

Experiences and Expectations of Health Sciences Students towards Licensing Examination: A Collective Case Study

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Abstract: This qualitative collective case study aimed to explore the perceptions and expectations towards relatively low performances in licensure exams among Health Sciences students at Harar Health Sciences College, from multiple perspectives. The study involved 15 participants, who were selected using purposive sampling, and data was collected through face-to-face one-on-one interviews using open-ended questionnaires and analyzed thematically. The study found that language barriers, poor reading habits, a lack of guidance and advisory services, a lack of study time, poor communication, and the absence of up-to-date learning materials were the major reasons for low performance in licensure examinations. The study recommends providing up-to-date materials, challenging assignments, focusing on professional courses from entry to the profession, and creating strong guidance, advisory, monitoring, and evaluation services to improve students' academic success. The study's findings highlight a knowledge gap and may serve as a basis for stakeholders to improve students' academic success. However, the study has limitations, such as its inability to generalize the findings to the source population, the absence of related published data, and the exclusion of other stakeholders such as parents and employers. The study recommends a mixed-method or follow-up study incorporating other stakeholders to yield better findings.

Keywords: Health sciences students, licensure examination, students' performance, collective case study

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Introduction

A health professional license is an occupational license that permits a person to legally practice medicine and other health care fields of study. Licensure tests are typically offered by governmental organizations for the purpose of regulating a specific profession or occupation and thereby protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public, not the profession (Kane & Kane, 1986). Most nations require such a license, bestowed either by a specified government-approved professional association or a government agency (Department of the Treasury Office of Economic Policy et al., 2015; Kane, Michael T., 1968).

The primary goal of pre-service medical and health sciences education is to produce healthcare forces who will meet the needs and expectations of patients and society. Thus, education qualifications, good training, and on-going professional development are fundamental for high-quality health care services. Hence, different countries apply for licensure exams before the graduates are going to start service to identify individuals who possess the minimum knowledge and experience necessary to perform tasks on the job safely and competently (Buja, 2019; World Health Organization, 2013).

According to the World Health Organization, transformation and expansion of health professionals' education require health professionals who have the necessary competencies (Wheeler et al., 2014). Hence, the World Health Organization suggested changes in regulation, including certification and licensing of graduates. It is also known that many countries around the world verify the competence and fitness to practice of health professionals by administering standard qualification, exit, or licensure examinations (L. M. & Borgermans, 2015; Wheeler et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2013).

Literature (Chandelkar et al., 2015; D. & H., 2018; Lertwilaiwittaya et al., 2019; R. M., 2019; Mard & Ghafouri, 2020; Narkhede et al., 2019) reveal that in previous studies, empirical material was collected on the competency of students regarding in-school performance such as objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) and/or objective structured practical examination (OSPE), and most of those researches were quantitative in nature. In essence, the aim of this study was to observe a real-life scenario where multiple actors were involved in students' achievement which created a value cocreation. There is no such research conducted in higher educational institutions. Thus, the stance of relativist ontology was taken, and an interpretive paradigm was assumed.

Besides, the Ethiopian government has designed national licensure exams for new first-degree graduates of medicinal and health sciences professionals. After dissipating a huge resource, the graduate students need job opportunities. However, with a maximum of five attempts to pass the test, the government offers job opportunities only to those who pass the exam on any of the five possible chances.

Nonetheless, within the last three years, the number of students at the college who scored the pass mark in the licensure exam has been very low. Currently, the graduating class students are worried about this exam result due to their previous low performance. Even though a strong student support system is available, the teachers and administrations of higher educational institutions are deeply concerned about the previous performances and poor job opportunities among their graduates.

The possible reasons for this low performance of students in licensure exams remain unknown and need further investigation. Unless the possible reasons are identified clearly and solutions are set for them, the students cannot achieve better in the future, fulfilling the country's as well as professional minimum competence requirements. Once more, there are few published data related to experiences and expectations of licensing exams, and thus, the current study focuses on addressing that gap by highlighting the case of Harar Health Sciences College. Therefore, the study may contribute to the knowledge base of information related to perceptions of relatively low performance in licensure exams and expectations for improving performance in the future from multiple perspectives.

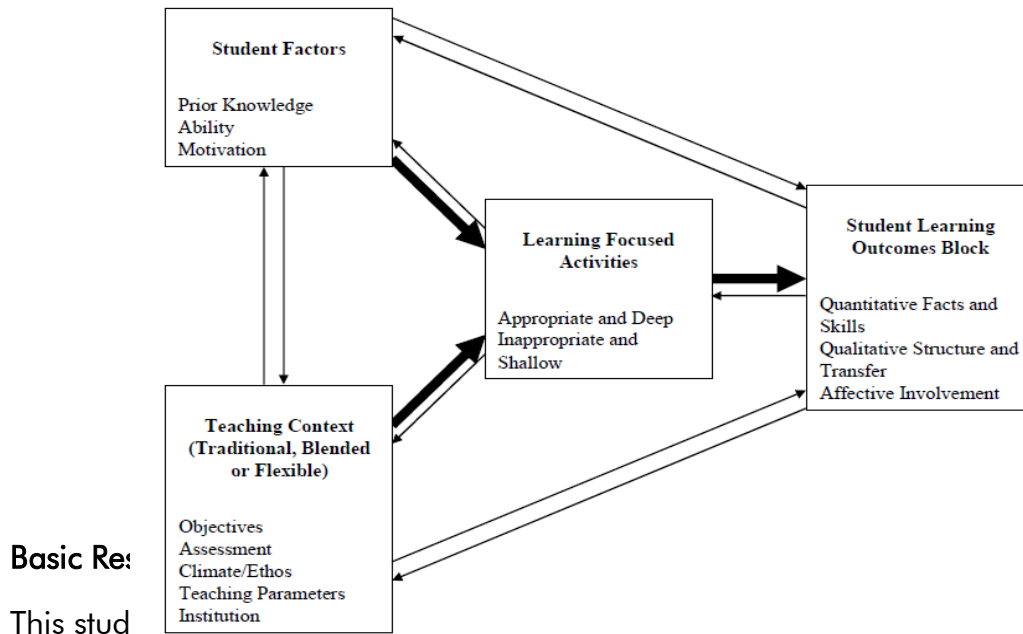
Conceptual Framework

In discussing the idea of a student's approach to learning, Biggs et al. use the 3P-model (presage, process, and product) to describe the factors that influence whether a student will take a deep or a surface approach to learning (De la Fuente et al., 2016; Hamilton & Tee, 2009).

According to this model of learning, the principles of alignment entail the existence of consistency and logic among all the elements and mutual support between the elements: the curriculum that we teach, the teaching methods that we use, the assessment procedures that we use, and the methods of reporting results (Fig. 1).

Figure 1:

A Biggs 3P-Model of teaching and learning adapted from (De la Fuente et al., 2016; Hamilton & Tee, 2009)



1. Why was the students' licensure exam performance - low?
2. How did the participants describe their experience with the licensure examination?
3. What are the challenges faced by students throughout the course of preparation for the licensure exam?
4. What are the challenges faced by teachers while preparing students for licensing exam domains?
5. What measures should be taken to improve students' performances in licensure examinations?

Methods and Materials

Study Area and Period

The study was conducted at Harar Health Sciences College, Harar, eastern Ethiopia, from February 3–10, 2022. Harar Health Sciences College is founded in Harar, the capital city of Harari Regional State and East Hararghe Zone of Oromiya. From Addis Ababa, Harar is located at 513.7 km in the far east of Ethiopia. The College is a public higher educational institution offering a range of health sciences training and education in Level IV, Level V and bachelorette degrees for a period of almost half a century. Accordingly, the college offers bachelorette degree training and education in the fields of Comprehensive Nursing, Midwifery, Pharmacy, Medical Laboratory Science, Public

Health, Pediatrics' Nursing, Emergency and critical care, Anesthesia and Health informatics (Scrolls, 2022).

Study Design

The study approach was a collective case study because the current study tried to explore performance in licensing examinations from multiple perspectives (students', teachers', and administrative perspectives), a case study design is appropriate for this study. A collective case study involves more than one case, which may or may not be physically colocated with other cases. A collective case study may be conducted at one site (e.g., a school, hospital, or university) by examining a number of different departments or other units at that site (Gregory, 2017; Luck et al., 2007; Mills et al., 2010).

This type of study helps researchers explore individual cases and provide details and explanations regarding a situation, phenomenon, or experience where individual studies provide information into the "why" or "how," and provide elaborative data through comparing cases cross-wise that allows for a more expansive understanding of the issue (Crowe et al., 2011; Léger & Martin, 2020).

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The proposed tool and interview were restricted to Harar Health Sciences College. Students are important consumers of academic experience with very fundamental expectations towards teaching and learning processes. Besides knowledge, attitude, and skill acquaintances, the students want to achieve their academic journey and hence score a success after completion of a specific program.

Moreover, a teacher is very concerned about a student's academic success. Whenever, negative situations such as stress, poor performance and/or academic failures and challenges are encountered, as well as positive circumstances, the teachers might show a deep concern towards their students. In a teaching institution, the teachers are very close to the students and they are the ones who can easily understand the teaching-learning process. The case of medical and health sciences graduates is one of such cases. In addition to that, teachers have great roles in capacitating the students and hence, can face so many challenges in their actions.

Lastly, the overall activity of an institution is acknowledged by its administrators. An administrator can influence the activities of students as well as the teachers' roles either directly or indirectly in one way or another. A little bit of support or discouragement from a higher official of a teaching institution has its own impact on the overall teaching-learning process. Therefore, for the current study, the bachelor's degree graduates who have sat for licensing exam at least once, the teachers as well as the college administrators were the sources of data.

In qualitative research, rather than numbers, it is the impressions, opinions and views that have a fundamental concern. And hence, in a qualitative case study, as many as

fifty participants, but as few as five can be studied (Alase, 2017; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, a total of six graduated students were included in the study based on the preset criteria. The participants were selected by using criterion sampling, which is one type of purposive sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015). Criterion sampling involves the identification of particular criteria of importance, the articulation of these criteria, and the systematic review and study of cases that meet the criteria. The reason for undertaking criterion sampling is to identify major system weaknesses for improvement (Benoot et al., 2016; Elmusharaf, 2016). Therefore, criterion sampling was employed with the following criteria of selection:

- The participants should be the graduated students;
- He/she should be a graduate of a regular generic degree program; and
- He/she should have sat for the licensure examination at least once.

Therefore, based on the above criteria, four graduates who scored the pass-mark on the first spot of the examination and the remaining three who did not score the pass-mark on the first spot were included in the study. Additionally, a total of six teachers (one from each department that has licensing examinations, that is, Midwifery, Medical Laboratory Sciences, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Public Health, and one from the common course department) were included in the study. The College has three higher officials (a dean and two vice Deans), and two administrators were included in the study.

The cases were purposefully selected with an assumption of rich information. Accordingly, a total of seven (7) students, six (6) teachers and two (2) administrators were included in this study, totaling fifteen (15) cases.

Among the students who took part in the study, one of them was among the students who took the exam in 2018/19 when the exam was given for the first time ever, and another one took the exam in 2019/20. The remaining five (5) students were those who sat for the exam in the 2021/22 academic year. Regarding the exam result status, four of them successfully passed the first entry of the exam whereas the other three were those who took the exam for the most recent time, in 2021, and they didn't pass the exam. Regarding the teachers who participated in the current study, only one of them was from the common course department and the rest five were from the department for which a licensing exam has been implemented.

For the sake of ethical considerations, codes were used to differentiate participants. For instance, 'S' stands for students whereas 'T' and 'A' designate teachers and administrators respectively. In order to differentiate a student from others, numbers were used as S1, S2, S3, ..., S7. Similarly, codes T1, T2, ..., T6 as well as A1, A2 represent teachers and administrators respectively. Among the students who took part in the study, two were males whereas the rest were females. Four of them were 23 years old and the rest were 22. From the Pharmacy and Public Health departments, two students were selected from each department while others were from midwifery, medical laboratory sciences, and the nursing department.

Instruments

A semi-structured data collection tool that was reviewed by qualitative research experts (one Ph.D. and two Ph.D. candidates) was used for data collection from multiple sources as stated above. The interview protocol includes questions concerning academic learning experiences, licensing exam expectations, performances, and difficulties from students', teachers' and administrative perspectives. Then, the individual students were interviewed privately and all interviews were audio-taped for accuracy.

The data was collected by a senior researcher who has experience in qualitative research data collection and has training in qualitative research methodology to assure the accuracy of the data. Additionally, an open-ended survey method was used to collect data from teachers and administrators after the purpose of the study was clearly explained.

Method of Data Analysis

As a qualitative researcher, it is the role and responsibility of the researcher to investigate and interpret the impact of the research subject-matter on the cases of the research participants (Alase, 2017). Thus, the thematic analysis was done.

Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured the accuracy of the data by checking interview and group transcripts for errors, and by continuously cross-checking codes during data analysis to maintain consistency in interpretation. Credibility was ensured by making sure the perceptual data collected were accurate through peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation of data from multiple sources.

Results and Discussions

Intentionally narrowing the focus of the findings of the study occurred through the identification of departments for which licensure exams have been offered. Then, for analysis, grouping of participants is done based on demographic information, such as being a student, teacher, or administrator. Interview transcripts and field notes were then descriptively coded to reduce the overall number of codes to a manageable number.

Theme Development

Themes were developed from repetitive examination and interpretation of the collected data. Then, a total of 31 tentative codes were developed by grouping texts into categories. Then, the codes were refined into four themes, as follows.

Theme One: Students' background

The first research question addressed "why was students' performance in the licensure exam low?" in the last few years since the examination started. All students voiced that

their understanding of the English language during the exam played a great role in their achievement. Student S3 stated: *My father is a teacher. He did a lot to help me understand the English language, starting when I was in fifth grade of the time, I use an English-to-English dictionary to understand vocabulary, and that improved my ability to understand the language.*

In contrast to the above student, student S5 said: *I need assistance from others to understand the message of the subject matter. I prefer to be taught by teachers who can speak my mother tongue.*

Student S1 said: *Most of the teachers who taught me professional courses could not speak my mother tongue. Whenever I want to ask for clarification, they say that they use the national language only for translation.*

A student's background indicates from where he/she comes including the kind of education the student went through. This includes their language, culture, values, family, and home environment. Studies showed that differences in student's socio-economic, demographic, and educational background explain 15% of the variation in low performance across students, on average (OECD, 2016). However, a study conducted in Türkiye found that English as a medium of instruction was not harmful to the students (Civan & Coşkun, 2016). Another study done at Isabel State University, Philippines, indicated that there is no difference in academic achievement among students who learn in English-only and multi-lingual classes (Maramag-Manalastas & Batang, 2018).

In countries like Ethiopia, where the medium of instruction is a second language, understanding the students' mother tongue to help them understand the subject matter is crucial for their performance (R. Nishanti, 2020). It is much harder, however, to teach abstract skills such as critical thinking and literacy skills directly through a second language. All students who failed the exam responded that their performance might be better if they learned from a teacher who could speak their mother tongue.

Learning style is a student's preference for how he/she likes to learn. This is termed as learning style and includes auditory, visual, or kinesthetic styles. It indicates how he/she comprehends and retains information best. Similarly, teachers like to teach and structure their classrooms in different ways, known as the teaching styles (Ahmed, 2020; Brien, 2007; Mupa & Isaac, 2015).

The authority style is primarily used in a lecture or auditorium setting, whereby the teacher will give a lengthy, one-way discussion on a pre-assigned topic while students take notes and memorize key pieces of information. For subjects that necessitate group work, peer feedback or lab-based learning, a delegator or group style of tutoring is often adopted. As a delegator, the teacher may take on an observer role to promote collaboration and encourage peer-to-peer learning. Teachers who adopt a facilitator or activity-based style encourage self-learning in the classroom through increased peer-to-teacher learning. The demonstrator retains authority in the classroom. However,

instead of relying solely on a verbal lecture, the demonstrator style combines lectures with other teaching forms, including multimedia presentations, demonstrations and class activities (B. Thornton, 2013). One of the participants, student S4 said:

It would have been better if my teachers used pictures and videos in the classroom. And also, I wonder if they taught me how to access those learning videos. In addition to that, it's important that my teachers who taught me the theory class facilitate the skill demonstration sessions at least once because most of the skill demonstration sessions were caught by the skill lab assistance. Also, I want to say that if my teachers provided me with the checklists and guidelines for skill-related topics, I would understand better, and my current exam status would be better".

All teachers responded to the question that addressed the reasons why students' performance in the national licensure exam is low. They voiced that students' poor backgrounds, language barriers, and poor readings habit could be the reasons for their low performance in this exam. Teachers T6 and T3 responded:

I feel that the students' performance might be low if they fail to understand the message of a specific question which solely depends on their knowledge background -. And also, the students' English language understanding ability is the key to their activities such as reading. If a student is able to understand the subject matter, he/she will be motivated to study hard and perform better.

Studies show that there is a significant relationship between knowledge of the subject matter and academic achievement. For instance, a study conducted in Singapore found that knowledge and context have a positive relationship with students' performance in examinations (Liem, 2019). Another study conducted among university students in Germany concluded that the theoretical as well as practical knowledge of students could lead to effective achievement in their courses (Binder et al., 2019).

Another teacher (T4), stated:

The student who had an interest in studying his/her profession would perform better. And also, having pre-requisite knowledge and skills such as upgrading, helps them achieve their academic goal.

Studies indicated that they underline the importance of interest for academic choices and for self-regulated learning when the instructional setting is less structured. Accordingly, a study conducted in Malaysia pinpointed that interest in a subject and/or profession is important for academic success (Wong & Wong, 2019). A study conducted in China found that academic interest had a significant positive impact on academic performance (Wu et al., 2019). Another study done at Agogo State College, Ghana showed that a strong positive relationship exists between students' interest in studying and academic performance (Arhin & Gideon, 2020).

Another teacher, T5, added:

According to the information we have, the exam items are case-based questions. Most of the time, case-based scenario items are long by nature. So, if the exam questions are too long, it will be difficult for the students to understand their ideas. In addition to that, if the departments did not create the opportunity for students to get prepared for the exam, their performance could be low.

Changes in pattern of question papers near examinations affect student's performance. Traditionally, classroom tests are short in nature and their ideas are shallow (Arhin & Yanney, 2020). A study done at the United Arab Emirates University in Dubai concluded that exit exam questions are long and require more time to complete. According to this study, if the students couldn't finish their exam on time, they might leave part/s of the exam undone which could result in low performance (Arhin & Yanney, 2020). Another study showed that nonstandard test items are more difficult for students to answer correctly than standard test items, and result in poorer student performance (Caldwell & Pate, 2013). Another study also found that students' performance in tests showed a significant improvement when frequent quizzes were used as it improved students' reading habits (Mwapea, 2015).

Experience

The experience of students, specifically in licensure exams is another basic question for the current study. This experience can be narrated and shared with other students to help them perform better in this exam. Accordingly, "How did the participants describe their experience in the licensure examination?" was one basic question in this research. Regarding this, all of the students stated that their prior learning experiences were vital for their performance, even though they did not pass the exam. A student, S7, stated:

The classroom materials such as teacher's handouts and books were important. However, most classroom activities were not problem-based which can facilitate students practice and understanding. The classroom tests were not similar to the licensure exam questions. The classroom tests and assignments were not challenging enough to make me read much material. They could easily be accessible from the teachers' handouts. Even, most of my teachers did not give me assignments.

Previous studies concluded that promoting students' interest can contribute to a more engaged, motivated, learning experience (Pakula, 2019). This can be achieved by enriching the students with challenging assignments, quizzes, and test, as these encourage them to search more from time to time. According to a framework for improving school performances, balancing external assessments and teacher-based assessments in the assessment of learning and integrating student formative assessment is essential to making students perform better in national or external exams (Paulo Santiago, Claire Shewbridge, Deborah Nusche, 2013).

Another student said:

There was a little bit of difference between licensure exam questions and classroom tests. Licensure exam questions were clear and understandable, but they required more in-depth understanding than model exams and classroom tests. My biggest feeling is that for more than two months after graduation, I studied hard focusing on the major courses.

Student S1 stated:

A classroom test requires simple memorization in contrast to licensure exam. Licensure exam questions require solid knowledge addressing the basis for a specific profession. Students, S5, also shared the same idea concerning the differences between classroom tests and licensure exam questions. Another student, S4, spoke:

There is a big difference between licensure exams and classroom tests. For example, the licensure exam was more related to concepts. In classroom tests, some teachers intentionally use ambiguous words to confuse students. But what helped us was that the departments reduced some loads and gave us time to study.

Theme Two: Contents

In this section, the following research questions were partially discussed:

1. What are the challenges faced by students throughout the course of licensure exam preparation?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers while preparing students for licensing exam domains?

The term 'content' describes two points: curricular content and exam item content. The curricular content was described by both teachers and students whereas the exam content was expressed only by the students. For instance, the students stated that the national exam requires the basic knowledge skills and attitude related to a specific profession starting from the first year up to graduation, and therefore, the preparation should start from entry into the profession. If not, it is difficult to cover the entire professional curriculum within a short period of time. One of the students, S3, said:

I failed to pass the exam because I did not start studying on time. Then, I could not cover the whole professional curriculum. I did not get enough time to even cover the exam domain. And finally, I understood that effort was not enough to pass the exam because the exam questions require a long-term, deep understanding of the course contents.

A study from Stanford Psychology Scholars found that college students employing a strategic approach to the use of study resources improved their exam scores by an average of one-third of a letter grade (Martinovich, 2017). Two of the students stated:

Among the 200 questions, 140 were case-based items. Those case-scenario items were too long and thus, I couldn't catch the message of the question. While I was trying to understand a single question, four to six, sometimes, eight minutes were gone. Then, I developed tension and stress, and I lost my attention. This student added: You should

make sure that you study hard and take your education very seriously. When you study hard you will receive a lot of benefits and if you do not study hard and don't take your education seriously you may live to regret it. You should make sure that you realize what type of benefits your education will give you because once you do this you will be motivated to study hard since you will know how much it will help you.

Another student, S5, said:

Just after graduation, I got a job and started working at a health facility. After then, I learned a lot from working in the area because the health professionals have more up-to-date knowledge and skills than my teachers. Most of the time, I used to ask questions related to my profession and so I learned a lot even after graduation. Another important thing was that rather than theory classes, what I learned during my clinical practicum helped me a lot to pass the exam.

Regarding the course content, all teachers stated that it's difficult to cover the course contents while clarifying each point. One of the teachers, T2, stated:

After I complete a session, I would like to give a question that is similar to a licensing exam question. However, lack of time challenged me to manage it and I ended up only displaying the question. After a while, I left such practice and focused only on lecturing. This teacher again added that, mostly, the time allocated for a specific subject is not enough even to cover the contents because most of the students need translation to their mother tongue language to understand the subject matter. So, while I was translating the major points, the time allocated might be up. Then, I would leave the class without summarizing the session because another teacher might wait for me for his turn, or I might have another class, or the students might want to go home, and the like".

A study done at Arleton State University, Texas, showed there is no relationship between class attendance and students' academic success (Schultz & Sharp, 2007). But, another study found that there is no significant relationship between the length of the class schedule and exam performance (Trout, 2018). Another study done at the University of Uyo, Nigeria, concluded that students should set a study timetable long enough for effective academic exercises which might be at least two to three hours daily for their private study and stick to it (Ukpong & George, 2013).

A teacher, T4, mentioned:

I preferred to teach theoretical description with a projector and computer because I could not cover the bulky course content within the curricular schedule. Rather, I used to provide some probing questions at the end of the classes to summarize the portion I taught.

Studies showed that probing questions are important for academic success and improve students' performance. Accordingly, a study conducted at Edvantia, West Virginia, found that probing questions after an interactive session is an effective instructional technique, being sure to address teacher training, fidelity of implementation, and

assessment of student achievement issues (Craig & Ill, 2015). Another study concluded that asking questions has the potential to facilitate or influence the learning process, but it may also have the capacity to turn a child's learning off if not handled tactfully (Naz et al., 2013). Another study found that probing questions are strongly influenced by support for student autonomy (Kosko, 2016; Sahin, 2015).

Theme Three: Responsibility

Under this theme, besides the points raised under theme two, the following research questions were discussed:

1. What are the challenges faced by students throughout the course of licensure exam preparation?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers while preparing students for licensing exam domains?

Additionally, this theme pointed out the course of activities that should be done by the students, the teachers, the departments, administrators and/or the college in general. For instance, teaching and learning processes are challenging by nature, especially if there is no commitment from both sides. The majority of teachers responded that classroom management skills are very basic for successful academic activities. Most importantly, a class might include 35 or more students and hence managing this large number of students while keeping their diverse backgrounds is very tough. Then, we preferred direct lecturing omitting interactive sessions as they might not be effective.

One of the teachers, T6, said:

I omitted facilitating discussion while I was teaching because I thought it wasn't effective since the class was made up of a large number of students. In such a case, I just stopped in front of the class and waited for the students to either ask or respond to a question.

Studies showed that classroom management strategies are useful to increase students' capacities in their subject matter which can positively influence their performance during examinations (George et al., 2017; Nisar et al., 2019).

Reading habit

The students' effort or hard working is key to academic success. All students stated that reading patterns are crucial for their performance in academia including this licensure exam. Relating to this, student S7 said *I had no information about the exam. I was thinking the information I got from the department about the exam domain was not exactly true. But those students who just focused on reading the professional courses a little bit more than me were successful.*

Student S4 stated: *I was hearing the information about the exam domain. The teachers used to talk about it during class and clinical practicum. But there was a problem with teachers and departments in general. The problem was that they told us about the exam,*

but I did not see any activities done to help us prepare for the exam. Once upon a time, the department informed us we do have a model exam. We took that exam. Then, we did not get feedback on it. We could not know even how many questions we answered correctly”.

Regular reading increases one's vocabulary and ability to think, improves one's verbal and writing abilities, and broadens one's horizons. Thus, it is important for students to adopt a reading culture for improved academic performance. Studies found that students reading habits have a significant influence on academic performance. And also the studies confirmed that there is a strong positive relationship between reading habit and performance examination (Oriogu et al., 2017; Owusu-Acheaw, 2014; Taha, 2021).

Teaching and coaching habits

Besides teaching styles, teaching habits play a great role in classroom management. And also, coaching is a basic skill a teacher should develop specifically during skill demonstration or clinical practice. The student participants stated that they have no experience with skill demonstration in college because most of the teachers use videos to teach the skill part of the subjects. And most of the students focus only on completing the class. Then, there was no one to ask about skill practice. The students believed that it was the students who made the teachers omit the skill demonstration part and focus only on the theoretical part of the curriculum. They added that during clinical practice, most of the teachers came for attendance checks. They just enter the ward, look here and there, and leave the ward without saying anything about the cases. Therefore, the students concluded that it would be better if the teachers would be with them and help them practice better because there were a lot of points from clinical practice that helped us on the licensing exam. Student S6 voiced:

My father is a high school teacher. Often, he talks about the importance of skill practice for health professionals. One day, I remembered his idea and asked my teacher if he was ready to take us to the skill demonstration lab. Then, he answered me that he was assigned only for the theory part and the demonstration would be covered by the skill-lab assistants. After that day I informed my dad and he brought me a lot of videos and checklists. He helped me understand the concepts while reading with me. Even for this exam, my father helped me a lot to improve my study habits.

Studies show that student outcomes are predicted by teaching practices. Factors such as parental background, school factors, and teachers' factors have a serious influence on students' academic performance (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Ouyang et al., 2019; Tokunbo Olufemi et al., 2018).

Guidance and advisory services

The students voiced:

Just like research projects, what if other subjects do have advisors! The way I was studying might not be effective. r the material I used to study could not be credentialed or be out of date. In this and similar cases, I would need help from my teachers. However, there is no active academic guidance service in our college except for research and community-based and team training programs (CBTP / TTP). Even, guidance for research as well as CBTP and TTP was not effective.

Student activities, communication and feedback

During the study year, students perform a lot of academic activities for which they might be rewarded directly or indirectly. These student activities include assignments, projects, tests, homework, etc. And these activities should challenge students and make them read so many references. But the appropriate source should be listed by the teachers in order to keep students from wasting their time reading fake and outdated materials. One of the students, S3, said:

Most of my teachers did not give assignments. Their handout also has no list of references, and then it's difficult for me to find books even at the college library. Even if the assignments are given, they are solely from that teacher's handout. The same is true for the tests. I read only the handouts and answered them easily. For tests, some of my teachers used to tell us the slides that were included and not included in the exam, and thus I limited myself to my teachers' handouts only.

Regarding feedback from the students who took the exam, all teachers said 'No', however, they could ask about the exam sheet if they could take a copy of it. The majority of teachers stated that they did not interact and communicate with students to get feedback. Often, they responded to their concerns, and they did not even imagine taking feedback from them.

Theme Four: Willingness

This theme, focuses on the last research question: "What activities should be done to improve students' performances in licensure examinations?" One of the teachers, T4, said:

The students perform better if they have an interest in studying their profession. Students' belief in their own efforts is also very fundamental to perform better. I faced some students who lacked self-confidence while they were performing fine.

Accommodation for students whether with families or living separately has its own socio-economic effect on academic success. The students also believed that the families' residence is far from their university area. They stated that living separately from the family is not good. Activities such as cooking food, washing clothes or searching for water take hours. Most importantly, financially they could face challenges. So, they believed that the performance would be better if there were dormitory and café services that were identical to those at universities. They also added that it would be good if the teachers were more familiar with licensure exam items just like entrance exams, etc.

Because it helps the teachers know what the questions look like and their major area of focus. The most up-to-date credential reading materials should be prepared by the departments and be accessible to help students study hard. Another teacher, T6, said:

We, the teachers should take initiative and focus more on professional courses starting from entry. Whenever teachers are assigned to teach those courses, it should be based on competence, and feedback from students should be considered.

Providing feedback means giving students an explanation of what they are doing correctly and/or incorrectly, with the focus of the feedback on what the student is doing right. It has a compelling influence on student achievement. When teachers seek or at least are open to what learners know, what they understand, where they make errors, and when they have misconceptions when they are not engaged, then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful. Feedback from teachers makes learning visible. It is most productive for a student's learning when they are provided with an explanation as to what is accurate and inaccurate about their work. Reducing stress around exam time is conducive to student's mental wellbeing and this is achieved through feedback from students and responding to them accordingly (Ambrose et al., 2009).

A study done at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, concluded that the teachers used a form of feedback that was often ineffective in satisfying the students and improving their learning experience (Mamoon et al., 2016). From the administrative side, it's believed that activities should be tracked at different levels using objective performance measures. Administrative activity and teaching-learning processes are inseparable, and hence it should be a collaborative effort to act more even including the parents. Working through the standards starting from the first day of students' entry up to their graduation as part of academic quality assurance is important.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from this study show that language barriers, poor reading habits, a lack of guidance and advisory services, a lack of time, poor communication, and poor learning material were the major reasons for low performance in licensure examinations. And also, in relation to building the capacity of students, poor measurements were taken by the departments and the college as a whole. Additionally, the college teachers were poorly involved in the students' exam preparation. Activities such as clinical practicum have a crucial role in enriching students with up-to-date information and guidelines.

Throughout the journey to graduation, insufficient preparation time, lack of early preparation for the exam, such that the students could start preparing themselves as soon as they joined the profession on the second year, poor initiation from the department and absence of information about the exam items were the challenges faced by the students whereas bulky contents of the curriculum with inadequate session time, lack of information about the exam item, and lack of commitment among the

students, the teachers, departments, and the college are the challenges that have been faced by the teachers while teaching their students.

Therefore, providing up-to-date materials, giving assignments that can challenge students, focusing on professional courses from the start, and creating strong guidance, advisory, monitoring, and evaluation services are recommended.

Limitations of the study

As this study followed a qualitative approach, generalization of the research findings to the source population is impossible. Furthermore, there is no related published data to compare the research findings. Moreover, the study population was comprised of students, teachers and administrators only. However, the case of students' performance can also be explored from parents' and other stakeholders such as employers' perspectives. Therefore, conducting mixed methods or follow-up study over a relatively long period of time incorporating parents and other stakeholders can yield better findings.

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Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet

Bu nitel durum çalışmasının amacı, Harar Sağlık Bilimleri Yüksekokulu'ndaki Sağlık Bilimleri öğrencilerinin lisans sınavlarındaki nispeten düşük performanslarına yönelik algı ve beklentilerini çoklu perspektiflerden araştırmaktır. Bu çalışmaya, on beş katılımcı dahil edilmiş ve katılımcıları seçmek için amaçlı örnekleme tekniği kullanılmıştır. Veriler yüz yüze görüşme ve açık uçlu soru formları kullanılarak toplanmış ve tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, dil engelleri, zayıf okuma alışkanlıkları, rehberlik ve danışmanlık hizmetlerinin eksikliği, çalışma zamanının yetersizliği, zayıf iletişim ve güncel öğrenme materyallerinin yokluğu, lisans sınavlarındaki düşük performansın başlıca nedenleri olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu nedenle, güncel materyaller sağlama, öğrencilere zorlayıcı görevler verme, mesleğe girişten itibaren mesleki derslere odaklanma ve öğrencilerin akademik başarısını artırmak için güçlü rehberlik, danışmanlık, izleme ve değerlendirme hizmetleri önerilmektedir. Çalışma bulguları, öğrencilerin lisans sınavlarındaki düşük performanslarına ilişkin deneyimler, algılar ve nedenler konusundaki bilgi boşluğuna dikkat çekerek tıp ve sağlık bilimleri öğrencileri, öğretmenler, yöneticiler ve araştırmacılar için temel oluşturabilir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma çeşitli paydaşlar için öğrencilerin akademik başarılarını artırmaya yönelik bir kanıt olabilir. Bu çalışma nitel bir yaklaşım izlediği için, araştırma bulgularının kaynak popülasyona genelleştirilmesi mümkün değildir. Ayrıca, araştırma bulgularını karşılaştırmak için ilgili hususta yayınlanmış veri bulunmamaktadır. Dahası, çalışma popülasyonu sadece öğrenciler, öğretmenler ve yöneticilerden oluşmaktadır. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin performansı, ebeveynlerin ve işverenlerin perspektiflerinden de incelenebilir. Bu nedenle, daha derinlemesine bulgular elde etmek için ebeveynleri ve diğer paydaşları da içeren karma yöntem veya boylamsal yöntem ile çalışmaların yapılması önerilmektedir.

Ethics Committee Approval: The ethics committee approval for this reserach was obtained from Health Research Ethical Review Committee of Harar Health Sciences College. (Ref. number: ERC05/2022)

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all 15 participants.

Peer Review: This research was peer-reviewed.

Authors' Contribution:

1. Abdusamed Mohammed: Conceptualizing, Developing Proposal, Formulation of instrument, Data Collection, Analysis and Thesis write-up.
2. Furo Beshir: Translation of data collection tool in to two local languages (i.e. Afan Oromo, and Amharic), Supervision of data collection process.

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