

# Challenges and Opportunities of Internship Method in Technologist Surgery Undergraduate Interns: A Qualitative Content Analysis Study

## Abstract

**Background:** In the clinical environment, clinical education is one of the components of nursing education that transforms a student from a novice to a competent student. This professional transition can be taught in a variety of methods. One of these ways is training students through internships. The purpose of this study is to examine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of internships for undergraduate surgical technology students. **Materials and Methods:** In this qualitative content analysis based on SWOT theory, ten faculty trainers, non-faculty trainers, operating room supervisors, and undergraduate intern students in the operating room field were selected based on the entry criteria. Then, based on the mentioned theory, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants, the questions were asked, and after extracting the codes, classification was performed based on the SWOT theory. **Results:** Based on the findings, four subcategories of strengths, weaknesses, problems, and opportunities were identified in the management and implementation domain. The most often used code for its qualities was enhancing the student's communication with the surgical team and lowering his nervousness. The most repeated code in its weak points were using the student as a tool and staying away from working scientifically. **Conclusions:** Based on the results of the present study, an internship in the operating room can solve the problem of lack of human resources to a large extent, however, it can lead to the improvement of the professional skills of students during the internship period, provided that the work of students, and staff is based on scientific principles.

**Keywords:** Clinical, evaluation, internship, operating rooms, students

## Introduction

Clinical education is the central part of nursing education, in which the student applies scientific knowledge in the clinical environment by helping an instructor, strengthening fundamental and specialized skills.<sup>[1]</sup> Operating room technology is a branch of medical science that is taught at the continuous undergraduate level in Iran. Graduates of this program are involved in pre-, intra-, and post-operative care and are familiar with the fundamentals of the operating room as well as a variety of surgical techniques, equipment, and tools.<sup>[2]</sup> Working in this environment requires capable and skilled forces because it is highly sensitive. The slightest mistake can damage the patient and other surgical team members.<sup>[3]</sup> Various studies considered three main issues essential in understanding the competence of experts in this field: knowledge (theoretical knowledge, practical

and situational knowledge), teamwork and communication with colleagues and patients, and the ability to coordinate and manage.<sup>[4,5]</sup> Studies demonstrated that practical experience gained in the operating room environment can help students better understand their specific roles, and make them aware of the importance of working and communicating as part of a team.<sup>[6]</sup> The operating room environment has become main training area for technologists, and it focuses on collaboration with specialist staff, working and performing as part of a team, and fully understanding safe operating room programs.<sup>[7]</sup> However, research has indicated that the high levels of stress in the operating room have a detrimental<sup>[8]</sup> impact on students' professional development and the process of turning information into action. Knowledge management is dysfunctional,<sup>[9]</sup> learning opportunities and safety are decreased<sup>[10]</sup> as a result,

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and medical errors will rise as graduates of the operating room field lack the skills needed to perform clinical work.<sup>[11]</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that the conventional methods of nursing education, which are attended by the students with close and controlled supervision by instructors. It is related that it was not successful to obtain necessary professional preparation to pass from the role of a student to an independent professional role, and the need for transformation in educational planning is felt.<sup>[12]</sup> One of the mechanisms that the faculties developed for the final year of nursing students is to prepare a 1-year training program in the form of an internship, where the student, after completing the theory units, will work full-time in the clinical environment and alongside the members of treatment team becomes a professional nurse the internship plan, which requires close cooperation between the university and the hospital, and the students work under the supervision of the head of department along with the competent nurses present in that shift as a guide and clinical instructor, to create a stress-free atmosphere for the student.<sup>[13]</sup> In addition to monitoring and resolving students' academic and non-academic concerns, educational coaches should also assess students' success in meeting learning objectives in an indirect manner. The implementation of internship-style programs for nursing students has been demonstrated by Wolinsky-Nahmias and Auerbach<sup>[14]</sup> to not only ease the transition of students into their professional roles, but, with proper implementation, to mitigate the issue of the nation's nursing staff shortage. Lei and Yin stated that internships provide the students with an opportunity to apply classroom learning in a practical environment, while actively engaging in a professional capacity.<sup>[16]</sup> At the beginning of internship, students are likely to face several challenges until they become familiar with various tasks required. This hands-on learning opportunity allows students to work closely with a faculty advisor and an intern employer, thus promoting partnerships between the college and the community.<sup>[15,16]</sup> Furthermore, in a study conducted by Bukaliya<sup>[17]</sup> in Zimbabwe, although the internship allows students to be educated according to the needs of the society, it has some challenges that he points out: some may not have the patience or the opportunity to teach the students. To be consider the existence or presence of students as a threat to themselves. Besides, the qualifications of some people may be lower than students.

Considering the cases and the fact that the internship plan has been implemented for the first time to train undergraduate students in the field of operating room technology at Dezful University of Medical Sciences, the researcher deems it imperative to conduct a study to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of this plan to enhance learning. This study aimed to explain the challenges, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses of Technologist Surgery Undergraduate Intern at Dezful University of Medical Sciences internship plan.

## Materials and Methods

**Study design and setting:** In this qualitative content analysis conducted study from September 24, 2022 to July 23, 2023 after obtaining permission from Dezful University of Medical Sciences, Iran, the Research Vice-Chancellor, ten available and objective participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for faculty members: designer or executor of surgical technology intern's internship method. The inclusion criteria for non-faculty members are a minimum of 2 years of work experience in the operating room. Criteria for student inclusion: Participation in an internship for a minimum of 6 months. The following are the exclusion criteria for students: operating room bachelor trainee students and operating room nurses: an associate degree, work experience of less than 5 years, unwillingness to participate in the project, and attendance at the fixed morning shift. Then, the time and place of interview were selected via prior coordination with the participant. A face-to-face interview was conducted with semi-structured questions, such as: "Give me your opinion about implementing the internship method?" It started, and then exploratory questions, such as questions about challenges, strengths, weaknesses, etc., were asked. The participants' responses were recorded with their satisfaction and then noted down and analyzed by the researcher. First, the codes were extracted, and then, based on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) theory, the codes were placed in the classes. SWOT model is a tool for evaluating managerial and educational situations.<sup>[18]</sup>

If the participants wanted, their voices were recorded, and after recording, the researcher took notes and then analyzed the interview. Content analysis was done by a nurse with 2 years of experience working in operating room, 6 years as a faculty member of the operating room group, and more than five of qualitative researches. The interviews were conducted that lasted between 25 and 55 min. The researcher adhered to the inclusion criteria during the sample selection process. The data was collected and analyzed by the researcher for a year to guarantee its accuracy and acceptability. Experts and participants verified the data's accuracy. Additionally, two researchers coded the recorded interviews. Additionally, two researchers coded the recorded interviews, and their reliability was verified by achieving an agreement above nine-tenths. The validity of interview was ensured by restating and summarizing the implied concepts and asking the participants to confirm their accuracy. The method is explained in detail to achieve consistency so that others can follow the research steps. Therefore, the transferability of information is improved by describing the demographic characteristics of the participants to allow the audience to choose how to implement the results.

Data analysis was done based on SWOT theory. SWOT analysis (or SWOT matrix) is a strategic planning and

management technique to help a person or organization identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to business competition or project planning.<sup>[19]</sup> Sometimes, it is called situational assessment or situational analysis.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Ethical considerations**

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Research Vice-Chancellor of Dezful University of Medical Sciences with the ethical code IR.DUMS.REC.1401.083. Furthermore, the participants reviewed and endorsed the informed consent document for their involvement in this research. Prior to each interview, participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of their information and informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

**Results**

There were 10 participants in this research, including four faculty members, one non-faculty member, one operating room manager, and four students [Table 1]. In data analysis, four subcategories were extracted [Figure 1]: In the data analysis, 215 codes were obtained, and after removing duplicates, 32 codes were placed in four categories.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics and background information of the participants**

Age	Gender	Education	Position	Work experience
42	Female	PHD	faculty member	16
37	Female	Mastery	faculty member	14
30	Female	Mastery	faculty member	5
29	Female	Mastery	faculty member	5
41	Female	Mastery	Non faculty member	17
54	Female	Bachelor	operating room manager	32
23	Female	Diploma	Student	1
24	Female	Diploma	Student	1
25	Male	Diploma	Student	1
22	Male	Diploma	Student	1

**Strength points**

Most of the participants expressed that the strengths of the implementation of this plan were improving student and staff interaction, reducing student anxiety, building self-confidence in students, increasing student independence, getting familiar with the flow of tasks in different shifts, gaining new experiences, acquiring the ability to think critically, making more clinical decisions, socialization, developing time management ability, facilitating the passage of professional role, more responsibility of personnel towards students, feeling of security against confusion, and feeling of belonging to the surgical team. However, some students with low internship grades showed more student confusion in this model.

Participant 1: *“In this project, we saw that students and staff became more responsible.”*

Participant 8: *“We ran similarly to the staff and were considered as the surgical team members.”*

Participant 10: *“They always wanted us to go from this room to another room be circular.”*

**Weakness points**

The majority of the participants observed that the student’s theoretical knowledge was diminished, the student was using tools, the student was more fatigued, the workload of the personnel increased, the student was distant from the primary performance, the operating room experts were unable to answer theoretical questions, the activities in non-academic hospitals were more challenging, the faculty members were located far from the operating room, and the practical knowledge of the faculty members was reduced.

Participant 3: *“One of the disadvantages of this plan is that the number of hours we go to the operating room will decrease, and most of the students are looking for tasks such as tracking the lack of equipment and registering the staff shifts in the staff movement system, and they act as if*



**Figure 1: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis Internship Method in technologists' surgery student**

they are in charge of the operating room Because of the science of surgery is evolving and new surgical tools and surgical techniques are introduced, some of our skills will gradually decrease .”

Participant 7: “The staff do not know how to answer the questions we ask in the field of pathophysiology or patient anatomy.”

### Challenges

Some of the challenging aspects of implementing this educational plan were identified by the participants as the lack of motivation among the students, the manner of supervision by the manager, the control of the correct implementation of the exercises, and the lack of rest space and comfort facilities.

Participant 4: “Sometimes the person in charge of operating room cannot properly manage the students and does not pay attention to their attendance hours, which is why the group manager needs to supervise the students in parallel and indirectly.”

Participant 3: “The group director should have a written program to supervise the interns and the scope of authority of operating room manager should be specified, to prevent the opportunity of any abuse of the student in the operating room.”

### Opportunities

Most of the participants noted more interaction between the university and the hospital, compensating for the lack of operating room nurses, a solution to reduce the problem of the lack of instructors in educational groups, reducing the workload of faculty instructors, creating opportunities for instructors to do non-educational tasks, and increasing financial income for officials and expert personnel, earning points for participation in training (incentive) for officials and expert personnel as opportunities to implement this training plan.

Participant 6: “For those of us who are not members of faculties, it is a good opportunity to get educational points for our promotion.”

Participant 2: “Implementing this plan is very good for those of us who lack operating room instructors.”

### Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to explore this curriculum’s strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. The internship period is an excellent opportunity for nursing students to gain independence, expertise, skills, and self-confidence<sup>[21]</sup> Final-year nursing students by being placed in a natural clinical environment and experiencing work shifts, ward routines, regulations, and communication with colleagues, as well as using experienced and qualified personnel as student training instructors, help improve the clinical competence of students.<sup>[22]</sup>

Liu *et al.* demonstrated that the student’s presence, independent of the instructor’s direct presence, would enable the student to acquire new experiences in a variety of situations. This would also necessitate the student to think more critically and deeply, and to solve problems using the knowledge of science and the experiences of others. The department’s nurses will develop new skills and knowledge,<sup>[23]</sup> identify their clinical issues,<sup>[24]</sup> and, by resolving them, advance their professional development.<sup>[25]</sup> In the complex and risky environment of the operating room, interpersonal conflict is relatively common, so communication with the surgical team is the most challenging exercise for the students of operating room technology.<sup>[26]</sup> Facing the tense operating room environment, humiliating experiences, and non-acceptance by the surgical team as a member was the most critical challenge for surgical technology students, which has deprived them of educational opportunities and professional ability.<sup>[3]</sup> The continuous and regular presence of operating room students in the morning and evening shifts without the presence of a clinical instructor similar to staff working in the department can create an opportunity for more communication with the surgical team, as the participants said, We run along with the staff and are members of the surgical team. They are integrated as part of the surgical team, facilitating chances for learning, experience acquisition, and enhancement of their professional skills and competencies. This method effectively decreases financial expenditures for medical facilities, a notable strength corroborated by other investigations.<sup>[27]</sup> But, in addition to the positive and constructive consequences in the socialization and transition experience of the students, they have noted that the staff’s attitude towards us was more instrumental; they all told us to go from one room to another room, and so they told us to be circular and forbade us from doing basic things, which made us tired and feel uncomfortable. Studies demonstrated that in the current solution, nursing internships are far from the professional responsibilities of department. Notwithstanding the explicitness of the internship philosophy and program designed for students to collaborate independently with the internship department, the department staff do not accommodate the students. Despite assigning part of primary work to the students, they ignore their personnel; in this case, they do not have the necessary ability and competence to perform specialized and professional affairs.<sup>[28]</sup> Therefore, with the current procedure, the student’s commitment and responsibility do not grow and develop which should be corrected in practice.<sup>[29,30]</sup>

Inappropriate and unprofessional behavior of surgeons and personnel was among other cases Guo *et al.*<sup>[31]</sup> reported that staff didn’t show suitable behavior toward the students and ignored them.<sup>[32]</sup> The department’s daily program included untrained and non-specialist personnel, which was another flaw in Verwood’s intervention plan. This led to a lack of training and confusion,<sup>[33]</sup> as well as a decrease

in the students' self-confidence.<sup>[34]</sup> Thus, it is essential that the instructors, working with the supervisors, assign the students to skilled and informed staff in accordance with the prior planning and appropriately monitor the attainment of the learning objectives. There were experienced employees who did not want to train and cooperate with students and said, "We have a lot of work, and we don't have enough time for training." Lack of enough time, lack of interest in training, and lack of theoretical preparation for the internship were problems reported by the nurses in the study by Souza, which led to disruption in the development of the internship,<sup>[35]</sup> which is consistent with the results of present study.

The participants expressed the lack of supervision of entry and exit: "Sometimes operating room manager cannot properly manage the students and ignores their attendance hours, which is where the group manager needs to cover the students in parallel and indirectly. Training new professional students requires supervision from the service nurse and supervisors, particularly from supervisors, who "must be significantly involved in education, which, depending on how they do their activities, may fill gaps in their way of working and their knowledge."<sup>[36]</sup> According to this perspective, they need to design their daily activities to foster students' growing independence, teamwork, and, ultimately, professional maturity.<sup>[37]</sup> This important matter should not be implemented except with the participation of university professors on a part-time basis in hospitals, as well as holding numerous meetings and talking with supervisors and personnel about their problems and challenges. It is necessary for students to attend these meetings to understand that they still need educational support. Lack of motivation among students was one of other things that staff and supervisors expressed about students. They reported that the students were tremendously motivated at the start of their internship. Nonetheless, their drive dwindled with each passing day, resulting in several unexplained absences toward the conclusion of the internship. Motivation is one of the variables that influence learning, and it serves as a foundation for reflection and critique of the concerns highlighted.<sup>[38]</sup> Studies showed that students do not find independent work during the internship or gain valuable experiences for transitioning to the nursing role, so they are unmotivated and reluctant to work.<sup>[39,40]</sup> Therefore, their motivation will increase with real professional support, self-confidence, and opportunities to overcome fearful situations. Finally, the lack of a place to rest and amenities were some weaknesses the participants reported. The lack of infrastructure and human resources was the reality of healthcare services for a long time,<sup>[41]</sup> and this lack is more felt in the intern group because they are present in the hospital all the time, so university managers and medical centers should find a solution for this challenge.<sup>[42]</sup>

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the present study, it should be concluded that implementing this plan has challenges and weaknesses that can be removed or adjusted to help improve the professional competence of intern students. Consequently, it is recommended that the educational groups of the faculties, in conjunction with the supervisors of the groups, take the management of the internship courses more seriously. At the conclusion of each course, question-and-answer sessions should be conducted in the presence of students and clinical instructors to solicit their opinions and suggestions. Subsequently, suitable solutions should be devised to address the existing issues, thereby enhancing the quality of the internship courses. One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted in a hospital that lacks resident students in all surgical departments, and the results may not be generalizable to students working in universities with residents in surgical departments. Another limitation of research was that in the selection of the participants, all the trainers were female, therefore there was a limitation in terms of gender diversity.

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## Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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