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Literature Review

Measures of graduate entry nursing student program experiences: A scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Characterize the types of graduate entry nursing student experiences measured and the instruments used to measure these experiences.

Design: Scoping review.

Data sources: Nine electronic bibliographic databases.

Review methods: Databases were searched for published articles and theses reporting development, psychometric properties, or use of a quantitative measure of experience in accelerated second-degree entry to nursing students. Articles and theses were exported, deduped, dual screened, then data extracted, charted and analyzed.

Results: Sixty-three publications met inclusion criteria; most were peer reviewed journal articles from United States of America. Domains of student experience measured encompassed overall program, simulation, clinical education models, stress, coping and support, and sub-programs such as mindfulness-based stress reduction. More than half of studies used to exist measures, mostly assessing stress or support, reporting limited details regarding validity and reliability.

Conclusions: Measurement of student experiences is essential to understanding and improving quality of education programs. This review characterized the range of experiences measured, and instruments used. The synthesis provides educational programs, clinicians, and researchers an opportunity to avoid unnecessary measure development and research duplication.

Scoping review protocol registration: Open Science Framework (OSF): <https://osf.io/354nb>.

Tweetable abstract: measures of experience in second-degree accelerated nursing students #experiences #metrics.

Reporting method: PRISMA-ScR.

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Introduction

Graduate entry nursing programs, also known as accelerated second degree programs, attract students with a unique set of characteristics including maturity and rich life experiences (Neill, 2012), from

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varied cultural and academic backgrounds (McKenna & Vanderheide, 2012). These graduate students also seek out programs that offer the opportunity to learn alongside similar minded individuals (Macdiarmid et al., 2021a) and have been identified to be seeking a change of direction towards a more satisfying career in which they can make an impactful contribution to both patient outcomes and communities (Macdiarmid et al., 2021a, 2021b). The attraction of becoming a registered nursing professional through a shortened two-year degree, with reduced financial costs is an added incentive (Cangelosi, 2007; Macdiarmid et al., 2021a).

Graduate entry nursing students' experiences in pre-registration nursing education and clinical practice may be different to the experiences of undergraduate nursing students, given their altruistic motivations (ten Hoeve et al., 2017), prior participation in tertiary education, and broader life experiences. As experienced learners, graduate entry nursing students may arrive with an expectation of teaching and learning pedagogy informed by their previous educational experience. Graduate entry nursing students have unique learning needs and require novel approaches to teaching. For example, Stacey et al. (2018) suggest a tiredness with an evidence-based learning approach and Maddison and Strang (2018) found graduate entry nursing students enjoyed working collaboratively to explore case studies, facilitated by an academic. These findings are paving the way to new ways of working and developing graduate entry nursing programs (Macdiarmid et al., 2021a, 2021b).

As teaching and learning strategies and pedagogy evolves, rigorous evaluation of the effect of innovation is fundamental to good teaching practice. Using the right tools (instruments, scales, measures, items) to investigate the specific experiences of this nursing student cohort is essential to respond to student needs and develop robust strategies for recruitment and retention of students. Understanding existing tools available to measure these experiences reduces the likelihood of developing new and unnecessary tools, reducing duplication, redundancy, and research waste (Rosengaard et al., 2024).

Student experiences have been defined several ways. For the purpose of this review of measures, the Australian government endorsed Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT; <https://www.qilt.edu.au/About>) were used as a guide, with the addition of psychological impacts as related to their teaching and learning experience. The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching indicators focus on quality of educational experience, development of skills, engagement, teaching quality, support, and resources.

Our preliminary electronic database search did not identify any prior scoping review or systematic review of graduate entry nursing student experience measures. There are several systematic reviews of broader student cohorts or nursing students' educational experiences (Eick et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2020; Irwin & Coutts, 2015; Marshall et al., 2015; Matus et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2016), however, these reviews did not focus on measurement of experience. Three reviews of instruments for measuring experience were identified in a preliminary search of the databases (Araka et al., 2020; Richardson, 2005; Spooren et al., 2013). Richardson (2005) reviewed instruments to measure students' evaluation of teachers, program satisfaction and quality. Spooren et al. (2013) provided an overview of the literature on student evaluation of teaching in higher education and Araka et al. (2020) provide an overview of measurement of self-regulated learning on e-learning platforms. None of the three reviews of instruments specifically focused on graduate entry nursing student experience.

In summary, investigating the experiences measured, and the instruments and psychometric properties of the instruments used to measure graduate entry nursing students' experiences, will provide an important knowledge synthesis. This new knowledge will inform future studies of students' experience, ensuring the most appropriate

instrument is used or developed for the type of experience being explored. Understanding these experiences and measures will contribute to reducing replication in measure development and research waste.

Objectives

The overarching objective of this review was to characterize the types of graduate entry nursing student experiences measured and the instruments used to measure these experiences. The four research questions included, what are the: 1) student and program characteristics where experiences were measured?, 2) types of experiences measured?, 3) characteristics of studies reporting the development or use of experience measures?, and 4) psychometric properties of instruments used to measure experiences?

Methods

Protocol and registration

This review followed scoping review procedural and reporting recommendations (Peters et al., 2020; Pollock et al., 2021; Tricco et al., 2018). The protocol was registered with Open Science Framework prior to conducting the final searches (<https://osf.io/354nb>).

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria are reported as they align with the "Population," "Concept," and "Context" of the review question. The population eligible for the review was "graduate entry nursing students," defined as students enrolled in a preregistration graduate entry nursing program. The main concept was "measures of experience" of these students. Search terms for measures or measurement properties of measurement instruments drew from a published search filter (Terwee et al., 2009). The term "experience," and variations of this term, were not used in the search, as these would have limited the search and potentially led to not identifying relevant publications. Rather, we identified and excluded publications which did not include measures of experience during the duplicate screening procedure. The context for the "measures of experience" was during, and related to, the education program the nursing students' were enrolled in. The key search terms for this population included relevant variations of *student AND nurse AND graduate entry*. Further details of inclusion and exclusion criteria are now provided for instruments, study design, settings and participants, experience measures, and publications.

Types of instruments

Eligible graduate entry nursing student experiences data collection instruments included those administered by either an interviewer, self, or computer such as online survey or written questionnaire. Experience may include, but is not limited to the development of skills, engagement, quality of teaching, support, resources, professional growth and development, socialisation to nursing, and development of professional identity. Measures may have been applied to students enrolled in an education program in any setting where a graduate entry nursing student goes to engage in nursing education.

Study design

Published full text original articles were considered if they reported a study which: 1) used a data collection instrument to investigate graduate entry nursing students' experiences and/or 2) reported measurement properties of reliability, validity, responsiveness and / or interpretability. Studies that collected only qualitative

data were excluded. Quality improvement or evaluation projects without ethics or institutional review board approval were also excluded.

Settings and participants

Studies were considered for inclusion if participants were graduate entry nursing students enrolled in a pre-registration graduate entry nursing program. Graduate entry nursing students could have been participants as either the only population or a sub-population of a sample. In the review 'education programs' include accelerated, graduate, entry to practice, Master's-level, nursing programs.

Types of student experience outcome measures

Instruments measuring graduate entry nursing students' experiences as an outcome were eligible for inclusion. To be considered for inclusion, studies needed to explicitly state that student experiences or satisfaction with experiences were measured. These experiences could include overall quality of educational experience, skills development, learner engagement, teaching quality, student support, psychological impacts, and learning resources.

Types of publications

Peer-reviewed journal publications, published dissertations, and theses, in the English language without date limiters and up to the final search date (January 2025) were considered for inclusion. Editorials, commentaries, discursive papers, protocols, and reviews were also considered. Studies not published in the English language were excluded. Books, abstracts-alone, unpublished theses, and conference proceedings were also excluded.

Information sources

To identify relevant studies, a three-staged search strategy was adopted: 1) electronic bibliographic databases, 2) reference lists of included studies, and 3) reference lists of published reviews.

Electronic databases included: Cochrane EBM Reviews (OVID), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) Complete (EBSCO), EMCARE (OVID), Health Psychosocial Instruments (OVID), Joanna Briggs Institute (OVID), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (Medline, EBSCO), PUBMED, and Scopus, and for grey literature, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. No date limiters were applied.

Search

The search was translated and executed across databases using relevant field codes for abstracts. The full search strategy for Scopus is provided in [Supplementary File 1](#).

Selection of sources of evidence

Data were imported to EndNote X9 bibliographic software, deduped, then imported to Covidence 2.0 (Veritas Health Innovation Ltd). Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts, then full text documents, against eligibility criteria (RJ, SJ, RW, PM, RM, RT). Consensus was achieved through discussion. Screening procedures were reported in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) flow chart ([Page et al., 2021](#)).

Data charting process

Data were extracted independently in duplicate into the researcher-developed extraction tool in Covidence 2.0 (Veritas Health Innovation Ltd). The data extraction items and fields were tested by reviewers prior to extraction. Consensus was achieved

through discussion. Extracted items included (1) characteristics of publications, such as type of publication, study aims or objectives, country research conducted, and participant and program characteristics, and (2) domains of student experience, measurement instrument/s, and measurement properties.

Synthesis of results

Data were analyzed and synthesized by reviewers using the Synthesis Without Meta-analysis recommendations (SWIM; [Campbell et al., 2020](#)). This approach to synthesis enabled summarizing the tabulated characteristics of included publications and domains of student experience, measurement instrument/s, and measurement properties reported. The synthesis is reported using tabulation, figures, and narrative description.

Results

The final search was conducted on 22nd January 2025 (SC) generating 4246 references. No further references were identified through searching references lists of reviews or included publications.

Selection of sources of evidence

Screening and selection procedures identified 63 publications meeting selection criteria reflecting 62 different studies. The search and screening procedure is illustrated in [Fig. 1](#).

Records were excluded at both title and abstract then full-text stages primarily due to wrong population, such as no graduate entry students, or no student experiences being measured. Frequent team communication during screening resulted in an average of 80% proportionate agreement amongst screening across the team.

Sixty-three publications were included, of these, one study was reported in both a doctoral thesis and subsequent journal article ([Lott, 2016](#); [Lott & Davis, 2018](#)), and four journal articles reported studies analyzing New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) survey data collected between 2008 and 2015 ([Alicea-Planas & Kazer, 2019](#); [DeWitty et al., 2016](#); [Hoffart et al., 2019](#); [Tornwall et al., 2018](#)).

Characteristics of included publications

Most publications were peer reviewed journal articles ($n = 46$) or doctoral theses ($n = 15$). Studies were conducted primarily in the USA ($n = 50$), Canada ($n = 5$), Australia ($n = 3$) or Hong Kong ($n = 2$), with the remaining single studies being conducted in Israel, Japan, and England (UK). Study design was predominantly descriptive observational such as cross-sectional survey or cohort studies. Characteristics of included publications are reported in [Supplementary Table 1](#). The largest samples were from the New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) scholarship program, a national Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Association of Colleges of Nursing initiative, presented in four studies with samples of 432, 1660, 3335 and 3502 students ([Alicea-Planas & Kazer, 2019](#); [DeWitty et al., 2016](#); [Hoffart et al., 2019](#); [Tornwall et al., 2018](#)). The New Careers in Nursing program offered scholarships to nursing students in accelerated baccalaureate (ABSN) and master's (AMSN) degree programs at 130 schools in the United States. Fifteen studies had samples of less than 50 students, seven of which were doctoral theses. Participants were mostly reported to be female and over the age of 25 years.

Domains of student experience, measurement instrument/s, and measurement properties

Of the 62 different studies ([Lott, 2016](#); [Lott & Davis, 2018](#) considered as one study), more than half reported the use of existing

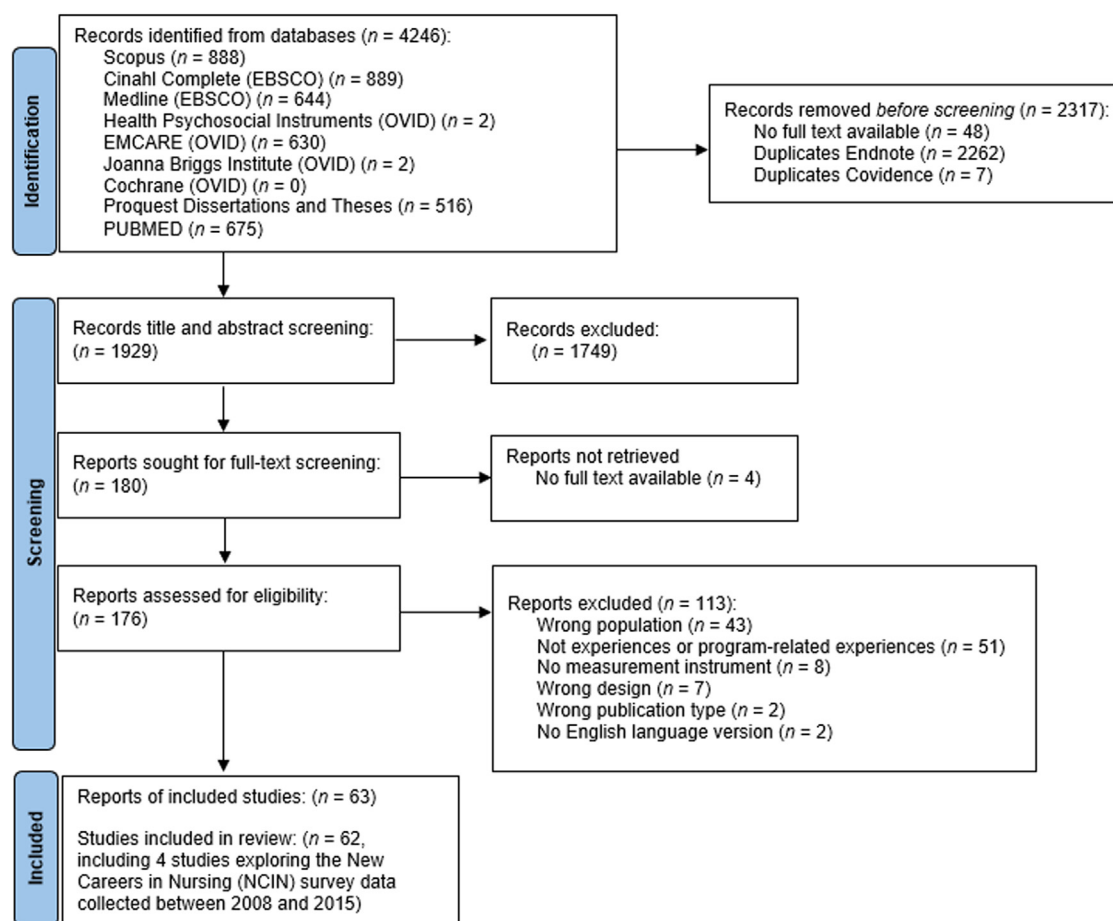


Fig. 1. Search and screening (PRISMA) flowchart.

measures of experience ($n = 39$; 63%), such as Sedgwick (2013) who used the Belongingness Scale-Clinical Placement Experience (BES-CPE; Levett-Jones et al., 2009), and reported both validity and reliability for the measures. Domains of student experience, measurement instrument/s, and measurement properties are reported in Supplementary Table 1. In some studies, several measures were used in their assessment battery, such as Perceived Stress Scale, Coping Self-Efficacy Scale, and Resilience Scale (Harmelink, 2016) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Deakin Coping Scale, Social Support Questionnaire, and Student Life Stress Inventory (Reeve et al., 2013). In total, across all studies 45 different measures were reported. Of those studies reporting the mode of delivery ($n = 45$; 73%), 53% were online electronic surveys ($n = 24$), 42% in-person/paper ($n = 19$), the remaining two were posted/paper surveys.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988) was the most frequently used instrument, cited in four studies (Bumanglag, 2021; Drew et al., 2016; Harmelink, 2016; Ouellet et al., 2008). This was followed by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988), cited in three studies (Bravo, 2021; Reeve et al., 2013; Wolf et al., 2015). The remaining studies ($n = 23$; 37%) used new, local or author developed measures or items, such as Raines (2009) data collection instrument which was an investigator-developed survey informed by Benner (1984) domains of nursing practice.

Ten of these studies reporting new, local or author developed measures or items did not report any psychometric properties, while others reported reliability and/or validity data. Limited information regarding item or measure development procedures was reported.

A broad range of domains of student experience were measured across the publications, illustrated in Fig. 2.

Domains included students' overall experience of the program or a sub-program within the program. Examples included mindfulness-based stress reduction, psychological impacts of their program including stress and anxiety, specific aspects of learning and teaching such as simulation or clinical or academic teaching or teaching models, and teaching and learning interventions such as a new pedagogical approach or technological innovation.

Discussion

The objective of this review was to characterize the types of graduate entry nursing student experiences measured and the instruments used to measure these experiences. To this end, we described studies measuring graduate entry nursing student experiences, types of experiences measured, characteristics of studies reporting development or use of experience measures, and psychometric properties of instruments used to measure experiences. Most studies reported the experiences of graduate entry nursing students from the United States and the largest student populations were from New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) scholarship program. The high proportion of included studies from the United States was not surprising given that graduate entry nursing programs were established in the United States well before many other countries (Cangelosi & Whitt, 2005; Shier et al., 2008). More broadly, studies were conducted in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, and UK. Further investigation of graduate entry nursing students' experiences would be useful in countries where

Conclusions

Graduate entry nursing student experiences were largely measured in programs from the United States and were focused on the domains of students' overall experience, psychological impacts of their program, and learning and teaching models and innovations. The items and measures in these studies included previously developed valid and reliable instruments alongside newly developed tools. Whilst there are a range of measurement instruments available, further clarity regarding the quality and validity of these instruments would be of value to inform future robust investigations of graduate entry nursing students' experiences. Extending the measurement of student experiences of graduate entry nursing programs globally may highlight differing experiences given their recent advent to curricula outside of the United States. This broader view may afford an opportunity to strengthen the scholarship of teaching and learning and graduate entry nursing programs globally by developing, implementing, and rigorously measuring interventions to enhance student experience across all aspects of their learning.

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Ethical considerations

Ethical review was not required for this scoping review of previously published works.

Author agreement

This article is the authors' original work, has not been previously published, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The authors have seen and approved the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Rebecca J. Jarden: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rachel Macdiarmid:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Patricia McClunie-Trust:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Sophie Jones:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. **Jan Dewar:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Philippa Marriott:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Kay Shannon:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Virginia Jones:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Rosemary Turner:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Steph Clout:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Data curation. **Rhona Winnington:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.teln.2025.05.001.

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