

Nursing Students and Peer Mentoring in a Nursing College: Perceived Benefits and Supports

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

Peer mentoring in nursing is an interactive process that involves peer mentees and mentors together with college lecturers. Students continued to perceive mentorship not just as a method of solving academic problems, but also as a tool for the achievement of the individual student educational goals. This study aimed at evaluating the perception of nursing students with regards to peer mentoring in one of the selected college of nursing campus in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A non-experimental, exploratory-descriptive quantitative research design was used in this study. Sixty nursing students from a four-year comprehensive basic diploma-nursing programme were recruited for the study using randomly selected 24 mentors and 36 mentees who consented to participate in the study. The findings revealed that peer mentoring in nursing is yet to attain a stage whereby an experienced student nurse provides support and guidance to another student nurse who is experiencing academic or personal difficulties. The main source of mentorship information to students is college staff and students themselves. The findings in this study indicated that the students are aware of the concept and benefits of peer mentoring. Peer mentors are also aware that they need support from college lecturers on how to implement the peer mentoring effectively. Majority of students knew about peer mentoring through the college staff and they reviled that mentors support should come from the mentoring coordinators and the central mentoring office. This study suggests that there is the need to introduce a Peer mentoring central committee in order to support and train mentors who are capable and willing to help other students in their learning problems.

Keywords: Mentoring, Peer monitoring, Undergraduate, Nursing education

INTRODUCTION

Peer mentoring in the context of nursing student can be defined as a process whereby an experienced student nurse provides support and guidance to another student nurse who is having academic or personal difficulties. Foremost, this professional relationship is characterized by an intervention to support, assist and improve the retention, academic success and educational experience of nursing students [1]. Thus, peer mentoring to nursing students is an important and integral component of nursing education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, many scholars' in different parameters have investigated peer mentoring to nursing students. According to Bozeman and Feeney [2] peer mentoring has expanded and founded in most Colleges and Universities, frequently as a means to outreach, retain, and recruit minority students and in European countries, mentoring was found to integrate individual and organizational aspects and environmental, collegial, pedagogical and clinical attributes in nursing placements [3]. Furthermore, mentoring facilitates the development of problem-solving and decision-making skills by helping to clear up difficult nursing situations [4].

Schmidt et al. [5] reported that peer mentoring outside of the classroom and or acute care setting facilitates student involvement in community and social issues, allowing practical application of classroom. Peer mentoring involves more experienced students supporting new students during their academic and personal development and it has been found

to be effective in improving achievement, with some suggesting peer [6]. It is documented that mentoring users gain higher mean grades than non-users [7]. Furthermore, mentors' confidence and students' confidence in mentors increases when the relationship and the two roles are clearly defined and understood by all and that at least some of the mentorship skills required are inherent rather than acquired or taught [8]. Another scholars, Crisp and Cruz [6] pointed out that peer mentoring involves more experienced students supporting new students during their academic and personal development, and has been found to be effective in improving achievement. Additionally, peer mentors educate, guide, coach, support, counsel, and serve as role models for fellow students in their schools and departments [9]. They also provide a student-centred service that results in frequent positive feedback from students in all levels of the nursing programme [10]. Morse [11] describes the characteristics of a good peer mentor as someone who is generous, competent, self-confident, and open to a collaborative relationship.

In Sub-Saharan Africa within there are scarce resources related to peer mentoring to nursing students. However, in traditional African social environment, a thin line may exist between natural mentors and extended family members. Most of the natural mentors in African societies are extended family relatives rather than non-family members. Furthermore, natural mentorship does not require the mentee to live with the mentor as the case in fostering. The scenario may mean greater independence for the mentee and lesser social burden for the mentor. The natural mentors had been used to strengthen psychosocial well-being in child-headed households, who are victims of intra-state genocide [12].

In South Africa (SA), mentoring in the nursing profession is mainly observed in the clinical setting even though it is not formalized. There are no guidelines from the South African Nursing Council (SANC) to serve as a guide to mentors in clinical settings and mentors do not undergo special preparation. Although mentorship is not a common practice among South African professional nurses, preceptors are frequently used in a variety of healthcare settings where student nurses undertake their clinical learning [13]. Similarly, in the discipline of social psychology, the study that involved Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of South Africa programme considered to be an ideal in which to explore the quality of mentoring relationships, since its primary purpose is to provide adult friendships to youth considered to be at risk of antisocial outcomes. The BBBS programme in SA presents an ideal opportunity to reflect on the nature of the relationships formed in a context quite different from the USA where the programme was started [14].

Mhlaba [13] added that the nature and quality of the mentor-mentee relationship is a major concern for an effective mentoring process. Furthermore, clinical mentors support to students is crucial for growth and development of nursing students and quality of clinical skills. The role of the mentor is emerged as befriending, assisting, advising, supporting, teaching and motivating other students. Moreover, there is a need for the nurse educators and clinicians to work together to ensure the formalization of peer mentoring programme, through training of the mentors for the role and formalizing those roles [13].

Peer mentoring to nursing students has now become a challenge for educators, managers, clinicians and students. Bray and Nettleton [15] reported that despite the many studies of mentoring in nursing, there is still confusion about the description of mentoring in the context of students. The review of the literature by Murphy et al. [16] revealed that difficulty implementation of peer mentoring has contributed to uncertainty regarding its efficacy among nursing students. Murphy et al. [16] state that the difficulties in initiating contact, developing peer-mentor relationships and time constraints pose challenges to delivering in on-campus and off-campus students peer support. In the context of the college of nursing in KZN, Mhlaba [13] reported knowledge deficit on mentorship related to informal clinical mentoring among nursing students as one of the challenges that faced by the students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, exploratory quantitative research design was used in this study to explore the views of the nursing students in a selected college campus of interest with regards to peer mentoring. The study was conducted in one of the KwaZulu-Natal College of Nursing (KZN CN) college campus offering a four-year comprehensive basic diploma nursing programme. On selected campus, peer mentoring is said to be practised among the student.

The total number of students in the selected campus was 60. Due to the limited number of students in the population for the study, the entire population was conveniently included as part of the sample. Therefore, the sample for the study was 60 student nurses. A 41 item self-report questionnaire was used to collect data in this study. The study instrument was adapted from Andrews and Clark [17] peer mentoring evaluation toolkit. Andrew and Clark's [17] tool focused on Peer Mentoring Works. How Peer Mentoring Enhances Student Success in Higher Education. Items in the data collection instrument were grouped according to the study objectives. Seven (7) items collected demographic data, five (5) items focused on participants understanding of the term peer mentoring, twenty-one (21) items looked at the benefits for nursing students engaging in peer mentoring. The last (7) items described an available support to nursing students engaging in peer mentoring.

In order to test the reliability of the instrument, a test and retest of the instrument were conducted. The data collection instrument was administered twice over a period of two weeks to a group of randomly selected five (5) first year and five (5) fourth-year nursing student from the college campus that was temporarily accommodating this study. The findings from both rounds were analyzed and compared. The alpha Cronbach was 0.76 which indicated a high internal constancy. Furthermore, research objective compared to the questionnaire items, and they were reviewed by two experts in quantitative approaches in order to ensure their content validity.

The data generated from the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 21.0. Generally, descriptive statistics such as means, percentages and tables were used to describe the results of the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal prior to the conduct of the study. Similarly, permission was obtained from the selected campus where the study was conducted. Finally, as a requirement, informed consent was obtained from the students to participate in the study. The students were informed that participation is voluntary and that all information collected will be kept confidential.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sixty questionnaires were distributed, duly completed, returned and valid for analysis. Females constituted (n=40; 66.7%) of the study population and (n=44; 73.0%) of the respondents were less than or equal to 30 years of age, with a mean age of 23 years. Nearly half of the respondents (n=29; 66.7%) were second-year students and (n=36; 60.0%) were peer mentees. All respondents were full-time students and the majority (n=46; 76.7%) of participants were living in the college residence.

Table 1. Respondent's sources of knowledge about peer mentoring.

Students sources of understanding peer mentoring	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
College staff	35	58.3	25	41.7
Fellow students	19	31.7	41	68.3
Open day	16	26.7	44	73.3
Virtual Learning Environment	4	6.7	56	93.3
Email lecturer	2	3.3	58	96.7
Prospectus virtual	1	1.7	59	98.3

The students were asked about their sources of understanding of peer mentoring; the finding indicated that 35 (58.3%) of the respondents got information from college staff, 19 (31.7%) from fellow students, 16 (26.7%) on opening day, 4 (6.7%) through virtual learning environment, (n=2; 3.3%) through Email lecturer and (n=1; 1.7%) from the prospectus virtual as **Table 1** summarises the student sources of understanding mentoring.

Table 2. Benefits of peer mentoring for mentors and mentees.

Benefits of peer mentoring	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion/neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more committed to completing my course	35 (58.3%)	17 (28.3%)	6 (10.0%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
I felt as part of the college	26 (43.3%)	24 (40.3%)	8 (13.3%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
I feel my communication skills are more developed	24 (40.0%)	27 (45.0%)	7 (11.7%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
I am finding my time at college enjoyable	19 (31.7%)	24 (40.0%)	11 (18.3%)	6 (10%)	0 (0%)
Peer mentoring has positively influenced the way I approached learning	18 (30.0%)	23 (38.3%)	12 (20.0%)	4 (6.7%)	3 (5.0%)
I felt I am making more use of the opportunities available at college	17 (28.3%)	26 (43.3%)	13 (21.7%)	4 (6.7%)	0 (0%)

Regarding the benefits of peer mentoring, the majority (n=35; 58.3%) of participants strongly agreed to be committed to complete their course and (n=26; 43.30%) strongly agreed that they felt as part of the college. In communication skills development with peer mentoring, the majority, 24 (40.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed to this assertion and (n=24; 40.0%) agreed that they find their time at the college enjoyable. The result of the study also showed that (n=26; 43.3%) of the participants agreed that they felt they are making more use of the opportunities available at college and (n=24; 40%) also agreed that they feel they can talk to their mentor/mentee if they are worried. This is shown in **Table 2**.

Table 3. Available support to nursing students engaging in peer mentoring.

Available support to students engaging in peer mentoring	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion/neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I was supported by the mentoring coordinator in my collage	19 (79.2)	4 (16.6)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)
The training I received prepared me for the role	10 (41.6%)	7 (29.2%)	7 (29.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)
I was given support when I needed it from the central mentoring office	7 (29.2%)	10 (41.6%)	6 (25.0%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)
I sought support from other peer mentors	7 (29.2%)	9 (37.5%)	6 (25.0%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	24 (100%)

As reflected in **Table 3**, participants were asked to whether there was an available support for students engaging in peer mentoring. Majority of respondents (n=19; 79.2%) strongly agreed that they were supported by the mentoring coordinator in the college and (n=10; 41.6%) also strongly agreed that the training they received prepared them for the role. On the options of given support when I needed it from the central mentoring office, less than half (n=10; 41.6%) of participants agreed that they were given support when they needed it from the central mentoring office and (n=9; 37.5%) agreed that they sought support from other peer mentors when necessary.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Peer mentoring is a complex term to define as it incorporates into the terms peer and mentor. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ^[18], defined peer mentoring as the use of same age or same background educators to convey educational messages to a target group. Furthermore, Muir ^[19] defined peer mentoring as the processes through which a more experienced individual encourages and assists a less experienced individual to develop his or her potential within a shared area of interest.

For gaining insight into whether nursing students have information about peer mentoring, students admitted understanding peer mentoring from different sources. The findings of this study showed that as much as half of respondents 31.7% got information on peer mentoring from college staff. This finding is consistent with a study by Lattanzi et al. ^[20] who examined the application, outcomes of a service-learning project designed to facilitate peer mentorship and the development of social responsibility in selected medical University of physical therapy. The study reported that the physical therapy faculty members identified peer mentoring to students in practice and students travelled to designated community homeless clinic in teams. The study reported that first-year students were able to practice newly acquired skills under the supervision and peer mentorship of third-year students. Furthermore, the project was effective in meeting the community needs, fostering student understandings of social responsibility, and creating a valuable peer mentorship experience ^[20]. This type of innovative approach to student-to-student peer mentoring teaching strategy could be used to deliver health care to at-risk populations in a community-based setting ^[21].

The findings in this study indicated that the 31.7% of respondent admitted to getting information on peer mentoring from fellow students. Riley and Fearing ^[22] reported that undergraduate nursing students with academic problems were selected to be mentored by nurse educator graduate students who were obtained from the university school of nursing. Regarding the view that peer mentoring information may be obtained on opening day majority 26.7% of respondents agree opposed to 6.7% who responded disagree on virtual learning environments (VLE), 3.3%, who responded agree through Email lecturer and 1.7% who agree with regards to use of prospectus virtual. These results are supported by Kolek and Saunders ^[23] who commanded the use of three models of peer mentoring which are social networking sites such as Facebook, VLE, for example, Web CT or Blackboard and virtual worlds or three-dimensional multi-user. Therefore, the study found that prospectus virtual is a not common source of information about peer mentoring.

Regarding the benefit of engaging in peer mentoring by nursing students, most of the respondents (58.3%) strongly agreed that peer mentoring make students feel that they are more committed to completing their course compared to (28.3%) who just agree and (10.0%) who disagree and (10.0%) who strongly disagree. This is in line with a study by Brannagan et al. ^[24] which states that students, who were exposed to both the instructor and peer mentor in the skills

lab, found that when being guided by the mentor, there were greater gains in critical thinking and problem-solving as related to their work particularly in the skills lab.

Concerning whether peer mentoring makes student feels part of the college, it was found that the majority (43.3%), of the respondents, strongly agreed and 40.3% who just agree as opposed to 3.3% who had no opinion and 3.3% who disagreed. Dennison ^[10] commented that mentors promote materials and resources for clinical teaching and supporting an open comfortable learning environment. This is in line with Zey ^[25] survey who stated that the mentor acts as a key role player in creating learning opportunities and a favourable environment to maximize the students' learning. Regarding the view that peer mentoring makes students feel that their communication skills are more developed, the majority (40.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 45.0% agreed with this view as opposed to 11.7% who no opinion and 3.3% who disagreed. However, a study by Selwyn ^[26] indicates that nursing institutions need to include guidelines on ensuring Facebook is used in a secure and professional manner whenever peers use it as a means of communication for mentorship. With regards to the view that students find their time at college enjoyable with peer mentoring in this study 31.7% strongly agree, and 40.0% agreed as opposed to 18.3% who no opinion and 10% who disagree. This indicates that there is a need for formalization of peer mentoring in nursing colleges.

In this study, it was found that peer mentoring has positively influenced the way student approached learning (30.0% strongly agreed and 38.3% agreed). This study found that on the view to whether a student can talk to mentor/mentee when worried 26.7% respondents strongly agreed, 40% agreed and 10.0% disagreed and 5.0% who strongly disagreed. However, Li et al. ^[27] investigated the advantages of peer mentoring in relation to the psychological aspect of the nursing students in the clinical practice and commented that nursing students' stress levels decreased after clinical practice with peer mentees. Furthermore, this study noted that students benefit in peer mentoring by feeling that they are making more use of the opportunities available at the college, 43.3% agreed and 28.3% strongly agreed, however nearly quarter (21.7%) of respondents disagreed and 6.6% had no opinion on the view. A study by Jokelainen et al. ^[3] differs with this result in a statement that mentoring of nursing students will improve the quality of students' practice and provide an opportunity to employ students as part of the nursing staff in health facilities whenever there is a shortage of nurses. For effective student support, peer mentoring should involve more experienced students who support new students during their academic and personal development and has been found to be effective in improving their achievements.

The findings in this study showed that the majority (79.2%) of the mentors strongly agreed and 16.6% agreed that the mentoring coordinator in the college supported them, whilst 4.2% had no opinion. This is congruent to a study by Hogan et al. ^[28] who advocated that traditional mentoring in higher education has included faculty and staff members who provide mostly informal mentoring to graduate students in the university setting. This finding is in line with Riley and Fearing ^[22] who commented that an effective mentoring relationship could be developed to assist with academic achievement and clinical performance of nursing students. Findings in this study, therefore, indicated that a significant number of respondents agreed that the students who are engaging in peer mentoring received support from the mentoring coordinator in the college. However, there is a need to investigate the types of support given to the mentees.

Regarding the view that the training received by student mentors prepared them for the role, the findings in this study indicated that the majority (41.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 29.2% just agreed compared to 29.2% who had no opinion on the view. The findings showed that the majority of student mentors responded positively to the view compared to the small number of mentors who had no opinions. About 29.2% of the respondents were of the view that supports mentoring given when they needed it from the central mentoring office and 41.6% agree whilst 4.2% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

This corresponds with a study conducted by Muir ^[19] who discussed that peer mentoring is the processes through which a more experienced individual encourages and support the mentor to develop his or her potential within a shared area of interest. The findings further indicated that the 29.2% of the respondents strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed to the statement that mentor sought support from other peer mentors as opposed to 25.0% respondents who had no opinion and 8.3% disagreed to the statement. However, in the conceptual framework by Zey ^[25], the role of the mentor is to serve as a facilitator to guide the mentee in the application of theory to practice in any learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Peer mentoring in nursing is an interactive process, which involves peer mentees, mentors as well as college lecturers' who are the initiators and coordinators of the process. The findings in this research indicated that nursing students participating in a four-year comprehensive basic diploma nursing programme are aware of the concept and benefits of peer mentoring. The findings further indicated that the peer mentors are aware that they need support from college lecturers on how to implement the peer mentoring effectively. Majority of students knew about peer mentoring through the college staff and they revealed that mentors' support should come from the mentoring coordinators and the central mentoring office. By taking into considerations the benefits brought by peer mentoring in nursing education, it is pivotal to strengthen peer-mentoring programmes that best achieve the goals of helping nursing students in all learning

settings. As peer mentors educate, guide, coach, support, counsel and serve as role models for fellow students in their schools and departments, it is recommended that mentors training programmes should be planned carefully in consultation with interested and capable students to help other students in their learning problems. The existing peer mentoring strategies should be evaluated in order improve them and maximizing the benefits brought by peer mentoring.

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