






Significance of the Peer Group Clinical Mentoring Programme in Preparing Nursing Student Mentees for the Future Practice: Qualitative Retrospective Case Study

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Abstract. The foundation of any nursing education programme lies in developing clinical competence and professional growth for aspiring nurses. Therefore, implementing diverse clinical teaching and learning strategies, including peer group clinical mentorship, is imperative. The present study delved into the importance of peer group clinical mentorship based on the perspectives and experiences of nursing student mentees in a nursing education institution that faces resource constraints in the North-West Province. The study objectives were achieved through a retrospective case study. Two World Café sessions were held with 51 nursing student mentees who received clinical practice mentoring. A semi-structured schedule was followed based on Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988). The collected data was analyzed using the Four Levels of Analysis, derived from the Indigenous Health Research Framework proposed by Pienaar in 2017. Three themes emerged in this research, and the findings reveal that peer group clinical mentorship creates a space for nursing student mentees to acquire clinical competence and professionalism while interacting and socializing with one another, as well as improves psycho-social well-being and decreases clinical absenteeism among nursing students during clinical learning. Despite the poorly implemented peer group clinical mentorship in resource-stricken nursing education institutions, the findings of this research showed that peer group clinical mentorship is a vital clinical learning and teaching approach in ensuring competence and professionalism among nursing students.

Keywords: Peer-Group; Clinical Mentoring, Nursing Students, Retrospective Case, North-West Province, South Africa

1 Introduction

The foundation of any nursing education programme lies in developing clinical competence and professional growth for aspiring nurses. As a result of the intricate and challenging nature of nursing education for students, it is vital to incorporate diverse teaching and learning approaches, such as peer group clinical mentorship [1]. Peer-group clinical mentorship is a cost-effective method for training nursing students, particularly when resources are limited, even compared to other clinical learning methods. According to Jacobsen, Sandsleth, and Gonzalez, senior nursing students can mentor their peers at lower levels of their studies [2]. This approach is known as peer group clinical mentorship, where senior students provide educational support and act as role models. Equally, peer group clinical mentorship helps enhance academic and clinical performance, interpersonal connections, and attitudes towards the clinical setting.

Globally, there is a change in paradigm learning, and there has been a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning [3]. Notably, student-centred learning provides opportunities for nursing students to learn actively and independently, acquire such skills, and encourage continuous learning throughout one's life. Hence, the peer group clinical mentorship is strongly recommended as a crucial clinical teaching and learning strategy for socialising nursing student mentee into nursing, especially in a resource-stricken setting [1, 4]. Thus, Wong and colleagues argued that peer group clinical mentorship is essential, especially for nursing students who encounter challenges in meeting the theoretical and clinical requirements of nursing education and training [5].

Nursing education programmes face significant challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, congested clinical teaching sites, and a shortage of practice nurses and nurse educators [6]. On the other hand, time constraints, attitude, shortage of practice nurses and nurse educators, including workload and patient-care demands, are among the factors nursing students are not adequately mentored during clinical learning [4, 7, 8]. These challenges require effective and impactful clinical teaching and learning strategies that can efficiently benefit an increasing number of nursing students. The effectiveness of the peer group clinical mentorship as a peer teaching and learning strategy is well-documented [9, 10]. World Nursing Report emphasized ten critical actions for improving nursing practice and training [11]. For example, Nursing education and practice should align with national health priorities to ensure nurses are effectively equipped, as highlighted in critical issues 4, 6, and 7. This implies providing adequate clinical support to ensure professionalism and competence, which must be prioritised and enforced. Subsequently, to ensure Africa's transformation into a powerhouse for the future in line with the African Union Agenda 2063, adequate training of nursing students for future practice should be achieved. The Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4 also intend to ensure inclusive education, health, and well-being for all. This implies that various clinical teaching and learning strategies, such as peer group clinical mentoring programmes, should be employed. This strategy is cost-effective and feasible, especially for resource stricken Nursing Education Institutions.

The rationale for the study is based on the essential role of peer group clinical mentoring in preparing nursing student mentees and mentors to

enhance clinical learning, provide clinical support, and promote clinical competence and professionalism. Thus, Foolchand and Maritz assert that one of the significant challenges facing nursing education in the 21st century is preparing student nurses for complex healthcare environments and ensuring they are clinically competent to practice in these settings [12]. Thus, this paper aimed to explore the significance of peer group clinical mentorship in the resource stricken, particularly in the specific Nursing Education Institution.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This paper employed a Qualitative Retrospective Case Study to understand how significant a peer group clinical mentorship for nursing student mentee is, particularly in resource-stricken Nursing Education Institutions [13]. A qualitative retrospective case study is a comprehensive investigation that explores the recollected knowledge of a particular social group [14-16]. Notably, to verify and complete the required sections of this qualitative manuscript, the COREQ checklist was used. [17].

2.2 Study Setting

The study was conducted at a public Nursing Education Institution in the North-West province. The institution offered the Bachelor of Nursing Science program, and at the time of the study, it was accredited under Regulation 425. Currently, the institution is accredited under Regulation 174 to train nursing student mentees, leading to registration in the

Professional Nurse and Midwife categories by the South African Nursing Council (SANC) [18].

2.3 Population and Sampling

This study employed a non-probability purposive random sampling method to select 51 nursing students based on their experiences regarding the significance of the peer group clinical mentorship. Notably, 72 first year and 56 second-year nursing students registered for the Bachelor of Nursing Science programme under Regulation 425, as prescribed by SANC. This study did not include third and fourth-year nursing students, as they were senior nursing students who served as mentors during peer group clinical mentoring sessions at various clinical sites. In this study, the principle of data saturation was employed to determine the sample size [19]. The researcher only stopped collecting data when no new information was obtained.

3 Measures to ensure Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the research was ensured by applying the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, in accordance with the rigorous standards set by Lincoln and Guba [13, 20]. To ensure credibility, the World Café data collection method was utilized. This method encouraged independent leaders to provide clarification and encouraged active participation of student mentees in group discussions. Significantly, independent leaders were responsible for facilitating discussions and ensuring proper ownership.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to achieve the transferability of this research. The sample selection was based on the nursing students' experiences regarding the importance of peer group clinical mentorship at a specific Nursing Education Institution. The study achieved dependability by allowing nursing students to share their combined experiences, as recommended by Koen and colleagues [21]. World Café sessions were used to collect data in this study, while group leaders ensured that meticulous notes were taken to achieve confirmability.

4 Ethical Consideration

In this study, to maintain ethical standards, the study ensured confidentiality and anonymity by avoiding any mention of nursing student mentee's names. This study sought ethical clearance from the North-West University Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-00027-19-A1). Notably, no coercion was exerted on nursing student mentees who participated in the study. Participation in this study was voluntary, and the nursing student mentee's right to self-determination was respected. Approval was requested from the School of Nursing Science Director to gather information from nursing students being mentored. The mentees were given an informed consent document containing all pertinent information before agreeing to participate in the research.

5 Data Collection

The data collection method employed in this research involved the use of World Café. A semi-structured schedule was followed in line with Gibbs' Reflective Cycle [22]. The World Café method is an effective and

engaging approach that facilitates meaningful conversations. It is a valuable process that encourages collaborative discussions. This method assisted nursing student mentees in reflecting and describing their experiences regarding the significance of peer group clinical mentorship. The primary researcher conducted two World Café sessions with a total of 51 participants, 27 and 24 per session, respectively in September 2019. The study followed the six design principles of the World Café method [23].

6 Data Analysis

For this study, Four Levels of Analysis, derived from the Indigenous Health Research Framework proposed by Pienaar, was employed to bring meaning to the collected data [24]. These levels helped to organise, review, and interpret the data to gain insights and identify patterns. The concepts were derived from the nursing student mentees' words in level one. More specifically, the significance of clinical mentorship from peers, as perceived by the mentees, was highlighted. While in level two, with the help of the participants, the researcher categorised similar concepts into groups and then organised those groups into themes, creating a logical pattern. In level three, the researcher used intuitive deduction to follow up on this level, resulting in the emergence of new patterns of data. Lastly, a pattern or storyline was identified in level four, defining the significance embedded in the provision of the peer group clinical mentorship for nursing student mentee.

7 Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 delineates the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings of the study.

TABLE 1: Themes and sub-themes surfaced from the data analysis.

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Professionalism	1.1. Professional Socialising 1.2. Ethical Practices 1.3. Minimised Occupational Incidences
2. Clinical Competence	2.1. Clinical Demonstration and Practices of Skills
3. Improved Psycho-social well-being	3.1. Improved self-esteem & self-confidence 3.2. Academic performance 3.3. Reduced drop-out and improved clinical attendance

Theme 1: Professionalism

Three sub-themes emerged: professional socialising, ethical practices, and minimised occupational incidences.

Sub-theme 1.1: Professional Socialising

Nursing students mentees postulate that, “*undergraduate peer group clinical mentoring programme creates rapport among undergraduate nursing students across all levels*”. Furthermore, mentorships create a space for nursing students to interact professionally and socialize with one another and their mentors.

Sub-theme 1.2: Ethical Practices

Learner nurse mentees allude that peer group clinical mentorship is significant as they are “*able to reduce clinical accidents as juniors and*

assist to implement ethical practices and to decide if we still want to continue with the nursing programme or not.”

Sub-theme 1.3: Minimised Occupational Incidences

According to nursing students mentees, the peer group clinical mentorship is significant as mentees are *“able to reduce clinical accidents as juniors and assist to implement ethical practices and to decide if we still want to continue with the nursing programme or not.”*

Theme 2: Clinical Competence

One sub-themes emerged: Clinical Demonstration and Practices of skills.

Sub-theme 2.1: Clinical Demonstration and Practices of Skills

Participants discussed the importance of peer group clinical mentorship during clinical learning as mentors demonstrate various clinical skills. Furthermore, they are provided with an opportunity to practice clinical skills. According to them, *“clinical peer mentors assist us with the attainment of clinical competency through skills demonstrations”*.

Theme 3: Improved Psycho-social well-being

Notably, under this theme, three sub-themes emerged, improved self-esteem and self-confidence, academic performance and reduced drop-out.

Sub-theme 3.1: Improved self-esteem and self-confidence

It emerged that the peer group clinical mentorship is playing a very crucial role in *“preparing mentees psychosocially, improves self-esteem and confidence”* during clinical learning.

Sub-theme 3.2: Reduced nursing students drop-out and Improved clinical attendance.

According to participants in this study, the peer group clinical mentorship “*reduces anxiety on the first day of the clinical placement and it is easier to learn from peers and it is less intimidating.*” This helps to maintain the training of aspiring nursing students in the nursing programme.

8 Discussion

This paper explored and described the experiences of nursing student mentee regarding the significance of the peer group clinical mentorship during clinical learning at selected resource-stricken Nursing Education Institution in the North-West Province of South Africa. The findings of this study denote that peer group clinical mentorship is essential in providing clinical support to mentees, with senior nursing students playing a crucial role in this process. Similarly, literature examination highlights that peer group clinical mentorship enhances the nursing student mentee's professionalism, creating an ideal clinical learning environment [25, 26]. Shahr, Yazdani and Afshar argued that peer group clinical mentorship is crucial for professional socialising nursing student mentee into nursing and attaining knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and norms [27]. Therefore, implementing a peer group clinical mentoring program is imperative to effectively enhance the clinical teaching and learning of nursing student mentees in the face of a persistent shortage of practice nurses and educators.

This study's participants allude that peer group clinical mentorship plays a crucial role in fostering ethical conduct among mentees during clinical

learning. Congruently, in the study conducted by Moon and Chang among nurses, ethical practice is emphasised as a hallmark of the nursing profession. [28]. Therefore, peer group clinical mentorship must be implemented as an essential teaching and learning approach to promote ethical nursing practice, which serves as the foundation of the nursing profession. Consequently, South African Nursing Council emphasize the code of ethics as it reminds all nurses of their responsibilities towards individuals, families, groups, and communities [29]. Notably, ethical practice maintains high professional standards in clinical settings.

The findings of this study further highlighted that peer group clinical mentorship minimised occupational incidences among nursing student mentees. Similarly, the qualitative study conducted among nursing students in the Limpopo province emphasises the significance of peer group clinical mentorship. The findings suggest that peer group clinical mentorship helps ease the concerns of nursing student mentees experiencing increased occupational health risks [30]. On the contrary, the cross-sectional study conducted among nursing students found that insufficient clinical mentoring by nursing staff and preceptors equally contributed to nursing students' exposure to HIV and TB [31]. Notably, lack of clinical mentoring could be attributed to various factors, including a shortage of nurses. Despite these challenges, clinical teaching and learning of nursing student mentees is crucial. Hence, Ntho strongly recommends that peer group clinical mentorship must be a mandatory part of the portfolio of evidence that student mentors submit for a summative assessment [32]. This will effectively encourage participation and reward student mentors for their efforts.

Also, it emerged that peer group clinical mentorship assists nursing students in improving clinical skills as mentors demonstrate skills while mentees practice in their presence. Peer-group clinical mentorship improves clinical competence. Scholars corroborate the findings of this study as they widely acknowledge that peer group clinical mentorship assists nursing student mentees in developing clinical competence. [1, 4, 33, 34]. Conversely, the significance of the peer group clinical mentorship is aligned with integrating theory into the practice as nursing student mentees are honing clinical skills demonstrated by mentors [12].

The findings of this study revealed that participating in peer group clinical mentorship improved the psycho-social well-being of nursing student mentee, including self-esteem and confidence. Marino and colleagues as well argue that mentoring is an essential environmental factor that can foster individual's resilience [35]. Several studies highlighted the positive association between peer group clinical mentorship relations and self-esteem, including self-confidence [35-37]. Moreover, the literature examination suggests that peer group clinical mentorship improve nursing student mentees academic performances, enthusiasm, and increase retention rates [7, 25, 34]. Nursing Education Institutions should create clear guidelines for effective peer group clinical mentorship. These guidelines should aim to establish a framework for effective clinical mentoring and elaborate on the roles and responsibilities of involved stakeholders (nurse educators, clinical practice nurses, and the nursing education directorate, including representatives from both peer mentors and mentees). Notably, providing inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities for nursing students can ensure that future nurses are clinically competent,

significantly contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims to promote good health and well-being for all.

9 Limitation of the study

The study was conducted only in one campus of the Nursing Education Institution in North-West Province, thus employed a case study research design. The results cannot be generalized to other campuses.

10 Conclusion

Despite the poorly implemented peer group clinical mentorship in resource-stricken nursing education institutions, the findings of this research showed that peer group clinical mentorship is a vital clinical learning and teaching approach in ensuring competence and professionalism among nursing students.

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