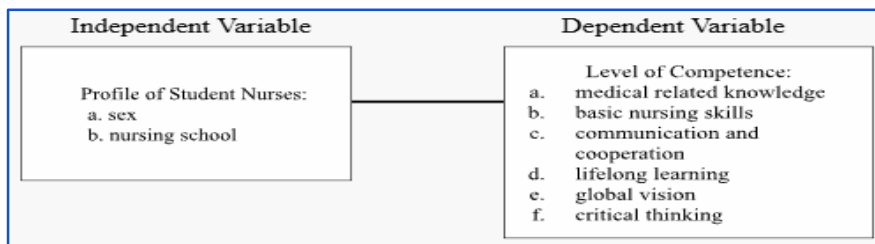
Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, with the freedom to withdraw at any point during the data gathering. The confidentiality of their information was strictly maintained, accessible only to the researchers and the study's research adviser. Participants were neither compensated nor given any rewards for their participation. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the researchers collected all forms and ensured the data was securely stored. All collected data was kept in a secure location, ensuring utmost confidentiality throughout the process. All physical data will be securely stored in a storage box, while digital data will be stored in a Google Drive with access restricted to the researchers only. The retention period of the data collected will be two years. After the retention period has passed, the paper-based information will be shredded, and the Google Drive that was initially created will be deleted immediately.

Research Framework

The study is grounded in the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by David Kolb in 1984, which emphasizes the transformation of experiences into knowledge through a cyclical model consisting of four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. These stages are further divided into two categories: Grasping Experience, which includes Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation, and Transforming Experience, which encompasses Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. Concrete Experience involves gaining new experiences, while Reflective Observation focuses on reflecting on personal experiences. Abstract Conceptualization is about adjusting and forming new ideas based on these experiences and reflections, and Active Experimentation involves implementing these new ideas in real-world situations and making modifications to enhance them. By incorporating the ELT into the study "Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real- World Experience," the research systematically evaluates nursing students' readiness to handle real-life challenges. This framework supports the continuous growth and development of student nurses, linking their educational experiences to becoming competent nurses in the future.

The study's independent variables include sex and nursing school, which analyze differences in competence levels between male and female students and examine how these levels vary among different nursing institutions. The dependent variables in the study, based on the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience involves gaining medical knowledge and basic nursing skills through evidence-based practice and patient care. Reflective observation includes reflecting on experiences and teamwork to improve communication and cooperation in clinical settings. Abstract conceptualization encompasses developing new ideas and strategies for continuous learning and quality improvement based on reflections. Active experimentation involves applying new strategies in real-world settings, incorporating informatics, cultural competence, and critical thinking for safe and effective practice. By using the ELT framework, the study aims to enhance nursing education and practice, ultimately improving the quality and safety of healthcare delivery.

Figure 1 Conceptual research paradigm showing the relationship



between independent and dependent variables

3) Results:

The profile of the participants who took part in this study were categorized according to their sex and nursing school. As to sex, the majority of the participants were female, comprising 246 individuals (79.35%), while 64 participants (20.65%) were identified as male. As for nursing schools, the largest proportion were from Iloilo Doctors College with 122 participants (39.35%), followed by University San Agustin with 87 participants (28.06%). Central Philippine University accounted for 42 participants (13.55%), while Western Visayas State University had 24 participants (7.74%).

PHINMA University of Iloilo recorded 21 participants (6.77%), and the smallest proportion came from St. Paul University Iloilo with 14 participants (4.52%).

Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as a Whole

Table 1 presents the level of competence of student nurses in handling real-world clinical experiences across six components, all classified under high competence, with an overall mean score of 4.12. The highest-rated component is Basic Nursing Skills (4.33), which reflects the students' ability to perform essential nursing tasks while upholding patient care standards, privacy, and professional dedication. This is followed by Life-long Learning (4.20), highlighting their commitment to continuous education, self-reflection, and time management for personal and professional growth. Communication and Cooperation ranks third (4.19), emphasizing clear expression, active listening, and effective collaboration within healthcare teams and with patients' families. Critical Thinking (4.04) showcases their capacity to apply medical knowledge and logical reasoning in assessing health issues and implementing evidence-based solutions. Global Vision (4.01) indicates awareness of international health trends and cultural sensitivity in clinical practice. Lastly, Medical-Related Knowledge (3.95) reflects their understanding of diagnostics, treatments, and clinical judgment, marking it as the lowest among the six but still within the high competence range.

Table 1. Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as a Whole

Components	Mean	Interpretation
Basic Nursing Skill	4.33	High Competence
Life-long Learning	4.20	High Competence
Communication and Cooperation	4.19	High Competence
Critical Thinking	4.04	High Competence
Global Vision	4.01	High Competence
Medical Related Knowledge	3.95	High Competence
Overall	4.12	High Competence

Level of Competence in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as to Sex

Table 2 compares student nurses' competence in real-world clinical experiences by sex. Male students generally scored higher in basic nursing skills, medical-related knowledge, global vision, and critical thinking, while female students showed higher in life-long learning. With overall mean scores of 4.17 for males and 4.11 for females, both groups demonstrate high competence and readiness for clinical practice.

Table 2. Level of Competence in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as to Sex

Components	Sex	Mean	Interpretation
Basic Nursing Skill	MF	4.37	High Competence High Competence
		4.33	
Life-long Learning	MF	4.17	High Competence High Competence
		4.21	
Communication and Cooperation	MF	4.21	High Competence High Competence
		4.19	
Critical Thinking	MF	4.13	High Competence High Competence
		4.01	
Global Vision	MF	4.12	High Competence High Competence
		3.98	
Medical Related Knowledge	MF	4.00	High Competence High Competence
		3.95	
Overall	MF	4.17	High Competence High Competence
		4.11	

Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as to Nursing School

Table 3 presents the level of competence of student nurses from six Iloilo City nursing schools in facing real-world clinical experiences, all falling within the "high" range, with overall mean scores from 3.98 to 4.38. (School A) Central Philippine University (CPU) ranked highest (4.38), followed by (School F) Western Visayas State University (4.29), (School D) PHINMA University of Iloilo (4.25), (School C) St. Paul University Iloilo (4.16), (School E) University of San Agustin (4.12), and (School B) Iloilo Doctors College (3.98).

Table 3. Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience as to Nursing School

Components	Nursing School	Mean	Interpretation
Basic Nursing Skill	A	4.49	High Competence High Competence
	B	4.21	
	C	4.43	
	D	4.43	
	E	4.34	
	F	4.52	
Life-long Learning	A	4.46	High Competence High Competence
	B	4.05	
	C	4.19	
	D	4.44	
	E	4.17	
	F	4.42	
Communication and Cooperation	A	4.50	High Competence High Competence
	B	4.01	
	C	4.16	
	D	4.50	
	E	4.16	
	F	4.41	
Critical Thinking	A	4.46	High Competence High Competence
	B	4.05	
	C	4.19	
	D	4.44	
	E	4.17	
	F	4.42	
Global Vision	A	4.29	High Competence High Competence
	B	3.86	
	C	3.99	
	D	4.07	
	E	4.03	
	F	4.15	
Medical Related Knowledge	A	4.22	High Competence High Competence
	B	3.82	
Overall	C	3.93	High Competence High Competence
	D	3.90	
	E	3.99	
	F	4.06	
Overall	A	4.46	High Competence High Competence
	B	4.05	
	C	4.19	
	D	4.44	
	E	4.17	
	F	4.42	

Difference in the level of competence in facing real-world clinical experience as to profile

Table 4 presents student nurses' level of competence by sex and nursing school. Male students scored higher (4.17) than females (4.11), but both groups fall within the "high" competence range. A p-value of 0.493 indicates no significant difference based on sex. Among schools, (School A) Central Philippine University ranked highest (4.38), while (School B) Iloilo Doctors College had the lowest (3.98); all schools still reflect a high level of competence.

Table 4. Difference in the level of competence in facing real-world clinical experience as to profile

Profile	Mean	p-value
Sex		
Male	4.17	0.493
Female	4.11	
Nursing School		
A	4.38	0.002*
B	3.98	
C	4.16	
D	4.25	
E	4.12	
F	4.29	

4) Discussion:

As nursing education evolves, student nurses must develop competence through academic training, institutional support, and personal commitment. In this study, 79.35% of participants were female, reflecting global trends. Prosen (2022) [19] found that gender influences nursing students' role perceptions; female students often focus on caregiving, while male students lean toward leadership and technical roles. These differences can affect clinical exposure and confidence.

Level of Competence of Student Nurses in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience when they are grouped as a whole and according to profile as to Six Components

For the level of competence when taken as a whole, student nurses demonstrated a "High" level of competence in facing real-world experience, with mean scores recorded as "High Competence" in all six components. The highest-ranking component, Basic Nursing Skills, highlighting the strong emphasis on hands-on training in nursing education. Supporting this, Poorchangizi et al. (2019) [18] emphasized that core professional values such as patient confidentiality are essential for safe and effective care. This outcome likely stems from a structured curriculum and consistent clinical exposure.

As for Life-long Learning, which has received a high rating, due to the growing emphasis on continuing education and professional development in nursing (Mlambo et al., 2021) [12]. The study underscores that nurses who engage in continuous learning report higher job satisfaction and improved competence. Furthermore, Padilha et al. (2019) [17] found that virtual simulations enhance retention and critical thinking, suggesting that technology-driven education supports students' self-directed learning.

Similarly, Communication and Cooperation received a high rating, highlighting its key role in effective nursing care. This result aligns with Howick et al. (2024) [4], demonstrating that strong communication improves patient safety and satisfaction. This likely reflects curriculum focus on collaboration and empathy. However, Hijji et al. (2019) [3] identified challenges like time constraints, heavy workloads, and language barriers can hinder effective communication, leading to misunderstandings and lower satisfaction levels; student nurses may still face challenges in real-world applications.

While the Critical Thinking component, although ranked as fourth, remains an integral aspect of nursing competence. As Sharon and Green (2023) [21] highlight, life-threatening clinical simulations significantly boost critical thinking by increasing curiosity and problem-solving skills. Thus, the findings further support the idea that nursing education must continue integrating real-world scenarios to enhance student preparedness. Furthermore, Mohd Esa et al. (2023) [13] found that nursing students demonstrated intermediate levels of systematic analysis, suggesting that critical thinking skills require further development through exposure to classroom lectures, clinical exposures and clinical case studies.

On the other hand, the lower mean scores in Global Vision may be due to insufficient exposure to experience with international healthcare or diverse patient populations. Although Global Vision remains at a high level, Teixeira et al. (2022) [22] argue that nurse managers' job is to actively identify cultural barriers and encourage diversity training, ensuring nurses can work effectively in multicultural environments.

Medical-Related Knowledge received the lowest rating, maybe due to students' lack of confidence in applying theoretical knowledge to clinical practice. This aligns with Maniago et al. (2020) [10], who found that student nurses often experience lack of confidence and anxiety when performing physical assessments, thereby highlighting a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. According to Li et al. (2019) [8] evidence-based practice is often hindered by lack of time, inadequate academic training, and insufficient resources. These obstacles reduce the translation of medical knowledge into clinical decisions, which can weaken students' confidence in applying what they learn. Moreover, Yamamoto et al. (2021) [24] highlight that workplace environment, access to learning resources, and meaningful clinical exposure are critical in shaping medical knowledge competence. If students are exposed to limited case variety or lack guided reflection during clinical rotations, their grasp of medical concepts may remain superficial.

In accordance with sex, the findings reveal a difference in the level of competence between male and female students nurses, with male students recording a slightly higher overall mean compared to female students. Despite this difference, both groups fall within the high level of competence. The findings on Medical Related Knowledge align with research on gender-defined roles in nursing, which suggests that male and female nursing students may approach medical knowledge differently. According to Prosen (2022) [19], male nursing students often emphasize technical aspects of nursing, including disease assessment and treatment protocols, whereas female students tend to focus on holistic patient care and interpersonal aspects of nursing. This could suggest that male students may feel more confident in applying medical knowledge in structured, technical contexts, whereas female students may prioritize patient-centered. In Basic Nursing Skills, where male students recorded a higher mean score may come from strong engagement with technical and procedural aspects of nursing care. This aligns with Magnaye et al. (2023) [9] emphasized that nursing students' skills are shaped by training strategies, teaching methods, and hands-on experience. Their study showed that structured skill and return demonstrations help connect theory to practice and build confidence. It also found that male students tend to focus on technical skills, while female students show strengths in patient-centered care, highlighting gender differences in applying nursing competencies. For Communication and Cooperation, the minimal difference between male and female students aligns with Tong et al. (2023) [23], which found that both male and female nurses perceive caring and communication as central to their professional identity. However, the same authors suggested that the perception of caring is influenced by gender and how the nurses view themselves on their role of caring. On the other hand, Fang et al. (2023) [1] concluded that collaborative learning environments are proven to develop greater knowledge retention and improved academic performance. This is likely because working with peers and interacting with patients strengthens their communication skills, teamwork, and real-world readiness. As for Life-Long learning, the findings suggest that female student nurses demonstrate a higher engagement compared to male, reinforcing their commitment to continuous education and professional development. This aligns with the study by Masibo et al. (2024) [11] which indicates that gender differences may affect the scope of nursing practice and professional development opportunities as male nurses often have a broader scope of practice, while female nurses tend to show stronger development in key professional areas. This may be due to greater motivation for self-improvement, career advancement, and adaptability in evolving healthcare environments. According to Kabir et al. (2022) [7], female nursing students exhibited higher e-learning readiness and acceptance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may explain their stronger inclination toward lifelong learning. Meanwhile, Global Vision findings show that male nursing students often show a broader global perspective, likely due to exposure to international healthcare models, leadership goals, and technical training (Prosen, 2022) [19]. In contrast, female students tend to focus on patient-centered care and local health issues, showing strong interpersonal and caregiving skills (Teixeira et al., 2022) [22]. These differences may reflect varied career goals and training paths. To balance this, nursing programs should include international exchanges, teamwork activities, and leadership training for all students. In terms of critical thinking, male students usually excel in structured, technical problem-solving, thanks to clinical simulations and task-based training (Sharon & Green, 2023) [21]. Female students, while equally capable, lean toward holistic and patient-focused reasoning, using intuition and adaptability (Mohd Esa et al., 2023) [13]. These differences may stem from how each group is trained, males through high-intensity problem-solving, and females through continuous, patient-centered learning. With regards to nursing school, the higher mean scores in Medical-Related Knowledge and Critical Thinking at Central Philippine University (School A) may be due to strong theoretical foundations, comprehensive disease assessments, and a curriculum emphasizing analytical reasoning. Gaspar et al. (2015) [2] suggest that a structured academic framework combined with clinical exposure enhances medical knowledge and decision-making. Central Philippine University employs advanced diagnostic training and evidence-based learning strategies, contributing to superior performance in these areas. Whereas, Iloilo Doctors College recorded the lowest mean across several components, yet still maintained high competence, suggesting consistent training standards despite potential institutional limitations. Most probably because differences in faculty expertise, clinical resources, and learning methodologies influence how nursing students develop their skills (Magnaye et al., 2023) [9].

For Basic Nursing Skills, the highest score in West Visayas State University may be attributed to strong clinical demonstrations and hands-on learning approaches. Raguini et al. (2020) [20] emphasize that return demonstrations and structured training significantly improve nursing competencies. Meanwhile, Communication and Cooperation scores remained consistently high across schools, aligning with findings from Tong et al. (2023) [23], which highlight that interpersonal effectiveness is crucial in nursing teamwork and patient engagement. However, the lower Global Vision mean at Iloilo Doctors College contrasts with studies emphasizing international exposure as a key factor in developing global healthcare awareness (Prosen, 2022) [19]. Differences in access to global health discussions, research opportunities, and cross-cultural training programs likely influence how students engage with broader healthcare perspectives. Difference in the level of competence in Facing Real-World Clinical Experience when they are grouped according to profile. Most participants in this study are female, reflecting nursing as a female-dominated profession. However, male participants scored higher. According to Ogunmuyiwa et al. (2025) [16] female student nurses had higher clinical competence, possibly due to societal views favoring females in caregiving roles. In contrast, Mousavi et al. (2024) [14] found no link between gender and competence, while other studies suggest students with feministic traits, regardless of gender, may show higher competence. Student competence also varies by school. Munangare et al. (2024) [15] noted that students may over- or underrate themselves based on confidence. Iloilo Doctors College (School B) scored lowest, possibly due to low self-confidence or underestimation. Instructor competence significantly influences student development. Teaching styles differ by school, and effective instructors who coach, model, and support enhance students' understanding, critical thinking, and confidence. Central Philippine University (School A) ranked highest, possibly due to diverse teaching methods and confident students. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) underpins this study by showing how nursing students build competence through a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. It aligns with the study's aim to assess readiness for real-world clinical challenges by highlighting how practical experiences become meaningful learning. ELT emphasizes clinical immersion (Concrete Experience), reflection (Reflective Observation), insight development (Abstract Conceptualization), and application (Active Experimentation), supporting ongoing professional growth and quality patient care.

5) Conclusion:

This study found that the fourth-year student nurses from each participating nursing school in Iloilo City generally possess a high level of competence in facing real-world clinical experience. Basic Nursing Skills ranked the highest and Medical-Related Knowledge being the lowest among the components assessed which indicates that student nurses are most confident and proficient in performing clinical tasks rather than understanding and applying theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Male students had a higher mean score in all six competence areas than female students. However, the difference was not statistically significant, indicating that both sexes are equally competent in clinical settings. Male students lean towards more logical and rational aspects of nursing such as technical procedures, assessment and treatment protocols (Basic Nursing Skills, Medical-Related Knowledge), leadership aspirations (Global Vision), and structured, evidenced-based approaches (Critical Thinking). On the other hand, Female students excel in incorporating holistic reasoning (Critical Thinking) and prioritize patient-centered care (Life-long Learning, Global Vision). When grouped according to nursing school, there was a statistically significant difference in competence levels. (School A) Central Philippine University overall mean score, suggesting stronger preparation and training in that institution compared to others. This highlights the role of institutional quality and resources in shaping student competence.

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9) Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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