

TRANSITION FROM NURSING STUDENT TO PROFESSIONAL ROLE:
VIEWPOINTS OF GEN Z NURSES

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study examined the transition experiences of Generation Z nurses from student to professional roles. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Twelve Generation Z nurses who met the inclusion criteria were purposely selected to participate in the study, with seven participating in in-depth interviews and five in a focus group discussion. Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, including member checking, data triangulation, and audit trails. Data were analyzed following Colaizzi's (1978) systematic application of phenomenological method, this ensured that thematic framework was rigorously derived from the data. Findings revealed that participants transition experience while navigating professional role included struggling with inadequacy, encountering challenges, and maintaining learned values. Their means of coping in addressing transition challenges as professionals focused on collaborative teamwork and organizational conformity, seeking social and professional support, balancing work and personal life, and adjusting to organizational expectations. Gen Z nurses commitment to pursue practice centered on cultivating professional growth by acknowledging supportive work environment, pursuing opportunities, and recognizing patients' response. These findings underscore the importance of structured support systems and values-driven workplace cultures to facilitate successful role transition, enhance professional competence, and improve retention among Generation Z nurses.

Keywords: *Transition from Student to Professional, Descriptive-Phenomenology, Digos Davao del Sur*

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Introduction

The transition of Generation Z nurses from students to professional practitioners is a complex and challenging process. In contemporary hospital settings, Gen Z nurses frequently encounter discrepancies between their expectations and the realities of clinical practice. Wu et al. (2025) reported that factors such as heavy workload, insufficient team support, high performance expectations, and gradual adaptation are

major stressors that can contribute to premature resignation. New graduate nurses often experience transition shock, which is intensified by inadequate orientation, limited mentorship, and role ambiguity, leaving them feeling underprepared (Wang et al., 2024). Furthermore, Kim and Park (2024) noted that Gen Z nurses who completed their education during or shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic faced reduced practicum exposure and altered clinical

training, further limiting their hands-on readiness.

Globally, Hallaran et al. (2023) found that support systems and a sense of preparedness are critical for newly graduated nurses, whereas unsupported work cultures and self-perceived inadequacy impede successful integration. Latent class analyses have revealed distinct profiles of transition shock, with some nurses experiencing physical fatigue and knowledge gaps, and others reporting emotional overwhelm and self-doubt, suggesting that standardized support programs may be insufficient (Wang et al., 2024). Similarly, Korean studies indicate that Gen Z nurses struggle to adapt to hierarchical workplace cultures (Kim & Lee, 2023).

In the Philippine context, new nurses entering practice without formal induction programs face heightened challenges (Ayta et al., 2024). Qualitative studies have further highlighted difficulties in role mastery and adaptive practice during early professional experiences (Padagas et al., 2021). Although Han et al. (2024) explored career experiences of Gen Z nurses in standardized emergency department training in Shanghai, there is limited qualitative research focusing on Gen Z nurses in Southeast Asia or the Philippines. A recent global systematic review also noted that most studies on role transition were conducted outside the Philippines (Cai Wah See et al., 2023). These gaps underscore the need for research exploring how Gen Z nurses perceive and navigate their transition from student to professional within local Philippine healthcare settings. This study, therefore, aims to examine the lived experiences of Gen Z nurses during this critical transition.

Literature Review

The transition of Gen Z nurses from nursing student to professional role is a critical period that significantly impacts competence, confidence, and retention, particularly for Generation Z nurses who bring unique generational characteristics to the workplace. Han et al. (2024) explored the

early career experiences of Gen Z newly graduated nurses and found that transition shock as manifested by emotional stress, role confusion, and fatigue is a common experience. Participants highlighted the challenge of adapting to high workload demands while simultaneously striving to demonstrate competence and professionalism, suggesting that early support structures are crucial for successful integration.

Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) conducted a latent class analysis on transition shock and identified different profiles of nurses based on stress levels, coping strategies, and adaptation outcomes. Their study revealed that nurses who had access to mentorship programs and peer support demonstrated higher resilience and reported a smoother transition experience, indicating that workplace environment and social support significantly influence adjustment.

These findings aligned with those of How et al. (2024), who emphasized that Gen Z nurses place high importance on career development, opportunities, recognition, and work-life balance during their early professional years. According to their study, unmet expectations in these areas contributed to dissatisfaction and increased turnover intentions among new nurses.

Eunkyung Kim et al. (2024) in parallel expressed that Gen Z nurses' work-value priorities, such as career growth and meaningful recognition, significantly influence job satisfaction and may affect retention.

Together, these findings underscore the importance of tailored support programs for Gen Z nurses that foster resilience and coping, clarify their professional-insights that this literature review will explore in depth.

The review is organized around three thematic categories that encapsulate the new body of literature: (1) experiences of Gen Z nurses in assuming their professional role – experiences in transition from student to professional, (2) coping strategies of Gen Z nurses in addressing transitioning challenges

as professionals (3) how experiences shape Gen Z nurses commitment to pursue practice.

Experiences of Gen Z Nurses in Assuming their Professional Role – Experiences in Transition from Student to Professional

Recent literature on Gen Z nurses highlights key themes of transition shock, resilience, work environment, and turnover intention. Xin et al. (2024) found that transition shock reduces retention intention, but career calling and resilience can buffer this effect, helping nurses navigate early professional challenges. Wang et al. (2024) identified different transition shock profiles, with those experiencing “high shock” needing more structured support and mentoring to build confidence and competence. Qualitative research by Han et al. (2024) showed that Gen Z nurses in emergency departments rely on peer support, psychological restructuring, and leadership guidance to cope with role stress, emphasizing that resilience is strengthened through interaction with the team and self-reflection. Finally, Kim et al. (2023) described Gen Z nurses’ adaptation as progressing through “chaos,” “endeavoring to adapt,” and “accepting myself,” illustrating how they gradually develop professional identity and a sense of belonging, particularly when workplace culture is inclusive and supportive.

Moreover, many other studies highlight the transition experiences of Gen Z nurses as they move from student to professional roles, revealing both challenges and coping strategies. Moon and Lee (2025) found that Gen Z nurses in a Korean tertiary hospital often feel embarrassed or intimidated in hierarchical work environments, confused by unfamiliar roles, and stressed by criticism; yet they actively seek to improve their competence and maintain a separation between personal and professional life. Similarly, Kreedi et al. (2022) reported that newly graduated nurses in Kuwait relied on support and additional professional development to navigate the realities of clinical practice. Prosen and Ličen (2023) described the transition as multifaceted,

noting that nurses with less prior clinical experience experienced “transition shock,” feeling anxious and underprepared, though differences in academic preparation influenced readiness.

Coping Strategies of Gen Z Nurses in Addressing Transitioning Challenges as Professionals

Emerging research indicates that Generation Z nurses adopt a range of strategies to cope with the stresses of transitioning into professional roles, such as workload pressures, role ambiguity, and transition shock. According to Han et al. (2024), peer networks, cognitive reframing, and supportive leadership help foster resilience and a sense of belonging. Li et al. (2022) noted that self-efficacy and resilience serve as mediators between transition shock and professional identity, supporting nurses’ confidence under pressure. Mindfulness practices have also been shown to aid emotional regulation and stress management (Wang et al., 2023). Additionally, Xin et al. (2024) emphasized that organizational strategies that strengthen career calling and resilience can mitigate the negative impact of transition shock, highlighting the value of both personal and systemic support.

The literature highlights the challenges Gen Z nurses face as they transition from students to professionals and the strategies they employ to cope in clinical settings. Hallaran et al. (2023) found that supportive teams helped new nurses in Ontario, Canada, manage stress and feel accepted. Similarly, Pawlak et al. (2025) reported that Gen Z nurses experience higher stress than Generations X and Y and often rely on support to cope. Flynn et al. (2025) identified both positive coping strategies—such as self-reflection, seeking information, emotional support, and acceptance—and negative strategies, including avoidance and denial. Jiang et al. (2024) noted that Gen Z emergency nurses in Shanghai experience secondary traumatic stress, physiological and psychological symptoms, and behavioral changes, which they address gradually through workflow optimizations and digital

tools (Loveitt, 2023). Professional development and peer mentoring are also crucial, as they enhance competence, gain veteran approval, and foster workplace resilience (Maravilla, 2021; Serafin et al., 2020). Collectively, these studies suggest that coping among Gen Z nurses is multifaceted, relying on individual, social, and organizational resources.

How Experiences Shape Gen Z Nurses Commitment to Pursue Practice

Study findings suggest that the early professional experiences of Gen Z nurses strongly influence their commitment to continue in the field. Han et al. (2024) found that supportive team interactions, peer networks, and transformational leadership foster resilience, helping nurses navigate initial stress and maintain engagement in practice. Similarly, Moon and Lee (2025) reported that challenges in hierarchical clinical environments, role ambiguity, and initial performance anxiety shape how Gen Z nurses perceive their professional identity, with positive experiences enhancing commitment. Flynn et al. (2025) highlighted that effective coping strategies, including self-reflection, seeking guidance, and gradual skill development, strengthen professional confidence and job satisfaction. Pawlak et al. (2025) further emphasized that generational differences in stress perception affect the pace of adaptation, with Gen Z nurses more likely to seek support to sustain motivation. Collectively, these studies indicate that both individual coping strategies and supportive workplace environments are critical in shaping Gen Z nurses' dedication to their practice.

Gen Z nurses' commitment to pursuing practice is shaped by a combination of personal motivations, workplace support, and professional growth opportunities. Lommi et al. (2024) found that intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including family influence, passion, and desire to help others, drive career commitment among Italian Gen Z nurses. Lee and Shin (2025) noted that organizational support, work-life balance, and placement in preferred units strengthened commitment and reduced turnover intentions. Similarly, Al-Moteri et

al. (2025) highlighted that meaningful work, career development, supportive teamwork, and a respectful environment foster engagement and long-term retention. Collectively, these studies indicate that early-career experiences and workplace conditions play a critical role in shaping Gen Z nurses' dedication to their profession.

Methods

The research study employed a descriptive-phenomenological design to explore the experiences of Generation Z nurses transitioning from students to professional practitioners. This approach was considered best suited for this study because it was concerned with the lived experiences of participants who had direct contact with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted in various private hospitals in Digos, City, Davao del Sur, Philippines. The place was proximate enough to the researcher because she was living in the province. Such insider view allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information and became well acquainted with the participants.

Participants were selected via purposive sampling. They were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) one needed to be between ages 22-26 years old which were members of Generation Z (2) a registered nurse (3) employed in a hospital with at least six months of work experience in any area (4) voluntary participation with informed consent to ensure confidentiality. An exclusion criteria was also set to ensure that participants aligned closely with the research objectives. Nurses that came from a different generation were excluded in the study.

A total of twelve participants were included in the study until saturation was obtained. Seven participants for in-depth interviews and five in a focus group discussion. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) established that researchers typically achieved saturation while carrying out qualitative research from the very first 12

interviews and therefore 10 to 15 sample participants were sufficient in a way to gave diverse perspectives and were manageable to deal with. The interview was conducted using a series of open-ended questions. In-depth interview was done to capture participants' personal experiences and perspectives in detail, while focus group discussion facilitated the exploration of shared experiences and group dynamics. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent from the participants and then transcribed verbatim.

The research process followed a systematic procedure to collect data. Initially, a set of research questions were formulated and subsequently reviewed and approved by the adviser and proposal defense panel. Following this approval, the questionnaire was validated by at least three expert validators. The researcher then secured an ethical approval from the DDCI research office and the program chair. Prior to data collection in the hospital setting, formal permission was obtained from the head of institution of the participating hospitals in Digos City, Davao del Sur, Philippines. Informed consent was obtained prior to scheduling the interview. The informed consent included the study objectives, interview process, confidentiality assurances, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed that withdrawal from the interview is allowed anytime without penalty should they wish to do so.

To increase the credibility and reliability, the study utilized the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985). By stringently applying the standards, this study attempted to maximize the validity of the outcomes and concurrently preserved the real live experiences of the Gen Z nurses in Digos, Davao del Sur. Credibility was ensured using member checking, and data triangulation. Transferability was achieved through descriptive and detailed illustrations of research environment, participants, and results. Dependability was maintained using a detailed audit trail that documented all research decisions, from participant recruitment to data analysis. Lastly,

confirmability was promoted by keeping an impartial point of view during data collection and analysis. The methods maintained the integrity of the study and provided an insight into the experiences of Gen Z nurses in the private hospital settings. Reflexivity was also employed by the researcher, constant monitoring of their own emotions and thoughts during the data gathering process was done to remain objective and minimize biases.

Ethical considerations were observed to ensure the protection of the participants' rights, well-being, and dignity. The study provided important social value by exploring the transition of Generation Z nurses from students to professionals. To alleviate any possible risks, the participants were assured that the study would be used solely for research purposes and all information gathered will not be disclosed to unauthorized parties. The participants' participation was voluntary, they had the right to refuse to participate if they feel uncomfortable in any way. If the respondents chose to withdraw from the study, all the information they provided will not be included in the data collected. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by using anonymity during the study to protect the identity of all participants.

Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method analysis was applied within the research to explore how Generation Z nurses perceived their professional roles and responsibilities and cope with work challenges. This analysis best fit for the study because it was applied to examine participants' lived experiences and hence gave a precise and vivid sense of what they were going through (Jiang et al., 2024).

Through a focus on the subjective meaning-making process, the method ensured that Generation Z nurses' views were the focus of the analysis. Data analysis were done following these steps: (1) reading transcripts multiple times for familiarization and listening to audio recordings to record implicit information (2) extracting significant statements to understand what the participants stated and identify what

meanings exist (3)formulated meanings were made after carefully analyzing each significant statements (4) organizing or grouping of formulated meanings into clusters of themes that represent common patterns among participants (5)developing an exhaustive description integrating cluster themes and emergent themes while capturing the full breadth and depth of gen z nurses lived experiences in their transition (6)producing the fundamental structure by condensing the detailed accounts into concise,essential statements and (7)validating findings with participants. A narrative synthesis was built, with participants' direct quotes used to ground interpretations.

Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings from twelve Generation Z nurses working in private hospitals in Digos, Davao del Sur. Participants reported diverse experiences during their transition from nursing student to professional practitioner. Through a detailed thematic analysis of their narratives the researcher explored the lived experiences of Gen Z nurses transition experience from nursing student to professional role.

Data analysis yielded three emergent themes: Navigating the Professional Role,

Collaborative Teamwork and Organizational Conformity, and **Cultivating Professional Growth**. The identified emergent themes were substantiated into nine clustered themes: **Struggling with Inadequacy, Encountering Challenges, Maintaining Learned Values, Seeking Social and Professional Support, Balancing Work and Personal Life, Adjusting to Organizational Expectations, Acknowledging a Supportive Work Environment, Pursuing Opportunities, and Recognizing Patients' Responses**. These themes reflected the transition experiences, challenges and strategies Gen Z nurses employed as they progressed from student nurses to practicing professionals.

Profile of the Participant

The participants of study were ages 22 to 26 years old. The cohort includes 12 Gen Z registered nurses working in private hospitals in Digos, Davao del Sur. They have a minimum of 6 months of work experience in the hospital. Out of 12 participants, five were gathered for the focus group discussion (FGD), and seven participated in the in-depth interviews (IDI). Table 1 presented the demographic profile of the participants with code names indicated to safeguard the participant's anonymity.

Table 1. The Participant's Profile

Code Name	Age Group	Months of Experience	Study Group
P1	24 yo	10 months	FGD
P 2	26 yo	9 months	FGD
P 3	24 yo	6 months	FGD
P4	23 yo	10 months	FGD
P 5	22 yo	9 months	FGD
P 6	23 yo	9 months	IDI
P7	23 yo	7 months	IDI
P 8	23 yo	9 months	IDI

P 9	24 yo	10 months	IDI
P 10	23 yo	6 months	IDI
P 11	23 yo	11 months	IDI
P 12	23 yo	9 months	IDI

Out of the total 48 transcripts, 78 significant statements were gathered and a total of 12 themes emerged. The three emergent themes that addressed the three main research questions after the analysis were Navigating Professional Role, Collaborative Teamwork and Organizational Conformity, and Cultivating Professional Growth as they started their transition from student nurses to real-life professional nurses as shown in the thematic map that follows in Figure 2.

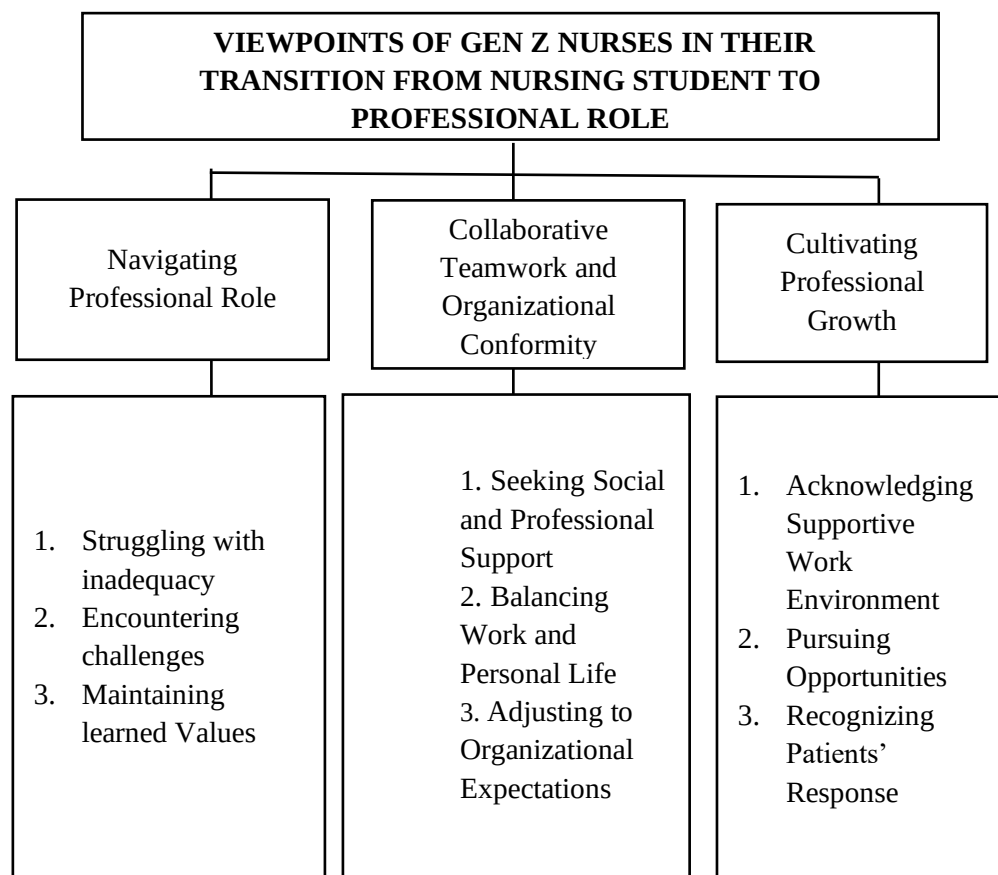


Figure 2. Thematic Map

Figure 2 presents the experiences and evolving perspective of Gen Z nurses in their transition from nursing student to professional role that highlight the reality that they faced as neophytes in the clinical setting.

Emergent Theme 1: Navigating Professional Role

The experiences in navigating professional role in this theme revolve around the experiences of Gen Z nurses as they transitioned from being student nurses to real-life clinical nurses deployed in private hospitals. It presents their feelings of fear, unreadiness, limiting belief, and lack of confidence to begin with. Hospitals may not be new settings for the participants, but the role that they partake has changed ultimately, making them feel overwhelmed. Several overarching themes emerged that show the diversity of their feelings in entering this new phase of their career.

These observations are consistent with what Chicca and Shellenbarger (2019) asserted; saying that Gen Z nurses may be digitally skilled, yet poor in establishing strong patient-centered, experiential care paradigms. Being said, they become less confident in managing high-stress interpersonal interactions which is prominent in hospitals on daily basis. Huter et al. (2020) also noted that this has become a concern as they rely heavily on technology which sometimes led to questioning their capabilities in bedside competencies.

Cluster Theme 1.1: Struggling with Inadequacy

Participants reported significant challenges and limited readiness as they transitioned into clinical practice. While confident in their theoretical knowledge, many felt unprepared and anxious when assuming their new responsibilities. One participant noted:

“I struggled being alone. I felt the need to stand alone. To be honest, I am not that prepared because a student’s learning style is different from learning on your own while working as a staff nurse.”(P2, T6 , Lines 144-146)

Another participant stated,

“For me, you can never really be prepared to be a nurse.” (P1, T1 , Line 1)

They highlighted the gap between the controlled, supervised learning environment of nursing school and the independent, high-stakes demands of hospital practice, which fostered insecurity and self-doubt. Another participant shared,

“Actually, I was a bit nervous and overthinking at the time because we are dealing with lives. My preparedness is about 80 percent, but I still have doubts.” (P5, T4 , Lines 50-52)

Despite guidance from instructors and academic preparation, participants emphasized that these foundations were insufficient to meet the realities of professional practice. Entering the clinical field evoked fear, hesitation, and a sense of overwhelming responsibility, illustrating the challenges of adjusting to independent decision-making and accountability.

These findings align with previous research on transition shock among new nurses. Maravilla (2021) describes the “reality shock” experienced when academic preparation is tested against clinical demands, while Loveitt (2023) notes that this period is often marked by anxiety and self-doubt as new nurses adapt to professional roles. Roy’s Adaptation Model also helps explain this process as a stage of adjustment, where individuals must realign their roles and coping mechanisms to respond effectively to their new environment (Roy & Andrews, 2009).

Cluster Theme 1.2: Encountering Challenges

The theme of encountering challenges reflects how Generation Z nurses navigate the demands of their new professional roles and the emotional, cognitive, and physical pressures of the workplace. Participants described the transition as a continuous learning process shaped by real-world exposure. One participant shared that:

“Moving from being guided in school to handling patients on my own was overwhelming. Everything felt new—different colleagues, heavier workload, and unpredictable schedules.” (P7, T7, Lines 171-172)

Challenges included unsupportive colleagues, unfamiliar work environments, demanding patients, complex responsibilities, and limited supervision. One nurse reflected,

“I would say the watchers are very demanding, also the patient cases, sometimes is unfamiliar.” (P1, T 6, Lines 142-143)

Participants emphasized that these struggles were both challenging and developmental. Exposure to real-world responsibilities compelled them to reconcile academic knowledge with the unpredictability of patient care. Over time, confidence, autonomy, and professional identity gradually emerged. As one nurse explained,

“At first, I doubted myself constantly, but managing responsibilities on my own helped me think critically and take ownership of my work.” (P5, T7, Line 161)

These experiences align with previous studies highlighting the tension Gen Z nurses face between academic preparation and clinical realities. Huter et al. (2020) note that while they possess strong theoretical and technological foundations, applying hands-on skills in emotionally demanding situations is difficult. Loveitt (2023) emphasizes that anxiety and uncertainty are common during early professional practice, and Maravilla (2021) adds that hierarchical workplace structures and limited mentorship can further delay full adaptation.

Cluster Theme 1.3: Maintaining Learned Values

Participants emphasized that professional growth during the early years of nursing is closely tied to sustaining the values and attitudes acquired during their education. Beyond technical competence, Gen Z nurses identified patience, empathy, accountability, integrity, and teamwork as essential guides for effective practice. One participant shared,

“Actually I was able to follow the core values that were taught to us in school called ITEACH - integrity, teamwork, excellence, accountability, commitment, and humility. I always carry those values with me whenever I work.” (P1, T2, Lines 34-37)

Others highlighted the significance of having feelings of compassion and care towards the patient, also values accountability,

“I easily feel compassion for patients. I care for them.” (P5, T5, Line 129)

“I value accountability to my patients. I always do what is right and necessary because I am accountable for whatever actions I take.” (P6, T6, Line 129)

These foundational values were described not as abstract ideals but as practical tools that shape decision-making, interactions with colleagues, and patient care. By consciously applying these values, nurses were able to navigate ethical dilemmas, manage emotional challenges, and cultivate trust with patients and families. Participants highlighted that maintaining these learned values supports both professional development and the evolution of a responsible, ethical nursing identity.

Overall, the findings illustrate that the transition from student to professional is a dynamic process in which skills and values

develop together, and that sustaining school-learned principles is central to competent and ethical practice.

Emergent Theme 2: Collaborative Teamwork and Organizational Conformity

The experiences of Gen Z nurses in collaborative teamwork and organizational conformity reveal that coping is shaped by both personal and organizational factors. Participants emphasized the importance of support systems, including family and colleagues, in managing stress and maintaining focus. Strategies such as emotional regulation, reflective practice, task prioritization, and self-care enabled nurses to navigate challenges while ensuring patient safety and sustaining professional effectiveness.

These findings align with existing literature highlighting the role of workplace support and structured guidance in professional adjustment. Mentoring and collaborative teamwork enhance resilience and reduce turnover intentions (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024). Gen Z nurses thrive in organizational cultures that provide constructive feedback, mutual respect, and opportunities for skill development (Abdullah Bangcola, 2024). Coping mechanisms such as reflection, prioritization, and emotional regulation are critical for early-career nurses to manage stressors effectively (Huter et al., 2020).

Cluster Theme 2.1: Seeking Social and Professional Support

Social and professional support emerged as a key factor in the professional adjustment of Gen Z nurses. Participants emphasized that guidance from colleagues, supervisors, and mentors helped them navigate clinical complexities while fostering confidence and emotional stability. One participant explained,

“I ask for help and advice from the senior nurses. Or I go directly to the supervisor. They

are supportive of me.”(P1, T7, Lines 179-180)

Others stated,

“ The good thing in my area is that everyone of the staff is very helpful and accommodating. They really try to help and educate me, in that simple way I get to learn more to better take care of my patients.” (P 1, T3, Lines 59-61)

“My coworkers never leave me behind. We are always connected, even if I message them during late night and ask for clarifications they never hesitate to reply. They are very kind.” (P4, T17, Lines 427-430)

Supportive interactions functioned on multiple levels: they reduced anxiety and self-doubt, reinforced clinical competence through hands-on guidance and feedback, and nurtured emotional well-being by creating a network of peers and mentors. Mentorship was both formal, via structured supervision, and informal, through collaborative problem-solving and peer support.

These findings align with existing literature. Mentoring relationships and teamwork enhance resilience, job satisfaction, and retention among early-career nurses (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024). Supportive organizational cultures that promote constructive feedback and peer collaboration foster professional growth and confidence (Abdullah Bangcola, 2024). Structured guidance paired with collaborative learning has been shown to improve competency, stress management, and the ability to navigate complex clinical situations (Huter et al., 2020).

Cluster Theme 2.2: Balancing Work and Personal Life

Balancing work and personal life emerged as a critical component of coping and professional adjustment among Gen Z

nurses. Participants described resilience as the ability to remain composed under pressure, recover from challenges, and sustain consistent patient care. Emotional coping strategies including self-awareness, reflection, and boundary-setting helped them manage anxiety, frustration, and early signs of burnout. One participant shared,

“What I always do is maintain my work-life balance. Even if things get toxic at work, after duty, I just leave everything behind. I do work-out and I don’t bring work home.” (P3, T12, Lines 306-309)

Nurses reported intentionally setting boundaries, practicing mindfulness, and engaging in routines such as prayer, reflection, and time management to maintain emotional balance and energy. These strategies strengthened their capacity to navigate workplace stressors while preserving personal well-being. One participant shared,

“Before anything else, I pray that I do what is right for my patients and that I do not make mistakes as a nurse.” (P4, T17, Lines 439-440)

Another participant added,

“I’m the kind of person who tends to keep challenges within myself. I take time to process the problem situation and I deal with it responsibly.” (P5, T22, Lines 554-556)

These findings are supported by existing literature. Adaptive coping mechanisms are associated with greater confidence, clinical competence, and stress management among early-career nurses (Huter et al., 2020). Resilience is linked to higher job satisfaction and retention (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024), while self-care and emotional regulation are critical in preventing burnout among Gen Z nurses (Abdullah & Bangcola, 2024).

Cluster Theme 2.3: Adjusting to Organizational Expectations

Adapting to organizational expectations emerged as a critical component of professional adjustment among Gen Z nurses. Participants described developing structured routines to organize tasks, prioritize responsibilities, and maintain efficiency in high-pressure clinical settings. Planning care according to patient acuity, managing time effectively, and adhering to established protocols were essential to ensuring patient safety and minimizing errors. One participant shared,

“I try to structure and pattern my care to clients but it’s tailor made, so your care for client number one is different from client number two especially that I am assigned in the ICU.” (P1, T3, Lines 78-80)

Discipline was reflected in punctuality, accountability, attentiveness, and the practice of double-checking documentation and procedures. Nurses also emphasized the importance of separating personal concerns from professional responsibilities to sustain focus during duty hours. These structured approaches enhanced confidence, supported clinical decision-making, and strengthened professional credibility. One participant shared,

“I separate my personal life from my professional life. So if I’m trying to work, I should focus on work. And if there is a problem at home, I should not bring it to work.” (P1, T3, Lines 83-85)

Additionally they considered focus as a core. With the immense demand of clinical setting, this skill is noted as one of their means of coping with their roles. One explained,

“I always set my mind that when I am on duty, I need to focus on what I do, especially in carrying out the doctor’s orders. I never bring my personal problems to

work.” (P4, T18, Lines 449-453)

Existing literature reinforces these findings. Disciplined work habits and effective time management are associated with sustained professional performance and reduced burnout (Abdullah Bangcola, 2024). Similarly, organized task management contributes to improved patient outcomes and long-term commitment among novice nurses (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024).

Emergent Theme 3: Cultivating Professional Growth

Cultivating professional growth among Gen Z nurses is shaped by relational support, development opportunities, and personal values. Supportive relationships with colleagues and mentors provide guidance, emotional reassurance, and motivation to remain in the profession. Opportunities for training and skill development enhance competence and confidence. Participants emphasized that intrinsic values such as compassion, empathy, and professionalism sustain their commitment despite workplace challenges. Although external factors like salary and career advancement influence retention, alignment between supportive environments, professional growth, and personal values fosters a strong sense of purpose, identity, and satisfaction in their nursing roles.

The significance of relational support, professional development, and values-driven practice is corroborated in the literature. Abdullah and Bangcola (2024) emphasizes that supportive organizational culture, mentorship, and peer collaboration reinforce early-career nurses' engagement and professional identity. Tussing Chipps et al. (2024) note that recognition, encouragement, and opportunities for skill enhancement increase resilience and reduce turnover intention.

Cluster Theme 3.1: Acknowledging Supportive Work Environment

A supportive work environment emerged as central to professional commitment and retention among Gen Z nurses. Participants emphasized that mentorship, collegial relationships, and supervisory guidance foster collaboration, reduce stress, and build clinical confidence.

One participant stated that:

“One senior nurse even called me and said, “Don’t give up.” That gave me more strength to keep going and stay until I finish my contract next year.” (P3, T12, Lines 299-302)

Support extended beyond technical instruction to include emotional reassurance and encouragement during complex clinical situations. Others added,

“I can say that my work is more bearable because of my colleagues. There’s cooperation.” (P1, T11, Lines 291)

Both formal mentorship and informal peer support strengthened competence and resilience. Nurses reported that feeling supported encouraged them to seek guidance, voice concerns, and participate more confidently in patient care. As another participant shared,

“If your relationships with colleagues, mentors, supervisors, and doctors are okay, you enjoy your work more. It doesn’t feel like a burden no matter how busy.” (P6, T12, Lines 310-313)

Such environments enhanced job satisfaction and reinforced their commitment to the profession. These findings align with existing literature indicating that mentoring and cohesive teamwork improve resilience, job satisfaction, and retention among novice nurses (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024). Supportive organizational cultures that provide constructive feedback and recognition further promote professional growth and reduce burnout (Abdullah & Bangcola, 2024; Huter et al., 2020).

Cluster Theme 3.2: Pursuing Opportunities

Access to professional development opportunities emerged as a key factor influencing career growth and retention among Gen Z nurses. Participants emphasized that training, workshops, certifications, and exposure to specialized clinical areas enhanced their competence, confidence, and motivation to remain in the profession. One participant shared,

“Training encourages me because it improves my skills, It makes me feel more confident and effective as a nurse.” (P1, T13, Lines 322-323)

Others noted the motivational effect of career advancement and professional growth saying,

“For me career growth opportunities ha a big influence. It helps me grow professionally and personally, making me a more effective nurse.” (P6, T13, Lines 334-336)

“We had training in basic procedures, and these influenced and motivated me to stay longer in the workplace.” (P1, T13, Lines 332-333)

Beyond skill enhancement, these opportunities strengthened professional identity and self-efficacy by exposing nurses to diverse patient cases and advanced procedures. Perceived organizational support for career progression fostered loyalty, engagement, and sustained commitment.

These findings align with existing literature indicating that structured training and advancement opportunities enhance clinical competence and professional confidence (Abdullah Bangcola, 2024). Exposure to varied clinical experiences promotes resilience and job satisfaction (Huter et al., 2020), while career development initiatives contribute significantly to nurse retention (Tussing Chipps et al., 2024).

Cluster Theme 3.3: Recognizing Patients' Responses

Recognizing patients' responses emerged as a key factor sustaining Gen Z nurses' commitment despite workplace challenges. Participants reported that witnessing patient recovery and making a tangible difference in care provided intrinsic motivation and a sense of purpose. One nurse stated,

“It feels fulfilling, especially when patients say thank you.” (P1, 13, Lines 341-344)

Another participant shared,
“What keeps me going is seeing my patients discharged from the ICU. It is very fulfilling to see them recover and make progress.” (P1, T4, Lines 112-115)

Others added,

“I give my 100 percent care for them because it comes back to you, making your heart happy when they are happy.” (P2, T13, Lines 348-349)

Professional values, including empathy, compassion, respect, and patient-centered care, reinforced this commitment. Nurses emphasized treating all patients with dignity and highlighted the emotional rewards of alleviating suffering through both clinical interventions and small acts of care. Personal values and ethical principles consistently guided their practice, strengthening engagement and perseverance in the profession.

These findings align with literature demonstrating that intrinsic motivation and adherence to professional values enhance engagement, resilience, and long-term retention among early-career nurses (Abdullah Bangcola, 2024; Huter et al., 2020).

Implications

The main finding of this study is that Generation Z nurses' successful transition from students to professional practitioners is strongly influenced by the interplay of personal values, relational and professional support, structured coping strategies, and access to growth opportunities. Maintaining core values learned during nursing education, such as empathy, accountability, and patient-centered care, alongside mentorship, collaborative teamwork, and organizational guidance, enabled nurses to navigate workplace challenges, build confidence, and sustain commitment.

This finding is important because it highlights that effective role transition is not solely dependent on technical competence, but also on supportive work environments and alignment with personal and professional values. Understanding these factors allows healthcare institutions to design targeted interventions such as mentorship programs, structured guidance, and professional development opportunities that enhance resilience, professional adjustment, and retention among early-career nurses, ultimately improving patient care and workforce stability.

Recommendation for nursing administrators, they can have better understanding about the Gen Z nurse's mindset, expectations, and learning styles that can improve inter-generational communication, mentorship, and team dynamics. It will also allow experienced nurses to provide more relevant guidance and foster a supportive environment that eases the new nurse's transition process.

For hospital administrators, this will allow them to design and implement more effective orientation and training programs, and mentorship structures that align with the learning styles and values of their Gen Z staff nurses. By addressing their transition difficulties, hospitals can reduce nurses turnover, burnout, and improve retention, job satisfaction and overall performance of new nurses.

For future researchers, they can have insights from this study that can guide the

development of targeted support programs, mentoring systems, and educational curricula to ease role transition, which future researchers can evaluate or refine in the future.

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