

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES, FACILITATORS
AND COPING MECHANISMS OF DIETETICS
STUDENTS IN PREPARATION FOR STUDENTS'
CLINICAL TRAINING**

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ABSTRACT

Clinical training is a critical component of dietetics education, bridging theoretical knowledge and practical application in it. However, students are likely to face a lot of challenges in their preparation for clinical placements. Despite that, there is limited understanding of the specific challenges, facilitators, and coping mechanisms they undergo during this transition. This study aimed to explore these factors in depth, facilitators they have and coping strategies they might take focusing on dietetics students' preparation for clinical training. This study was conducted as qualitative research. Qualitative data were collected through four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This study executed a purposive sampling. Twenty students participated in this study, with several ranges of CGPAs. Participant with CGPA 2.5-3.0 (n=1), CGPA 3.0-3.5 (n=9) and CGPA 3.5-4.0 (n=10). Only students in semester 6 were permitted to be participants in this study. Data analysis was managed with NVivo Software and inductively analyzed using open coding. The findings revealed four key challenges: theoretical and practical readiness gap; psychological and emotional struggle; lack of transportation, accommodation facilities and financial constraints; and lack of self-management skills and poor physical ability. Facilitators identified included: social support and collaborative learning; financial stability and have transport; positivity; and accessibility in technology-enhanced learning. Coping mechanisms identified: proactive learning strategies; finding alternatives transportation and accommodation facilities; developing interpersonal communication skills; performing effective financial management; seeking social and information support; and balancing personal growth and productivity. These results determined that effective preparation for clinical training depends on a complex interplay of academic, psychological, logistical, and social factors. Practically, the study highlights the need for curriculum innovations to increase practical exposure, institutional support to alleviate financial and logistical barriers, and strengthened social support systems to build resilience, ultimately enabling dietetics students to transition more successfully into clinical practice.

Keywords: challenges, facilitators, coping mechanism, dietetic students, clinical training

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

A dietetics student is someone that is enrolled in a degree program at a few selected institutions or universities. Some of the core modules that dietetics students usually will learn are Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT), Therapeutic Diet Preparation, Food Science, Clinical Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology, Behavioural Psychology, Food Preparation, Human Physiology and Biomolecular Science (Mosse, 2024; *Dietetics Course in Malaysia - Pathway & Requirements*, 2024). The degree program of dietetics basically takes 4 years of study to be completed with three types of industrial placements (*Dietetics Course in Malaysia - Pathway & Requirements*, 2024). According to the previous research, the three types of industrial placements that need to be accomplished by dietetics students are clinical placement, community dietetics placement and food service placement. However, there are several challenges and facilitators that dietetics students may be facing in preparation for clinical training. Moreover, due to the first time in clinical training, students may develop a feeling of fear and anxiety, perhaps from inconsistency between practice and theories (Gibson et al., 2015).

In addition, this study was conducted to get an overview of the challenges, facilitators and coping mechanisms in dietetics students and clinical instructors in preparation for students clinical training as there might be beneficial for both to enhance readiness despite overcoming the barriers in clinical training. The challenges or barriers that happen will affect the students or even might develop an imposter phenomenon in dietetics students. The imposter phenomenon (IP) basically an emotional condition that associated with feeling like frauds or “imposter” where arises of psychological distress, self-doubt, feeling of failure and strained the relationships that gives detrimental effect on students’ clinical outcomes (Bravata et al., 2019; Bernard et al., 2002). Moreover, students tend to develop psychological distress since the COVID-19 was reported in the early of