

Challenges Experienced by Student Nurses During Skill Acquisition at The Clinical Area

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Acquisition of adequate skills has been shown to improve the quality of care provided to patients when the care providers are competent. The study explores challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition in the clinical area so that strategies to minimize them are drawn.

Methods: A systematic review in which Google search engines and Google scholar, and CINAHL were used to obtain published journal articles. The search terms used included: Challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition in the clinical area, Challenges encountered by student nurses during hospital practice, Challenges experienced by student nurses whilst at clinical placement.

Results: Challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition are related to issues in the clinical environment, and learning opportunities such as shortage of clinical staffs and clinical tutors, little support supervision, shortage of materials, student allocations, role model, and short time for practicing in the clinical area, interpersonal relationship, and theory-practice gap.

Conclusion: The challenges experienced by student nurses cut across the clinical area environment, the students, and the clinical instructors.

Keywords

Nursing education, Skills, Students, Clinical training.

Introduction

Clinical learning experience is located at the center of nursing education and it's the basis on the development of professional nursing. The empowerment of nursing students occurs during clinical learning in a complex and dynamic learning environment. Student nurses often experience challenges like shortage of clinical staffs and clinical instructors, lack of support supervision, shortage of materials, student allocation, lack of role models, Short time for practicing, interpersonal relationship, and knowledge-theory gap [1].

Esther [2], revealed that over 60% of all students who left the nursing program prematurely attributed their dissatisfaction and subsequent attrition to challenges during skills acquisition. Clinical training is considered as an indispensable and very important part

of professional nursing education yet its major objective is not attained by many student nurses.

Clinical learning is challenging, unpredictable, stressful and constantly changing. Negative clinical experiences effects trust, attitude, and student learning. They can waste a great deal of time and energy, impose heavy financial burden on education system, mental tension, and cause students unable to handle or finish the course in the required and defined time [3].

In Uganda despite improved curriculum, nurses graduating from nursing colleges are not competent enough to deliver the quality care to patients in most hospitals (UDHS, 2009). It is speculated that if student nurses continue learning from these unfriendly and less friendly clinical environments, the nursing profession is going to be full of nurses with inadequate skills who may not be able to meet the golden nursing standards (UDHS, 2009). The unified understanding of these challenges will guide in setting strategies

to facilitate adequate clinical skills acquisition which is a core in the nursing profession.

Methodology

A systematic review was used in this study to integrate and provide scientific knowledge from previous studies. The relevant literature from empirical research published in scientific journals was collected, systematized and evaluated. The google search engines, google scholar, and CINAHL were used to obtain journal articles. The search terms used included: Challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition in the clinical area, Challenges encountered by student nurses during hospital practice, Challenges experienced by student nurses whilst at clinical placement. The literature from different types of research designs and multiple research methodologies both qualitative and quantitative were included.

The journal articles from 2008 to 2018 written in English, done in a hospital environment and considered student nurses were reviewed. The studies that were done in the communities or rural settings, considered only student midwives, intern nurses and professional nurses were not included.

Major challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition

The major challenges commonly experienced by student nurses usually involve; Incompetence of clinical instructors, Shortage of positive role model, non- supporting learning environment [4], short duration placements, unclear objectives and guidelines, lack of orientation and belongingness by staff at the clinical sites [5]. Ineffective communication, inadequate readiness, and emotional reaction [3]. According to Chun [6], inappropriate clinical evaluation method, linguistic and intercultural competence difficulties are some of the challenges.

Incompetence of clinical instructors

This entails inadequate preparation, inadequate clinical supervision, inappropriate approach in using instructional strategies, and distorted evaluation process [4]. This is common especially with novice clinical instructors. This is so challenging to student nurses when the ward personnel deny both student and their instructor an opportunity to perform.

Lack of preparation on the side of mentors and other staff is a challenge to student nurses on the practicum [1]. Mentors need to be well prepared to teach/guide/mentor students if they want competent products that will carry out safe patient care.

The knowledge deficit of mentors is yet another challenge to training students. In a study conducted by Hart G, et al [7], it was found that student expected their clinical teachers to be knowledgeable and skilled in the field of nursing. Also according to Friendly, et al [8], one most important professional responsibility of nurses is to keep up with ever changing standard of practice. Some of the nursing staff have good interaction with nursing students and that are interested in helping students in the placements but they are

limited by the content they have in relation to what students need and they also lack teaching skills.

Non supportive learning environment

According to Zohreh V, et al. [4], non-supportive learning environment is that with non-supportive interpersonal communication, lack access to direct experience for students, traditionalism in clinical behavior, and stressful psychosocial environment. Students were complaining about non-supportive relationship of the instructors and clinical nurses with them. They indicated about behavioral and verbal violence of the instructors, lack of criticism acceptance by the instructors, and not caring about the students learning repeatedly. Harsh morality of the instructor with the students resulted in fear of students not to dare ask questions. It even formed the sense of isolation in the students and withdrew them from the treatment team.

Inadequate sense of Humor

Another challenge students face while at the clinical area is being taught without a sense of humor [9]. It is stipulated that nurses involved in clinical education tend to be energetic individuals with an infectious enthusiasm coming from self-confidence, excitement about nursing and pleasure in teaching but warns that if these hard working people (nurses) are continuously not motivated and given their financial incentives, they may resort to teach for the sake while ignoring students' interests/expectations.

Some staff lack interest in teaching or guiding students. They see students as people whom they can do without. Clinical staff say "students are mere visitors who are seen to disrupt accepted working practices of the hospital [10]. On the other hand, certain staff takes students as laborers who have come to relieve them from work. The student nurses complain that doctors see their students as junior colleagues whereas nurses see student nurses as laborers [7].

Language barrier

Student nurses at times experience particular difficulties with communication in clinical areas. This challenge both patients (who find it difficult to convey their needs) and to student nurses (who are not able to explain the procedure to the patients [6]. Using a language, you are unfamiliar with at clinical area by patients poses a challenge to non-local students of the area [4]. The study revealed that patients always tend to avoid students who do not speak the same language like them due to fear of being misunderstood / diagnosed of their sickness and other related concerns.

Perception of intercultural competence

The nursing students often experience challenges in handling patients from other cultures and religions. Lack of knowledge and understanding of other cultures, and the ability to adjust in order to meet patient needs and have a smooth dialogue greatly challenges adequate skills acquisition [6].

Inappropriate clinical evaluation method

Students are worried that the current clinical evaluation forms are

not sufficient and appropriate for their clinical evaluation. The forms exclude competencies in communication skills, decision making, and critical thinking skills [5,11].

Clinical assessment has also been noted by students on training as challenging. During clinical assessment of individual students, problems of validity, reliability, subjectivity and bias is a routine [3].

Unsuitable programming of clinical education

The limitation of clinical training hours, and lack of appropriate unified laws and regulations challenges students during skills acquisition. Also planning for teaching and learning nursing competencies is not appropriate thus a big challenge to student nurses. All students do not reach the same level of competency the same period of time [5].

According to studies by [9], students frequently complain that they do not spend enough time in clinical areas to feel comfortable. A similar complaint was noted by [3]. He found out that the length of the clinical placement was a challenge and it affected the level of confidence reached by student nurses on practicum. The short period clinical placements limit student's ability to become members of the team, resulting in a superficial learning. However, [12] argues that valuable time is wasted as a result of the frequency and duration of clinical placement rotations from one unit to another. The insufficient deployment time is a major challenge affecting student nurses on practicum [2]. She further states that in a busy setting, there may be limited time for teaching and giving feedback to students.

Another study by [4], identifies barriers to normal feedback as due to inadequate supervision training, unfavorable ward learning environment besides insufficient time spent with students.

Ngaiyaye et al, [12] during the study of challenges in neonatal nursing also identified short duration and variation in clinical placement as major challenges student nurses encounter during skills acquisition.

Anxiety

Students in the clinical area more often experience anxiety as a result of feeling incompetent especially during their first placements [11]. Also a study by [1] on the 3rd and 4th year nursing students revealed that clinical experience was the most stressful part of skills acquisition. They added that unfamiliar areas, difficult patients, fear of making mistakes and being evaluated by faculty staff were expressed as anxiety producing situations especially during initial placements. Also in related studies by [7], it was found out that nursing students undertaking clinical practice had unmeasurable stress and anxiety that affected their comfort ability and acquiring new skills. The ward is the best place to learn but very few of the learners' needs are met in this setting [13]. He also points out things like evaluation by others on clinical experience and total patient care, interpersonal relations with staff, quality of care and procedures are the sources of anxiety. Also experiencing of

apprehension and lack of confidence in fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities of professional nursing contributes to anxiety and its consequences [3].

Shortage of equipment

Also lack of working materials on the part of the students and inadequate teaching materials stated by a student nurse on practicum as big challenge as per study done in Cameroon by [8]. Shortage of materials made students not able to acquire the skills due to lack of resources needed for use in the clinical area [16].

Theory- practice gap

Another major challenge is the gap between theory and practice. Many nursing students were not happy with the way the theoretical basis was being integrated into practice. They had a lot of theory but had no way of practicing it [10]. The student nurses usually found themselves torn between the demands of their tutor and practicing nurses in real clinical situations and are unable to generalize from what they learnt in theory.

Student nurses lack interest to participate in the clinical area because at times they could think that nursing was not really professional. They had confusion between theory and practice. Students said they just did basic nursing care, very basic like giving bed births, keeping patients clean and making their beds clean which any one could do including nursing aids for the entire training [3]. It was also noted that students were restricted from practicing other skills and are just limited to the basics.

Student allocation

Another challenge that hindered adequate acquisition of clinical skills by students was too many students versus number of patients in the clinical area. It was reported by many students and this was summarized by one of them who said this 'There was too much competition to find clients, for example, when you are allocated to a specific ward there are requirements for you to achieve, so if there are so many students in that area you tend to have problems on how to achieve your objectives' [14].

Student motivation

According to [14] reported that students are not motivated to learn the skills as they lack initiative in their own learning. Lack of seriousness among students on placements poses a challenge to those who are objective in a way that they disrupt the normal school and hospital programs and routines, according to findings by [11]. It is stated that student nurses at times encounter personality conflicts and lack of interest from their colleagues who are irregular, lack respect for staff and not willing to learn. This problem affects other students especially when group task is given or when the mentor feels over disturbed by other students. Furthermore, a study carried out in Australia by [2] stated that nursing students were facing a significant issue in horizontal violence. This horizontal violence is used to describe bullying and aggression, involving intergroup conflict particularly during clinical placements, humiliation and lack of respect, powerlessness and becoming invisible.

Conclusion

Challenges experienced by student nurses during skills acquisition can originate within the students themselves, non-supporting clinical environment, lack of resources, knowledge gap among clinical nurses, clinical instructors and tutors, and lack of role modelling. In principle when student nurses have acquired necessary skills the quality of care provided to patients improve. The challenges cause anxiety, psychosocial stress and negative attitude towards the profession which make students unable to attain the necessary skills.

Recommendations

Nurse training institutions must set standards for clinical instructors and mentors, as well as designing a clear program with objectives to be adhered to while in clinical area. From the above review, the clinical staffs need to consider student nurses as potential for professionals, therefore they should guide, counsel, support and be patient with them. The government i.e. Ministry of Education and sports, and Ministry of Health will need to strengthen supervision and monitoring of clinical instructors, tutors, clinical mentors and staffs in regards to how students acquire skills in clinical areas.

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