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Introduction

- In many Canadian provinces such as Ontario, academic bridging programs have been offered to internationally educated nurses (IENs) as a means to promote their rapid integration, allowing them to move quickly into Canada's nursing workforce (Lum, 2006; Lum & Turriffin, 2007).
- It may also be required of the IEN as a way to provide proof of safe practice, especially those IENs who have not worked for three or more years.
- For others, bridging programs are used as a way to meet identified gaps in their previous nursing education and work experience.
- There are a different models of bridging programs offered in many Canadian provinces.
- Bassendowski and Petrucka (2010) suggested that "these programs are relatively new and research will need to be undertaken in order to justify their existence" (p. 10).
- There is limited literature available to determine how bridging programs contribute to and/or facilitate the IENs' ability to transition to Canada's health care system.
- It is important to look at the effects of bridging programs in IENs through a systematic review. This systematic review will help contribute to the state of knowledge on academic bridging programs for IENs. It will also be useful in understanding the training and education needs of IENs, as well as their readiness to practice based on available literature.

Results

- Bridging programs were regulatory requirements generally intended to address identified gaps in IENs' previous education and experience in the home country.
- May include theory and/or clinical components, and may be hosted in-class within an educational institution and/or a health care agency, or by distance modalities.
- May lead to a credential (diploma or baccalaureate degree) or eligibility to write the registration exam or for licensure.
- Return to nursing.** The primary reason that motivated IENs to undertake a bridging program was the desire to return to nursing.
- Return to nursing was described as a noun in two ways.
 - In the first instance, return to nursing was a form of struggle IENs. It was a challenge that IENs had to go through as they were compelled to do a bridging program in order to gain registration and/or licensure in their host countries. They presented with challenges owing to the multiple roles as partner, parent and/or relative who needed to support themselves through schools, while supporting their families in the host country or back home.
 - Secondly, return to nursing also referred to a set of outcomes that came as a result of an IEN's attendance in and successful completion of a bridging program in his/her host country, which ultimately led to their ability to gain registration and/or licensure, and subsequent employment as a nurse in the host country. The effects of bridging programs on IENs, and the outcomes and components of Return to Nursing are depicted in Figure 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 3

Return to Nursing: Effects and Components of Process

Effect	Definition of effect	Strategies
The concepts from the regulatory body, the client-centred care	Acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to gain registration and/or licensure as a nurse, and to provide safe care to clients in the host country	Classroom instruction Instructor- and preceptor-supervised clinical practice Provision of modules
Do something better for us, for our future	Opportunities that become available to IENs as a result of their successful completion of a bridging program, and gaining registration and/or licensure, and subsequent employment as nurses in the host country, subsequently contributing to their personal, professional and career development and success	Earning an academic credential Eligibility for registration / licensure
We have to learn English	Developing and/or enhancing IENs' English language skills as well as professional communication	Classroom instruction Clinical practice
Faculty, program coordinator and preceptors were willing to work with them	Sources of moral and emotional support for IENs as they attend a bridging program Support provided to IENs by their mentors that contribute to the development of their self-confidence and self-worth	Providing program staff and clinical preceptors resources to better understand IEN background

Discussion

- Return to nursing** offers a model to explain the effects of bridging programs in IENs based on studies that wholly or in part, addressed the research question for this meta-synthesis - *What are the effects (perceived or otherwise) of bridging programs in IENs?* This is a first attempt at consolidating information from relevant literature to shed light on the value of bridging programs in the credentialing process for IENs.
- Recognizing the difference in standards and scopes of nursing practice from one jurisdiction to another played a significant role in helping the IENs acknowledge their learning needs. This was particularly observed amongst IENs whose first language was not English.
- Successful completion of a bridging program is a pathway to a better life for the IEN and his or her family.
- This group of IENs acknowledged the invaluable help they obtained from their re-training.
- While bridging programs have been successful in developing and enhancing IENs' English fluency, it must be recognized that the time spent in classroom and clinical settings while attending the program will not be sufficient to completely address all language difficulties experienced by IENs.

Methods

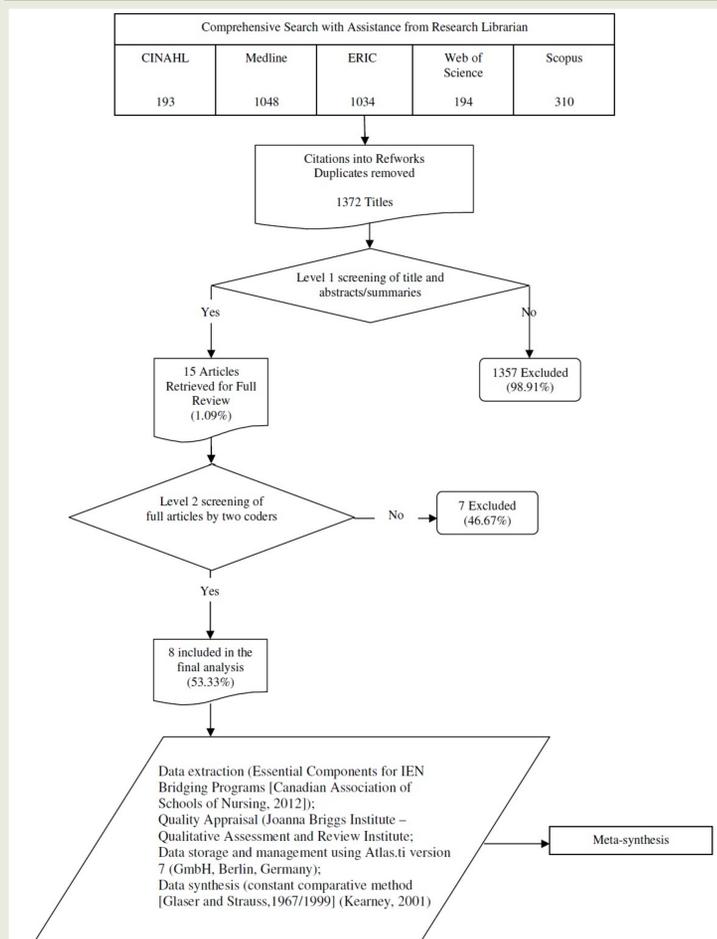


Figure 1. Screening for relevant studies for this meta-synthesis.

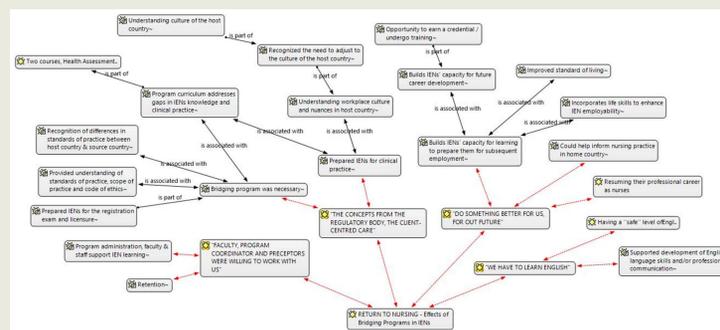


Figure 2. Effects of bridging programs in IENs – Return to Nursing.



Practical Nursing Bridging Program for IENs (Fast-Track) students at Centennial College in Toronto, Ontario.

Conclusions

Return to nursing offers some insight on the value of bridging programs in IEN credentialing. As nursing shortage across the globe continues, nation states seeking to hire IENs to augment their nursing workforce may need to put in place strategies that will facilitate the ability of IEN to succeed and contribute to the health care needs of the host country. In an era where there is also scarcity of financial resources, this is particularly important if host countries are to retain IENs. Putting in place bridging programs that meet both the IENs' and host country's needs may prove to be an essential tool to facilitate IENs' return to nursing.

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