

20 YEARS OF UNDERGRADUATE NURSING RESEARCH: TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATIONS (1999-2019)

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Abstract

Undergraduate student nurses undergo rigorous training to become proficient healthcare practitioners, equipped with the skills to engage in research and critical investigation activities. A fundamental component of their education is the cultivation of evidence-based practice (EBP) competencies. This includes the ability to formulate clinical questions, conduct systematic literature reviews, and critically appraise research findings. EBP empowers nurses to deliver high-quality healthcare by utilizing scientifically validated evidence (Nordsteien et al., 2017; Majid et al., 2011).

To attain the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and transition into the role of professional nurses, student nurses are mandated to complete a thesis, a pivotal requirement for graduation. This essential academic endeavor holds significant prominence within the BSN program of Bicol University College of Nursing (BUCN). In the past, the Nursing Research subject was traditionally offered at level IV, where the completion of the thesis was mandatory for graduation. However, instances of students facing unique circumstances that impeded their progress raised concerns. Consequently, to accommodate such situations, Nursing Research has been shifted to level III, allowing students who face challenges in thesis completion to continue working on their research while progressing into level IV.

This strategic alteration in the curriculum aims to provide students with a more flexible and supportive environment for thesis development and completion. It recognizes the diverse challenges that student nurses may encounter during their academic journey, ensuring that these challenges do not hinder their progress towards graduation. In this way,

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BUCN is committed to nurturing the next generation of competent and research-savvy nurses who can seamlessly integrate EBP into their professional practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The undergraduate student nurses are honed in college to be skillful health care workers. They are trained to have the capacity to develop accurate search and critical investigation skills to be able to do researches and other scientific activities.

They are expected to apply evidence-based practice (EBP) once working as professional nurses. They are projected to know EBP and be able to ask clinical questions, undergo systematic literature searches and conduct critical appraisal of research findings (Nordsteien et al. 2017). EBP provides nurses with a method to use critically appraised and scientifically proven evidence for delivering quality health care to a specific population (Majid, et al., 2011). In becoming a professional nurse, one must attain the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and student nurses must write, defend, and submit a thesis in order to graduate, as it is regarded as a major requirement for the completion of the degree. Thesis writing is vital in the BSN program of Bicol University College of Nursing (BUCN). In the past, the Nursing Research subject was offered in level IV but when one or two students were not able to finish the thesis due to peculiar circumstances, they were not allowed to attend the graduation.

Hence, Nursing Research was transferred to level III that if and when a level III student fails to finish thesis writing, they would still be allowed to work on their paper while in level IV.

According to Yeoman et al. (2008), writing a thesis after engaging in faculty-mentored undergraduate research is one of the greatest ways for undergraduates to learn how to write like a scientist. However, developing writing abilities does not happen by itself, and providing writing classes and customized coaching present substantial obstacles. Yeoman et al. (2008) proposed a hybrid paradigm in which students benefitted from the structure of a course as well as the customized benefits of working with instructors one-on-one. They utilized a Thesis Assessment Protocol to arrange involvement in scientific peer review in order to optimize these one-on-one encounters. They discovered that their approach not only improved student writing but also helped faculty members across the department—not just those teaching the course—work more effectively and efficiently with student writers by comparing theses written by students who took this course and comparable students who did not.

Related to this, Bicol University (BU) considers research as one of its primordial functions and it has emphasized that thesis writing must not only be done as a requirement in attaining the degree but must foster research skills and address relevant research agenda to help the university in promoting its functions on research. Whether the BUCN undergraduate theses' are written within the context of BU's research priorities, and whether they have relevance in regional responsiveness are two of the purposes of this paper. Indeed, writing the thesis is an opportunity for the undergraduates to learn to think and write like a scientist. In their thesis undertakings, they are made to write a major research paper mentored by their thesis adviser and the coursework becomes a distinctive research experience which help students develop critical thinking skills and research abilities (Hunter et al. 2007).

This study then looked expansively into the insights and prospects of the BSN theses to gain precise and profound intuitive comprehension of their choice of topics. It further looked into the completed theses' trends, whether the results give major contribution to nursing practice, nursing education, nursing research, and to general health. It

is in this concept that the study is undertaken where its main objective is to determine insights and prospects toward the undergraduate nursing researches of student nurses of BUCN. Specifically, it reviewed the BUCN student researches along *Medical-Surgical Nursing*, *Maternal and Child Nursing*, *Mental Health Nursing*, *Community Health Nursing*, and other key findings. It endeavored to summarize historical trends based on research designs, sampling locations, population groups, and responsiveness to regional needs. Finally, it aimed to derive at concepts that could enhance existing academic policies responsive to the nursing curriculum.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In BUCN, a subject teacher is assigned to teach the Nursing Research 1 subject. The output of Nursing Research 1 is a paper for proposal inclusive of Chapters 1, 2 and 3. A research adviser is assigned per student or group of students to give boost and assistance to the student researchers. When the students are ready for proposal, they are expected to defend their study in front of a panel. The panel's corrections, suggestions, and recommendations would be vital to the completion of their respective studies. The subject, Nursing Research 2, is offered on the succeeding semester and the output of such course is the final manuscript on a hardbound after passing through the final oral examination. Students undergo final oral examination by means of —defending the result of their studies, presented in a completed thesis from Chapters 1 to 5, complete with findings, conclusions and recommendations, inclusive of the salient preliminary pages, references and appendices. The thesis writing process is considered highly essential in sharpening the scientific minds and dexterity of the student nurses in research and technical writing. Students who perform with distinctive dexterity outshine the others and are commonly given awards for *Best Paper* and *Best Paper Presentors*.

This study made a comprehensive systematic review of the theses done by BUCN student nurses. The study aimed to determine the insights and prospects of the theses, highlighting the major fields of nursing. Hence, the systematic review done served to synthesize evidence and assessed the scope of literature on a topic through PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The theses were then classified along *Medical-Surgical*, *Maternal and Child*, *Mental Health* and *Community Health Nursing* which are the major fields of nursing care and management (NCM).

The other classifications were strategically classified under other key findings due to the distinctive areas they covered and because of the pertinent number of theses done along the aforementioned categories. These classifications are based on the professional courses under the CMO No. 15, 2017. Target outcomes were measured by objectively searching the undergraduate nursing researches from 1999 to 2019. Theses done before and after the aforementioned years were not considered in the data gathering procedure. Study took place from August 2020 to January 2021.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Researches of the BUCN Department

Medical-Surgical, *Maternal and Child*, *Mental Health*, and *Community Health Nursing* are considered four of the major fields of nursing, and hence was regarded herein as the major classifications of the researches of BUCN students. Other key findings were also underscored which were based on the other salient professional courses of nursing found to have also been the foci of a number of researches. This encompassed *Health Assessment* and *Lifestyle*, *Nurses' and Student Nurses' Professional Development*, and *Nursing Practice, Education and Research*. Findings revealed that the researches of the BUCN student nurses present topics that are covered under those various major fields of nursing. Figure 1 shows the highest number of researches along *Medical Surgical Nursing* with 151 (26.22%). Results also showed the other major fields of nursing such as *Maternal and Child Care* with 81 (14.06%), *Mental Health* with 100 (17.40%), and *Community Health Nursing* with 91 (16%).

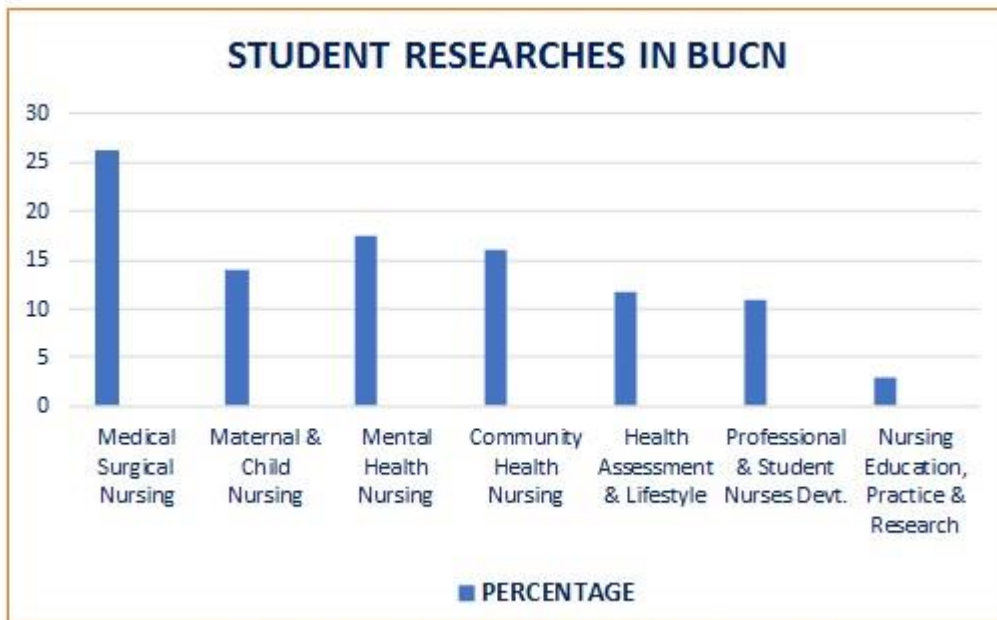


Figure 1. Researches in BU College of Nursing

Inclusive under the *Medical Surgical Nursing* topics were cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), communicable diseases, and diseases of the older adults. Other medical surgical topics included diseases of the skin, cases of health emergencies, and disorders in endocrine and metabolism. Under the *Maternal and Child Nursing*, specific topics included health and health issues of pregnant and postpartum mothers, of neonates, infants, toddlers and school children, and issues on women. With regards to *Mental Health Nursing*, topics were on social media and its effects to students. Other topics were drug dependence, stresses and coping strategies, family background, and relationships with significant others. *Community Health Nursing* included specific topics like traditional medicines, occupational hazards, water and sanitation, and Department of Health's (DOH) programs implemented in city health offices (CHOs), rural health units (RHUs), and barangay health stations (BHS). The other key findings zeroed in on the other professional courses that are relevant to *Health Assessment and Lifestyle* with 68 (11.81%), *Professional and Student Nurses' Development* with 63 (10.93%) and *Nursing Education, Nursing Practice, and Nursing Research* with 17 (2.95%).

3.2 Summary of Historical Trends

Historical Trends based on Research Designs. Undergraduate theses from BUCN are comprised of both descriptive and experimental studies. The descriptive studies were sub-classified into quantitative, qualitative, and feasibility study. Figure 3 is the summary of BUCN undergraduate theses based on the type of research design.

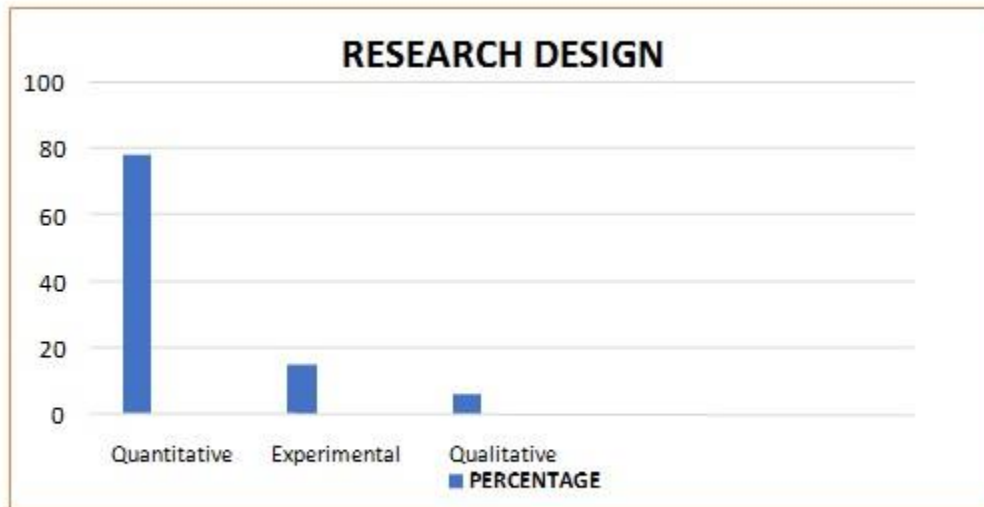


Figure 2. Summary of BUCN Undergraduate Theses based on the Type of Research Design

In Figure 2, it can be inferred that most of the theses made by the students lean towards descriptive study. In the distribution of the type of descriptive study, most of the theses utilized a quantitative method with 452 (78.47%), followed by experimental study with 87 (15.10%), then qualitative approach with 35 (6.08%), and feasibility study with 2 (.35%).

The factors which have affected the distribution of the theses based on research design are the institution's curriculum, the difficulties encountered, financial issues considered, and appropriate changes made by the panel of evaluators during the students' pre-oral examinations. The BUCN curriculum on research may have emphasized on quantitative and qualitative studies with a little less emphasis on experimental studies, as manifested in the disparity between descriptive and experimental studies. Additionally, studies that are experimental in nature tend to be costly and extremely challenging for the students. If they opted to do experimental investigation, they followed a certain pattern which they based on the available resources and equipment within the institution.

As it is, there was an accumulation of descriptive theses which simply showed that students opted for the descriptive type which was more practical to undertake. And, because of the lack of local references and stricter ethical considerations, option to undergo case studies, feasibility studies, and qualitative methods are low. With regards to the respondents, they are usually selected from a population who have a background and familiarity in the particular industry of the specific topic of research. Since experimental came as the second most commonly employed research design, laboratory animals were utilized. These experimental studies mostly involved assessing the effects of certain plants on various health conditions like wound healing, and anti-diabetic and antilipidemic effects. Most of these were tested on laboratory approved animals, like male albino mice (*Mus musculus*) and wistar rats (*Rattus norvegicus*).

Historical Trends based on Sampling Locations. The sampling location of the undergraduate theses undertaken were highly concentrated in Bicol region. In the five provinces of Bicol shown on Figure 3, the area or province which had the most number of studies is in Albay with 551 (95.66%), followed by Sorsogon with 20 studies (3.47%), then, Masbate with 5 studies (.87%). For those undertaken in Albay, most of these studies concentrated within the 2nd congressional district, followed by district 3, and last is district 1.



Figure 1. Historical Trends based on Sampling Locations

Majority of the studies were done in the researchers' locale of choice. The trend for the distribution of the locations could be associated to the site of the university. Students do data gathering on school days and during summer vacation, because of this, the sampling location for the theses becomes limited to the student's area of convenience. This is evidenced by the high percentage of studies undertaken in the 2nd district where Legazpi City is located. In the aspect of experimental studies, 87 of these theses, especially those requiring the use of animal test subjects, set their experiments in a laboratory setting at the Research Development and Management Division (RDMD) of BU. Incidentally, aside from Bicol region, one (1) study took place internationally where data gathering was done through online modalities.

Another reason for selecting the sampling location is the availability of sampling population. Some of the theses' target population were the indigent groups, and individuals afflicted with certain diseases who are available on specific areas, and in a specified community situation. This led to the distribution of research outside of Albay.

Historical Trends based on Population Groups. The population groups that students used as sample populations for their theses greatly varied. They covered all age groups, diverse types of occupation, various health conditions, secondary and tertiary schools, and various community situations. In the 576 theses reviewed, the researchers determined the common population groups and they are shown in Figure 4.

Out of the listed population groups, the healthcare workers were the most common respondents or participants utilized by the BUCN undergraduate theses from 1999-2019 as shown in 208 (48.61%) theses. The second most common were the students with 173 (30.03%) entries, while the third most common is laboratory animal or species with 87 (15.10%) entries. A few theses were on other professionals with 21 (3.65%), and the last population group is the older adults with 15 (2.60%) entries.

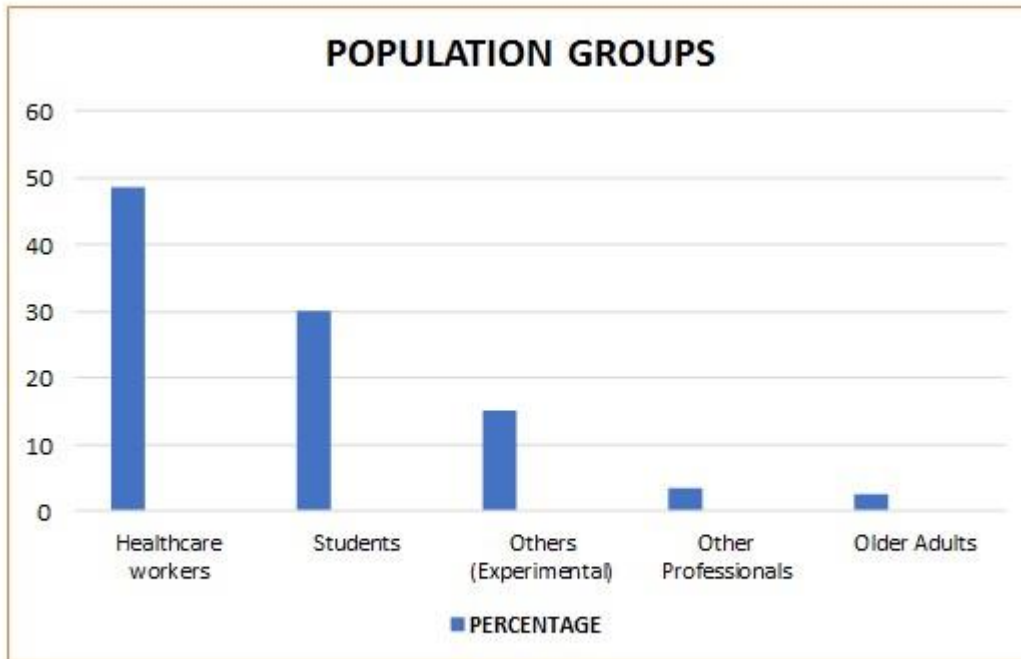


Figure 4. Historical Trends based on Population Groups

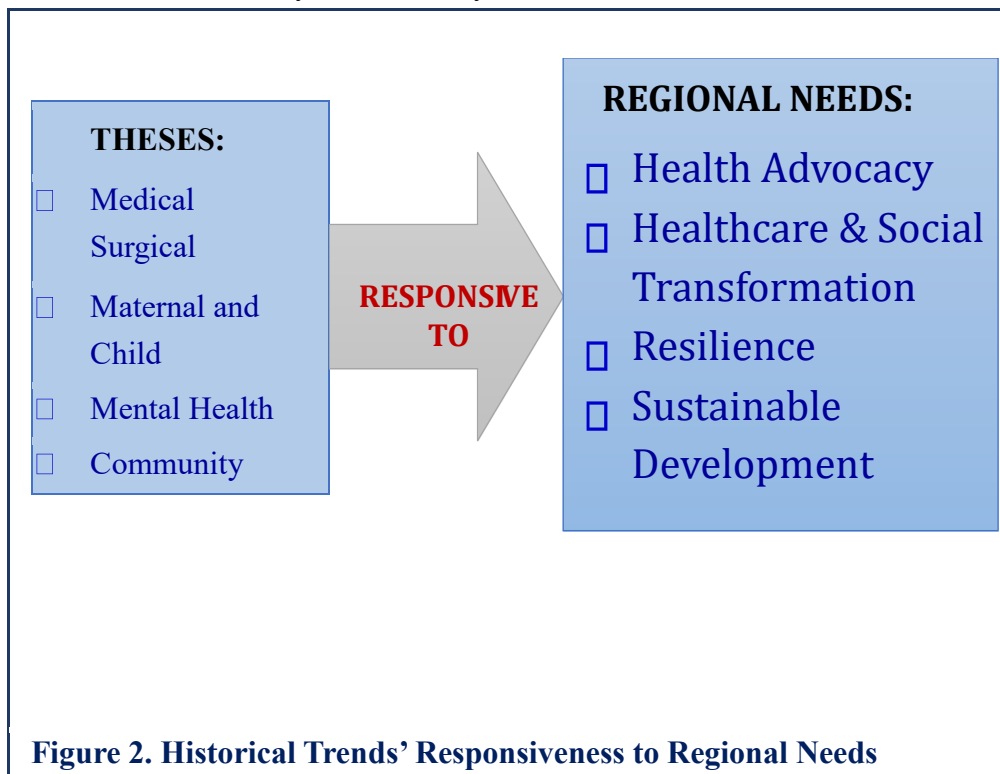
Among the healthcare workers in the population group of students' researches, most of them are from nearby clinical areas and community health areas such as city health offices, rural health units, barangay health stations and other offices and factories in the province of Albay. And for these healthcare workers, accessibility is another reason, plus its relation to the profession which the students opted to investigate. With regards to the population group on students, most of these are the researchers' fellow student nurses in the college itself, and those from the other campuses within the university. Students from the secondary schools in the province were likewise utilized as respondents as they were located within the area where the student researchers were residing. This is associated to the bulk of these located in Albay, specifically in the second district. Given that the students are being molded as future nurse professionals, they are more inclined to focus on topics in line with healthcare.

Historical Trends based on Responsiveness to Regional Needs. Writing a thesis, defending it, and submitting a hard bound copy are essential activities needed as partial fulfillment in the requirement for attaining the degree of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). This requirement is set by CHED, hence, all student nurses are mandated to undergo the process of thesis writing, individually, or as a group. One of the purposes of writing a research is to look for a problem, ascertain how this problem should be addressed based on a particular research methodology, and collate, interpret, analyze and report the data gathered through a scientific process. As it is, the responsiveness of all these research undertakings is essential to the needs of society. It is a fundamental goal of every research to respond positively and more directly to the people's needs, and in these undertakings, the most salient needs are the health needs of the clientele. In Figure 5, findings revealed that the researches were found to be highly responsive to the relevant regional needs of: *Health Advocacy, Healthcare and Social Transformation, Resilience and Sustainable Development*.

Health Advocacy. These health needs directly affect the health systems and health systems are expected to be responsive. Based on the nursing undergraduates' researches' foci on health, health issues, healthcare workers and health care systems, findings revealed that the BUCN student nurses' theses are well responsive to the Department of Health's (DOH) health advocacy programs. The DOH's health advocacy programs encompass

the health and wellness of all population groups from all settings in the society, and all sampling groups. The researches evolved around the DOH programs offered across the health system.

The DOH programs were addressed by the BUCN researches and were found to be highly responsive as health advocacies which are the *Lifestyle-related Diseases, Adolescent Health and Development Program, Food and Water-borne Diseases' Prevention and Control Program, HIV/AIDS and STI Prevention and Control Program, Emerging and Re-Emerging Infectious Disease Program, Environmental Health Program, National Safe Motherhood Program, and Occupational Health Program*. The researches anticipated and adapted to the current and future health demands, resulting in better health outcomes (Mirzoev & Kane, 2017). And, as postulated in the findings, these health advocacy issues revolved around medical surgical nursing, maternal and child health, mental health, health of the community and a healthy environment.



Healthcare and Social Transformation. As the nursing researches had varied foci, the student nurses had undertaken varied scientific processes toward attaining exceptionally written theses that revealed valuable findings. Through the research methodologies, they were able to write researches that are patient-centered, healthcare worker-focused, and balanced health continuum. And more remarkably, as young and vibrant student nurses, their skills were enhanced to effect transformative changes in the healthcare domain. They have contributed to healthcare transformation which led to increased awareness among concerned authorities and among the clientele, and which expanded toward recommendations for policy review. More importantly, findings revealed that the BUCN student nurses' theses are well responsive to the need for social transformation. Although these theses zeroed in on health issues and health systems, they too gave a great impact on social transformation which focused on professional nurses, other professionals (such as teachers, police and fire officers) and students' advancements and development. These researches definitely contributed to social transformation and would eventually help in building a healthy nation.

Resilience. Results of the historical trends on responsiveness to regional needs also focused on resilience. Theses explored challenges of professional nurses, healthcare workers, teachers, and students' strategies on addressing challenges and stresses. Hence, resilience was largely postulated. Resilience is highlighted on Connor & Zhang's (2006) study where they explained that resilience is the ability to overcome difficulties in humans, and it varies depending on context, time, age, gender, and cultural origin. The focus of psychological and nursing researches on resilience moved from decreasing the bad to boosting the positive. Hence, the study of resilience has progressed from descriptions of resilient characteristics to the identification of the mechanism for achieving resilience and the desire to reintegrate in a robust manner. This was true in a substantial number of BUCN undergraduate theses.

Sustainable Development. Additionally, the need for sustainable development has been addressed as well. These needs encompassed particular variables underlined in the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and underscored in the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The theses completed by the undergraduate students address the health issues and challenges related to the MDGs like: Reduction in Child Mortality (MDG 4); Improve Maternal Health (MDG 5), and Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other Diseases (MDG 6). Other theses focused on gender equality and the health of women which gave emphasis in Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women (MDG 3).

In terms of the SDGs, the theses undertaken collectively addressed the SDGs on: Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Life on Land. These concepts may also be underscored in future research endeavors for a more prolific and expansive findings that may help in boosting the nursing curriculum, promoting health of the clientele and achieving national development.

3.3 Concepts derived at to Enhance Existing Academic Policies

Several concepts have been filtered out from the various theses undertaken by the BUCN student nurses. It is note worthy that the theses have attempted to address the needs within the healthcare system.

This healthcare system encompassed the management of specific diseases, communicable or non-communicable, the health, wellness and illnesses of individuals from all age brackets, maintaining an unpolluted and sanitary environment, competencies of student nurses, performance of nurse professionals and attributes of other professionals, interventions to mental transitory complications, enhancing relationships among clients and their significant others, and finally, interactions between nurses and the other healthcare team members. These concepts may help enhance existing research academic policies that are responsive to the nursing curriculum, and to the ever changing complexities of time. Hence, key concepts have surfaced from the various nursing researches. These concepts were deduced as themes and are shown in Figure 6. The themes are: *Competence, Collaboration, Innovation, Professional Growth & Development, and Research Capacity.*



Figure 3. Concepts derived at to Enhance Existing Academic Policies

Competence was underscored in several theses especially those that focused on related learning experiences (RLE) of the student nurses in skills laboratory, clinical areas, and community health. Competence was also highlighted by a number of theses which determined the performance of nurses and healthcare workers in managing clients with cardiovascular, noncommunicable, and communicable diseases under the *Medical Surgical Nursing*, and managing clients within the field of *Maternal and Child Nursing* and *Community Health Nursing*. *Collaboration* was also highlighted in several theses as collaboration is practiced among the various healthcare team members. Collaboration is important among the *carers* in the healthcare settings and among authorities in the local government units, academic institutions, and non-government organizations. Tasks can be done faster and more efficiently with proper collaboration. Collaboration among students, student leaders and teachers was also given emphasis in a number of researches which emphasized that collaboration through teamwork leads to greater learning outcomes.

Innovation is another concept underscored among the theses. Innovation is elucidated as several theses focused on issues and challenges in nursing practice, education and research. Theses posited habits and practices on innovations where healthcare workers and other professionals carry out when the need arises. The well and sick clients, student nurses, and other college and high school students always do hard work, and they come up with strategies in dealing with particular problems realizing that developing specific innovations can help. Healthcare workers come up with revised structures in handling patients, and utilize new or refurbished equipment to provide better care. In attaining good grades despite challenges and difficulties in school, student nurses establish new innovations in their study habits. Moreover, the other professionals were also found to be hardworkers. They implement innovations as part of their strategies, and thereby enable themselves to accomplish more, pass accreditation processes, receive rewards and recognition, and get promotions.

Professional Growth and Development or Professionalism is a vital component of any —profession. It is a core value of all professionals, most particularly of healthcare workers, especially that they deal with the lives of their clients. That is why sheer dynamism and dedication that go with unparalleled commitment and compassion manifested by the healthcare workers have also been conceptualized in most researches of the BUCN student nurses. This is noteworthy because those benefited by such virtue of professionalism are the clientele in all sampling locations and from all population groups. Professionalism, even if intricate and diverse, is necessary, as it is a dynamic process, and is relevant to the core of nursing.

The study of Ghadirian et al. (2014) described professionalism with relevance, breadth, and idea of nursing professionalism that it becomes the concept of a starting point for further research and development in extending nursing knowledge. And hence, they expounded that nursing education should be able to develop a distinctive professional knowledge among young nurse enthusiasts.

Writing and completing all these researches and theses have trained student nurses to become proficient researchers with highly developed dexterity and research capacity. *Research capacity* is expounded by Chen et al. (2019) in their study which indicated that research capacity in nursing is the ability to undertake nursing research activities in a sustainable fashion in a given environment. Indeed, nursing research capacity is essential for the advancement of the profession as well as yield beneficial results for nurses, the clientele, and the healthcare system. More study can be done to better understand the interrelationships between the linked notions of research capabilities to the profession of nursing.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researches of the BUCN students focused mainly on crucial and wide-ranging research topics that directed their investigation on the key concepts of nursing. The historical trends articulated the student researchers' knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) in developing a clear understanding of the appropriate methods and prioritizing the needs of the clients and how to take their research skills in the student nurses' future nursing careers. The concepts derived at by the various theses have gained strength in the management of specific diseases, interventions to mental transitory complications, maintaining an unpolluted and sanitary environment, and, enhancing relationships among clients and their significant others, and interactions between nurses and the other healthcare team. These concepts may help enhance existing research academic policies that are responsive to the nursing curriculum.

This study gives emphasis on fostering research directions so that students may prioritize researches responsive to changes in the healthcare settings, client populations, government protocols and to the ever-evolving nursing practice. It further recommends that the BUCN may utilize the findings of the student researches in the enhancements of their course syllabi, especially those in the context of nursing practice and nursing education.

The student researches may be disseminated through paper presentations. The students may be assisted in the financial aspect required in the dissemination processes. Student researchers may do paper presentations in local, national and international fora to help build their confidence as presenters and competence as researchers. They may also submit for publication in peer reviewed journals to be able to share the substantial findings of their researches in a wider audience. Student nurse researchers may be inspired to continue practicing their investigative skills after graduation and continue to do research with other healthcare professionals and develop linkages with healthcare institutions. Finally, the BU administration may provide larger opportunities for student researchers parallel to the faculty researchers in enhancing the lives of the Bicolano's sick and well community. The instructors, professors and other stakeholders of Bicol University may come up with a list of more substantial, updated and indispensable research agenda to guide the students on their thesis topics.

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