

**A Descriptive Study of Former Minority Nursing Students' Perceptions of the Nursing
Fundamentals Course**

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Abstract

Failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course impacted students financially and emotionally. The problem was that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed in Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program. The final sample comprised nine former minority nursing students recruited via my LinkedIn account. This study was guided by Tinto's theory of student departure, which emphasized the importance of academic and social integration to prevent dropout. Data collection involved an open-ended survey on Qualtrics, with manual analysis and coding to identify themes. Findings revealed that Nursing Fundamentals, a demanding course that blends theory and practice, can be academically challenging for minority students, leading to course failure. Some students who failed exhibited low self-efficacy in clinical settings, increasing their risk of dropping out. The study underscores the importance of both academic and social integration in reducing attrition, as Tinto's theory highlights. Results suggest that difficulties with Nursing Fundamentals contribute to failure, and low self-efficacy in clinical settings heightens the risk of dropout. Recommendations include early faculty identification of at-risk students, tailored remediation, increased faculty diversity, and diversity training to foster support and respect, ultimately reducing failure rates. Future research might focus on the success of minority nursing students in the Nursing Fundamentals course rather than failures. They should use interviews and open-ended surveys, starting with interviews and then selecting a subset for the survey, to improve data triangulation and credibility in understanding minority nursing students' attrition.

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Section 1: Foundation

The population of the United States is becoming more diverse, with the racial composition now estimated at 75.5% White, 13.6% Black, 19.1% Hispanic or Latino, 6.3% Asian, and 1.3% American Indian (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Projections for 2030 show a slight shift: 74.2% White, 13.8% Black, 21.1% Hispanic, 6.9% Asian, and 1.3% American Indian (United States Census Bureau, 2022). This expected increase in diversity underscores the importance of a nursing workforce that mirrors these demographic changes to provide culturally sensitive care and improve patient outcomes (Green, 2020). Despite this growing diversity, the current registered nurse workforce remains mostly White at 80.1%, with 7.2% Asian, 6.3% African American, 6.9% Hispanic, and only 0.4% American Indian (Smiley et al., 2023). This reveals a significant underrepresentation of African Americans and Hispanics, compared to their respective population shares of 13.6% and 19.1%.

The high failure and attrition rates among minority nursing students significantly limit the number of diverse graduates entering the nursing workforce, which is vital for addressing the needs of a culturally diverse healthcare population (Johannessen et al., 2022) and decreasing healthcare disparities (Petges & Sabio, 2020). The nursing shortages worsened by the pandemic highlight the urgent need for nursing programs to improve student retention to meet future healthcare demands. Given the expected decline in the RN workforce, it is essential to examine the factors influencing program completion (Dries, 2020).

Nursing programs are actively working to increase the diversity of their student bodies to help address healthcare disparities. According to 2021 data, the nursing student demographic was about 15.5% male and 84.5% female (Zippia, n.d.). In terms of ethnicity, nursing students identified as 64.2% White, 11.3% Asian, 10.8% African American, 9% Hispanic, 0.4%

American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4.3% Unknown (Zippia, n.d.). The average age of nursing students is 43.6 years, with approximately 59% non-traditional; 28% are between 30 and 40, and 14% are between 20 and 30 (Zippia, n.d.). These age statistics show that a large portion of nursing students do not follow the traditional path. Furthermore, research by Kamer and Ishitani (2021) indicates that full-time, financially disadvantaged, and first-generation non-traditional students face a higher risk of dropping out in their first year.

The pathway to entering the nursing profession includes three educational levels: (a) diploma programs, (b) associate degree in nursing (ADN), and (c) Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) (Petges & Sabio, 2020). While the BSN degree is increasingly regarded as the preferred minimum qualification for nursing professionals, ADN nursing graduates are not limited in their scope of practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, n.d.). Enrollment in BSN programs has grown; however, many students choose ADN programs to complete their prelicensure training (Petges & Sabio, 2020). Nursing programs aim to attract a more diverse student body capable of succeeding both academically and on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), thereby improving their rankings and accreditation status (American Association for Colleges of Nursing, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2021). Nevertheless, nursing programs face challenges in increasing student diversity, as minority students are often considered at higher risk of attrition (Bennett et al., 2021; Eudy & Brooks, 2022; Merritt, 2021).

Bennett et al. (2021) conducted a study within a nursing program at a predominantly White university to examine how attrition affects the diversity of the nursing workforce. The findings showed that African American students experienced the highest attrition rate in the program, with 39 students enrolled, 19 graduating, and only 17 passing the NCLEX exam

(Bennett et al., 2021). Eudy and Brooks (2022) noted that attrition is influenced by both program-specific and student-related factors, as well as the level of integration between them. Therefore, if the program provides academic support and additional resources to minority students, along with opportunities for positive interactions with faculty and peers, these students are more likely to achieve both academic and social integration, which can ultimately reduce their chances of leaving the institution. Furthermore, Green (2020) points out that some minority nursing students may have attended under-resourced pre-college schools, be first-generation college students, and possibly lack the academic preparedness needed to succeed in a more rigorous academic environment, all of which can hinder their academic success and affect their transition to college.

To support a successful transition to college and ensure that minority nursing students complete their programs, nursing faculty may need to increase their awareness of the challenges these students face before they begin their programs. This understanding will help them adjust their teaching strategies to evidence-based practices that encourage success among students at risk of dropping out (Green, 2020). As Murray and Loyd (2020) point out, the learning environment is crucial, since minoritized nursing students tend to excel when they feel respected, valued, and appreciated. Additionally, reducing attrition requires fostering students' resilience by creating a supportive environment that motivates them to complete their studies (Soerensen et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring the perceptions of minority nursing students can provide valuable insights for creating an academic environment that supports their success (Eudy & Brooks, 2022).

Eudy and Brooks (2022) conducted a retrospective review of nursing students at a small college in the Southeastern region, where the attrition rate for the nursing fundamentals course

exceeded the typical 10%. The purpose of the study was to identify factors that contributed to the successful completion of the Nursing Fundamentals course by ADN nursing students. The findings revealed a significant correlation between race and course success. Specifically, Eudy and Brooks (2022) suggested that White nursing students were more likely to succeed in the Nursing Fundamentals course compared to their minority counterparts, which included Hispanics, African Americans, and other groups such as Native Americans, multiracial individuals, Asian Americans, and Alaskan Natives. Additionally, the results indicated that up to 27.5% students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course chose to withdraw from the program rather than retake it (Eudy & Brooks, 2022).

Numerous studies have examined attrition, particularly in nursing programs (Matz et al., 2023). To effectively reduce attrition, it is important to understand students' perceptions of their course failures. Insights into the challenges encountered in Nursing Fundamentals can help with early identification of students who are struggling (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). Without early intervention for students at risk of failing Nursing Fundamentals, attrition increases due to course failures (Eudy & Brooks, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The problem was that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). Failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course affected students financially and emotionally and also reduced the nursing program's revenue (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). Additionally, minority students' failure in Nursing Fundamentals affected the healthcare system by causing attrition and decreasing the number of diverse nursing graduates available for the nursing workforce (Donnell et al., 2018; Hannaford et al., 2021; Van Hoek et al., 2019).

Bennett et al. (2021) found that African American students had the highest dropout rates from nursing programs, largely due to low self-efficacy. They recommended future research to explore the impact of interventions targeting pre-college or first-year students on self-efficacy and attrition across diverse student groups. In a quantitative study, Eudy and Brooks (2022) examined factors affecting success in the Nursing Fundamentals course and found that White students were more likely to pass than minority students. The authors suggested a follow-up study involving interviews with students who failed to understand better the factors influencing their success in the course.

If the challenges faced by minority nursing students struggling with Nursing Fundamentals are not addressed, the consequences may extend beyond the classroom and exacerbate existing diversity issues in the nursing workforce. This lack of diversity could contribute to healthcare disparities among an increasingly diverse patient population, making it harder for families to access effective strategies for illness prevention and management. Inadequate support for minority nursing students jeopardizes their academic success and undermines the fairness and effectiveness of healthcare delivery in communities facing significant health challenges (Green, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed in Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program. This inquiry examined the factors that may have contributed to failure and attrition among nursing students. I focused on participants' perceptions of the research's problem and purpose. The research questions were selected to explore students' views on their failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course and the reasons for their departure from the

nursing program. Following IRB approval, I conducted an online study with minority students from community colleges or four-year institutions in the U.S. who had failed the Nursing Fundamentals course after 2015 and subsequently dropped out. Participants were recruited via LinkedIn and included former students who met the specified criteria. The sample consisted of nine former minority nursing students. I created the survey questions and field-tested them with two experts to ensure alignment with the research design. The open-ended survey was conducted using Qualtrics. Using thematic analysis, the data were coded, and themes were formulated from the codes.

Research Questions

RQ1

What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding failing the Nursing Fundamentals course?

RQ2

What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding leaving the nursing program?

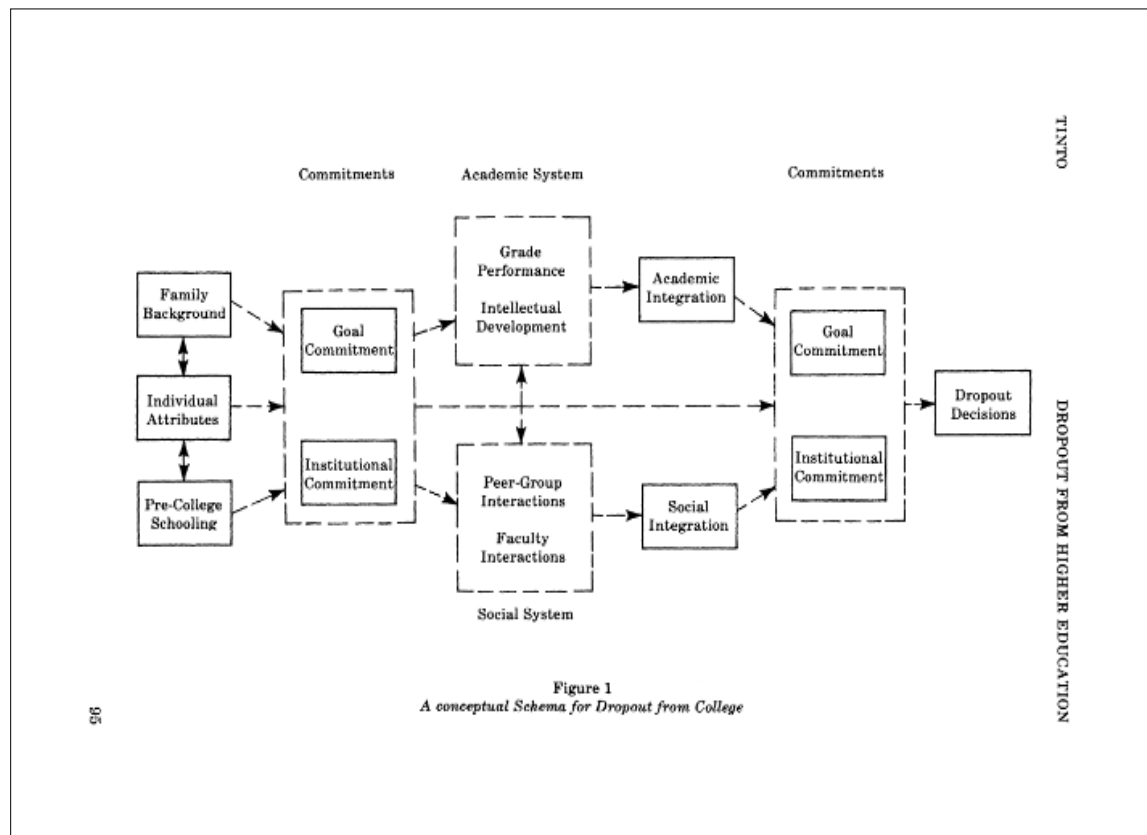
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study was Tinto's longitudinal model of student departure (1975). It was believed that students decide to leave college based on their interactions with the institution's social and academic systems (Tinto, 1975). Students' experiences, whether positive or negative, during these interactions influence their commitments to the institution and their goals, ultimately leading to withdrawal or retention (Tinto, 1975). Grade performance affects academic integration, and interactions with peers and faculty influence social integration. The level of commitment is shaped by both academic and social integration within the college

environment. Tinto (1975) argued that a student's decision to withdraw is based on the relationship between their commitments to the institution and their goal of completing college (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Tinto's Dropout From College Diagram



Note. Source: Review of Educational Research

Tinto's theory was utilized in research to examine the lived experiences of pharmacy students. In a study by Choi et al. (2019) focusing on pharmacy students facing educational challenges, three participants who struggled academically remained in the program due to strengthened social and academic integration. In contrast, one student had to leave the program as numerous social obligations hindered their academic integration. These findings aligned with Tinto's theory, indicating that the dismissed student experienced insufficient academic

integration, which ultimately affected his ability to complete the program. While social integration was present, the institution's commitment remained intact, and the student did not voluntarily withdraw. Moreover, Tinto's theory served as a framework for other studies investigating attrition and retention in higher education, helping to explain and analyze these complex phenomena.

This research employed Tinto's theory as a foundational framework, positing that a student's failure in a course directly impacts their academic performance, which, in turn, can affect their academic integration and commitment to educational goals, ultimately leading to attrition. Additionally, minority nursing students often enter the program with varying factors, such as family background (first-generation status, minority status), personal attributes (age, gender), and pre-college experiences (social achievements, GPAs, academic records), all of which may influence their academic and social integration. Previous research has indicated that first-generation students are at a higher risk of attrition in nursing programs (Sangoleye et al., 2023). Furthermore, a study by Nelson (2019) found that students were more likely to leave the nursing program when they felt a lack of belonging, which, in turn, negatively affected their social integration and commitment to the institution. There was a positive correlation between a minority student's pre-college GPA and their college GPA, suggesting that higher pre-college GPAs are generally associated with greater academic success (Cho & Serrano, 2020). Additionally, Cho and Serrano (2020) identified a link between age and academic achievement, noting that as minority students mature, their likelihood of academic success tends to increase. Consequently, this study aimed to investigate the academic and social integration of former minority nursing students in college, specifically regarding their failures in Nursing Fundamentals and subsequent withdrawals from the program.

Definitions of Key Terms

Attrition

Attrition is the exodus of students from an academic program before completion (Crane & Abbott, 2021).

Minority Students

Students who identify as not part of the nation's leading ethnic or racial group (RAND, n.d.).

Nursing Fundamentals Course

The Nursing Fundamentals course is an introductory nursing course that covers the preliminary skills and concepts in care provision (Miller et al., 2016). It also includes a theoretical and skills-development component (Yang et al., 2022).

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program regarding factors that may have contributed to their failure and attrition. This study was vital because insights into former nursing students' perceptions of potential contributors to their academic failure and attrition can help to identify issues early and enable timely interventions to avert them.

The theoretical framework used for this study was Vincent Tinto's longitudinal model of student departure (1975). This theoretical framework posited that a student's attrition was determined by social and academic integration within the academic environment. A student entered higher education with certain characteristics and backgrounds; however, success or failure was determined by the academic integration between the student and the institution

(Tinto, 1975). The social and academic integration between the student and the institution determined whether the student left the institution (Tinto, 1975).

A literature review was conducted to identify the latest research on the topic to support the findings. The databases most pertinent to education and healthcare were accessed to locate the literature needed for review. The databases used for the literature review were EBSCOhost, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The initial search terms included *minority nursing students' attrition, failure in nursing courses, failure in nursing programs, nursing course failure among non-English-speaking students, attrition in associate degree nursing programs, and attrition at community colleges*. Later, an advanced search was conducted using keyword groups such as *Minority or ESL or English as a second language or English as a foreign language or EFL or non-English speak n3 (Student) And (Nursing) n3 (program or class or course or degree or college or university or higher education) And (Attrition or retention, graduation, or failure)*. The limits for both the initial and the advanced searches were 2019-2025 and peer-reviewed only. Additionally, other articles referenced in the selected articles were used to locate literature supporting the problem statement, purpose statement, theoretical framework, and research questions.

Attrition in Higher Education

Approximately 32.9% of undergraduate students drop out of college (Hanson, 2023). According to statistics, in July 2021, 40 million students dropped out of college in America (Hanson, 2023). The attrition rates by race were a) Asians 10.9%, b) Blacks 20.2%, c) American Indians 45.1%, d) Whites 17.16%, and e) Hispanics 16.17% (Learnopoly, n.d.). Nieuwoudt and Pedler (2023) reported that among participants who contemplated leaving higher education (77.3%), females were more likely to do so due to family commitments, mental health

challenges, financial issues, and high expectations regarding study requirements. Nieuwoudt and Pedler's study differs from other studies that assert that male students are typically at greater risk of attrition (McKinney et al., 2019; Merritt, 2021).

McKinney et al. (2019) explored why students in higher education contemplated attrition and why they remained. Most of the participants were females in their first year of study, and most of them reported that the reasons they chose to remain in higher education included support from friends and family and commitment to completing their goals (personal and career). McKinney et al. (2019) also discovered that the reasons students desired to leave higher education that were most frequently reported included family obligations (44.97%), financial burdens (44.3%), work (38.2%), amount of time anticipated for study (42.06%), and managing time (42.73%). Most participants cited multiple reasons for remaining in higher education and for considering attrition, thereby demonstrating the complexity of addressing attrition (McKinney et al., 2019).

McKinney et al. (2019) surveyed students who left the program and those who considered attrition but decided to continue their education. They collected data only once, and more frequent data collection throughout the academic year could have yielded different results regarding reasons for contemplating leaving. However, both McKinney et al. (2019) and Nieuwoudt and Pedler (2023) attributed financial reasons, the demands of studying, and family obligations to students' consideration of attrition. However, Crane and Abbott (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2021) posited that minority students are more likely to drop out of higher education due to academic and financial obstacles. Therefore, all these researchers posit financial issues as one of the main reasons minority students consider attrition (Crane & Abbott, 2021; McKinney et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2021; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). Attrition is

multifactorial, and Schneider (2022) noted that preventing student attrition requires understanding the factors underlying it.

Based on their study, Matz et al. (2023) posited that students' sociodemographic characteristics and engagement with peers and the institution influenced attrition. Students with high GPAs who interacted well with their peers and in the classroom were likelier to remain in college (Matz et al., 2023). Matz et al.'s (2023) results support Tinto's (1975) theory, which states that successful academic integration leads to a successful commitment to a goal, and successful social integration leads to a successful commitment to the institution, thereby making these students more likely to complete their degree program. Although several other studies also contend that student engagement is essential for preventing attrition (Hoi, 2023; Korhonen et al., 2019; Rivera Munoz et al., 2020; Shcheglova et al., 2020; Tight, 2020; Trinidad et al., 2020), Bargmann et al. (2022) revealed in their study that motivation should be considered necessary for preventing attrition. Bargmann et al. (2022) studied first-year students interested in teaching as a career to determine if three components of motivation (cost, interest, and self-efficacy) would influence them to drop out three months after the first year of higher education and would affect their decisions to pursue their career after completion of the first year. The data revealed that cost, interest, and self-efficacy all positively affected the students' decisions to pursue their careers. However, the intention to drop out was directly related to cost and interest (Bargmann et al., 2022). Bargmann et al. (2022) did not focus on engagement as an essential construct for preventing attrition but did consider motivation a significant factor. A possible explanation for Bargmann et al.'s (2022) results was that the participants were primarily women, even though prior studies showed that men were more at risk of attrition. Additionally, the attrition rate was high, and participants who left were predominantly men with low GPAs, which may have

affected the results (Bargmann et al., 2022).

There are multiple reasons for attrition in higher education, and both Nieuwoudt and Pedler (2023) and McKinney et al. (2019) identified family obligations, the demands related to studying, and financial issues, while Crane and Abbott (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2021) identified academic and financial issues as commonly reported reasons for attrition. These four studies identified financial issues as a commonly reported reason for attrition. However, Bargmann et al. (2022) identified motivation as the primary factor in preventing attrition in higher education, despite several studies identifying student engagement as the primary factor. Owen (2021) attributed poor transition to nursing school while trying to balance life as a factor that can result in scholastic failure.

Attrition in Community Colleges

Understanding the transition process of first-year students to community college can provide insights into college completion, transfer to four-year colleges, and integration (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). Before entering college, students are often expected to make career choices about which they need more information, a requirement that can overwhelm the transition to college (Bargmann et al., 2022). Transitioning to community college entails first-year students' integration and adaptation to their new environment, including establishing relationships (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). Rucks-Ahidiana and Bork's (2020) study revealed that relationships on-campus and off-campus provide both information and support and complement each other. The information received through on-campus relationships focuses on college-related processes, while the off-campus information is general advice about college, career, and goals. Support received through off-campus relationships is primarily from family and friends, whereas support received on campus is primarily from peers. The relationships

community college students develop on and off campus can impact their decision to remain at the institution and are needed for a successful college transition (Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020), a point which supports Tinto's (1975) theory that social integration can influence a student's decision to drop out of college. Margarit and Kennedy (2019) examined variables (students' academic background and financial status) that can predict on-time graduation from community colleges. Results revealed that variables linked to academic integration at a community college were more influential in shaping a student's ability to complete college than variables associated with the student's background. This study also supports Tinto's (1975) theory that academic integration impacts a student's decision to drop out of college.

Additionally, some studies indicate that students' backgrounds can significantly affect their progress in college. McKinney et al. (2019) posited via their study that course dropping in community colleges is linked to attrition, and the groups that were most likely to drop courses were males, students between the ages of 20 and 24, students with a GPA less than 2.0, African Americans, part-time students, GED students, and academically disadvantaged students (McKinney et al., 2019). Students who dropped at least one out of every five attempted courses were likely to have a 44% chance of completing college. The attrition rate for African Americans at two-year colleges is 20.2%, compared with 17.16% for Whites (Hanson, 2023). McKinney et al.'s (2019) study supports the view that background history is a possible determinant of attrition, consistent with Tinto's (1975) theory that attrition results from unsuccessful academic and social integration, which students' backgrounds can influence. Also, older students who work (Fifer, 2019) are likely to enter college with family responsibilities, so they have limited time to interact with traditional students (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019), which places them at risk for unsuccessful social integration (Tinto, 1975) and risk for first-year attrition (Kamer & Ishitani, 2021).

Among students with family responsibilities, the groups most at risk of college attrition are female, first-generation, and low-income students. According to the data, the attrition rate for low-income students is 51.04% (What to Become, 2021). First-generation students have a college attrition rate of 55.9% (Nam, 2023), and females have a college attrition rate of 51.51% (Flores, n.d.).

Attrition in Nursing Programs

According to Peruski (2019), the main reason students leave nursing programs is the failure of the courses' clinical and didactic components. Due to the demands of the nursing profession, pre-licensure education is challenging and rigorous (Fifer, 2019). Nursing programs prepare students to care for patients in complex clinical environments, and successful completion of nursing courses requires students to demonstrate competence in documenting patient care, assessing patients, collaborating with other disciplines, administering medications, and other psychomotor skills (Rodger & Jukes, 2021). Many nursing students are nontraditional, and most work and attend school concurrently (Fifer, 2019), placing them at risk of attrition. The attrition rate for students who work and attend school concurrently is approximately 20% (Ecton et al., 2023). Consequently, nursing students face numerous challenges that must be overcome to complete nursing school (Sangoleye et al., 2023).

The multiple challenges nursing students face in nursing programs put them at risk for attrition. The academic challenges include succeeding in their first clinical course (Younas et al., 2022), developing a mindset necessary for success (Lewis et al., 2022), and adapting to the program's rigorous workload (Twidwell et al., 2019). Stress during nursing school and the balancing of financial and personal obligations are additional challenges that nursing students face (Elmir et al., 2019; Merritt, 2021). To cope with the challenges of nursing programs,

students rely on faculty support to validate their struggles and facilitate their success (Fifer, 2019).

The Nursing Fundamentals course, with its clinical component that requires the application of theory to practice, is a pivotal part of nursing education (Konrad et al., 2021). Brady et al. (2019) argue that the first clinical experience is crucial in affirming a student's decision to pursue nursing. Onovo (2019), Eudy and Brooks (2022), and Konrad et al. (2021) have all delved into student success in the Nursing Fundamentals course. While Onovo (2019) and Eudy and Brooks (2022) focused on the challenges in Nursing Fundamentals, Konrad et al. (2021) explored successful strategies for teaching the clinical component online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Success in the Nursing Fundamentals course depends on meeting its objectives, which focus on evidence-based, safe, patient-centered, collaborative, and holistic, professional care (Konrad et al., 2021). Often, passing the Nursing Fundamentals course determines a student's eligibility to continue in the nursing program (Onovo, 2019) and their decision to remain in the program (Eudy & Brooks, 2022).

In addition to passing the Nursing Fundamentals course, emotional intelligence is a crucial skill for nursing students as they prepare for their profession. Studies have consistently shown a direct correlation between emotional intelligence and reduced attrition in higher education (ALmegewly et al., 2022; Alshurideh & Alsharari, 2020; McGuire, 2023). According to ALmegewly et al. (2022), nursing students need emotional intelligence to navigate the demands of their future profession, including managing relationships with families, coping with stress, interacting with patients and healthcare workers, and handling their own emotions. ALmegewly et al. (2022) specifically studied emotional intelligence in nursing students and its impact on academic achievement. Benington et al. (2020) also investigated the influence of

emotional intelligence on nursing students' first-time pass rates in courses. Both studies used Schutte's Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) to measure emotional intelligence and yielded different results. ALmegewly et al. (2022) found that successful nursing students often exhibit high emotional intelligence. Benington et al. (2020) found no significant relationship between passing nursing courses the first time and emotional intelligence.

Both studies yielded different results, possibly because the data were self-reported, which may have introduced response bias and affected data quality (Rosenman et al., 2011). Also, Benington et al. (2020) and ALmegewly et al. (2022) may have obtained different results regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and success in nursing courses because the populations differed. Benington et al. (2020) used a nursing student population in the United States, and ALmegewly et al. (2022) used a nursing student population in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, ALmegewly et al. (2022) found that not accounting for culture and the neophyte researcher status of the study's authors may have affected the study's results.

Another skill deemed essential to nursing practice is competence (Munangatire & McInerney, 2021). To practice nursing, nursing students must develop the competence to provide safe, quality patient care, which must be achieved upon graduation (Munangatire & McInerney, 2021). Competence is determined by nursing students' demonstration of their ability to incorporate information from different sources to guide decision-making in patient care (Fukada, 2018). When clinical reasoning and critical thinking skills are developed and integrated into nursing education, students develop clinical judgment and demonstrate competence (Klenke-Borgmann et al., 2020; Wong & Kowitlawakul, 2020). Clinical competence is the student's ability to learn in the clinical setting (Munangatire & McInerney, 2021) and is usually evaluated by the clinical instructor (Rodger & Juckes, 2021). Nursing students who fail to demonstrate the

competence needed for safe patient care fail the course and must repeat it, which can be challenging for the clinical instructor (Rodger & Jukes, 2021).

Owen (2021) studied baccalaureate nursing students who were previously academically successful but later failed a didactic course, examining their perceptions of failure. According to Owen (2021), the nursing students identified intrinsic factors contributing to their failure, specifically the absence of the skills (competence) required for nursing school. Munangatire and McInerney (2021) conducted a phenomenographic study to explore nursing students' perceptions of competence and the processes that facilitate its development. Five descriptions of competence emerged, indicating that nursing educators may need to adjust teaching strategies to align with students' understanding of competence to facilitate success. Both studies by Munangatire and McInerney (2021) and Owen (2021) demonstrate the importance of competence for success in nursing school.

Due to structural racism in nursing education, minority nursing students' performances can be affected academically, clinically, and socially (Johannessen et al., 2022). Most nursing programs in the United States have predominantly white female faculty members (Charania & Patel, 2022). This lack of diversity in nursing faculty is usually challenging for minority students (Charania & Patel, 2022). Per Van Mulligen (2022), faculty involvement, student support (on campus and in the community), and students' access to remediation are among the factors that can contribute to minority attrition in nursing programs. Coleman et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore African American nursing students' perceptions of factors that affected their success in nursing school. Per the results of the study, the common themes that emerged were (a) feeling invisible, (b) lack of sense of belonging, (c) having to work much harder than white peers, (d) having to focus on their education to succeed, and (e) miscommunication with faculty and

classmates (Coleman et al., 2021). Some participants were the only African Americans in their classes and were reluctant to seek faculty assistance based on their perceptions. Participants who had other African American students in the class reported feeling a sense of belonging and less isolated (Coleman et al., 2021).

Faculty's Perspectives on Retaining Minority Nursing Students

The clinical instructors' perspectives on teaching nursing students deemed at risk of failure can provide insight into how these students are affected, both professionally and personally (Rodger & Jukes, 2021). Merritt (2021) postulated that minority students were at greater risk of attrition from nursing programs, a finding supported by Eudy and Brooks (2022), who reported that a higher-than-expected percentage of students who failed Nursing Fundamentals chose to leave the program rather than repeat the course. At-risk students are classified based on demographics such as race, ESL status, and students who are educationally, financially, and socially disadvantaged (Merritt, 2021).

According to Butler and Ardary's (2020) study exploring the experiences of nursing faculty tutors, faculty tutoring at-risk nursing students can lead to student success in academia by facilitating students' development in identifying their personal academic needs, which are of utmost importance for achieving their goals. Faculty who tutored at-risk students felt that the primary step was to assess the problem, including the student's knowledge, understanding of course material, and study habits (Butler & Ardary, 2020). After assessing the problem/s, the teaching strategies must be personalized for each at-risk student. The final step in tutoring at-risk nursing students, once the problem has been assessed and individualized teaching strategies have been implemented, involves the student practicing answering questions like those on the NCLEX-RN exam (Butler & Ardary, 2020). Mastery in answering NCLEX-RN-type questions

reduces test anxiety and formulates readiness for course exams and the NCLEX (Butler & Ardary, 2020), which can impact attrition.

A project was conducted at a Midwest community college as part of an evidence-based quality improvement (EBQI) program to improve the retention rate of second- and third-semester nursing students (Merritt, 2021). The project implemented supportive strategies to help students overcome academic barriers and improve their final course grades. The at-risk students were identified by faculty based on their failure in a course and their decision to repeat it. However, the students most identified as at-risk were Hispanics and immigrants who were not legal residents. The students interacted with faculty during pre-semester workshops and intra-semester activities, including test-taking strategies, critical-thinking skills, and lab practice. Students who participated in intra-semester activities improved their final course grades. From a faculty perspective, the academic challenges experienced by at-risk students in the nursing program can facilitate early identification of issues and minimize barriers that may lead to attrition (Merritt, 2021). Student-faculty interaction can impact success, lending credence to the belief that nursing students' perspectives on their challenges should be respected and valued (Murray & Loyd, 2020).

Nursing Students' Perspectives Regarding Academic Challenges

Students' perspectives regarding their educational needs can be very insightful for educators and help address course challenges. Studies have shown that how students are treated by faculty can impact their success (Fifer, 2019). Jakubec et al. (2020) explored students' perspectives on their journey from failure to success in a nursing course. The students felt that the period during which they failed the course was transitional and vital because they were struggling with issues related to self-efficacy and personal identity, as well as with assuming the

identity of a mature undergraduate (Jakubec et al., 2020).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to achieve knowledge and perform new skills (Page, 2022), critical to nursing students' success. Page (2022) conducted a qualitative study to examine what minority nursing students perceived as hindering or enhancing their self-efficacy, which revealed these themes: (a) coping with several stressors, (b) applying what was learned in the classroom in the clinical setting, and (c) interacting with the clinical faculty. The students identified that applying what they had learned (doing it) and positive interactions with clinical faculty increased their self-efficacy. However, coping with several stressors, such as poor time-management skills, work, and family responsibilities, hindered their self-efficacy (Page, 2022).

According to Owen (2021), a study examining nursing students' perceptions of course failure in a baccalaureate program found that participants identified faculty criticism and the need to use resources as fundamental factors contributing to their failure. The extrinsic factors the students identified as contributing to their course failure included challenging life events, limited coping skills, and an inability to express themselves to unsupportive and influential faculty (Owen, 2021). Owen (2021) and Page (2022) asserted that interactive faculty relationships are essential for minority nursing students' success.

Frank (2020) contends that educators should employ strategies to support nursing students experiencing failure. Some nursing programs dismiss students after failing at least two courses (Veesart & Cannon, 2022). Consequently, a course failure puts students at risk of attrition from the program. Mingo (2023) maintained that students could experience grief and loss after academic failure. Therefore, nurse educators should consider using Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief as a lens for students experiencing grief and loss following academic failure. Students experiencing grief due to failure may progress through the five stages of grief (Denial,

Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance), which may not occur in a linear fashion and are unique to each student (Mingo, 2023). The nurse educator may need to assess which stage of grief the student is experiencing, and it is recommended that the plan to support the student's success be individualized (Mingo, 2023). More research is needed on the effectiveness of this strategy in supporting students who have experienced academic failure.

Not all students dismissed from nursing programs lacked academic ability (Veesart & Cannon, 2022). Veesart and Cannon (2022) studied participants who were dismissed from a nursing program and were predominantly Hispanic (19 of 37); 13 were White, 2 were Asian, and 3 were Black. The study's outcome indicated that the nursing students reported having high GPAs before entering college and did not believe it was necessary to study (Veesart & Cannon, 2022). The students verbalized that they did not know how to study and wasted time when they should have been studying (Veesart & Cannon, 2022). Like the results of other studies, the participants reported that life events such as loss of employment, mental health issues, and illness contributed to their failure to complete the nursing program (Veesart & Cannon, 2022).

Chachula et al. (2022) reported that nursing students who experienced incivility from peers, clinical instructors, and faculty considered leaving their nursing programs. Most of the students who contemplated leaving the program were minorities, and 46.5% of the participants felt they were mistreated due to their race (Chachula et al., 2022). Fifer (2019) studied what ADN students perceived as caring behavior from their instructors. The study revealed that minority nursing students felt their instructors should take time to get to know them and be supportive and respectful (Fifer, 2019). This study concurs with Brady et al. (2019), who postulated that nursing students need to feel supported in both experiential and classroom settings. Latinx nursing students identified the stressors they experienced in nursing school

included a) overwhelming course load, b) balancing family, work, and school, c) navigating in unknown territory and not being able to receive any assistance from family, d) feeling alienated, especially in an environment where there is absence of faculty of same race, and e) trying to persist despite several obstacles (Rapoza et al., 2021). Stress has been shown to contribute significantly to minorities' underperformance in nursing programs, and Owen (2021) and Page (2022) both postulated this in their research.

All these studies revealed nursing students' perspectives on their need for assistance beyond academics to succeed in nursing programs. Based on their study's results, Veersart and Cannon (2022) proposed that nursing programs' admission criteria should not only include grade point average reports but also consider extrinsic influences and evaluate stress management.

Strategies to Prevent Failure and Attrition

To prevent course failure and attrition, faculty play a vital role in implementing strategies that facilitate student integration and retention. However, the literature indicates that increasing diversity among nursing students requires more diverse nursing faculty (Charania & Patel, 2022; Green, 2020). Based on the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2023) data, minority nursing faculty represent only 19.2% of the full-time nursing faculty nationwide, yet 24.5% of the population is minority (United States Census Bureau, 2022), and approximately 30% of nursing students are minorities (Nursing OnPoint, n.d.). According to DeWitty and Murray (2020), minority students require faculty who are similar in appearance so they can visualize themselves as successful, and the absence of minority faculty can result in attrition. The predominantly White nursing faculty supports Miller and Vaughn's (2023) assertion that faculty need development in cultural sensitivity and Charania and Patel's (2022) perspective that faculty need to implement inclusive teaching to facilitate self-efficacy in all students. However, nursing

faculty differ in their training and experience and may hold biases that can hinder their willingness to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their teaching (Charania & Patel, 2022). Faculty may be unaware of the pre-college challenges faced by minority nursing students or of their educational needs (Green, 2020). However, faculty development in inclusive teaching can raise awareness of academic strategies that foster equity, connection, and inclusion for all students (Charania & Patel, 2022). Studies have shown that nursing programs can develop culturally sensitive faculty (Green, 2020) and be responsive to the needs of the diverse student body (Everett, 2022). Green (2020) also posited that faculty who participated in training on strategies to facilitate student success in nursing may be more successful at retaining and developing minority students.

Onabadejo (2020) conducted a study with nursing faculty to identify multicultural strategies to assist minority students. Onabadejo's (2020) study outcomes indicated that multicultural strategies that nursing faculty implemented to assist minority nursing students included (a) various teaching strategies such as case studies, self-reflection, and concept mapping, (b) training and faculty support where faculty received professional training regarding cultural sensitivity, and (c) support to overcome the barriers of students and faculty where faculty accessed resources regarding cultural training and engaged students in discussions to shed light on their perspectives. Students' perspectives on faculty teaching characteristics that promote and inhibit learning should be considered when formulating programs and teaching strategies (Labrague et al., 2020). The nursing curriculum may need to be evaluated with respect to the inclusion of diversity and equity discussions in every course and the representation of minority students and their fair treatment (Miller & Vaughn, 2023).

A strategy that may help address minority attrition in nursing programs is for faculty to

interact with students in both classroom and clinical settings to foster a supportive learning environment (Van Mulligen, 2022). Some researchers propose early detection of at-risk behaviors, such as exam failure and difficulty with clinical skills (Rodger & Juckes, 2021), and prompt intervention to prevent failure (Elkins, 2019; Van Mulligen, 2022). Merritt (2021) posited that strategies supporting at-risk students can be used in academic settings to prevent the development of barriers. That time may need to be allotted for faculty to engage in retention strategies. The strategies that can be implemented in the clinical setting for at-risk students include (a) promoting safety and learning in patient care, (b) ensuring communication and collaboration occur between staff and students and are timely, and (c) ensuring students complete tasks (Rodger & Juckes, 2021).

Quaye et al. (2020) asserted that student engagement programs, such as learning seminars and learning communities (LC), which are deemed successful in promoting academic success, can be implemented to benefit most students, including minorities. Learning Communities (LCs) in community colleges have been shown to successfully engage and enhance learning, and it is recommended that recruitment for these communities focus on non-traditional students, such as minority, part-time, or international students (Parlier et al., 2022). Both Quaye et al. (2020) and Parlier et al. (2022) agree that learning communities can benefit minority students by promoting success and averting attrition in nursing programs. In addition to academic support, minority nursing students require psychological support to cope with the stress of academic failure (Mingo, 2023) and financial support to assist with financial issues (Noone et al., 2020). According to Kirui and McGee (2021), financial support is associated with enhanced academic success among minority nursing students.

Despite numerous support services in place, nursing schools have recognized that these

services are effective only if students access them (Everett, 2022). However, institutional attachment is promoted when students employ support services (Onabadejo, 2020). The nurse educator plays a pivotal role in supporting and mentoring students experiencing academic failure and should help them access appropriate on-campus and community resources (Mingo, 2023). Support services for higher education students enhance student success and the likelihood of degree completion (Johnson et al., 2022). Johnson et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study of students at Qatar University who accessed support services in the Spring and Fall 2019 semesters to evaluate their success. Most of the students who accessed support services were at-risk students. The results showed that students who used support services during Spring 2019 (a higher number than in Fall 2019) had a 57% increase in their GPAs, while half of the students (50%) who used support services during Fall 2019 increased their GPAs.

Everett (2022) found that students at risk of failing were likely to avoid asking their instructors for help or accessing other learning support services (Everett, 2022). Some students avoided using resources such as faculty office hours due to ethnic stereotypes (Pusey-Reid & Blackman-Richards, 2022). Everett's (2022) study exploring reasons students (n=9) are reluctant to seek academic assistance demonstrated that the most frequently reported reason was limited time, and the second most frequently reported reason was timidity.

Psychological help-seeking behaviors are affected by stress, even when stress is the reason for seeking help (Attis-Josias, 2023). With minority nursing students in a predominantly White institution who were studied regarding their perspectives concerning seeking help while enduring stress, it was discovered that the barriers to seeking help were the absence of minority faculty, microaggressions, and insufficient campus diversity (Attis-Josias, 2023). Everett (2022) postulated that students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes regarding the behaviors involved in

seeking assistance must be developed to enable them to manage academic challenges successfully. A comprehensive approach that integrates social, environmental, and personal components must be employed to address the unwillingness to seek help (Everett, 2022). According to Everett (2022), students should be taught to prioritize academic needs to succeed due to time constraints. For timid students, their social skills may need development, and activities should be formulated to build relationships with peers and increase confidence. Students may need new models for success to support all their academic needs, and nursing programs may need to commit to using these diverse models to promote success among students completing the nursing program (Everett, 2022). Regarding the barriers to seeking support services perceived by minority students, staff, and faculty, there is a need to develop awareness of microaggressions and unconscious bias (Attis-Josias, 2023). Addressing barriers to seeking support can promote minority nursing students' success, thereby fortifying the profession (McNally et al., 2019), as stakeholders and nursing organizations have agreed that increasing minority representation in nursing is of utmost importance to healthcare (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2023).

Ethical Assurances

I conducted the research ethically by following the principles outlined in the 1979 Belmont Report, which offers guidelines for protecting human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). The core principles of the Belmont Report, Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice, were central to my approach throughout the entire research process (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). I obtained approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before starting the study. The survey questions I created focused on participants' experiences of failing a nursing course and were designed to

pose minimal psychological and emotional risks since the participants had already left the program. I carefully crafted the questions to reduce any potential effects. Before starting the survey, I clearly explained that participation was voluntary and secured informed consent from all participants. To protect confidentiality, I de-identified the participants and will store the data securely for 5 years, in accordance with IRB guidelines and using strong computer passwords. Additionally, all data were de-identified so that neither the institution nor the participants could be easily identified.

As the researcher, I was dedicated to respecting and protecting participants' rights. I provided them with information about various aspects of the study, including their rights. I highlighted that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. As a former clinical instructor in Nursing Fundamentals and an African American, I was aware of my own biases regarding why students might fail and how minority nursing students were treated in clinical settings. I understood that these biases could affect my interpretation of the data (Liu, 2022). To address this, I carefully documented my positionality in my research journal daily, believing it significantly influenced my study (Holmes, 2020). My understanding of positionality influenced how I selected participants, developed research questions, and interpreted the data. To reduce bias in the study, I employed reflexivity (Bloomberg, 2023) by journaling my feelings and biases throughout data collection and analysis.

Summary

Minority nursing students who fail the Nursing Fundamentals course often face a higher risk of attrition from their programs (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew regarding the factors contributing to their failure and withdrawal. As the

patient population becomes more diverse, nursing programs must train students who reflect this diversity and reduce attrition rates to address health disparities. Identifying the factors driving attrition is crucial for implementing interventions to prevent student failure and minimize dropouts. The survey was conducted online. Purposive sampling was used to select former nursing students who identify as minorities and have failed the Nursing Fundamentals course and withdrawn from nursing programs since 2015. I used Tinto's (1975) dropout theory as a framework. I received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Two research questions were selected: RQ1) What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding failing the Nursing Fundamentals course? RQ2) What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding leaving the nursing program? The definition of key terms included attrition, minority students, and the nursing fundamentals course. The literature review focused on attrition in higher education, community colleges, and nursing programs. I also reviewed faculty and student perspectives on nursing student retention. I concluded the literature review with strategies to prevent failure and attrition.

Eudy and Brooks (2022) found that minority nursing students in community colleges are more likely to fail Nursing Fundamentals and leave the program. Success also depends on emotional intelligence (ALmegewly et al., 2022) and competence (Munangatire & McInerney, 2021). Higher emotional intelligence correlates with lower attrition in higher education (ALmegewly et al., 2022; Alshurideh & Alsharari, 2020; McGuire, 2023).

I conducted research ethically following the 1979 Belmont Report, which guides the protection of human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Its core principles, Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice, guided my approach throughout the process.

Section 2: Methodology and Design

The problem was that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). Failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course impacted students financially and emotionally, as well as the nursing program's revenue (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed in Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program. This inquiry examined the factors that may have contributed to failure and attrition among nursing students.

This section elaborated on the research design and methodology, including the population and sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of the study's framework, I sought to emphasize the significance of my research and its potential to positively influence the lives of minority nursing students. Additionally, a summary of the section was included to provide a concise overview of the key points discussed and to highlight the research's promising impact.

Design and Method

I chose a qualitative, descriptive design for this research. A qualitative approach was selected because the data needed to investigate participants' perceptions of their failures in Nursing Fundamentals and their subsequent withdrawal from the nursing program should be rich and nuanced, as Yazan (2015) stated. Hennick et al. (2020) explained that qualitative research examines individuals' experiences with events, objects, or behaviors, as well as the explanations and interpretations they offer.

To develop this study, quantitative techniques were intentionally avoided, mainly because the data were not suitable for such analysis. The data were inherently non-numerical and difficult

to quantify, making them unsuitable for quantitative methods (Hancock et al., 2021).

Quantitative research typically relies on statistical techniques to analyze numerical data, enabling researchers to make predictions and draw conclusions based on statistical analyses and correlations (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023). In contrast, this research highlighted the rich, subjective experiences of participants. Its goal was to understand and interpret the meanings and insights that emerged from their perceptions, which would be hard to capture through numbers alone. To accomplish this, the study used qualitative data analysis techniques, focusing on textual data to gain a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences and emotions (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023). Given these considerations, qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate approach, aligning well with the specific research problem and objectives outlined in this study. This approach not only enabled a more detailed exploration of the phenomenon but also fostered a stronger connection to participants' viewpoints.

I investigated participants' perceptions of their failures in Nursing Fundamentals and how these setbacks led them to withdraw from the nursing program. A descriptive study design was used to examine potential reasons for failures in Nursing Fundamentals and subsequent nursing program dropout among former minority nursing students. This design was chosen because it is commonly used in nursing research (Bradshaw et al., 2017, as cited in Villamin et al., 2025) and allows for flexibility in incorporating methods from other qualitative approaches (Villamin et al., 2025). A qualitative descriptive study helps researchers focus on the data, enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2020; Sandelowski, 2010, as cited in Villamin et al., 2025). For this study, I examined attrition among former minority students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course. Using a descriptive study design, my goal was to identify strategies to improve nursing education and reduce failures in

Nursing Fundamentals and attrition rates among minority college students, ultimately offering valuable insights for the field.

The alternative design options evaluated included phenomenological, narrative, and case-study research. Phenomenology was ultimately not selected because of its complex data analysis and interpretation processes, which can be particularly difficult for novice researchers (Lewis, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019). Additionally, the process of bracketing, intended to reduce bias, may not be entirely effective (Bloomberg, 2023), potentially affecting the study's rigor. Narrative research was also excluded because, although it relies on participants' stories of lived experience, these narratives can often be shaped, fabricated, or otherwise influenced (Clandinin, 2023). This raises concerns about issues of ownership, rights, and power dynamics within the stories (Loseke, 2022). A case study approach was considered but ultimately rejected due to unforeseen difficulties in recruiting interview participants. These considerations led me to choose a descriptive study design, which I believe best fits the research problem, purpose, and questions.

The data collection method used in this research was open-ended surveys. Open-ended surveys, used in qualitative research, gather detailed, situation-specific data (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023). Another method considered was focus groups. However, when used in research, focus groups can be dominated by one or a few participants, which can impact the validity of the data collected (Webb & Kevern, 2001). The survey data was analyzed manually.

Researchers begin their research with their existing beliefs about the world, their interactions and relationships within it, and their understanding of knowledge, collectively known as the researcher's positionality (Holmes, 2020). This positionality significantly influences the research process (Holmes, 2020), including both data collection and analysis (Hanson et al., 2022), and it continually changes throughout the research journey (Bloomberg,

2023). My current perspective is that of a novice researcher and a member of a minority group, having previously worked as a clinical nurse educator in a baccalaureate nursing fundamentals program. I believe that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course and left the nursing program often did so for various reasons, such as financial difficulties and a lack of academic and family support. Consequently, I practiced reflexivity by examining my biases and assumptions and how they influenced my decisions during the research process (Bloomberg, 2023), which I carefully documented in my research journal.

Population and Sample

The research population included former nursing students who identified as minorities, were enrolled in college, had failed Nursing Fundamentals since 2015, and later withdrew from the nursing program. This specific group was considered suitable for the study because they were uniquely positioned to answer the research questions. In qualitative research, sample sizes usually represent a subset of the overall population directly related to the problem statement. The sample for this study consisted of nine participants. According to Alam (2021), qualitative research often uses small sample sizes to collect data and gain insights into the phenomenon being studied. Participants were recruited until data saturation was reached, meaning that no new information regarding the phenomenon emerged.

The sample for this study was chosen using purposive sampling, a targeted method that involves selecting participants based on the specific objectives and needs of the research (Andrade, 2021). The inclusion criteria identified two particular groups: (a) individuals who identify as members of minority communities, including but not limited to racial and ethnic minorities, as well as those from underrepresented backgrounds; and (b) former nursing students who faced academic challenges, specifically those who have failed the Nursing Fundamentals

course at least once since 2015 and subsequently decided to leave the nursing program entirely.

To recruit participants fitting these criteria, outreach was conducted through targeted posts on LinkedIn, a professional networking platform that enabled focused engagement with individuals who might meet the research parameters. This method aimed to reach potential participants who not only met the inclusion criteria but were also likely to share valuable insights and experiences related to the study's focus on educational barriers and support systems in the nursing field.

Instrumentation

The data collection tool used for this study was an open-ended survey designed to gather detailed qualitative responses. The survey included two demographic questions to collect basic participant information and ten narrative questions that prompted in-depth reflections. Of these ten questions, four focused on the challenges and failures students faced in the Nursing Fundamentals course. Another four questions examined the factors leading to student dropout from the nursing program. Each question was carefully developed to align with the theoretical framework of our study and to incorporate insights from the literature review, ensuring that the data gathered would add meaningful context and depth to our findings.

In qualitative research, conducting field tests is a crucial practice for validating data-collection tools, minimizing potential risks to participants, and ensuring data reliability (Bloomberg, 2023). A comprehensive field test was conducted to evaluate the survey questions used in the study. This assessment was carried out by two highly qualified subject-matter experts, both of whom hold doctoral degrees and bring extensive experience to the process. Recognized professionals from minority backgrounds add valuable insights to the research. With over five years of experience teaching Nursing Fundamentals courses, these experts have

developed a deep understanding of the nuances involved in the research process. Their expertise not only improved the quality of the field test but also helped ensure that the questions are culturally relevant and pedagogically sound, ultimately supporting the integrity and effectiveness of the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was essential before recruiting participants and collecting data. Once I obtained the necessary approval, I began the recruitment process on LinkedIn. In my recruitment post, I clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the expected survey duration, the participation criteria, and the incentive offered. Participation was entirely voluntary, and those who met the criteria received compensation.

The data collection process was designed to gather comprehensive and detailed information (Durkin et al., 2020) and involved open-ended surveys (Schoch, 2020). The survey was created using Qualtrics. Participants accessed it through a link provided after giving their consent and completed it online. The information gained from these open-ended surveys offers several benefits, including easy data collection, organization, analysis, and documentation of study findings (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021).

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing, reflective process that begins during data collection rather than waiting until the data collection is finished (Stake, 1995). Thematic analysis was used to code the survey data manually. Using this approach, the data were organized into codes from which themes emerged. I reviewed the data to identify key concepts (themes) based on these codes. Thematic analysis is described as a non-linear, iterative process conducted in overlapping stages (Bloomberg, 2023). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) outline the process as involving phases of compiling, deconstructing, reassembling, interpreting, and

concluding. The analysis and interpretation involved multiple readings of the survey responses and revisions to the codes and themes (Bloomberg, 2023).

In conducting my research involving human subjects, I carefully followed the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report. These principles include (a) Beneficence, which emphasizes maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harm to participants; (b) Justice, which ensures a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research; and (c) Respect for Persons, which recognizes individuals' autonomy and their right to make informed decisions about participation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

My research framework was based on the constructivist research paradigm. This paradigm suggested that reality is not a fixed entity but is instead constructed through social interactions and individual experiences (Singh, 2019). By adopting this perspective, I aimed to explore and understand the various interpretations and meanings participants attached to their experiences, thus enriching the overall findings of my research.

Assumptions

I assumed the premises were valid before starting the research (Bloomberg, 2023). One main assumption was that recruiting participants online would be more effective than using traditional methods, a view supported by Mavragani (2023). I also believed that attracting interviewees through social media would be straightforward. However, it became clear that changes to the recruitment poster were necessary to boost participation, such as adding an incentive. Since definitions of data saturation differ, I assumed that achieving saturation through coding would be sufficient for this study. Still, some scholars argued that data could never be fully saturated because it is inherently grounded in participants' perspectives, which vary depending on factors such as education, beliefs, understanding of the research topic, and personal

experiences (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). During the research process, some assumptions might have been proven wrong, underscoring the importance of researchers being transparent about any errors in their assumptions once the study concludes (Bloomberg, 2023). This transparency regarding assumptions enhanced the credibility of the research (Bloomberg, 2023).

Limitations

In research, limitations are inherent shortcomings of a study beyond the researchers' control (Bloomberg, 2023; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Although these limitations are unavoidable, they can significantly affect the study's outcomes and interpretations (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Such limitations may stem from data collection methods, the overall research design, and the sampling techniques used (Bloomberg, 2023). For example, a limitation of data collection tools is that surveys can pose challenges for sample selection and participant engagement, as respondents may selectively recall their answers (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021). Additionally, flaws in data collection can undermine both the credibility and reliability of the research results (Bloomberg, 2023).

In this study, a significant limitation of the sampling technique was the number of students willing to participate during the recruitment phase, which may have affected data saturation. Recruitment occurred at the end of summer and the start of the fall semester, periods that likely influenced response rates. To address this limitation, I began recruitment after receiving IRB approval. Additionally, the participation criteria were refined multiple times to become more inclusive, with the final change incorporating an IRB-approved incentive. Another limitation was the potential irreproducibility of the data collection or analysis process (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018), which could affect confirmability. To mitigate this, I carefully documented the procedures followed in data collection and analysis in my research journal.

Delimitations

According to Bloomberg (2023), delimitations are the choices a researcher makes to ensure the study's feasibility, viability, and achievement of objectives. In dissertations, delimitations define the boundaries that the researcher establishes to clarify what will and will not be included in the study, thereby improving the rigor and overall quality of the dissertation (Coker, 2022). My research included several delimitations, such as the chosen research design and theoretical framework (Coker, 2022). Additionally, the study used a descriptive research design and conducted an online survey, offering compensation to participants. Recognizing these delimitations was essential to strengthen the study's credibility (Bloomberg, 2023).

Summary

The problem was that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). Failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course affected students financially and emotionally, as well as the nursing program's revenue (Eudy & Brooks, 2022). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program. This inquiry examined the factors that may have contributed to failure and attrition among nursing students.

The research methodology chosen for this study was qualitative because rich, thick data are needed to answer the research questions. The research design was descriptive. The method used was open-ended surveys, and the questions were derived from interview questions that two subject-matter experts field-tested. The research sample comprised nine former nursing students who identified as minorities, attended college, failed Nursing Fundamentals no earlier than 2015, and left the program. Participants were selected purposefully.

The research was conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards, adhering to the principles and guidelines of the Belmont Report. Before recruitment and data collection, IRB approval was obtained to protect participants' rights and welfare. Data was collected using Qualtrics and analyzed manually. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. A lack of transparency regarding the assumptions can undermine the study's credibility; therefore, the assumptions were documented. Limitations and delimitations can undermine the trustworthiness of the research; therefore, these potential issues were anticipated and addressed.

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently withdrew from the nursing program regarding factors that may have contributed to their failure and attrition. The problem was that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs (Eudy & Brooks, 2022).

This section presents the study's findings, evaluates the outcomes, discusses implications and practice recommendations, outlines recommendations for future research, and concludes. The study's findings inform the themes of the research questions, which are derived from the data analysis. The data analysis is iterative, requires critical thinking and careful consideration, and is conducted throughout the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

As previously noted, limitations are the inherent imperfections of a study that researchers cannot control (Bloomberg, 2023; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Among the limitations that may affect the interpretation of the results is the decision to use an open-ended survey rather than semi-structured interviews for data collection. Furthermore, the use of surveys can influence the selection of the sample population and their willingness to provide genuine responses to questions (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021), ultimately affecting the interpretation of the findings.

Findings

In this study, I investigated the perceptions of former minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals and subsequently left the program, focusing on factors that may have contributed to their failure and withdrawal. After collecting data, I conducted a thorough analysis to understand the deeper meanings of the findings. I used thematic analysis, a common qualitative method valued for its simplicity and suitability for novice researchers, as it offers a

clear, step-by-step process for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main steps in thematic analysis include: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) developing themes, 4) refining themes, 5) naming each theme and providing definitions, and 6) compiling the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I reviewed the data several times to familiarize myself with the information. I used the data to develop initial codes, which I then organized into categories informed by my literature review. These categories were subsequently reclassified into themes. I revised the themes to more accurately capture the participants' responses. Finally, I defined the themes and generated a report detailing the findings.

Demographics

The open-ended survey involved 9 participants, all enrolled in nursing programs across the contiguous United States. The geographic distribution of these participants was diverse, with three individuals residing in Texas, two in New Jersey, and one each from Arizona, California, Maryland, and Florida. Each participant had decided to leave their nursing programs between 2017 and 2021, with departures occurring at various times. Specifically, one participant exited the program in 2017, another in 2018, one more in 2019, four participants withdrew during the challenging year of 2020, and two participants left in 2021. For a clearer understanding of the participants' profiles, Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of their demographic information, detailing age, gender, and other relevant characteristics.

Table 1*Participants Demographics*

Participant	State Attended Nursing School	Year Left Nursing Program
1	Texas	2018
2	Arizona	2021
3	Maryland	2020
4	California	2020
5	Florida	2017
6	New Jersey	2019
7	New Jersey	2021
8	Texas	2020
9	Texas	2020

Note. Participants were enrolled in nursing programs throughout the contiguous United States.

Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness is a priority in qualitative research because it demonstrates the work's truthfulness and rigor (Ahmed, 2024). Qualitative data are gathered through descriptive language and narratives, focusing on individuals' underlying meanings, experiences, and emotions. This research often uses methods such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended surveys, enabling researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth (Ahmed, 2024). Because qualitative research is considered subjective, establishing trustworthiness is important (Ahmed, 2024). Researchers demonstrate trustworthiness using four criteria: 1) credibility, 2) confirmability, 3) dependability, and 4) transferability (Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility. Credibility refers to the degree of trust in the accuracy and reliability of the collected data (McLeod, 2024a). At the outset of my research, I aimed to gather data from two distinct sources: in-depth interviews and online surveys. This approach was intended to

demonstrate triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity of my findings. However, I encountered unexpected challenges recruiting interview participants, making the process more difficult than I had anticipated. As a result, I ultimately focused my data collection efforts exclusively on online open-ended surveys.

These surveys were meticulously crafted to reflect the key themes and objectives of my research. To enhance the validity of these survey questions, I conducted a field test with nursing professors who are not only well-versed in research but also experienced in teaching Nursing Fundamentals. Their expertise helped refine the questions, ensuring clarity and relevance.

To uphold the integrity of my research, I used Qualtrics, a robust survey platform that verified respondents' IP addresses. This measure was critical for confirming the authenticity of the data. I also thoroughly reviewed demographic responses to ensure all participants met the study's eligibility criteria. In addition to these methods, I employed reflexive journaling throughout the research process. This practice enabled me to reflect critically on my biases, assumptions, and decisions, thereby enhancing the research's overall credibility.

Confirmability. Confirmability is a crucial process through which researchers strive to ensure that their findings are not unduly influenced by personal biases or preconceived notions (Ahmed, 2024). To achieve this, I employed reflexive journaling, meticulously documenting my thoughts, feelings, and biases throughout the data analysis phase. In this practice, I not only recorded my reflections but also engaged in thoughtful introspection, questioning the origins of my ideas and beliefs. This self-reflective practice helped bring to light any potential biases that could cloud my interpretations, ultimately enhancing the credibility and authenticity of my research findings.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the extent to which research findings are credible

and well supported by clear, transparent documentation of the entire research process, especially the analytical methods used to clarify differences in outcomes (McLeod, 2024b). To establish dependability in my study, I employed reflexive journaling during the data analysis phase. This practice, while invaluable, was challenging for me, as I often found the meticulous process of recording my thoughts and reflections tedious and time-consuming. However, through this process, I came to a crucial realization: my personal biases and preconceptions could significantly influence my interpretation of the data. By acknowledging and documenting these biases in my journal, I aimed to mitigate their impact on my analysis and ultimately strengthen the reliability of my findings.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which descriptions and patterns identified in one context can be applied to different settings (Stahl & King, 2020). Achieving transferability requires providing readers with a comprehensive array of data that enables them to evaluate the relevance of the findings across contexts (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). To establish transferability in my study, I provided rich, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives. I carefully aligned direct quotes with thematic categories, illustrating not only the specific insights gleaned but also how these categories evolved into broader themes that encapsulated the essence of the findings. This methodological approach invites readers to draw connections and consider the research's implications across diverse situations.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding failing the Nursing Fundamentals course?

Based on the data, eight of the nine participants identified academic demands and a lack of self-efficacy in the clinical setting as reasons for their failure in Nursing Fundamentals. Six participants also reported inadequate use of resources as a contributing factor. Participants 1, 3,

5, 6, and 8 cited all three reasons, academic demands, lack of self-efficacy, and inadequate use of resources, as causes of their struggles in Nursing Fundamentals. Participants 7 and 9 cited academic demands and a lack of self-efficacy in the clinical setting as reasons for their failure. Participant 4 reported a lack of self-efficacy and inadequate use of resources as contributing factors. These findings indicate that failure in Nursing Fundamentals is multifaceted. Table 2 presents research question 1 and its themes.

Table 2

Research Question 1: Codes, Categories, and Themes

Research Question	Codes	Categories	Themes
RQ1: What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding failing the Nursing Fundamentals course?	Academic Demands Unsuitable career Overwhelmed Pace Workload Difficult course Unsure how to study Learning style Lacked confidence Feeling Nervous And Intimidated: Performance Anxiety Sense of Being Unsuitable resources Inadequate use of resources Reluctance to seek help Did not consult the counselor	Academic Demands Academic Challenges Lack of self-efficacy in the clinical setting Inadequate Use of Resources Reluctance to seek help	Theme 1: Academic Challenges Theme 2: Low Self-Efficacy in the Clinical Setting Theme 3: Inadequate Use of Resources

Note. codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes for RQ1 based on participants' responses.

Theme 1: Academic Challenges. Academic challenges are defined as difficulties in performing successfully in the classroom and clinical settings and in integrating theory with practice. Academic demands and academic challenges were the categories used for theme 1. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 perceived academic demands as a reason for failing Nursing Fundamentals. Participant 1 stated, “Nursing Fundamentals was overwhelming for me. The pace was fast, and there was so much material to learn at once.” Participant 3 stated, “The course was more difficult than expected. I underestimated how much time it would take to study, and I found the workload overwhelming.” Participant 8 stated, “Nursing Fundamentals was overwhelming with so many exams and skills to master at once. I often felt like I could not keep up.”

Participants 6, 7, 8, and 9 reported that academic challenges may have contributed to their failure in Nursing Fundamentals. Participant 6 stated, “I quickly realized I did not have the right study strategies.” Participant 7 reported, “I constantly felt like I was a step behind.” Participant 9 stated, “I found the material fascinating but also difficult at times, especially since I had to balance theory with practical skills.”

The theme highlights the academic challenges nursing students face in the Nursing Fundamentals course, including the overwhelming pace, heavy workload, and difficulty integrating theory and practice. Many students linked course failures to these demands and expressed feeling constantly behind due to ineffective study strategies.

Theme 2: Low Self-efficacy in the Clinical Setting. Low self-efficacy in the clinical setting reflects a lack of confidence in one’s ability to perform skills accurately, typically under supervision. The category contributing to this theme is a lack of self-efficacy in the clinical setting. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 reported low self-efficacy in the clinical setting as a possible contributor to their failure in Nursing Fundamentals. Participant 4 stated that in the

clinical setting, “I felt nervous most of the time, which affected my confidence.” Participant 5 reported, “I felt intimidated. Being with patients made everything feel real, and I worried constantly about doing something wrong in front of the instructor.” Participant 6 reported, “I loved working with patients, but I often froze under pressure, especially when my instructor was observing me.”

The theme highlighted nursing students’ low self-efficacy in clinical settings, undermining their confidence in their clinical skills. Participants reported feeling nervous and intimidated when interacting with patients, leading to performance anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed, especially under instructors’ scrutiny, which affected their success in Nursing Fundamentals.

Theme 3: Inadequate Use of Resources. Inadequate use of resources is defined as failing to access available resources to address difficulties in the course. The categories that contributed to inadequate use of resources are inadequate use of resources and reluctance to seek help. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 reported that inadequate use of resources possibly contributed to their failure in Nursing Fundamentals. According to Participant 3, “I did not use the online modules as much as I should have.” Participant 8 stated, “I only went to office hours once because I was embarrassed to ask for help.” Participant 4 stated, “I did not use the counseling center because I was not sure it would help with academic struggles. I felt there was not enough support – sometimes it seemed like the faculty expected us to know already how to study at the nursing level.”

Theme 3 highlighted the underutilization of resources among nursing students, who were reluctant to seek support for academic challenges. Participants felt this reluctance negatively impacted their performance in Nursing Fundamentals, as many avoided using online modules,

hesitated to seek help during office hours, and doubted the effectiveness of counseling services.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding leaving the nursing program?

Of the nine participants who left the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals, mental health issues were the most frequently cited reasons for their attrition. The second-most-cited reasons for leaving the nursing program were financial burdens and the perceived best option of moving on. Three participants reported that their failure in Nursing Fundamentals led them to realize that nursing was an unsuitable career path. One participant cited academic expectations as a possible contributing factor for leaving the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals. Table 3 shows the themes for research question 2.

Table 3

Research Question 2: Codes, Categories, and Themes

Research Question	Codes	Categories	Themes
RQ2: What are the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding leaving the nursing program?	Lack of emotional support	Mental Health Issues	Theme 1: Mental Health Issues
	Felt defeated		
	Lost confidence	Financial Burdens	Theme 2: Financial Burdens
	Fear of repeated failure		
Lack of Economic Support	Best Option	Theme 3: Best Option	
The Costs of Retaking the Course			
Only choice	Unsuitable Career Path	Theme 4: Unsuitable Career Path	
Better moving on			
	Unsuitable for the profession	Academic expectations	
	Needed to reevaluate career goals		

Note. codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes for RQ1 based on participants' responses

Theme 1 Mental Health Issues. Mental health issues negatively affected students' ability to perform successfully in either the academic or clinical settings of the Nursing Fundamentals course. The category that contributed to mental health issues was mental health issues. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 reported that mental health issues were one of the reasons they decided to leave the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals. Participant 1 stated, "Failing Nursing Fundamentals felt like a huge setback, and it shook my confidence completely." Participant 3 stated, "After failing, I felt defeated." Participant 5 reported, "Failing made me question my abilities. I could not see myself going through the same stress again and possibly failing again."

This theme emphasized the impact of mental health issues on minority students in Nursing Fundamentals, noting that these challenges affected their academic and clinical performance. Many participants felt that mental health issues led them to withdraw from the program after failing, expressing defeat, lost confidence, and uncertainty about their abilities.

Theme 2: Financial Burdens. Financial burdens were possible economic issues that could have arisen from repeating the Nursing Fundamentals course. The category that contributed to financial burdens was financial burdens. Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 cited financial burdens as contributing to their leaving the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals. Participant 1 stated, "I did not have the financial or emotional support to repeat the class and risk failing again." Participant 3 reported, "Repeating the class would have cost money I did not have, and I was already working part-time to support myself." Participant 4 stated, "Financially, repeating the course was hard."

The theme of financial burdens related to retaking the Nursing Fundamentals course emerged prominently. Participants noted that financial difficulties significantly influenced their

decision to leave the nursing program after failing the course, citing a lack of both economic and emotional support, as well as the costs of retaking the course.

Theme 3: Best Option. The best option is defined as the only outcome that is pragmatic across all scenarios. The category that contributed to the best option was the best option. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 felt that after failing Nursing Fundamentals, their best option was to leave the nursing program. Participant 5 reported, “I thought it was better to move on than keep pushing against the wall.” Participant 7 stated, “I decided to step away instead of continuing.” Participant 8 reported, “After failing, I felt crushed and could not picture myself repeating everything, so I decided to leave.” Participants felt that, after struggling and failing in Nursing Fundamentals, withdrawing from the nursing program seemed like their best option, driven by discouragement and fears of future failure in demanding coursework.

Theme 4: Unsuitable Career Path. An unsuitable career path is the recognition that nursing is not the right career for them, based on difficulties encountered in the Nursing Fundamentals course. The categories that contributed to an unsuitable career path are academic expectations and unsuitable career path. Participants 1, 2, and 9 felt that failing Nursing Fundamentals made them leave the nursing program because they decided nursing was an unsuitable career path for them. Participant 1 stated, “I did not see a clear path forward.” Participant 2 reported, “I accepted I could not go on and went for career mentorship programs.” Participant 9 stated, “I felt it was best to take a step back and reevaluate my goals.”

Some nursing students realized that nursing was not right for them after struggling in the Nursing Fundamentals course. Their challenges prompted them to leave the program, revealing their lack of preparedness. They expressed uncertainty about their future, sought alternative career mentorship, and decided to reassess their goals.

Evaluation of the Outcomes

Thematic analysis was employed to explore former minority nursing students' perceptions of their failure in Nursing Fundamentals and their decision to leave the nursing program. Data were gathered from open-ended surveys and analyzed manually, yielding 7 themes in response to the two research questions. For research question 1, three themes emerged from the data analysis; for research question 2, four themes emerged.

Since failure in Nursing Fundamentals can lead to attrition from the nursing program, my goal was to explore the students' perspectives on these phenomena so measures could be taken early to prevent them. The participants' perceptions of their failure in Nursing Fundamentals and their consequent attrition from the nursing program were quite insightful and suggest that the factors contributing to these phenomena are multifactorial. The data gathered can contribute to the existing literature on minority attrition from nursing programs, thereby adding a piece to the puzzle of nursing program attrition. Nursing programs can use collected data to develop initiatives that address the specific needs of minority nursing students, thereby improving their success rates.

Research Question 1

Theme 1: Academic Challenges. This theme addressed the academic challenges nursing students faced in the Nursing Fundamentals course. Participants felt overwhelmed by the fast pace, heavy workload, and difficulty integrating theory and practice. Many attributed course failures to these demands, with comments reflecting the overwhelming nature of the coursework and a lack of effective study strategies, leaving them feeling constantly behind. This finding concurs with Owen's (2021) study, which found that a poor transition to nursing school can lead to scholastic failure.

Theme 2: Low Self-efficacy in the Clinical Setting. This theme underscored nursing students' low self-efficacy in clinical settings, which adversely affected their confidence in performing skills under supervision. Participants expressed feelings of nervousness and intimidation when interacting with patients, resulting in performance anxiety. They often felt overwhelmed, especially when under their instructors' watchful eye, which further hindered their success in Nursing Fundamentals. Page (2022) found that course failure is associated with self-efficacy issues, supporting this finding.

Theme 3: Inadequate Use of Resources. Theme 3 emphasized the underutilization of resources among nursing students, reflecting their reluctance to seek support for academic challenges. Participants noted that this reluctance might have adversely affected their performance in Nursing Fundamentals, with many underutilizing online modules, feeling embarrassed to seek help during office hours, and doubting the effectiveness of counseling services for academic issues. This finding aligns with Everett (2022) and Pusey-Reid and Blackman-Richards (2022), who found that students struggling to pass a course were most likely to be reluctant to use resources.

Research Question 2

Theme 1: Mental Health Issues. This theme highlighted the impact of mental health issues on students in the Nursing Fundamentals course, highlighting that these challenges hinder their academic and clinical performance. Many participants indicated that mental health concerns contributed to their decision to withdraw from the program after failing the course, expressing feelings of defeat, lost confidence, and uncertainty about their abilities. Elmir et al. (2019) and Merritt (2021) concurred that stress during nursing school contributed to students' decisions to leave the program. Additionally, Veasart and Cannon (2022) found in their analysis of nursing

students who did not complete the undergraduate program that mental health issues contributed to their inability to finish. Mingo's (2023) conclusion that students can experience loss and grief after failing a course also supports this finding.

Theme 2: Financial Burdens. The theme of financial burdens associated with retaking the Nursing Fundamentals course emerged prominently. Participants noted that financial difficulties significantly influenced their decision to leave the nursing program after failing the course, citing a lack of both economic and emotional support, as well as the costs of retaking the course. Crane and Abbott (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2021) identified financial issues, in addition to academic reasons, as the most frequently reported causes of attrition, supporting this finding.

Theme 3: Best Option. Participants reported that after facing challenges and ultimately failing Nursing Fundamentals, their most viable option was to withdraw from the nursing program entirely. This decision frequently stemmed from feelings of discouragement and a belief that they might fail in the demanding coursework ahead. This finding aligns with Eudy and Brooks' (2022) study, which showed that success in Nursing Fundamentals can influence a student's decision to remain in the nursing program.

Theme 4: Unsuitable Career Path. The theme of an unsuitable career path highlights that some nursing students discovered that nursing was not right for them after struggling in the Nursing Fundamentals course. Their challenges led them to leave the program, revealing their lack of preparedness. Participants expressed uncertainty about their next steps, sought alternative career mentorship, and decided to reassess their goals. This is supported by Brady et al.'s (2019) research, which showed that the first clinical experience in nursing is essential in a student's affirmation that they should pursue nursing.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study provided insights into the perceptions of former minority nursing students on possible contributors to their failure in Nursing Fundamentals and their consequent attrition from the nursing program. Based on the findings, Nursing Fundamentals, a rigorous course that integrates theory and practice, can be academically challenging for minority students, leading to course failure. Additionally, some minority nursing students who failed Nursing Fundamentals had low self-efficacy in clinical settings. Resources were available to assist students experiencing difficulties in courses, yet these students were reluctant to use them, as the findings show.

Concerning attrition from the nursing program, former minority nursing students identified mental health issues and financial burdens as contributors. They also believed that failure in Nursing Fundamentals indicated that nursing was an unsuitable career choice for them and, therefore, considered leaving the program their best option. Consequently, support systems such as tutoring sessions (Butler & Ardary, 2020), mentoring programs, and mental health resources (Mingo, 2023) can be essential to overcoming the barriers posed by the program's demands and mitigating mental health issues. Additionally, institutions should explore options for financial assistance to alleviate the financial burdens nursing students face (Noone et al., 2020). Connecting students with financial aid resources can promote the success of minority nursing students (Kirui & McGee, 2021).

Since failure in Nursing Fundamentals can lead to attrition from the nursing program (Eudy & Brooks, 2022), the goal would be for nurse faculty to identify early the students at risk for failure (Merritt, 2021) and to begin a timely individualized remediation plan tailored to address specific learning needs with input from the students to promote success (Butler &

Ardary, 2020). For minority nursing students at predominantly White institutions, the absence of minority faculty is a barrier to seeking help (Attis-Josias, 2023). Consequently, increasing the diversity of the nursing faculty could improve minority students' willingness to access resources (DeWitty & Murray, 2020) and create a more inclusive environment (Charania & Patel, 2022), thereby reducing failure and attrition. Additionally, creating an inclusive environment in which all students feel valued and supported, including diversity training for faculty, can help cultivate a culture of respect and understanding (Green, 2020; Miller & Vaughn, 2023), thereby enhancing the overall educational experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on Vincent Tinto's (1975) longitudinal model of student departure, participants' academic difficulties indicated a lack of educational integration, which contributed to failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course. Many participants identified low self-efficacy as contributing to their inability to succeed in nursing, and Page (2022) posited that self-efficacy can be improved through positive interactions with faculty. Participants' reluctance to access resources indicated that faculty interaction was limited, which affected social integration. Consequently, the lack of social and academic integration led to attrition from the program (Tinto, 1975). I believe that future researchers could build on this study by evaluating the effectiveness of faculty participation on minority nursing students' self-efficacy, success in Nursing Fundamentals, and attrition.

The future researcher could improve this study by focusing on minority nursing students' success in the Nursing Fundamentals course rather than their failures, because, based on my experience, no participants were willing to be interviewed about their failures in the course and the resulting attrition from the nursing program. Also, the future researcher could use interviews

and open-ended surveys to gather data. However, I recommend that the researcher first conduct interviews with participants, then select some of them for the survey, thereby facilitating data triangulation and enhancing credibility.

Conclusions

This descriptive qualitative study investigated the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding their failure in Nursing Fundamentals and their subsequent withdrawal from the nursing program. The study addressed the problem that minority nursing students who failed the Nursing Fundamentals course were at risk of dropping out of their nursing programs. Data for this study were collected via an open-ended survey, and three themes were identified regarding failure in Nursing Fundamentals, which were: 1) academic challenges, 2) low self-efficacy in the clinical setting, and 3) inadequate use of resources. Four themes were identified for nursing program attrition, which were: 1) mental health issues, 2) financial burdens, 3) best option, and 4) unsuitable career path.

The findings for research question one, which explored the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding failure in Nursing Fundamentals, indicated that minority nursing students' failure in Nursing Fundamentals stems from academic challenges, low self-efficacy in the clinical setting, and inadequate use of resources. These findings were supported by previous research. Participants reported academic challenges, including feeling overwhelmed by a rigorous course, difficulty performing clinical skills under faculty supervision, and reluctance to seek resources when experiencing challenges in the course, which may have contributed to their failure. These perceptions provide valuable information for nursing faculty, enabling a better understanding of possible contributors to failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course, identifying at-risk students early, and formulating individualized remediation plans in

which students participate in identifying their needs.

The findings for question two, which investigated the perceptions of former minority nursing students regarding their decision to leave the nursing program, indicated that mental health issues, financial burdens, the best option, and an unsuitable career path were also supported by previous research. Participants reported they experienced mental health issues such as defeat, discouragement, and loss of confidence in their abilities after failing Nursing Fundamentals, so they left the nursing program. The financial burden of retaking the course, along with a lack of financial and emotional support, led some participants to leave the nursing program. Some participants felt it was the best option to leave the nursing program after experiencing academic challenges in Nursing Fundamentals and ultimately failing the course. Additionally, some participants reported that after failing Nursing Fundamentals, they concluded that nursing was an unsuitable career path and needed to reassess their goals and seek career mentoring.

The central message of this study is that former minority nursing students' perceptions of their failure in the Nursing Fundamentals course and their decisions to leave the nursing program are multifactorial in nature. The findings recommend faculty interaction with minority nursing students to foster social integration and increase self-efficacy. These interactions enable the identification and timely remediation of academic difficulties in the Nursing Fundamentals course through a personalized remediation plan that incorporates students' input on their needs, thereby preventing course failure. Success in a course demonstrates academic integration, and, when combined with social integration, it increases student retention and reduces attrition.

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Appendix A

Permission to use Figure 1

Permission to use Figure 1 granted by Dr. Vincent Tinto on 1/25/24.

Dear Karon:

Please feel free to use the figure in question.

Vincent Tinto

On Jan 24, 2024, at 7:34 PM, Karon Walters <K.Walters1827@o365.ncu.edu> wrote:

Good day, Dr. Tinto,

My name is Karon Walters, and I am pursuing my doctorate in nursing education. I am researching nursing students' attrition in community colleges for my dissertation and feel privileged to use your theory of attrition as my theoretical framework. I am requesting permission to use your figure "A conceptual schema for dropout from college" from Review of Educational Research, volume 45, issue 1, page 95. Can I use the figure with your permission? Please let me know. Thank you in advance for your help. Have a great day!

Sincerely,

Karon Walters

Appendix B

IRB Approval

9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

February 11, 2025

To: Karon Walters

Project Title: A Case Study of the Perspectives of Former Minority Nursing Students in the Nursing Fundamentals Course

NU IRB Number: IRB-FY24-25-394

Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of February 11, 2025

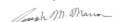
Dear Karon Walters:

The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.

Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: [Approved Documents Guidelines](#)

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair



Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB



Jessica Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix C

Recruitment Poster



Karon W.

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Hello everyone, my name is Karon Walters, a doctoral candidate at National University. I am trying to find participants for my research. I am interested in former nursing students' perspectives on their experiences with failing Nursing Fundamentals and their decision to leave the nursing program. This is voluntary research, and I am recruiting individuals who meet all these criteria:

1. You are age 18 or older
2. You identify as a minority (Black, Latinx, Asian, American Indian)
3. You attended nursing school at either a four-year college or a community college
4. You failed Nursing Fundamentals no earlier than 2015
5. You left the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals

Anyone who decides to participate will do either of the following activities:

1. Participate in a one-to-one online interview over Zoom for 45-60 minutes
2. Review the interview transcript via email for 15 minutes

OR

1. Complete an online survey for 30 minutes

The questions in both the interview and the survey will be about

- Your classroom and clinical experiences in Nursing Fundamentals
- Your failure in Nursing Fundamentals
- Your decision to leave the nursing program

Your information will be kept confidential.

Please contact me at K.Walters1827@o365.ncu.edu to participate in the interview

Please click the link below to participate in the survey

<https://lnkd.in/eec-rNsS>

Participants in this study will receive a \$30 Amazon gift card via email.

Those participating in the survey should contact me at K.Walters1827@o365.ncu.edu after completion to receive the gift card.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research! Looking forward to meeting you!

Karon Walters

Appendix D

Survey Questions

Demographic Information:

- 1) In what state did you attend nursing school?
- 2) What year did you leave the nursing program?

Survey Questions

- 1) What made you decide to attend nursing school?
- 2) What assistance did you receive during the college application process?
- 3) How did you feel about going to college?
- 4) How do you think your family felt about you choosing to study nursing?
- 5) Tell me about your experience in the Nursing Fundamentals course.
- 6) Tell me how you felt in the clinical setting.
- 7) What resources did the institution provide to support students failing in Nursing Fundamentals?
- 8) Which of these resources did you use?
- 9) What made you decide to leave the nursing program after failing Nursing Fundamentals?
- 10) What would you have done differently to help you pass the course?