

## MEASURING COMPETENCE: THE JOURNEY TO PROFESSIONAL READINESS IN NURSING EDUCATION

Prathima P<sup>1\*</sup>

Dr. Prof. Fatima Dsilva<sup>2</sup>

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Nitte Institute of Nursing Sciences, Nitte Deemed to be University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
2. Professor & Principal, Nitte Usha Institute of Nursing Sciences, NITTE Deemed to be University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.

\*Corresponding Author

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective of this study is to address the urgent need for a reliable framework for assessing nursing graduates' professional preparedness when they join the field. It aims to determine whether professional readiness is a measurable construct, investigate the complex idea of professional preparedness among nursing professionals, and create an integrated evaluation scale for nursing graduates. **Methodology:** This study is conducted in four phases using an exploratory sequential research design using a mixed-method approach. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, such as administrators, educators, practitioners, and nursing experts, are part of the qualitative phases. To determine the essential components of professional preparedness, thematic analysis is utilized. Based on the collected qualitative insights, an evaluation tool is developed and validated in the next quantitative steps. **Result:** Critical aspects of professional preparation, such as clinical abilities, cognitive skills, personal qualities, and adherence to ethical and professional standards, were identified through the qualitative data analysis. Stakeholder insights emphasized the need for improved communication, stress management strategies, and development of practical skills in nursing education. Nursing graduates' professional readiness can be measured thanks to the creation of an assessment tool and a theoretical framework that were developed with input from stakeholders. **Significance:** The results of patient care, nursing education, and institutional reputation are all significantly affected by this study. It seeks to raise patient care standards, increase retention rates, and promote a professional culture within the nursing profession by filling in professional preparedness gaps. The results offer significant perspectives for improving curricula, improving instructional techniques, and encouraging a professional culture in nursing students. In the end, this study adds to the larger conversation on the value of professional readiness assessments in raising job performance and boosting healthcare provision.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Skills, Clinical Competence, Self-Efficacy, Professionalism, Curriculum Development, Patient Care Outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

To fulfill healthcare sector needs, nursing education is always improving.<sup>1</sup> The changing healthcare landscape makes it more vital to prepare nursing graduates for their careers.<sup>2</sup> This extensive research project, "Development, Validation, and Testing of an Assessment Tool on Professional Readiness of Nursing Graduates," addresses the urgent need for a strong assessment framework to assess nursing graduates' readiness for the workforce.

Nursing graduates' "professional readiness" relates to their ability to use clinical knowledge, theoretical comprehension, and a professional perspective.<sup>3</sup> It involves applying knowledge and skills to healthcare conditions while adhering to moral and professional standards. Nursing graduates must work in a complicated healthcare environment that requires technical skills, communication, critical thinking, and situational flexibility.<sup>4</sup> Professional preparation includes graduates' capacity to work with interdisciplinary teams, interact with healthcare realities, and respect nursing's moral norms and ideals. Academic accomplishment alone does not define it.<sup>5</sup> Proliferation of knowledge, the scarcity of nurses, and the adoption of advanced technologies has intensified the global debate among nurse leaders about the "readiness" of recent graduates to enter the workforce and transition seamlessly into practice.<sup>6</sup> Due to the complexity of the study questions, a mixed-method approach was adopted. This strategy combines qualitative and quantitative tools to study the phenomenon thoroughly. The study is an exploratory sequential model that uses qualitative insights from the first phases to build and validate the quantitative instrument.

Each of the four research phases contributes to the overarching goal. The first two rounds of qualitative research involve gathering data from many stakeholders. In the initial part of the project, the researcher sought input from educators, practitioners, administrators, and national and international senior nursing specialists. The researcher used interviews and focus groups to study professional preparation. The evaluation instrument is validated in the second phase based on stakeholder opinions and first-phase insights.

## NEED OF THE STUDY

Nursing is a profession that is always changing due to patient requirements, technology breakthroughs, and improvements in healthcare procedures.<sup>7</sup> Making ensuring nursing graduates are sufficiently equipped to handle the demands of their profession is vital given the increasing demands placed on nursing practitioners. Nevertheless, studies have shown that nursing graduates have major gaps in their professional preparation, underscoring the need for a thorough assessment framework to gauge their preparedness for clinical practice. The urgent need for this research originates from studies undertaken at the Cleveland Clinic, which found significant gaps in the clinical scenario handling skills of recent nursing graduates. There are significant consequences for patient care outcomes from these shortcomings, since each year over a thousand recently

graduated nurses join the industry. It is concerning that a small percentage of recent graduates showed complete practice readiness, which raises questions about their capacity to oversee clinical settings and guarantee patient safety.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, there is a greater need for highly qualified nursing staff due to the global healthcare landscape, particularly in the post-COVID-19 period.<sup>9</sup> The significance of suitably educating nursing graduates for the industry is highlighted by the growing emphasis on professionalism, theoretical knowledge, and practical skills. Inadequate preparation has an impact on the standard of patient treatment as well as job placement rates, the standing of the institution, and the results of healthcare in general. The researcher believes that it is critical to address the pressing issue of nursing graduates finding it difficult to secure appropriate jobs because of insufficient skill and efficiency. Inadequate professional preparation has an impact on nursing schools, hospitals, and ultimately the standard of patient care in addition to individual graduates.<sup>10</sup> The researcher hopes to improve retention rates and workplace success in the nursing profession by conducting this study and offering insightful information about the components of professional readiness among nursing graduates and developing an integrated assessment scale.

## **AIM OF THE STUDY**

Develop and validate an assessment tool to evaluate nursing graduates' professional readiness. Explore the diverse dimensions of professional readiness and its influence on patient care and institutional effectiveness using mixed methods. Inform nursing education practices to improve graduates' preparedness, enhancing their career prospects and workplace success

### **Research Question**

Is professional readiness a measurable concept?

This question seeks to delve into the foundational understanding of whether professional readiness can be effectively quantified and assessed.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology is a way of systematically solving a research problem. It is a science of studying how research is done scientifically.<sup>11</sup> The methodology of research indicates the general pattern of organising the procedure for gathering valid and reliable data for the purpose of investigation.

### **Objectives**

The research objective establishes the general direction of the inquiry for researcher. The objectives of the study clearly explains each and every aspect of the study and thereby provides a better idea to the researcher of what is intended to find out.

To explore in depth the concepts of professional readiness among Nursing professionals.

To develop an integrated assessment scale on professional readiness among nursing graduates.

Research Approach

Mixed Method Approach (Both qualitative and quantitative)

Research design

Exploratory Sequential research design is used in this study.

Setting

Qualitative: Phase 1 & 2

National & Internationally Selected Nursing colleges and the Hospitals

Phase 1 of the research initiative involved conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse pool of stakeholders, including senior nursing professionals, educators, practitioners, and hospital administrators. With a sample size of 100 participants for interviews and multiple sessions for focus groups, data collection employed a random sampling method. The structured interview guide encompassed questions aimed at defining and measuring professional readiness for nursing graduates, with thematic analysis used to identify key dimensions and attributes. The outcome of Phase 1 informed the development of a theoretical framework illustrating the conceptual relationships among various dimensions leading to nursing students' professional readiness.

In Phase 2, a draft tool was developed based on expert opinions gathered from a sample size of 10 participants through purposive sampling. The objectives of the instrument were identified, and items were finalized and reviewed for clarity, formatting, and wording. Content validity was ensured through expert evaluation, focusing on construct validity and respondents' perceived willingness to answer. Reliability was assessed through measures such as Cronbach's alpha and test-retest reliability to ensure consistency and stability of the instrument over time. The outcome of Phase 2 was the construction of a research draft instrument with a high degree of validity and reliability, facilitating ease and willingness of respondents to engage with the assessment scale.

## RESULTS

The first phase of the study contacted 104 experts, of whom 74 responded. The participants included senior nursing staff, hospital administrators, medical professionals, and HR administrators from NABH/JCI-accredited hospitals, representing a wide range of affiliations. This ensured a comprehensive understanding of nursing graduates' professional preparedness.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

Interview guide, in-depth interviews, and concentrated group discussions provided critical qualitative data for assessment tool refinement. Thematic analysis revealed repeating themes and sub-themes in thereplies, providing a nuanced view of professional preparation.

## Identification of Critical Dimensions:

Phase 1 discussions with nursing leaders highlighted key career skills taught to nursing graduates, including clinical competence, decision-making, and therapeutic communication. Poor communication between nursing schools and hospitals was noted, impacting student nurse rotations. Enhancing academic-hospital connections was deemed crucial for improving nursing education. Concerns were raised about misconduct in nursing schools and the need for a medical education-focused approach. Emphasis was placed on nurturing morality, professionalism, and emotional regulation in nursingstudents. Additional hands-on training was recommended for emerging healthcare technologies like robotics and AI. Financial knowledge and fundamental management skills were seen as essential for nursing leadership. The importance of global competency training, mentorship, and emotional intelligence development was emphasized in the stressful healthcare environment. Expert, educator, and practitioner focus group discussions (FGDs) further explored nursing education, professional readiness, and challenges. FGDs stressed the importance of clinical judgment, communication, and stress reduction strategies. Addressing cognitive gaps and promoting a blame-free culture were identified as crucial for improving nursing education. The fifth FGD highlighted the necessity for teamwork, continual learning, and a global perspective in professional readiness. Challenges such as nursing graduates' incompetence and access to nursing degrees were also discussed, alongside recommendations for leadership development and culture change in nursing practice.From this the researcher had drawn the conclusion for each questions.

### 1. What is or how do you define professional readiness for Nursing graduates?

Graduate nurses are expected to (exhibit high levels competence) with adequate knowledge, (clinical judgment and reasoning skills), (personal attributes and high standards of ethical and professional practice)”

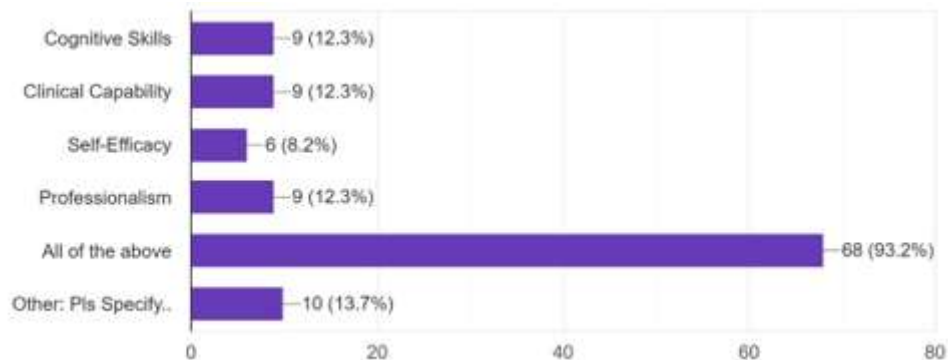
“A graduate nurse should be confident of handling patients at bedside independently and be() aware of written and spoken communication in the journey of patient care. Her handling of patients shouldcause No harm to patients, the hospital, and to the profession. “

To be able to (ability to apply knowledge and skills acquired in real-life situations) in a confident manner by following proper clinical and ethical standards with substantial judgment and clinical reasoning

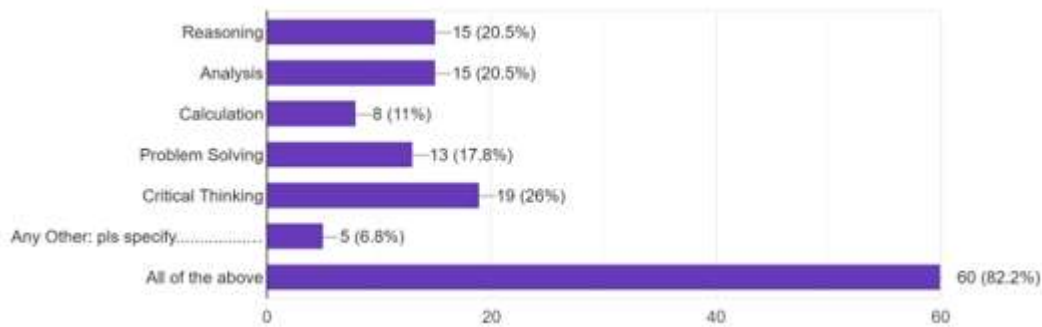
“willing to face challenges in their profession and the ability to meet the expectations of their services”.

“Readiness in terms of knowledge, skills, and good practices “Empowered and updated to take up new roles and responsibilities “

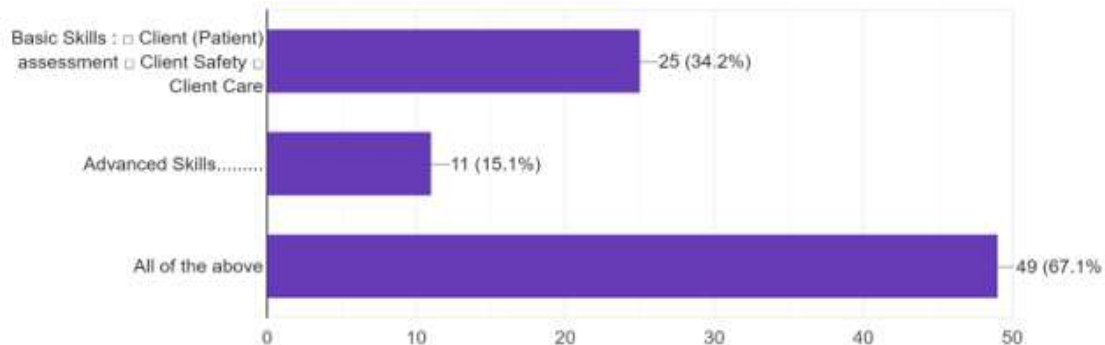
**What are the different parameters for measuring the professional readiness of Nursing Graduates?**  Cognitive Skills     Clinical Capability     Self-Efficacy     Professionalism     Others: pls specify.....



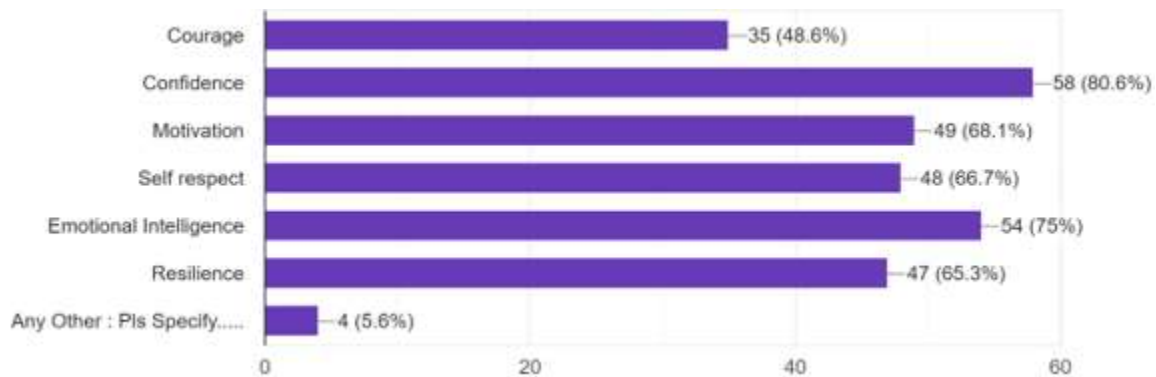
2. What are the cognitive skills that are required for passing out Nursing graduates?



3. What are the clinical competencies that are required according to you?

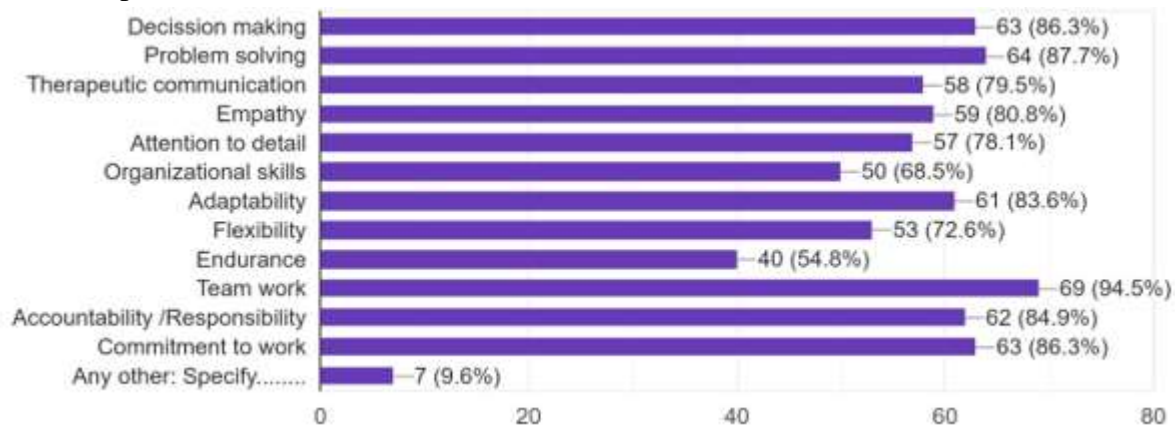


4. Do you agree that self-care skills play an immense role in Professional Readiness? Which parameters below help in building up self-care skills?

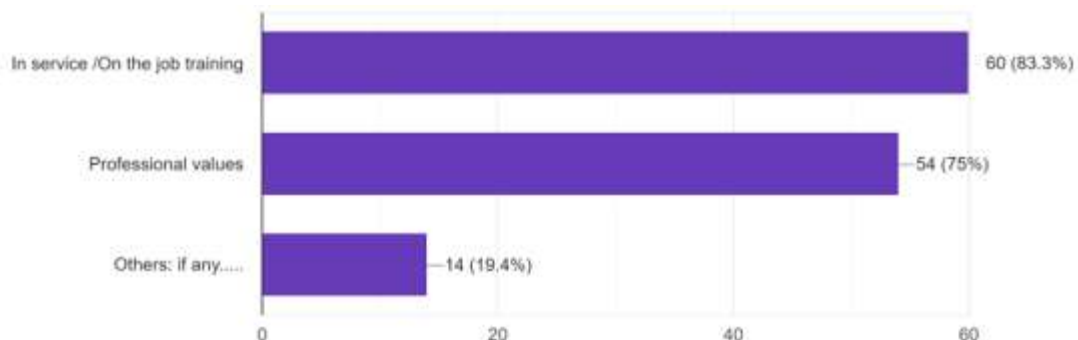


5. What are the Professional skill aspects?

Decision making skills,  Problem solving,  Therapeutic communication skills,  Empathy,  Attention to detail,  Organizational skills,  Adaptability  Flexibility,  Endurance,  Teamwork,  Accountability / Responsibility,  Commitment to work  Any other. specify.....? Self-discipline



6. Other aspects to be included in the training of Nurses to be professionally ready in Nursing colleges?  In service/On the job training  Professional values  Any other. Specify: yes



Validation of Existing Concepts:

The qualitative data validated concepts derived from the literature review, enhancing the robustness of the assessment scale.

Expert opinions confirmed the relevance of certain dimensions identified in the literature, providing a consensus-based foundation for the tool.

#### Refinement of Questionnaire Items:

In phase two, expert-reviewed questionnaire items were adjusted, resulting in a focused scale relevant to nursing. Initial testing covered cognition, clinical capability, self-efficacy, professionalism, and demographics. The tool comprised 98 items across categories: clinical aptitude (27), self-efficacy (15), and professionalism (30). Post-validation, adjustments were made, notably enhancing self-efficacy items. Experts confirmed content validity, aligning with the desired models. The tool now assesses nurses' competencies effectively.

### **DISCUSSION**

The research on developing a nursing graduate professional readiness assessment tool addresses a critical need in nursing education. Professional readiness in nursing encompasses clinical knowledge, theoretical understanding, and adherence to ethical norms. This study is vital due to findings from the Cleveland Clinic revealing disparities in nursing graduates' preparedness, impacting patient care and healthcare quality. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the research explores professional preparation, targeting gaps to enhance nursing careers and patient care. By evaluating professional readiness, the study aims to improve nursing retention and performance during the transition into practice.

### **CONCLUSION**

Professional readiness assessment instrument development, validation, and testing in nursing education signal a milestone in addressing the ever-changing healthcare concerns nursing graduates face. This comprehensive tool emphasises training graduates for the intellectual and practical demands of healthcare practice. A mixed-methods approach using qualitative stakeholder viewpoints improved the evaluation instrument's relevance and context. The research enhances professional preparedness by identifying cognitive ability, clinical competency, self-confidence, and professionalism. This validated tool links theoretical comprehension to practical execution, which may aid nursing education stakeholders. Our study recommends approaches to improve nursing curricula, pedagogy, and professional ethos in the ever-changing healthcare environment. These improvements enhance patient care and graduation preparation. This study advises assessing and improving nursing graduates' professional preparation to improve patient care and employability.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.



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