

Application of a Tool for the Assessment of Core Competencies of Nursing Tutors in selected Nurses Training Schools in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Introduction Competencies of nursing tutors (NTs) are critical factors in improving the quality of nursing education. However, assessment of tutor competencies is not systematically happening in Nurses Training Schools (NTSs) in Sri Lanka.

Objective This research project was carried out to assess the feasibility of using a core competency assessment tool to assess the competencies of NTs in NTSs in Sri Lanka.

Design This was a quasi – experimental research project conducted in eight randomly selected state NTSs in Sri Lanka. It was planned in three phases.

Methods The pre - interventional study was conducted in eight randomly selected NTSs to identify the existing practices used for the assessment of core competencies of NTs and to identify any gaps and issues. The main intervention i.e. development of a NT competency assessment tool and supportive strategies was implemented in three selected NTSs for three months. The post - interventional assessment was conducted to assess the feasibility of the new tool.

Results Results of the pre - intervention assessment identified that there were no formal competency assessment practices or validated assessment tools in NTSs in Sri Lanka. NTs expressed a high need of a mechanism for competency assessment. Post - intervention assessment showed that there was a high satisfaction among the NTs on the characteristics of the new tool, implementation process and the assessment process. Further, the number of self and supervisor assessments performed during the period and the utilization of assessment results have increased. Finally, outcomes demonstrated that the interventions were feasible to be implemented in NTSs in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion The new competency assessment tool with the established process for the sustainability was accepted as feasible to assess the competencies of NTs in NTSs in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it was recommended to implement this project in other NTSs to improve the level of nursing education in the country.

Key words: Nursing Tutor, Competency Assessment, Competency Assessment Tools

Introduction

Nursing profession provides a holistic care for individuals, families and communities to address their physical, psychological, social

and spiritual needs.^(1, 2) Therefore, Nurses Training Schools (NTSs) should be resourced with nursing teachers highly competent in every aspect of constantly evolving educational concepts⁽³⁾ to produce a

competent workforce. Hence, improving the competencies of nursing teachers is a critical factor in advancing the quality of nursing education.^(3,4,5,6,7) With regard to the terminology, despite the term “Nurse Educators” used in many literature^(4,6,7,10), nursing teachers are designated as “Nursing Tutors” in Sri Lanka and therefore the latter term was used in this study.

Identifying its importance, assessment of competencies of Nursing Tutors (NTs) is carried out in every country; to identify strengths and weaknesses of trainers, to plan professional development activities, to carryout performance appraisals and thereby to improve learner outcomes and nursing standards.⁽⁸⁾

In Sri Lanka, there are 16 functioning NTSs covering every province. Nursing academic staff comprise of 210 NTs.⁽⁹⁾ However, assessment of competencies of NTs to identify their strengths and weaknesses is not systematically done in NTSs in Sri Lanka. Even though WHO⁽¹⁰⁾ emphasizes that every country should have a standardized competency assessment mechanism for the NTs, this mechanism does not currently exist in NTSs in Sri Lanka.⁽⁹⁾

Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the aspect of competency assessment of NTs in NTSs in Sri Lanka in order to identify any gaps and to further improve the standards of nursing training in the country.

Objective

This research project was carried out to assess the feasibility of using a core competency assessment tool to assess the competencies of NTs in NTSs in Sri Lanka.

Design

This research project used the quasi – experimental study design and was carried out in randomly selected 08 state NTSs during the period from December 2017 to May 2019. It was conducted in 3 phases; (1). Pre - intervention assessment to identify the gaps and issues of existing assessment practices; (2). A package of interventions designed and implemented to address them; and (3). Post - intervention feasibility assessment to measure the success of the project.

Methods

Project stakeholders were identified from the ministerial level and at NTS level.

Pre - intervention assessment was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this phase; (1). A survey with all NTs (N = 90) working in 08 selected NTSs using the Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ) - 1; (2). Key informant interviews (KII) with stakeholders at decision making levels using Key Informant Interview guide - 1 and (3). A desk review using Check list - 1 to assess the existing practices for the assessment of core competencies of NTs were conducted.

A package of interventions was developed as possible solutions. It consisted of:

- ❑ Development and application of “NTs' Competency Assessment Tool”
- ❑ Development and utilization of supplementary material to facilitate the assessment process
 - “Tool implementation guide”
 - “Competency assessment register”
 - “Quarterly competency assessment return”
- ❑ Establishment of a management structure for the assessment process
- ❑ Establishment of implementation tasks and a schedule for the assessment process
- ❑ Staff training on the assessment process

Tool development^(11, 12, 13) was done in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) mainly incorporating the “WHO Nurse Educator Core Competencies - 2016”.⁽¹⁰⁾ A detailed review was done for face validity and content validity using a validation tool and validation criteria. Pre testing was done for face validity and content validity.⁽¹²⁾

The tool was arranged in following 8 domains; (1). Theories and principles of adult learning with 7 competency items; (2). Curriculum development and implementation with 12 items; (3). Nursing practice with 9 items; (4). Research and evidence with 8 items; (5). Communication, collaboration and partnership with 16 items; (6). Ethical /legal principles and professionalism with 7 items; (7). Monitoring and evaluation with 7 items and (8). Management, leadership and advocacy with 12 items. Items of each domain were categorized under knowledge, attitudes and skills. Each item was given a rating scale; as “Excellent”, “Very good”, “Good”, “Moderate” and “Weak”. Other interventions were prepared for sustainability.

These interventions were successfully implemented ⁽¹⁴⁾ for a period of three months in randomly selected 3 NTSS.

97% of participants have mentioned that a competency assessment tool is needed.

Table 1: Distribution of degree of satisfaction in the new tool.

No	Characteristic	Strongly satisfied %	Satisfied %	Average %	Dissatisfied %	Totally dissatisfied %
1	Appropriateness	67.5	25.0	7.5	00	00
2	Format	80.0	20.0	00	00	00
3	Content	92.5	7.5	00	00	00
4	Technical Accuracy	97.5	2.5	00	00	00
5	Completeness	30.0	65.0	10.0	00	00
6	Vocabulary	57.5	37.5	5.0	00	00
7	User Friendliness	42.5	47.5	10.0	00	00
8	Time taken for filling	20.0	40.0	40.0	00	00
9	Overall satisfaction with the new tool	60.0	32.5	7.5	00	00

Project Evaluation was carried out to assess the feasibility of the tool and the implementation process. ⁽¹⁵⁾ (1). A survey with the total sample of participants (N=40) in the three NTSS using the SAQ - 2; (2). KIIs with the same participants using KII guide - 2 and (3). A desk review of documents from 3 NTSS using the check list - 2 were conducted to see the results.

Results

Pre intervention assessment

Survey had a response rate was 82% (74/90). Fifty-one (51 %) were between 41 - 50 years; 73% were females; Grade 1 and Special Grade categories were equally distributed; 53 % were bachelor and 26 % were master degree holders.

Sixty-eight (68 %) have accepted that there were no formal practices and 74 % have stated that there were no valid tools for competency assessment. Only 25% of participants had adequate knowledge on WHO recommended core competencies. Out of the practices available, "student" and "supervisor" assessments were the most popular. Nearly 55% of participants said that competency assessments have not been done at all. Forty percent (40 %) were not satisfied about current way of assessments. Approximately,

Results of KIIs too confirmed that there were no practices and valid tools for competency assessments available and everybody (9/9) accepted a need for formal mechanism. Check list too did not find satisfactory evidence of such a mechanism.

Post Intervention Feasibility Assessment

More than 90% of participants were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" in seven out of eight characteristics of the tool and 60 % were satisfied in "time taken for filling". (Table -1)

More than 75% of NTs were satisfied in the implementation of the new tool. (Table – 2)

With regard to the satisfaction in competency assessment process with the new tool, 92.5 % accepted it as a feasible tool. Eighty-five percent had a good response to continue. (Table – 3)

Results of the KIIs revealed that everybody (9/9) was positive about the key characteristics of the new tool and were satisfied. Eight out of nine (8/9) said that the implementation of the tool is feasible and seven out of nine (7/9) were willing to continue with the new tool.

Hundred percent of NTs have performed self - assessments in all three NTSS. Supervisor

assessments done were only 58.83% and 52.94% in two NTSS. (Table – 4)

Table 2: Distribution of degree of satisfaction in the implementation of the new tool.

No	Characteristic	Strongly satisfied %	Satisfied %	Average %	Dissatisfied %	Totally dissatisfied %
1	Adequacy of the <u>orientation programme</u>	87.5	12.5	00	00	00
2	<u>Confidence</u> in using the tool	65.0	35.0	00	00	00
3	Positivity of the <u>reaction</u> towards the tool	50.0	40.0	10.0	00	00
4	Level of <u>compliance</u> to implement the tool	47.5	35.0	17.5	00	00
5	Possible <u>positive effects</u> of the tool on <u>performance</u>	60.0	37.5	2.5	00	00

Table 3: Distribution of degree of satisfaction in competency assessment process with the new tool.

No	Characteristic	Strongly satisfied %	Satisfied %	Average %	Dissatisfied %	Totally dissatisfied %
1	Simplicity of the process	65.0	27.5	7.5	00	00
2	Usefulness in evaluation /need assessment / development / performance appraisal	70.0	25.0	5.0	00	00
3	Satisfaction in the competency assessment with the new tool	52.5	35.0	12.5	00	00
4	Willingness to continue	47.5	37.5	15.0	00	00
5	Final judgment about the feasibility to implement the tool	62.5	30.0	7.5	00	00

Table 4: Distribution of types of competency assessments in three NTSS.

No	Type of assessment	Nurses Training School		
		Kandana (N = 17)	Ratnapura (N = 17)	Mulleriyawa (N = 6)
1	Number of supervisor assessments done during 03 months period	10/17 58.82%	9/17 52.94%	6/6 100%
2	Number of self – assessments done during 03 months period	17/17 100%	17/17 100%	6/6 100%

studied, simplified, shortened and adopted to Sri Lankan setting to make it relevant and user friendly. Adaptation was performed to make it validated to this country. ⁽⁸⁾

Discussion

“Nursing Tutor Competencies” is a vital factor in improving the quality of nursing education. ⁽³⁾ Therefore, scientifically developed “Nursing Tutor Competency Tools” and establishment of sustainable systems for the process of assessment are essential aspects to achieve these objectives. ⁽⁷⁾

Lack of such a system practiced in NTSS in Sri Lanka was the reason to undertake this research project. Eight NTSS were randomly selected to identify the gaps in process and 03 NTSS were subsequently selected randomly to establish the interventional strategies.

This was conducted in three phases. Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used to collect information to improve the validity and reliability of the information gathered for decision making at the interventional phase. A survey among NTs, KIs with key stakeholders and desk reviews of documents were carried out to understand the existing gaps from different perspectives. A package of interventions was designed and implemented during the interventional phase to address the identified gaps and issues.

Effective strategies to address the issues were suggested. Administrative feasibility, acceptability and time availability were taken into account in planning the interventions. The main intervention of development of a competency assessment tool was carried out to establish the process of assessment. “WHO nurse educator core competencies” ⁽⁶⁾ was

“Tool implementation guide” helped the users to standardize the assessment process. “Competency assessment register” maintained at NTSS examined the number and frequency of self and supervisor assessments performed during a defined period, and to collect information to prepare the “quarterly competency assessment return” which was to be forwarded to the focal point at the ministerial level to ensure sustainability. Staff training improved their motivation and guaranteed process standardization. Work roles were assigned to principals and NTs to smoothen the implementation. Monitoring was assigned to the focal point to improve adherence of the staff to the planned guidelines.

High level of satisfaction among the users on the tool and the implementation process and high level of utilization of assessment results in staff development were observed in post - intervention assessment.

The factors such as simplicity and cost effectiveness will improve the utilization of the above tool. It is expected to expand this process in a stepwise manner as the NTs acquire the needed competencies stated in the current tool. When considering the above outcomes, it is realized that the interventional strategies used in this research project have been successful and feasible to be applied in all the NTSS in the country.

Conclusion

A need was identified in the Nursing Tutors' competency assessment mechanism in NTSS

in Sri Lanka. The package of interventions consisting of a NT Competency Assessment Tool and other supportive strategies which were developed and implemented in selected NTSS was found to be feasible in implementing in NTS settings. The feasible tool and the process introduced in this project could be formally implemented using the same methodology in all 16 NTSS in Sri Lanka.

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