CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in the perceived teaching effectiveness of part-time and full-time faculty. The NCTEI was used to determine perceptions of teaching effectiveness of part-time and full-time faculty from seven ADN programs. The NCTEI measures teaching effectiveness along five different scales: Teaching Ability, Nursing Competence, Evaluations, Interpersonal Relationships, and Teacher’s Personality.

In this chapter, the results of data analysis are discussed. Next, the relationship of the findings of this study to prior research is examined. Then, implications of this study for future practice, research, and policy are investigated. Finally, the limitations of the study are described.

Discussion of the Results

The first three research questions posed in this study were designed to investigate perceived differences in the teaching effectiveness of full-time and part-time clinical nursing faculty. The first research question examined student perceptions. The results indicate that students do perceive a difference between the two groups of faculty. Students ranked instruction by full-time faculty as more effective than that offered by part-time faculty on each of the five scales and on the Overall score. The findings of the third research question support this conclusion.

The third research question investigated differences in the way ADN students perceive clinical instruction by nursing faculty and the way faculty perceive their own instruction. This question was analyzed by comparing the responses of part-time faculty to the responses of their students and the responses of full-time faculty to the responses of their students. No significant differences were found in student and faculty perceptions of teaching effectiveness. This finding supports the results to the first question. That is, if there are no significant differences in faculty and student perceptions of teaching effectiveness, student ratings of teachers are similar to teacher ratings of themselves. Assuming that teachers can accurately assess their own teaching effectiveness, if student ratings of teachers parallel teachers’ own ratings of their performance, this suggests that student ratings are a valid measurement of teaching effectiveness.

The findings from the second research question seem to contradict the findings of the first and third questions. This question asked if there are differences in the way full-time and part-time ADN clinical nursing faculty perceive their own teaching effectiveness. No significant differences were found. These results lead one to conclude that either the full-time faculty under-rated their effectiveness or that the part-time faculty over-rated their effectiveness.

The findings of this study might be related to several different factors. The first factor that might influence perceptions of teaching effectiveness is the faculty member’s teaching experience. Full-time faculty in this study had more teaching experience than
part-time faculty. Experience might enable full-time faculty to better judge the students’ abilities in the clinical setting. This judgment might allow the full-time faculty to respond to student needs in a more appropriate manner. For instance, experience might allow a faculty member to determine that one student needs close supervision while another can be allowed to function more independently. This experience might lead students and faculty to rank the Teaching Ability of full-time faculty higher than that of part-time faculty.

The greater teaching experience of the full-time faculty might also influence rankings of Evaluation. The skill involved with providing feedback to students in an appropriate manner might be learned over time. Part-time faculty may not have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill.

The second factor that might influence perceptions of teaching effectiveness is the educational level of the faculty. The full-time faculty who participated in the study had higher levels of education than the part-time faculty, with the majority of the full-time faculty holding graduate degrees in nursing. Full-time faculty members’ additional educational preparation might explain why students and faculty rate the Nursing Competence of full-time faculty higher than that of part-time faculty.

The differences in the education between the part-time and full-time faculty who participated in this study are similar to the differences in part-time and full-time faculty employed throughout the nation. Part-time faculty members are generally less-well educated than full-time faculty members (Zimbler, 2001).

It is interesting to note that while the full-time faculty were more educated than part-time faculty, there were no significant differences in the nursing credentials held. Credentialing is a mechanism used within the profession to recognize advanced levels of nursing practice. Faculty who hold nursing credentials might be expected to display high levels of Professional Competence, regardless of their employment status. One explanation for this apparent contradiction might be the multiple roles that full-time faculty play in the curriculum. For example, full-time faculty are usually responsible for preparing and delivering content in the classroom setting. This would permit the full-time faculty to draw parallels between didactic and clinical experiences. This might lead students to perceive their full-time faculty as subject matter experts and thus to recognize the Professional Competence of the full-time faculty more readily than that of the part-time faculty.

The difference in teaching responsibilities of full-time and part-time faculty is the third factor that might influence perceptions of teaching effectiveness. Students might rate full-time faculty higher in terms of Interpersonal Relationships because full-time faculty usually work with students in both the classroom and the clinical setting. This practice offers several advantages for full-time faculty and students. Students have the opportunity to interact with the full-time faculty on an almost daily basis. This allows them to develop closer relationships with full-time faculty and may lead the students to prefer the full-time faculty in the clinical setting.
Another explanation for the difference in rankings between the full and part-time faculty might be related to the greater commitment of full-time faculty to the nursing program. Full-time faculty are responsible for developing and improving the curriculum, for ensuring that national accreditation standards are met, and must answer to their administration and to their State Boards of Nursing if their students do not perform successfully on the NCLEX-RN. This commitment might mean that full-time faculty devote more time and energy to perfecting their teaching effectiveness.

The final research question asked how student ratings of effectiveness compare with the percentage of first-time pass rates on the NCLEX-RN. A review of the average pass rate for each school and the Overall student perception of teaching effectiveness did not reveal any relationship.

The NCLEX-RN was chosen as a standard for measurement because it is the one measure of effectiveness that would be common to all of the participating schools. ADN curricula are designed to prepare students to take the NCLEX-RN and only graduates are eligible for the exam. Since only successful students take the exam, those students who were not able to graduate were not included in this measurement. This might have affected the results to this question. Differences in teaching effectiveness might affect more vulnerable students more than it does successful students who are able to persevere regardless of the quality of teaching.

Another factor that might have affected the results of this analysis is that the pass rate score for each school was averaged over the last five years. The current year was not included in the analysis. It is possible that the faculty at the schools have changed in the last year or that students from previous years would have ranked faculty effectiveness differently.

Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research

The data from this study support many of the findings related to effective teaching from previous studies. The following discussion reviews studies relating to the concepts of teaching ability, nursing competence, evaluation, interpersonal relationships, and teacher’s personality.

Consider, for example, the matter of teaching ability. In the present study, full-time faculty were ranked higher than part-time faculty in terms of teaching ability. Teaching ability refers to the skills teachers use in the classroom or clinical setting to effectively convey knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the student. A review of the literature revealed that the ability to teach well is considered essential for effective teaching. Some researchers have asked various groups of students and faculty to describe factors that contribute to effective teaching (Humphrey, 1987; Mogan & Knox, 1983). Concepts related to teaching ability were included in the resulting lists. Several other studies found that factors related to teaching ability accounted for large percentages of the variance in teaching effectiveness and teacher evaluation (Armington, Reinkka, & Creighton, 1972; Jirovac, et al., 1998; Smith & Cranton, 1992). It would seem that the
findings of the present study support those of prior studies in terms of including teaching ability as one element when evaluating teaching effectiveness.

Another factor examined in both this study and previous investigations is professional competence. Professional competence describes teachers’ knowledge and skill in their discipline. Previous studies have confirmed that novice teachers, expert teachers, and students agree that professional competence is important for effective teaching (Brown, 1981; Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Collinson, 1999; Parker & Magnesen, 1986). Some researchers have found that novice teachers consider professional competence to be the most important aspect of teaching effectiveness (Parker & Magnesen, 1986). Other researchers found that experienced teachers believe that professional competence is a significant component of teaching effectiveness, but that other factors are more important (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Collinson, 1999). While the rankings of the role of professional competence vary in prior research, including professional competence as a standard by which to assess effective teaching is consistent in all prior studies. The inclusion of professional competence in the present study parallels these previous studies.

Evaluation is another factor related to effective teaching. Researchers have established the importance of evaluation (Jirovac et al., 1998; O’Shea & Parsons, 1979; Sieh & Bell, 1994) and described the skills required for evaluation (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Mogan & Knox, 1983; O’Shea & Parsons, 1979; Sieh & Bell, 1994). Good evaluation skills include the ability to provide constructive criticism to students without belittling them. Again, the inclusion of evaluation in the present study is consistent with those previous studies that argued about the importance of evaluation in the teaching process.

Good interpersonal relationships between students and faculty have been shown to be an integral part of teaching effectiveness (Brown, 1981; Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Such relationships also have a positive impact on the students’ education (Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Walsh and Maffei (1994) found that a good relationship between the teacher and student might enhance enjoyment in learning, improve student evaluations of faculty, and augment student learning. In this study, professional competence was one of the components used to measure teaching effectiveness. Findings that link professional competence to teaching effectiveness support findings from previous studies.

The teacher’s personality has been shown to contribute to the effectiveness of instruction (Fisher & Kent, 1998; Mogan & Knox, 1983). One researcher determined that student ratings of a teacher’s personality are more closely related to teaching effectiveness than the teacher’s own rating of personality (Feldman, 1986). In this study, there were no significant differences in student ratings and in teachers’ own ratings of their personality. Another researcher found an inverse relationship between those personality traits that contributed to effective teaching and age (Renaud & Murray, 1996). In this study, full-time faculty were significantly older than the part-time faculty, but students assigned higher ratings to the full-time faculty. Despite the difference in these
findings, this study demonstrated that teacher’s personality is a component of teaching effectiveness. This is consistent with findings from previous studies.

For the most part, the results of the current study are consistent with findings of other studies. Previous studies have sought to determine factors that contribute to teaching effectiveness (Brown, 1981; Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Humphrey, 1987; Jirovac et al., 1998; Mogan & Knox, 1983). Components of effective teaching include teaching ability, professional competence, evaluation practices, the interpersonal relationship established between teacher and student, and the teacher’s personality. The findings of this study contradicted prior research in regard to findings related to measurement of the teacher’s personality. Nonetheless, the use of each of the five factors in measuring teaching effectiveness is reaffirmed. The major contribution of this study, however, is not the identification of the factors that make up teaching effectiveness, but rather the actual measurement and comparison of teaching effectiveness in two groups of teachers.

**Implications for Future Practice, Research, and Policy**

Greater numbers of part-time faculty are utilized in higher education today than ever before. This is particularly true in public community colleges (Zimbler, 2001). However, the results of this study indicate that full-time clinical nursing faculty teach more effectively than part-time faculty. This finding has implications for future practice, research, and policy.

The implications for future practice are numerous. Since the use of part-time faculty is a given in many educational settings, the findings of the present study suggest that the focus of administrators who employ part-time faculty should be on providing adequate preparation for their teaching role. In the present study, full-time faculty were ranked higher than part-time faculty in terms of teaching ability. Part-time faculty should be provided with orientation programs that include seminars designed to improve their skill in conveying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the student.

The present study also indicated that students and faculty rank the professional competence of full-time faculty as higher than the professional competence of part-time faculty. The full-time faculty were better prepared educationally for their teaching role. Administrators should encourage part-time faculty to continue their education.

Even though part-time nursing faculty may not be as well educated as full-time faculty, many hold credentials in their field of expertise. Administrators should encourage part-time faculty to lead a class or seminar in their specific field for students. This would allow students to recognize the part-time faculty as subject matter experts and might lead to improved perceptions of professional competence.

Part-time faculty were also ranked lower than full-time faculty in terms of evaluation. Full-time faculty might help the part-time faculty improve their evaluation skills by reviewing some of the papers graded by part-time faculty to ensure that similar grading standards are used. This would also allow the full-time faculty to ensure that
written comments to students are appropriate and adequate. Full-time and part-time faculty might also discuss the type of feedback provided to students and the manner in which feedback is provided. This assistance might improve perceptions of the part-time faculty member’s evaluation skills.

In this study, part-time faculty were ranked lower than full-time faculty in the category of interpersonal relationships. A tactic for improving the interpersonal relationships of part-time faculty is to encourage mentoring relationships between experienced full-time faculty and part-time faculty. As part of the mentoring relationship, part-time faculty might be provided with the opportunity to observe full-time faculty in the clinical setting. This would allow the part-time faculty to observe the relationship between the full-time faculty and the students, and to model their own relationships with students accordingly.

A mentoring relationship between full-time and part-time faculty might also help improve part-time faculty member’s ratings on personality. In this study, part-time faculty ranked lower than full-time faculty in terms of teacher’s personality. The opportunity to mentor with full-time faculty might illustrate the traits of successful teachers to part-time faculty members. These implications for practice may help to improve the teaching effectiveness of part-time faculty.

The findings of this study also have implications for future research. This study found a significant difference in the rankings of full-time and part-time clinical nursing faculty. Future studies might explore teaching ability among full-time and part-time faculty in different disciplines. Such studies would expand the knowledge base on differences in teaching ability between full-time and part-time faculty.

In this study, there were significant differences in the education and experience of the part-time and full-time faculty. Future researchers might control for these differences by using respondents with similar backgrounds. Such studies might determine if factors other than education and experience influence teaching effectiveness.

Researchers might also wish to determine if the differences in education and experience between the part-time and full-time clinical nursing faculty who participated in this study hold true for faculty in other nursing programs. These studies might expand the knowledge available about nursing faculty in general.

In this study, full-time clinical nursing faculty members were ranked higher in terms of teaching effectiveness than part-time clinical nursing faculty. Future studies on teaching effectiveness might look at the classroom setting rather than the clinical setting. Such studies would determine if there are differences in the teaching effectiveness of full and part-time faculty in other settings.

Data collection for this study took place over one semester. Future studies might expand data collection over several semesters. A longitudinal study might reveal whether perceived differences in teaching effectiveness change over time.
In addition to the implications for future practice and research, the findings of this study also have implications for future policy. In this study, full-time faculty were found to be more effective teachers than part-time faculty. Those responsible for hiring policies may want to use the findings to review their employment policies regarding part-time faculty. The results suggest that teaching is more effective when delivered by full-time faculty members.

In this study, full-time faculty had higher levels of education than the part-time faculty. The findings have implications for those responsible for faculty development policies. The results suggest that part-time faculty might be well served by policies that encourage them to pursue higher levels of education. Policies that address issues of financial support, scholarships, and professional leave for part-time faculty might also be warranted.

The full-time faculty in this study had significantly more years of teaching experience than the part-time faculty. Policy makers should develop policies for the retention of part-time faculty. These policies might ensure that part-time faculty are more experienced teachers.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the practical implications of the findings, there were a number of limitations to this study. Several of these limitations related to the sample.

The first limitation of this study concerned the faculty sample. Thirty full-time faculty and 14 part-time faculty participated in the study. The unequal sample sizes might have influenced the results of the study.

The second limitation of the study is also related to the faculty sample. The full-time faculty were more experienced teachers than the part-time faculty. The difference in teaching experience might have influenced the results of the study.

The differing levels of education between the full and part-time faculty are the next limitation of the study. Full-time faculty were more highly educated than the part-time faculty who participated in the study. These educational differences might have impacted the results of the study.

The instrument used to collect data for this study might have also been a limitation. While every effort was made to ensure the instructions and items on the instrument were clear, several student participants wrote comments on the survey that they did not understand items, especially items in which the wording had been reversed. If students were not able to understand the items, the results might have been influenced.

Although there were limitations to the study, the results provide data about the teaching effectiveness of full-time and part-time clinical nursing faculty. This information provides a clearer picture of the use of part-time faculty.
In conclusion, the findings of this study suggested that students perceive significant differences in the teaching effectiveness of full-time versus part-time clinical nursing instructors. Ratings for these two groups differed on all scales of the NCTEI, as well as on overall scores on the instrument. Moreover, there were no significant differences in the ways that students rated the effectiveness of teachers and the self-ratings of the teachers themselves. Thus, the students’ perceptions of teaching effectiveness can be considered reliable.

These results are very important in the face of the increased use of part-time faculty, especially in the community college setting. If this trend continues, greater numbers of part-time instructors will be hired. If differences in teaching effectiveness between part-time and full-time teachers hold true over time, continued increases in the use of part-time faculty may lead to a decrease in the quality of instruction. Since instruction is at the heart of the academic endeavor, especially in the community college setting where the use of part-time faculty is most pronounced, the findings of this study have important implications for administrators and policy makers. To maintain a high level of instructional effectiveness in the future, it may be necessary to monitor the number of part-time faculty members or to offer programs and services that enhance the instructional skills of those part-time faculty members.