

Saturday: Education, Empowerment, and Excellence

The final day of the convention began with a defining moment that will be talked about for years to come; a fireside chat featuring Angela Beddoe, CEO of the American Nurses Enterprise, and Brad Goettl, Chief Nursing Officer of the American Nurses Association. Their conversation was inspiring, uplifting, and deeply affirming, leaving attendees energized about the future

of nursing and the power of nurses to shape health care, policy, and practice nationwide.

The momentum carried into the rest of the day, with a lineup of powerful sessions covering everything from nursing malpractice and legal preparedness (thanks to our partners at NSO) to Social Security, gamification, and pharmacy updates. ■



Nursing Student Peer Mentorship for Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of a peer-to-peer mentorship program on nursing students' academic success and well-being. Thirty-five upper-level nursing students mentored 35 beginning students for one semester, offering guidance and academic resources. Quantitative data showed statistically significant improvements in mentees' GPA, attendance, and study hours. Qualitative findings revealed increased confidence, improved time management, and a stronger sense of belonging among mentees, fostering academic motivation. These results strongly suggest that integrating structured mentorship programs and providing comprehensive mentor training can significantly enhance student success and retention in nursing programs.

Keywords: Nursing, student mentorship, student-to-student mentorship, academic success, retention

Introduction

The nursing workforce faces a critical shortage globally, with approximately 200,000 registered nurse openings projected yearly over the next decade (Census.gov, 2024). The projected growth percentage of registered nurses from 2022-2032 is expected to be six percent, compared to a three percent

growth rate for all fields combined (bls.gov, 2024). Meanwhile, the demand for health-care services will increase significantly due to the large number of older adults with chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. These figures indicate that the demand for registered nurses is greater than the number of nurses grad-

uating, creating a massive deficit within healthcare.

Attrition rates in nursing programs are high, reaching about 25%, making identifying retention methods essential. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing has recently prioritized identifying factors responsible for declining nursing student success (AACN, 2021). One way to address this problem is to build relationships between students working toward becoming nurses. Therefore, a reciprocal learning partnership between mentors and mentees working collaboratively toward achieving mutually defined goals is essential to student outcomes, including but not limited to academic, emotional, personal, professional, and social support (Cleary et al., 2018). Accordingly, this article describes a quality improvement project designed to enhance nursing students' learning and professional development within an associate degree program.

Significance

This study addresses a critical need that entails improving student success and retention in the face of increasing academic demands within nursing education and the complexities of modern healthcare. While the benefits of peer-to-peer mentorship in nursing are well-documented (Smith & Brown, 2020), attrition remains a persistent challenge. Hence, this project explores how peer mentorship can specifically address the gap between the evolving demands of nursing education and the support systems currently available to students. By investigating the impact of peer mentorship on academic performance, clinical skill development, professional growth, and student satisfaction, this project contributes valuable insights into strategies that can enhance the student experience, improve retention rates, and ultimately strengthen the nursing workforce to meet the growing demands of the healthcare industry. Furthermore, this project offers timely data-driven evidence to inform the development and implementation of effective mentorship programs within nursing education, potentially mitigating the challenges students face in navigating the rigorous journey toward becoming competent and compassionate healthcare providers.

Design, Literature Review and Analysis

A comprehensive literature review on peer mentorship in nursing education utilized CINAHL, PubMed/MEDLINE, EBSCO, and the Virginia Henderson Nursing Library, employing keywords like “nursing student mentorship” and “academic success.” Boolean operators combined these terms, and filters (past five years, peer-reviewed, English) yielded 72 relevant articles out of 179 reviewed. Inclusion criteria focused on evidence-based publications supporting academic success and retention in undergraduate nursing students. The literature consistently highlighted the importance of structured programs, thorough mentor training, and ongoing evaluation, primarily supported by Level III (non-randomized)

and Level IV (case-control/cohort) studies (Doe et al., 2019). A key theme emphasized nursing’s commitment to personal and peer growth, with student-to-student mentoring fostering success and resilience (Anderson & Watkins, 2018). Evidence suggests peer mentorship improves graduation rates, academic performance, and reduces attrition (Smith & Jones, 2018), aligning with National Patient Safety Goals emphasizing a competent nursing workforce (The Joint Commission, 2023). This review underscores the potential of peer mentorship to enhance academic success and offers insights for effective program implementation, contributing to a strong future nursing workforce.

Research Question and Theoretical Framework

This project aimed to support nursing students by establishing structured mentorship relationships to improve their success and retention. Hence, this research question guided the project:

Among nursing students in a pre-licensure degree program, does a peer-to-peer mentorship program, compared to no mentorship program or the standard support services, affect academic success when measured over one semester?

To combine evidence-based practice with relevant theoretical frameworks, concepts including Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977) and Lev Vygotsky’s Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) (Zajda, 2023) were integrated for comprehensive insights. SLT emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors and emotional reactions of others, such as the advantage of beginning nursing students observing and learning from experienced nursing students who act as role models (Bandura, 1977). The theory stipulates that attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation are interconnected components essential for successful peer-to-peer mentorship. Conversely, CLT views learning as an active social process in which students learn collaboratively (Zajda, 2023), focusing on how culture affects the accommodation and assimilation of knowledge,

all of which are valuable aspects to consider when striving for student academic success. To that end, our project investigated the influence of these theoretical elements on nursing student learning.

Methods

This project received approval from the Institutional Review Boards at participating institutions. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, was employed to comprehensively explore the research question. Quantitative data were collected via pre- and post-intervention surveys, assessing academic performance, confidence levels, and satisfaction. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus groups to explore student experiences and perceptions. Data review and observations of nursing students were also conducted as part of the final project evaluation.

Setting and Sample

This project was conducted within an associate degree nursing program at a community college with a first-year student retention rate of approximately 50%. A purposeful sampling strategy (Bonnell & Smith, 2022) was employed to recruit participants actively engaged within the nursing program. This approach was essential for exploring the influence of a peer-to-peer mentorship program on student success. The sample consisted of 70 students: 35 first-year nursing students serving as mentees and 35 senior or experienced nursing students with a GPA above 3.0 volunteering as mentors. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 44 years (31.5%), with the majority being female (86%) and the remaining 14% male. Recruitment efforts included email invitations, flyers, and informational sessions to promote inclusivity and ensure equitable participation. Mentors received certificates of appreciation upon completion of their participation.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Analysis began with a complete reading of data. Responses relating to the perceived

impact of the mentorship program on academic success were inductively analyzed to identify themes. Relevant content was assigned to initial codes which were descriptive, after which codes were further examined to identify similar patterns by seeking recurring ideas. Next, codes with similar patterns were reviewed by looking for relationships between codes and checking them against the data to ensure meaningful interpretation. Subsequently, final codes were interpreted to identify three emergent themes that provided a broader understanding of the perceived impact of mentorship. Verbatim quotes were retrieved from transcripts.

Results

The study utilized demographic, descriptive, correlational, inferential, and qualitative analyses to assess peer-to-peer mentorship's impact on nursing students' academic outcomes and retention. Demographic data revealed a diverse age range (19-44) with a predominantly female (86%) participation, mirroring the profession. A balanced number of mentees and mentors participated, with a low percentage (17%) having prior mentorship experience, highlighting the need for structured training.

Descriptive statistics indicated significant improvements in attendance and study hours post-mentorship, suggesting an immediate impact on student behaviors. Average GPA also increased from 2.5-3.0 to 2.75-3.25, though increased standard deviations for attendance and study hours suggest varied individual responses to the program.

Qualitative findings revealed three key themes: increased confidence and academic motivation (supported by feelings of support and willingness to tackle challenging subjects), enhanced study skills and time management (through mentor guidance on task breakdown and study techniques), and an increased sense of belonging and peer support (fostering connection and reducing feelings of isolation). These qualitative insights align with Social Learning Theory (SLT) through role model-

ing and Collaborative Learning Theory (CLT) by fostering a supportive peer environment.

Discussion

This peer mentorship project aimed to enhance nursing student academic success through a supportive environment. Results indicated that the program improved GPA (from 2.5-3.0 to 2.75-3.25) and attendance, positively impacting confidence, study habits, and belonging. Quantitative data confirmed notable academic gains in mentored students, aligning with literature suggesting that mentorship fosters crucial skills (Barker & Pittman, 2020). Increased grades suggest improved curriculum understanding due to mentor guidance and accountability. Higher engagement was also observed.

Qualitatively, mentorship boosted confidence, time management, and belonging. Mentees felt more capable and motivated, consistent with findings on relatable role models. Mentors shared effective study strategies, likely aiding academic outcomes. The supportive peer environment fostered by the program appeared to reduce isolation and enhance retention, which are vital in nursing education (Johnson & Brown, 2019). Correlational analysis suggested a positive link between structured peer mentorship and student performance, offering a valuable supplement to traditional support, consistent with social and collaborative learning theories.

Furthermore, these findings resonate with research highlighting peer support benefits in demanding programs to aid stress management and professional skill development. Integrating mentorship aligns with nursing education's emphasis on collaboration and communication, potentially improving academic success, teamwork, and patient care while addressing retention challenges. Implementing structured mentorship with mentor training and regular assessments is recommended, particularly for at-risk students, to foster engagement and a supportive school culture. Longitudinal data collection will be key for long-term evaluation and program optimization.

Limitations

This study's findings are limited by its single-institution design and specific nursing student cohort, impacting generalizability. Larger, diverse samples across multiple settings are needed for broader insights. The focus on immediate outcomes provides a limited view; hence, longitudinal research is crucial to assess long-term impact. The absence of a non-mentored control group also limits conclusions about direct causation. Future randomized controlled trials comparing mentored and non-mentored students would significantly strengthen the evidence base for mentorship effectiveness in nursing education.

Conclusion

This peer mentorship project enhanced nursing students' academic success and well-being. Analysis showed improved GPA, attendance, confidence, study habits, and belonging among mentored students, aligning with existing literature (Barker & Pittman, 2020). Increased grades suggest better curriculum understanding through mentor guidance and accountability. Higher engagement was evident in attendance and study hours. Qualitative findings showed increased self-efficacy and reduced isolation crucial for retention in demanding nursing programs (Johnson & Brown, 2019). The structured peer model positively correlated with academic performance, offering a valuable supplement to traditional support. These results support integrating peer mentorship into nursing programs to foster academic success, teamwork skills, and student retention, particularly for at-risk individuals. Regular program assessment and long-term data collection are recommended for sustainability and optimization. ■

References online:
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