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Attitudes of Registered Nurses Towards Nursing Students in Clinical Settings at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Clinical exposure is fundamental to nursing education, offering student nurses critical opportunities for skill acquisition, professional socialization, and practical application of theoretical knowledge. This study examines the attitudes of registered nurses toward nursing students during clinical placements at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive cross-sectional design, data were collected from 240 registered nurses across eight clinical wards using a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate attitude patterns and associated influencing factors. The results indicate that a majority of registered nurses exhibited positive attitudes, characterized by a willingness to mentor, supervise, and collaborate with nursing students. However, certain challenges were identified, including perceived increases in workload, student absenteeism, and

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concerns about student adherence to professional and ethical standards. Key determinants of nurse attitudes included the perceived clinical competence, communication ability, and adherence to professional dress codes among students. The study underscores the need for structured mentorship programs, regular workshops on ethical conduct, and more clearly defined internship frameworks to strengthen the clinical learning environment. Enhancing nurse-student interactions in clinical settings is essential for improving the quality of nursing education and ensuring the readiness of future nursing professionals for practice.

Keywords: Nurse Attitudes; Clinical Learning Environment; Nursing Education; Student Mentorship; Teaching Hospital Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession has always been clinical-based. Nursing has always emphasized the importance of learning in the clinical environment **(**Okechukwu *et.al.,* 2017). In Nigeria, nursing students spend up to half their Bachelor of nursing programme in clinical learning situations. This is in line with international best practices and requirement with nursing education (Richardson *et al*., 2012). Conversely, the renewed course is now available on the need to reduce the number of clinical hours to encourage more students and reduce the shortage (Gemma, 2019). Yet, Nursing practice is an indispensable part of the nursing education (Dunn & Hansford, 1997) and includes about 50% of the nursing syllabus, which provides chances for nursing students to practically experience their future career, and allows them to take their theoretical knowledge to the real world (Elcigil & Sari, 2008). Clinical experience is a very important tool in nursing where students are exposed to learn practical skills and practice what they have learnt theoretically from the classroom. For learning to occur, providing positive experiences for students during the practice process is essential (Garneau, 2016). However, not all experiences are positive. Quite a good number of them are negative (Clements *et al.,* 2016). Learning experiences in the practice process considerably influences the learning outcome of students into the nursing profession. Although learning outcome is bound to the nature of the overall experience, a considerable role is assigned to the types of humanistic relations that are initiated and fostered between the nurses and the students (Atack *et al.,* 2000). The practising nurses have all experienced the student role and most of them have memories of

clinical experiences that had been both stirring and disappointing. Because of their position in the clinical environment, staff nurses are important contributors to the learning experience of students. Professional and caring interactions between students and staff nurses are vital to augment not only student education but also the outlook of nursing (Porter & willing, 2001). Given the central role of the nurse clinician in student, nurse learning seemed important to understand the attitudes of Registered nurses towards nursing students.

According to the students' handbook (2019) and curriculum for students in the Department of Nursing University of Calabar, students who are in the second year of study in the department to those in their final year (fifth year) are been posted at the middle and/or the end of each semester to University of Calabar Teaching Hospital and other designated settings to obtain clinical knowledge and practice/obtain nursing skills from the already practising nurses. Students are placed for four to six weeks depending on the course requirements. Students who fail to meet with clinical attendance are not to be allowed to write exams on the course and are to repeat the posting (Students Handbook (2019, p.12). However, during the 6 weeks in the clinical settings, these students encounter different nurses and attitudes which either facilitate or discourage the learning process. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the attitude of nurses towards nursing students in clinical settings at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital.

The importance of clinical posting can never be over-emphasised. Although nursing students understand the importance of clinical posting and have a lot of expectations and plans to make the most of it, anxiety, fear of being incompetent, shock poses a serious challenge that requires the practising nurses to show understanding and guide these students to achieve their goals (Bella *et al.*, 2020). Irrespective of these attitudes, students' reaction individually differs. For a student who is new in the clinical setting, series of thoughts as well as fear and anxiety, run concurrently in his/her mind. It is, therefore, the role of the registered nurses to mentor such a student. Unfortunately, this is not always the case as this sounds more theory than practical. Either this is due to a busy job schedule or extrinsic/intrinsic factors which can be attitudinal. The positive attitudes of registered nurses oftentimes do promote learning and build self-confidence. Conversely, negative attitudes will deter a young nurse from learning the cause of lack of confidence as well as scare of continuing the profession. The study aims to examine the attitudes of registered

nurses towards nursing students in clinical settings of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital Calabar.

METHODS

Study Area

The research setting can be seen as the physical, social, and cultural sites the researcher conducts the study. The research setting was the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital located in Calabar Municipality; this facility was founded in 1979 and formerly sited at the South East of Calabar. The tertiary facility took off from St. Margaret's Hospital in Moore road located at Southern Calabar but was later moved to its permanent site in February 2012. The hospital undertakes human resource development, treatment of the patient at the specialist level and promotion of scientific knowledge through research. The establishment is headed by the Chief Medical Director to handle the administration and consist of several departments: Medicine and Dentistry, Nursing services, Pharmacy, Medical Laboratory units, Medical records department and the administrative department. The hospital has 24 wards, an intensive care unit (ICU), the main theatre (aside from the obstetric theatre), Diarrhea Treatment and Training Unit (DTTU), Radiography department running 24hour preventive and curative health services on an inpatient and outpatient basis. The choice of this institution for the study was because it is the largest facility that provides training for nursing students and the closest with a large number of Registered Nurses.



Figure 1: Map of Study Area

Research Design

A research design is a set of method and procedures used in collecting and analyzing measures of the variables specified in the problem research (Ajagbe *et al.*, 2014). The research design adopted for this study was descriptive research. Shields & Rangarajan, 2013 opines descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon been studied, the method was considered appropriate for this study because it helps the researcher to collect up-to-date information concerning registered nurses' attitudes towards nursing students to draw the valid conclusion in clinical settings of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar Cross River State.

Target Population

A target population is the total group of individuals from which the sample might be drawn (McLeod, 2019). The target population of this study consists of eight (8) wards with an estimated total of two hundred to two hundred and fifty nurses. Theses wards include female medical ward, male medical ward, male surgical, female surgical ward, Paediatric ward, labour ward, male orthopaedic ward and female orthopaedic ward.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of selecting a representative group from the population under study (McLeod, 2019). The sampling technique adopted was the convenience sampling technique where samples are selected based on availability.

Validity of Instrument

Validity is the ability of an instrument to measure that which it is supposed to measure. There are four types of validity which include construct validity (measures concept), content validity (measure representative of the aims), face Validity (Measures appearance to suit the aims) and criterion validity (measures correspondence to the different test of the same entity) to ensure validity. The method used was the content validity. The instrument was developed based on the study objectives to ensure content validity (Middleton *et al.*, 2019).

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability refers to the consistency of the instrument in measuring the desired parameter when applied elsewhere. The method used was the test-retest methods of reliability measurement which is performed by administering the same test twice over a while to a group of people.

Data Collection

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information and targeted variables in an established system which helps to answer relevant questions and evaluate outcomes (Voung *et al.*, 2018). A self-developed questionnaire was used to assess the attitudes of registered nurses towards nursing students in clinical settings of the University of Calabar teaching hospital Calabar. Data was also collected through structural interactive interviewing and questioning in the Female medical ward, Male medical ward, female surgical ward, male surgical ward, paediatric ward, labour ward, male orthopaedic ward and female orthopaedic ward.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the ethics of research was considered and respected to uphold the rights and dignity of humans, before administration of instrument to obtain data the researcher followed the process of obtaining permission from the hospital authority, consent from her respondents ensuring voluntary participation. Adherence and maintenance of

confidentiality by not exposing data and anonymity. The benefits of the study were explained to the respondent which facilitated their cooperation. The researcher also did not in any way harm the respondents either physically or psychologically and did not influence or impose her opinion on the respondent. All respondents were given free and fair opportunity void of preference thus maintaining equity through the research process.

Data Analysis

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was employed, data generated were analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 28. Frequencies and the simple percentage was used to draw the inference. Questions with a 4-point scale were graded from 4-1 using likert scale.

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter deals with data analysis and result presentation. Two hundred and forty-two (242) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, but two hundred and forty (240) copies were properly completed and returned, giving a return rate of 99.2%. Data generated were subjected to statistical analysis and results were presented according to research objectives

Table 1: Socio–Demographic Data of the Respondents N =240

S /N	Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Respondent's Highest Educational Qualification		
	School of Nursing	80	33.3%
	Degree	136	56.7%
	Master's Degree	11	4.6%
	Others	13	5.4%
	Total	240	100%
2.	Age Group		
	20-24 years	24	10.6%
	25 -29 years	101	42.1%
	30 -34 years	62	25.8%
	35 -39 years	33	13.8%
	40 years and above	20	8.3%
	Total	240	100.0
3.	Gender		
	Male	40	16.7%
	Female	200	83.3%
	Total	240	100%

S /N	Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage
4.	Years in service		
	1-15years	221	92.1%
	15 -30 years	19	7.9%
	Total	240	100%
5.	Ward		
	Male Medical Ward	15	6.3%
	Female Medical Ward	58	24.2%
	Male Surgical Ward	26	10.8%
	Female Surgical Ward	31	12.9%
	Paediatrics	34	14.2%
	Labour Ward	36	15.0%
	Male Orthopaedic Ward	23	9.6%
	Female Orthopaedic Ward	17	7.1%
	Total	240	100%
6.	Designation of respondents		
	NO I	88	36.7%
	SNO	94	39.2%
	PNO	21	8.8%
	CNO	17	7.1%
	ACNO	20	8.3%
	DDNS	0	0.0%
	Total	240	100%

Keys

NO: Nursing officer

SNO: Senior Nursing Officer

PNO: Principal Nursing Officer

ACNO: Assistant Chief Nursing Officer

CNO: Chief Nursing Officer

DDNS**:** Deputy Director of Nursing Science

Table 1 above shows the representation of the respondent's socio-demographic data. Considering their highest educational qualification, one hundred and thirty-six 136(56.7%) out of 240 respondents possess Degree certificate, while 80 (33.3%) are Nurses from the School of Nursing, 11 (4.6%) are Nurses with Master Degree whereas 13(5.6%) in fields other than nursing. Those within the Age group of 25-29 recorded the highest Percentage of 101(42.1%) while those within the Age Group of 40 above recorded the lowest percentage 20(8.3%). Gender wise, the table revealed that 200(83.3%) are females while 40(16.7%) are males. The table also showed that 221(92.1%) respondents have

worked for less than 15 years while 19(7.9%) participants have been in service for more than 15 years. Ninety-four 94(39.2%) and 88(36.7%) out of 240 respondents are Senior Nursing Officer and Nursing Officer I as against 17(7.1%) Chief Nursing Officer that participated.

Table 2: Attitudes of Registered Nurses towards Nursing Students on Clinical Settings of UCTH (N=240)

S/N	ITEMS	Strongly Agreed N (%)	Agreed N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Strongly Disagree N (%)
7	Nursing students conducts are satisfactory in the clinical area	74(30.8)	99(41.3)	55(22.9)	12(5.0)
8	It is always good having nursing students around in the ward	121(50.4)	113(47.1)	6(2.5)	0(0.0)
9	Nursing students demonstrate competency in patient care while on posting in the ward	54(22.5)	122(50.8)	56(23.3)	8(3.3)
10	If I were sick, I would like to be cared for by nursing students	45(18.8)	116(48.3)	59(24.6)	20(8.3)
11	I always have mixed feelings relating to nursing students	23(9.6)	73(30.4)	100(41.7)	44(18.3)
12	I do not tolerate indiscipline from nursing students hence I report them immediately to the ward charge	57(23.8)	81(33.8)	75(31.3)	27(11.3)
	Total	**62.3(26.0)**	**100.1(42.0)**	**58.5(24.3)**	**18.8(7.7)**

Table 2 describes Item numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 on the questionnaire which was constructed to look at Attitudes of Registered Nurses towards Nursing Students in Clinical Settings of UCTH. Approximately forty-one percent 99 (41.3%), and forty-eight percent116 (48.3%) agreed to the statement that "Nursing students conduct are satisfactory in the clinical area", and the statement "If I were sick, I would like to be cared for by nursing students" respectively. Meanwhile, more than half of the study participants 121(50.4%) strongly agreed with the statement that "It is always good having nursing students around in the ward" furthermore, 122(50.8%) agreed to the statement that "Nursing students demonstrate competency in patient care while on posting in the ward" and 81(33.8%) also agreed to the statement that "I do not tolerate indiscipline from nursing students hence I report them immediately to the ward charge". For another attitude oriented question, the respondents 100(41.7%) disagreed with the statement "I always have mixed feelings relating to nursing students" almost half of the overall responses 100.1 (42.0%) about Attitudes of Registered Nurses towards Nursing Students on Clinical Settings of UCTH indicating a positive perception of the variable of interest.

Table 3: Factors Influencing the Attitudes of Nursing Students in Clinical Settings of UCTH

N=240

S/N	ITEMS	Strongly Agreed N (%)	Agreed N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Strongly Disagree N (%)
13	Nursing students assist me in my duty	129(53.8)	98(40.8)	8(3.3)	2(0.8)
14	Nursing students show readiness to learning	89(37.1)	136(56.7)	15(6.3)	0(0.0)
15	Most nursing students are respectful	113(47.1)	122(50.8)	5(2.1%)	0(0)
16	Nursing students are smart in carrying out the assigned task	85(35.3)	121(48.2)	31(15.3)	3(1.2)
17	Nursing students always appear in approved uniform and dress code	119(49.6)	93(38.8)	26(10.8)	2(0.8)
18	The communication skills of nursing students are satisfactory	90(37.5)	106(44.2)	43(17.1)	3(1.3)
19	They maintained a good relationship with patients in the ward as well as other colleagues	101(42.1)	119(49.6)	20(8.3)	0(0.0)
20	Nursing students work hard even at odd shifts	71(29.6)	89(37.1)	66(27.5)	14(5.8)
21	I feel disappointed when nursing students cannot perform a task	72(30.0)	91(37.9)	51(21.3)	26(10.8)
22	Absenteeism among nursing students gets me angry	70(29.2)	123(51.3)	38(15.8)	9(3.8)
23	It is stressful dealing with nursing students	37(15.4)	91(37.9)	94(39.2)	18(7.5)
24	I enjoy teaching nursing students	127(52.9)	101(42.1)	9(3.8)	3(1.3)
25	Most of the nursing students are not confident and assertive	58(24.2)	108(45.0)	62(25.8)	12(5.0)
26	Nursing students are clinically unskilled	35(14.6)	71(29.9)	108(45.0)	26(10.8)
27	Nursing students do not maximize their training periods	54(22.5)	80(33.3)	76(31.7)	30(12.5)
28	Possession of little or no compliance to nursing ethics and rules	44(18.3)	86(35.8)	73(30.4)	37(15.4)
	Total	**80.9(33.7)**	**102.2(42.4)**	**45.3(17.7)**	**11.6(4.8)**

Table 3 describes the Factors Influencing the Attitudes of Nursing Students in Clinical Settings of UCTH which were emphasized on items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28. From above, the majority of responses 129(53.8%) strongly agreed with the statement "Nursing students assist me in my duty". Also, more than of the participants 136(56.7%) agreed with the statement "Nursing students show readiness to learning". Moreover, 122(50.8%) strongly agreed with

the statement "Most nursing students are respectful", and almost half of the participants 121(48.2%) agreed with the statement "Nursing students are smart in carrying out the assigned task". Almost half of the participants 119(49.6%) strongly agree and 93(38.8%) agreed on the question that Nursing students always appear in approved uniform and dress code. Furthermore, the study participants agreed that the communication skills of nursing students are satisfactory 106(44.2%). Respondents agreed to the statement that they maintained a good relationship with patients in the ward as well as other colleagues 119(49.6%). The study participants 89(37.1%) and 91(37.9%) agreed that "Nursing students work hard even at odd shifts" and that "they feel disappointed when nursing students cannot perform a task" respectively. Likewise, more than half of the respondents123(51.3%) agreed that "Absenteeism among nursing students gets me angry". The respondents 94(39.2%) and 108(45.0%) disagree "that It is stressful dealing with nursing students" and also disagree that "Nursing students are clinically unskilled "respectively. Furthermore, the study participants 80(33.3%) agree with the statement that "Nursing students do not maximize their training periods". Likewise, respondent 86(35.8%) agree with the statement that nursing students possess little or no compliance to nursing ethics and rules as shown in the table above.

DISCUSSION

The gender associated responses revealed that there were more female nurses than males. The concept of nursing in Nigeria is mostly associated with the female gender, so this is of no surprise. This occurrence agrees with Obi (2014) who researched perception and attitudes of clinical nurses at federal teaching hospital Abakaliki towards university-based nursing education in Nigeria (85.1**%**) and also agrees with the work of Richard (2007) who carried out a study in South Africa on the perception of registered nurses about continuing formal education. However, in Nigeria, observation has shown that male involvement in nursing is increasing now that nursing education has been moved into the university. In the area of respondent's highest qualification, the majority held Degree Certificate as their highest qualification. This could be attributed to the fact that nurses in most parts of Nigeria find it difficult to get in-service training to further their education and this is one of the major problems that prevent them from studying further; hence many of them remain "degree holder" even after many years of initial qualification. Olasehinde-Williams (2003), postulated that there is a need to supplement initial education with in-service courses so that individuals who already have jobs should be able to develop their knowledge for better professional practices. Part-time programmes, she said provide opportunities for acquiring status, while at the same time retaining full–time job. A tertiary health institution such as UCTH is expected to have more post basic nurses to improve skill and

patient care services. Olubiyi (2009), reports that WHO's studies show that nurses with more education deliver the most cost-effective care. Based on this observation globally, nurses are increasingly seeking higher education and this trend should be encouraged.

The participants who have worked for less than fifteen years were two hundred and twenty-one (221) in number and this is the largest group that participated. This indicates that a good number of the nurses at UCTH have not had enough working experience and this may affect care practices in the hospital. This is equally seen in the designation of participants where 94(39.2%) were Senior Nursing Officer and 88(36.7%) Nursing Officer I which formed the largest groups. This indicates that the majority of the nurses are young and inexperienced. The fact that 101(42.1%) fall within the age range of 25-29 presents an issue as this represents the age range of young school leavers who have not had enough working experiences. This is in line with Denise (2011) who found that the mean age of nurses in the USA is less than 35years, suggesting that the nursing population is getting younger. The finding that a good number of the nurses are younger and inexperienced does not agree with the statement by White (2001) that younger women in the USA are declining to choose nursing as a career. The case seems to be different in Nigeria.

Nursing is a practical discipline, in which students must be present in clinical settings to cooperate with nurses in the provision of patient care. Poor interpersonal communication between nurses and nursing students adversely affects clinical learning. Therefore, the attitudes of nurses and nursing students toward each other remarkably influence the promotion of clinical learning (Slaughter-Smith, 2012; Chuan & Barnett, 2012).

An investigation of staff nurses' attitudes toward nursing students demonstrated that many nurses agreed on numerous questions. The overall attitude related questions had a high percentage of agreed responses which indicates positive attitudes towards nursing students in clinical settings of the UCTH. This study is in line with the work of Obi (2014) on the Perception and Attitudes of Clinical Nurses at Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki towards University-Based Nursing Education in Nigeria and disagrees with the work of Parvin *et al.* (2015) on Nurses' attitude towards attendance of nursing students in the clinical setting in Shahrekord.

The respondents of this study agreed that student nurses show respect to colleagues. This finding disagrees with the statements by Uwah (2011) that generic nurses regard their seniors (clinical nurses) as inferior. No wonder Barros and Elia (2009) posited that attitude

causes overt behaviour and determines what an individual perceives, thinks or does. This finding agrees with that of Matsumura *et al.* (2004) whose study revealed that staff nurses (clinical nurses) in the USA have ambivalent (mixed) attitude towards Baccalaureate nurses. A positive attitude of clinical nurses in UCTH could be an indication that regular orientation in form of seminars/workshops has been instilled among the nurses, especially clinical nurses, where issues are addressed to create a conducive working environment that will favour the nursing practice.

However, the result of the current study also revealed that the nurse graduates are poor in maintaining nursing ethics and etiquettes. The finding is in line with the work of Obi (2014) on the perception and attitudes of clinical nurses at federal teaching hospital Abakaliki towards University-Based Nursing Education in Nigeria. These form a strong indication that Student nurse needs more enlightenment on professional culture, assertiveness and professional ethics /etiquette. This will create a conducive working environment that will favour better nursing practice and patient recovery.

The Nursing students were found to be competent in performing most of the core nursing jobs including being able to carry out procedures within the appropriate time, making accurate nursing diagnoses and evaluating the results of nursing care. The overall average factor-related questions had a high percentage of agreed response on clinical performance of student nurses which is an indication that a conducive working environment and mutual working relation will bring about better nursing practices which will favour patients, the nursing profession & the entire health care system. This finding is in line with Denise (2011), who reported that the overall clinical performance of nurse graduates in the USA was perceived by registered critical care nurses as being greater than expected. She reported that all the activities on a 6-dimension scale of nursing performance were carried out at least occasionally. Denise (2011), stated that choosing appropriate preceptors for nurse graduates is important and it allows for adequate performance and growth of these nurse graduates. Secondly, the pairing of a new graduate with an experienced clinical nurse can result in performance adequacy.

The study participant also agreed with the statement that the communication skills of nursing students are satisfactory which agrees with the Findings of Negarande (2012) research performed in Iran suggesting that the communication skills of senior nursing

students are at a moderate level. Poor interpersonal communication between nurses and nursing students adversely affects clinical learning

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study supported that a positive relationship between registered nurses and nursing students has a positive effect on the nursing student's attitude toward the clinical experience. In their profession, nurses are under tremendous stress due to different factors, such as staff shortage, heavy workload and continuous patient care. Nurses are required to cooperate with nursing students even without satisfaction. As such, nursing managers must provide a supportive environment for educational interventions and assessment of the attitudes of nurses toward these students, emphasizing the proper interaction between nurses and clinical instructors. Promotion of the attitudes of nurses and nursing students toward clinical education could facilitate learning, create diversity in clinical opportunities, provide adequate equipment, and provide sufficient time for performing care procedures. Students and nurses need to accept each other as legitimate partners in the health care team with the goal of not only safe, effective, holistic patient care but for the development of the nursing profession.

Recommendation

Base on the major findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Preceptorship/mentorship in the nursing practice and internship programme after graduation are necessary for effective performance in the nursing profession to enhance the clinical performance of nursing graduates.
- Nurse leaders and stakeholders should constantly organize workshops/seminars to address issues of nursing ethics and etiquettes as this will improve nurses' relationship and provide a conducive working environment which favours nursing learning and practice.

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