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International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: A systematic thematic synthesis of the literature

Caroline A. Browne, Catherine M. Fetherston, Kristina Medigovich

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INTERNATIONAL CLINICAL PLACEMENTS FOR AUSTRALIAN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE.

Word Count: 4443

AUTHORS

Caroline A Browne
Lecturer (Nursing) School of Health Professions, Murdoch University
Phone: +61 8 9582 5556
PO Box 1937, Mandurah, WA, 6210, Australia
Email: c.browne@murdoch.edu.au

Catherine M Fetherston
Associate Professor, Discipline Head (Nursing), School of Health Professions, Murdoch University
Phone: +61 8 9582 5516
PO Box 1937, Mandurah, WA, 6210, Australia
Email: c.fetherston@murdoch.edu.au

Kristina Medigovich
Lecturer (Nursing) School of Health Professions, Murdoch University
Phone: +61 8 9582 5512
PO Box 1937, Mandurah, WA, 6210, Australia
Email: k.medigovich@murdoch.edu.au
ABSTRACT

Objectives — International clinical placements provide undergraduate nursing students with the opportunity to experience or practice nursing care in diverse countries, settings and cultures. This systematic review aims to ascertain the current knowledge on international clinical placements offered by undergraduate nursing programs in Australia. It seeks to explore three questions (1) How have previous experiences of nursing students’ international clinical placements been described? (2) How have participants and stakeholders determined if the placement has been successful? And (3) What benefits or challenges have been identified by stakeholders as a result of participating in international clinical placements?

Design — A systematic thematic synthesis was undertaken.

Data Sources — A search of electronic databases including CINAHL, Proquest Central, Scopus, PubMed and Health Collection was undertaken between September and October 2014.

Review Methods — Key terms including ‘international clinical placement’ ‘study abroad’ ‘international exchange’ ‘nursing’ and ‘Australia’ were used to identify articles that appeared in peer-reviewed English language journals and that explored international clinical placements offered to undergraduate nursing students by Australian universities.

Results — Eight studies were identified that meet the inclusion criteria, and through thematic analysis five key themes were identified including developing cultural awareness and competence, providing a global perspective on healthcare, putting theoretical understanding into practice in the field, growing personally through reflection and overcoming apprehension to successfully meet the challenge. A comparison search of literature from Canada and the United Kingdom revealed similar themes occurred internationally.

Conclusions — Although personal successes were identified by students undertaking international clinical placement, further research is required to identify all stakeholder experiences including those of the educators, the educational institutions and travel providers supporting these placements and the communities where the placements take place.

Keywords — Nursing, undergraduate, international clinical placement, cultural awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing emergence of globalisation as an economic, educational and research priority has seen tertiary education institutions place a greater emphasis on preparing their students to work in multicultural and international settings. Given the impact that the diverse cultural makeup and current global climate can have on community health at all levels, the incorporation of components of international health and cultural competence is an important consideration for nursing programs and educators. Whether preparing nurses to either care for an increasingly...
culturally diverse patient population in their own countries or for a career path that may potentially cross international borders, achieving quality health care within this framework requires nurses to be culturally competent (Jeffreys & Smolilaka, 1999). The process of developing cultural competence must begin within their nursing education, however moving students from a theoretical knowledge of culture into an applied practical competence can be seen as a challenge. A possible solution to this ongoing problem is to provide students with the opportunity to undertake international clinical placements (ICPs).

**BACKGROUND**

The need to provide students with opportunities to develop cultural competence has resulted in educational institutions offering ICPs for small numbers of students, to enable them to experience living and practising within a different cultural environment. Different models of ICPs have been used within undergraduate nursing programs and range from short observational style practicums to longer term clinical exchanges. Placements have involved students travelling to both developed and developing countries to provide students with experience in a diverse range of settings from primary health care and health promotion (Ailinger, Molloy & Scasa, 2009; Hu, Andreatta, Yu & Li, 2010) to mental health nursing (Singh, Bartle, Hurrell, Slater & Hemingway, 2009), and to observe the differences in healthcare systems and how they are impacted by differing political, social, economic and cultural influences.

This systematic synthesis of the literature forms part of a larger research project that aims to develop a deeper understanding of how multiple stakeholders assign meaning and value to the successful development and outcomes of ICPs with a particular focus on those placements being undertaken in the Asian region. Gaining a greater insight into the range and scope of activities currently being undertaken in this area is particularly relevant considering the rise of Asia as an emerging economic powerhouse, and as the need to broaden and deepen our links with our regional neighbours grows (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). In response to the aims of this project this review was undertaken to ascertain the current knowledge on international clinical placements completed by Australian undergraduate nursing students in recent years and consequently sought to answer a number of questions: “How have previous experiences of nursing students’ International Clinical Placements been described?” “How have participants and stakeholders determined if the placement has been successful?” and “What benefits or challenges have been identified by stakeholders as a result of participating in International Clinical Placements?” It is hoped through asking these questions a picture will begin to emerge of how we currently view ICPs and highlight the gaps in our knowledge of this important area of undergraduate nurse education.

**METHODS**

A search of published literature was undertaken between September and December 2014 using databases that are recognised as containing extensive health, nursing and education references including CINAHL, Proquest Central,
Scopus, Pubmed and Health Collection. The search included terms ‘international clinical placement’, ‘study abroad’, ‘international exchange’, ‘nursing’ and ‘Australia’. The resulting search literature was also reviewed for alternate key terms that may elicit further relevant titles. Terms such as ‘international immersion experience’, ‘cultural immersion experience’ and ‘international health care experience’ were evident in the literature however appeared more relevant to studies undertaken in North America and yielded no new results in the Australian context. Inclusion criteria was limited to peer-reviewed research articles in English language journals related to ICPs offered by Australian Universities for undergraduate nursing students. It was decided to only include those articles that have undergone peer-review process, although it is possible that narrative or commentary based articles, unpublished thesis or other ‘grey’ literature may shed light on this experience. However due to the difficulty of establishing the validity of these sources they are not included in this review. Articles were limited to those published after 1990 however following review of all articles, none published prior to 1997 met the inclusion criteria for this review. The search yielded a total of 290 possible articles (Table 1 provides further detail of the literature retrieval process), yielding a total of seven articles that met the inclusion criteria. Careful examination of the reference list of each of the final seven articles failed to uncover any new peer-reviewed studies. A cited reference search was conducted of the original seven articles for subsequently published papers that resulted in the addition of an eighth article to the synthesis.

A thematic synthesis approach was used to organise the data presented in the included articles. Due to the largely qualitative nature of the articles included in this review, which are drawn from data that is not intended to be generalizable and is not without bias, an approach was required that would take into account the interpretive nature of the studies (Bearman & Dawson, 2013). A key strength of thematic synthesis is its ability to allow for conclusions that are based on common elements or themes drawn from multiple divergent studies (Lucas, Baird, Arai, Law & Roberts, 2007). Articles were summarised with information collected on aim, research design and methodology, limitations and key findings, an overview for each article is included in Table 2. Initially line by line coding was conducted on the results section of each article using NVivo 10 (QRS International, 2014) to support the process. Initial codes were then explored with frequently occurring codes developed into themes. These themes were then viewed through the lens of the research questions posed as part of this systematic review. This approach allowed the creation of analytical themes and translation of concepts across studies, from initial line by line coding, to the organisation of codes into descriptive themes, and finally the generation of analytical themes (Lucas et al, 2007).

**FINDINGS**

The systematic review uncovered eight studies describing ICPs in both developed countries such as England and Northern Ireland (Grant & Mckenna, 2003) and developing countries including Cambodia (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014), Thailand (Reid-Searl, Dwyer, Moxham, Happell & Sander, 2011; Inglis, Rolls & Kristy, 1998; Rolls, Inglis & Kristy, 1997), Nepal (Inglis, Rolls & Kristy, 2000), India (Charles, Maltby, Abrams, Shea, Brand & Nicol, 2014) and International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
Tanzania (Michael, Della, Banner, Duckworth & Nilson, 2012). The length of placements varies considerably from only eight days (Inglis et al, 2000) to five weeks (Charles et al, 2014). The articles included one quantitative study and seven qualitative studies, and as can be seen in Table 2, all studies were focused on a single international clinical placement. A variety of methods were used to collect data from participating students and data collection often took place at multiple points across the international placement experience.

The qualitative studies, with the exception of Tuckett and Crompton (2014) have a small sample size (ranging from three to nine participants), making generalisation to other settings difficult. However, consistent themes were discovered throughout the articles. Detailed summaries of the articles reviewed are presented in Table 2 to ensure that the original context of the studies is retained. A key argument against the synthesis of qualitative research is that the findings may be de-contextualised and that concepts from one setting may not be transferrable to another (Lucas et al, 2007). However information on the studies has been woven through the discussion of the analytical themes generated in an attempt to preserve the context of the studies that formed their basis.

Themes identified included ‘developing cultural awareness and competence’, ‘providing a global perspective on healthcare’, ‘translation of theory to practice’, ‘growing personally through reflection’ and ‘overcoming apprehension to successfully meet the challenge’. A diagrammatic representation of the process of moving from initial coding, to descriptive themes and finally to the analytical themes presented for discussion is shown in Table 3 using the theme growing personally through reflection as an example.

DISCUSSION

Developing cultural awareness and competence

Developing cultural competence and increasing cultural awareness was seen as an important outcome by both students and educators across the seven studies, with students expressing the importance of having a global awareness. This was evidenced in the Tuckett and Crompton (2014) study where students were able to reflect on how their experience of culture in Cambodia gave them an appreciation of global health issues that they may potentially encounter within the multicultural society back in Australia, through comments such as: ‘health care professionals need to have an understanding of different cultures’ and ‘(the placement) provides them with an appreciation of global health issues’ (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014, p 138). Students perceived the experience helped them to broaden their perspective and made them more aware of a different culture within its country of origin.

The observation and emersion that students are able to experience enables them to make comparisons between cultures leading to the potential for acknowledgement and integration into professional practice. This can best be articulated through the reflection of a student completing a two week international placement in Tanzania: ‘The similarity is that children are treasured in both cultures, as seen by the tender way the nurse comforted the child.'
While medical practice is manifested differently across cultures, the basic elements of love and care are the same.’ (Photograph 2, Michael et al, 2012). During a placement in India (Charles et al, 2014) a similar perception led students to recognise the validity of the Indian health care system, aided by their increased understanding of the Indian culture ‘I fully understand that they believe in how they care for their patients and implement nursing practices are those of high standards looking from the outside and I too would protect these beliefs of mine and probably would not like for a foreigner dictating how nursing procedures should be structured’ (Journal 8, Charles et al, 2014).

As a result of undertaking an ICP students recognised that they were also experiencing a different nursing culture than that which they had so far been familiar with. The recognition of nursing culture as distinct from ethnic culture, while recognised in multiple studies, was particularly evident in the study of a student placement in England and Northern Ireland (Grant & Mckenna, 2003). This was the only study included that focused on a placement in a developed country and with a culture that was most similar to that encountered in Australia. Despite the similarities in cultures students were able to recognise differences on both a micro and a macro level. Micro differences commented on were those such as differences in performing nursing skills, with comments such as ‘There was a lot of old-fashioned routines’ and ‘Haven’t seen aseptic technique used during dressing changes’. Whilst students also recognised macro differences in organisational structure and health care delivery with comments being made in relation to the hierarchy in the health care organisation, such as: ‘Doctors garner an abnormally large amount of, well more a sort of intimidated fear’. Such comments indicated students found the setting to be sufficiently different from the Australian health care system to warrant mention.

Providing a global perspective on health care

International clinical placements allow students to not only experience a different culture but also observe and practice within a different health care system. The ability for students to recognise the differences between Australia’s health care system and that of the destination country was evident in all seven studies however this contrast was greater in those studies of placements undertaken in developing countries. Whilst some students focused on the lack of resources and the large numbers of patients requiring care as a perceived barrier to ‘effective’ or ‘Westernised’ health care, others were able to recognise that providing effective health care is not about resources alone (Michael et al, 2012). The development of this understanding was evidenced by students in Dar Es Salaam (Michael et al, 2012) and in India (Charles et al, 2014) who recognised that with sound knowledge of the principles underlying good care, shortcomings in resources could be overcome. This understanding is reflected by the following student comments ‘The surgical area lacked a change room; instead workers changed into their clean scrubs in the office. The sluice room lacked hot water and was placed directly next to the theatre; however, it was clean, a bottle of methylated spirits placed prominently on the sink. It reminded me that providing health care comes from sound principles, not merely access to equipment and by using the provided space well, shortcomings can be overcome’ (Michael et al, 2012); and ‘although the standards and procedures are different to Australia, the
knowledge (from doctors and nurses) appears to be there (example healthy eating, antenatal screening etc.). It seems to be a matter of educating the village residents on healthy living practices rather than having expensive equipment and extensive facilities’ (Journal 5, Charles et al, 2014).

**Translation of theory to practice**

Undergraduate nursing programs include clinical practicum experiences throughout the degree to allow students the opportunity to consolidate their theoretical knowledge and apply it in a clinical setting. The evidence presented in these articles suggests that students believe that ICPs offer them the ability to make this progression. Students who attended a clinical placement in Cambodia noted that ‘learning about and improving knowledge of child health, physical assessment and the scope of the role of the nurse in a ‘disadvantaged community’ setting was invaluable’ (Tuckett & Crompton, 2012, p 140). This sentiment was echoed by the authors of two other studies: one a Tanzanian placement where ‘students recognised they could still provide care with what resources were available. As a consequence, an appreciation for their own pre-existing skills and knowledge was identified’ (Michael et al, 2012, p26) and in another placement in Surin, Thailand that ‘had assisted them to gain an understanding of how culture impacts on health care beyond what could have been learned at a theoretical level’ (Reid-Searl et al, 2011, p 895).

Students self-reporting indicates that they feel that they learn a great deal and derive benefit from the placement and anecdotally one study suggested that as students progressed in their placements they ‘responded much more confidently in the second and third interviews and saw themselves as having acquired more knowledge’ (Inglis et al, 1998).

Whilst students may perceive these placements as contributing significantly to their understanding and competence, two studies suggest that these changes might not be as great as anticipated. Providing students with a case scenario, presented an opportunity for Inglis et al (1998) to determine if students were able to take their knowledge and experiences and apply them in a community based situation. There was evidence presented in the study of students developing a greater understanding related to the cultural issues present in the society, the use of health promotion and recruiting community based volunteers in community based nursing practice. However the intellectual development seen by the authors was not as great as they had anticipated based on their prior anecdotal evidence (Inglis et al, 1998). The only quantitative study included in this review also suggests that changes in the attitudes of the students who undertook an ICP to Nepal was only modest and there was no marked shift in attitude on most items as a result of their placement when compared to a cohort of students who had not undertaken the placement (Inglis et al, 2000). Significant shifts in attitudes were seen in a few areas including those items relating to living conditions and work habits. The authors interpreted these changes in attitude as likely to have been as a consequence of students witnessing the living and social conditions in Nepal first hand whilst on placement.

**Growing personally through reflection**
The importance of personal development was raised by students throughout the studies, and ranged from their individual reasons for undertaking an ICP through to the outcomes of their experiences, as reflected at the conclusion of the placements. Students identified a variety of reasons for choosing to complete an ICP including personal reasons such as the opportunity to travel, to challenge themselves and to gain experience (Grant & Mckenna, 2003; Rolls et al, 1997; Tuckett & Crompton, 2014). The desire for students to ‘help others’ came through strongly in the study by Tuckett and Crompton (2014, p 139) with students believing they were motivated to go beyond what they normally would to help achieve their goal of helping others. This also triggered students to reflect on their reasons for becoming a nurse and how their wish to help others was integral to this decision, with the authors reflecting that the individual growth of students who undertake the placement is an outcome alongside developing their global awareness (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014).

Consistently the studies found students reflecting on their personal growth and how this impacted on their professional development and future career choices. The desire to work in the future for international aid organisations was mentioned by students as being a reason for participating in the placement (Tuckett & Crompton, 2012) as it provided them the opportunity to gain experience of working in a developing country. For many students witnessing first-hand the health care systems in developing countries was a confronting experience, which ultimately led to realisations that transcended health care. These realisations were reflected by student comments across placements, with a student on a placement in Surin, Thailand reflecting ‘We (Australia health care system) are way ahead of them with resources…but we are not way ahead of them when it comes to being in touch with humanity and treating, having a spiritual aspect of work’ (P2, Reid-Searl et al, 2011, p895); Other similar insights were evident in comments from a student on placement in Chiang Mai, Thailand ‘I thought most people in the village would have AIDS. That’s not true. They are concerned about the common cold just like we are’ (Student B, Rolls et al, 1997, p155) and from a student in India: ‘A great lesson that I have learned is that healthcare has to be acceptable within a cultural boundary for all… It is of no use promoting certain lifestyles which are not acceptable – this is a great lesson to be learned regarding our own Indigenous people’ (Journal 6, Charles et al, 2014).

**Overcoming apprehension to successfully meet the challenge**

International clinical placements provide students with a number of challenges and barriers that must be overcome to allow them to provide holistic nursing care in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. With multiple studies interviewing students prior to departure (Reid-Searl et al, 2011; Rolls et al, 1997; Tuckett & Crompton, 2013) consistent themes emerged regarding the apprehension that students feel at this time. Personal safety, professional competence and the ability to make a positive contribution without being a burden to the local community were discussed by students attending placement in Thailand in the study by Reid-Searl et al (2011). Similar concerns were raised by students interviewed by Rolls et al (1997) who were also undertaking a placement in Thailand, however in this study by the time of the second interview during the third week of the placement, these fears had largely been
allayed. This may indicate areas that could be addressed in educational sessions and resources provided by the universities prior to the students travelling, with the Reid-Searl (2011) study highlighting that students felt underprepared for the experience they were about to undertake.

Overcoming language barriers was recognised as a challenge by students prior to departure (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014; Rolls et al, 1997) and continued to be a barrier throughout the placement. Students undertaking the placement in Cambodia reflected on the difficulty communicating, and the use of interpreters, which resulted in a slow communication and difficulties in obtaining accurate information (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014). Students were required to find ways to improve communication even with the use of interpreters including ‘clear concise and simple terms’ and adapting pre-prepared lesson plans to ‘ensure cultural sensitivity and compatibility with translation to the Khmer language’ (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014, p 139). However concerns over language barriers prior to the placement were recognised as being less of an issue than initially thought in Chiang Mai, Thailand with students commenting ‘The language problem wasn’t as bad as I thought. I’ll feel a lot more relaxed if I go to another Asian country’ and ‘Within a week we picked up the language that we needed to know’ (Student B and A, Rolls et al, 1997, p 154).

Comparison of Findings with International Literature

Due to the small number of articles located on ICPs for Australian nursing students, a comparison was undertaken using international literature emanating from Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) to determine if findings in this review were consistent with data from other countries with similar nursing education programs to Australia. Following the same methods as the initial search similar numbers of relevant papers, as were found in the Australian literature, were found to meet the inclusion criteria. Seven articles from the UK and six from Canada, were identified and analysed to determine key themes that were then compared to those found in the Australian synthesis. A summary of the comparison of themes between the three countries can be found in Table 4.

The benefits for students in developing a greater global awareness through immersion in the cultural experience were consistent across all three countries. Research from the United Kingdom identified the significance of students feeling like a ‘foreigner’ (Greatrex-White, 2008) and the ‘different one’ or ‘other’ (Morgan, 2012) which enabled students to gain an appreciation for multicultural patients in their own country. Canadian students who completed a placement in Malawi echoed these findings with one student noting ‘in relation to cultural safety I have learned the importance of education and understanding as an outsider. This is important to avoid the making of judgements’ (Student Spring, Harrowing, Gregory, O’Sullivan, Lee & Doolittle, 2012, p 498). Similarly, a Canadian study (Kirkham, van Hofwegen & Pankratz, 2009) found the loss of the nursing students’ own cultural context bought a vulnerability and openness to their self-reflections that was able to enhance cultural understanding and communication.

The use of reflective strategies to provide students with the opportunity to consider their experience was found to
be an enabling factor for personal and professional growth in studies across all three countries. British students’ abilities to reflect on the experience they were undertaking enabled them to consider how skills and knowledge could be transferred to future nursing practice (Lee, 2004). Whereas Canadian nursing students, undertaking a placement in Zambia reflected on themselves as professionals and what was important to them (Asenso et al, 2013). For some, this resulted in them questioning the value of the placement for the host country, with one student commenting ‘I learned a lot as a nurse, personally and spiritually and I would not change that, but leaving here I am asking myself what we really accomplished here’ (p 232).

The influence of the media prior to departure on shaping students’ motivations for undertaking an ICP, and their perceptions of what they could contribute to the host country was evident in the Canadian literature. It was found images portrayed in the media may have contributed to the idea that Africa requires our help and is not capable of improving themselves (Afririe Asenso et al. 2014). This perception, on one hand, motivated students to participate in clinical placement so they could understand why health and social inequalities occur, but on the other contributed to their belief that there was anediness in developing countries that they felt they could help to fix (Burgess et al, 2014). While the concept of wanting to help was present in the Australian literature (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014), the influence that the media has on this desire was not investigated.

LIMITATIONS OF FINDINGS

Due to the small number of articles located on ICPs for Australian nursing students in the Asian region, the review was extended to those studies that included ICPs in Africa and Europe. Due to the significant differences in geography, social, economic and political development across regions this may have affected the results of this review, however it was believed that the added depth of data that these studies would add to the review warranted their inclusion.

The use of thematic synthesis to review qualitative research has been criticised, due to the nature of qualitative research, which does not lend itself to transferability outside its original context. An effort has been made to ensure that the original context of each study is not lost through the presentation of a detailed summary of each study, allowing the reader to determine if the context of the studies presented match their own (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

CONCLUSION

This review sought to investigate the existing literature to identify how Australian nursing students and ICP stakeholders describe the benefits and challenges of their placements and how they determine the placement’s success. The themes of developing cultural awareness and competence, providing a global perspective on healthcare and translation of theory to practice reflected the outcomes that students believed they were able to achieve as a consequence of participating in an ICP. The benefits and challenges experienced by the nursing students were

International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
identified through the themes of growing personally through reflection and overcoming apprehension to successfully meet the challenge. These themes were supported in the literature emanating from Canada and the UK, indicating that ICP leads to similar outcomes in other countries with similar nursing education programs. However what becomes clear when reviewing and reflecting on these themes is that each does not exist in isolation and successful ICPs, from the students’ perspective, are the result of seeing growth and development across a variety of personal and professional attributes and goals.

As the majority of the current literature is focused on how students view the benefits of the placement, it is difficult to determine whether these placements actually result in enhanced student outcomes or how these benefits are maintained over time (Tuckett & Crompton, 2014). Often, the educational institutions’ reasons for undertaking these placements, and the learning outcomes for students participating in these experiences were only described in broad statements such as ‘enabling students to study the delivery of health care in a developing country’ (Inglis et al, 2000, p 249). The student experience is just one perspective from which to view the success of ICPs. More research needs to be undertaken to determine if those successes identified by the students, are supported by the facilitators travelling with them, the educational institutions supporting these placements, the travel providers organising these placements and the communities in which these placements take place.

REFERENCES


International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.


synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 4*(4), doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-7-4


Table 1 – Literature Retrieval Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of Identified Articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Databases Searched</td>
<td>CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus, Proquest, Health Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number remaining following Title and Abstract Review</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles removed as duplicates</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Articles Reviewed</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles meeting inclusion criteria for systematic review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation Search Conducted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Number of articles included in review</td>
<td>8</td>
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Table 2: Summary of literature findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>International Clinical Placement</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Research Limitations</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles et al</td>
<td>To explore the meaning of cultural immersion for a group of Australian nursing students in India.</td>
<td>8 students</td>
<td>India. Five week cultural immersion program</td>
<td>Qualitative descriptive design. Journals with guided reflective questioning and free writing.</td>
<td>Guided by Colaizzi (1978) Journals read several times, re-read to extract significant statements; meanings were then formulated and organised into clusters of themes.</td>
<td>Small and homogenous sample size. One group of students participating in one placement from one university, limit the ability to generalise beyond this sample. The reflective journals used for data collection were also part of formal assessment processes for this clinical unit, this may have impacted on the answers given by participants, as they may have been motivated to answer in a way</td>
<td>Five themes were identified: focus on self, focus on difference, recognition of validity of different system, working within the cultural infrastructure, and application and transferability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
| Grant and McKenna (2003) | To allow students to describe their learning experiences of international clinical placements, explore perceptions of the clinical environment in which they were placed, identify positive and negative aspects of participating in international placements and provide information to | 9 students (3 interview only, 6 interview and journal review) | England and Northern Ireland. Four week clinical placement | Descriptive/Exploratory Approach. Used transcribed journal entries and interviews with students | Thematic content analysis | Homogenous sample group – all female with 7 of the 9 participants under 25. Sample taken from one one international clinical placement from one university. Difficult to generalise findings beyond the sample. | Reasons for undertaking placement identified by nursing students included opportunity to travel, experience nursing in another country, to challenge oneself, and for a cultural experience. Core category emerging from analysis - ‘nursing culture’ of the placement differentiated from culture in the ethnic sense. Themes in this category included progression, difference, and ‘having a go’. Findings highlighted importance of students understanding the type of environment they were entering and that there may be different approaches to nursing practice from which they are familiar. |

International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
| Inglis et al (1998) | To ascertain the changes in conceptual understanding that resulted from participation in a study abroad programme | 5 students (4 students participated in all 3 interviews, 1 participated in first two interviews only) | Chiang Mai, Thailand. Four week placement | Phenomenographic Methodology. Open ended interviews including community based case study scenario | Qualitative Coding | Small sample size generated from one international clinical placement offered by one university makes generalisation difficult. The same case study was administered to the students at the three interviews | Increased awareness of how nurses interacted with villages as communities, including respecting authority figures and importance of community assessment. Recognising the importance of the community in organising health clinics. Increased awareness of male dominance in Thai Society. |

| Inglis et al (2000) | To establish whether participation in the study abroad program to Nepal resulted in any measurable shifts in students’ attitudes towards the Nepalese people. | 36 students (18 who participated in placement and 18 in control group who had not participated in the placement) | Kathmandu, Nepal. 8 day placement | Exploratory. Questionnaire modelled on a tool previously used to examine knowledge and attitudes towards indigenous populations in Western Australia. Administered 6 weeks prior to departure and at the conclusion of the placement. | Comparison of mean scores of items between control group and participant group. T-ratio used to assess for significanc e. | The questionn aire used to collect data was designed to examine knowledge about a different population, with questions altered to reflect the different cultural context – it is not clear how | Response to most of the items in the questionnaire showed no marked shift in attitudes by the group who participated in the placement. Significant shifts were detected from the participant group on items related to the working and living conditions between the two questionnaires. |

International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<th>Setting</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
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<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Michael et al</td>
<td>To explore the effects of photographing in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania</td>
<td>Qualitative, visual methodology</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Eight weeks</td>
<td>Administered twice</td>
<td>Familiarity effect was measured using a control group, no biasing effect found. Control group did not travel, it is unclear as to whether their results could be used as a comparison to the main sample.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 changes may have impacted the usefulness of the tool in this context.

Michaelsen, A. (2012) photograp
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reid-Searl et al (2011)</td>
<td>Qualitative Exploratory.</td>
<td>Surin, Thailand. Four week placement</td>
<td>8 students</td>
<td>To examine the experiences of undergraduate nursing students when undertaking a clinical placement in Thailand</td>
<td>3 semi-structured interviews, one prior to departure, one midway through placement, and one prior to returning home.</td>
<td>Students developed insight into Tanzanian health care system including lack of resources and barriers to patient care. Personal and professional growth and development demonstrated whilst on placement in Tanzania.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes identified:
- Prior to departure – Anticipation
- Midway – making a difference, different worlds, part of a group
- Prior to return – reality check, group dynamics.

International clinical placements for Australian undergraduate nursing students: a systematic thematic synthesis of the literature.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Analysis Approach</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rolls et al</td>
<td>Investigation of student concerns, expectations and perceived benefits of study abroad experience.</td>
<td>5 Students</td>
<td>Chiang Mai, Thailand</td>
<td>Non-experimental descriptive. Serial interviews</td>
<td>The initial interview recorded data through transcription whilst the remaining two interviews used tape recording in addition to transcriptions. The data obtained from the initial interview may not be as accurate a reflection of the interview as the remaining</td>
<td>Concerns about studying in Thailand – initial concerns eased as placement progressed allowing students to focus on cultural immersion. Language seen as less of a barrier, with mutual acceptance of cultural differences more important than knowledge of culture. Expectations of program – cultural benefits acknowledged as well as personal development expectations. Experiencing the reality of AIDS pandemic in Thailand has greater impact than previous theoretical knowledge. Participating in the program was worth the cost of the placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuckett and Crompton (2014)</td>
<td>To report the qualitative experiences of three groups of Australian undergraduate nursing and midwifery students on 39 students (2010 n=13, 2011 n=15, 2012 n=11)</td>
<td>Siem Reap, Cambodia. Four week placement.</td>
<td>Interpretive Research design. Open ended expression of interest and questionnaire s completed on day 7, 18 and 27 of the clinical placement</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis.</td>
<td>Evaluates one placement offered by one university, which limits generalisation beyond sample, however does</td>
<td>Two transcripts, which may have impacted on initial data collection. The small sample size from one international placement offered by one university makes results difficult to generalise. There is no discussion of how themes were identified, data analysis is not clearly outlined and may impact on quality of results presented.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | | | | | | Understood through two core themes
- Global citizen, better citizen – broaden student’s life perspective, making them aware of another country with a different culture, assisting the students in future with their |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>undertak<strong>ing an international learning experience in Cambodia</strong></th>
<th>include multiple cohorts across three years. Questionnaire used to obtain qualitative data during placement – this may have impacted on the depth of qualitative data provided. Article does not outline questions asked.</th>
<th>career choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>career choices</td>
<td>• Personal/professional development – both personal and professional motives for identifying and participating in this placement. Helping others and life opportunities outside the classroom main themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: A diagrammatic representation of the coding process using the theme: Growing personally through reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflecting</th>
<th>Developing personally</th>
<th>Influencing future career decisions</th>
<th>Analytical Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>becoming more appreciative</td>
<td>growing personally gaining life skills motivating self personal and professional merging fulfilling a dream helping others</td>
<td>assisting with career choices influencing future career and work ready for the real world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Coding</td>
<td>Descriptive Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Growing personally through reflection
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of articles</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>7 Qualitative, 1 Quantitative</td>
<td>6 Qualitative, 1 Quantitative</td>
<td>6 Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Placements</td>
<td>8 days to 5 weeks</td>
<td>6 to 12 weeks * A large proportion of these studies represented 12 week placements which might reflect the funding models available to UK universities, with some European Union funding requiring a minimum of 12 weeks abroad (Goodman, Jones &amp; Macias, 2008)</td>
<td>3 to 12 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size Range</td>
<td>5 to 39 participants</td>
<td>10 to 74 participants</td>
<td>4 to 48 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Themes Identified | • Developing cultural awareness and competence  
• Providing a global perspective on healthcare  
• Translation of theory to practice  
• Growing personally through reflection  
• Overcoming apprehension to successfully meet the challenge | • Gaining confidence in personal and professional life  
• Discovering culture through being an ‘other’  
• Overcoming language barriers to develop connections  
• Using reflection to question their worldview  
• Becoming more independent | • Maintaining engagement and readjusting to life after the experience  
• Developing personal and professional empowerment through reflection  
• Learning through engagement with the local community  
• Motivated by the need to help  
• Developing a global awareness through cultural immersion |
Highlights

- Students reflect on increased cultural awareness and competence
- Placements provide students with a global perspective on health care
- Students reflect on the experience allowing for professional and personal growth
- Students must overcome apprehension to successful complete placement
- Significant gaps in the literature exist with existing focus on student perceptions