

## Student Nurse's Clinical Learning Environment: Clinical Teachers' Perspective

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### Abstract

*The study attempted to answer the following research questions; what factors influence student nurses' clinical learning during their clinical practice allocation and how does clinical learning environment influence student nurses learning? A phenomenological approach methodology was used to conduct the study. Eight clinical teachers at Rusangu University in Monze participated in study. The findings showed that study participants provided teaching and learning support to student nurses on attachment and integrated theory into practice by either discussing conditions or observing and demonstrating procedures when students were in the clinical areas. They also stated that communication was also good among the school staff and students. The study revealed that students face challenges during students' placements in their respective clinical sites. The main challenges included lack of medical surgical supplies, equipment and stationary s and students congesting the ward coming from different schools of nursing. This made teaching and learning for student's difficulty. The study suggests a necessity to use to look into the challenges faced by the clinical teachers in order to facilitate learning in clinical practice and creating a conducive clinical learning environment.*

**Keywords:** Student nurses, Clinical learning environment, clinical teachers, Perspective.

### Introduction

An ideal clinical learning environment allow students to apply 'theory to clinical practice and develop psychomotor skills required to enable them provide comprehensive quality care to clients and patients. In clinical practice, many factors may affect students learning. Clinical learning environments include hospitals, school clinics, health departments, hospice units, and other health care settings utilized for student learning (Steivy et al, 2015). There are many factors that can influence student nurses' clinical learning environment however, this paper discusses the Clinical teachers' perspectives on factors influencing the students' clinical learning environment. The clinical teachers play a major role in empowering students' learning, bridging the theory-practice gap, enhances their sense of responsibility, and provides them with opportunities to demonstrate nursing competence (Steivy et al, 2015).

### Methods

This was an exploratory phenomenological study that was carried out at Rusangu University, Monze campus focusing on the clinical practical experiences of student nurses allocated to the clinical area covering the following practicum at different clinical settings. Study population included the Eight (8) Clinical teachers involved in the clinical supervision of students. Purposive sampling method was used to select the study sample and data were collected using in-depth interviews. Participants were interviewed until data saturation appeared to have been reached by means of repeating themes. Data was analysed using themes. The interviews were tape recorded, taken down in notes and verbatim transcriptions were made. No adverse events occurred. Participants did not receive any form of compensation at the conclusion of the interviews. All participants were informed of the objective and design of the

study. The participants were asked of their consent and were assured of the confidentiality of the information to be shared. Especially on having to audiotape the interviews, they were requested to sign a consent form. Emphatically, their right on having to withdraw at any stage of the study was stressed. The study was conducted after approval was obtained from ERES converge (Research Ethics Committee) and in addition permission to conduct the study was obtained from Dean of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Demographic data of the participants**

A sample of 8 Clinical supervisors was chosen for the study. This consisted of (5) females and (3) males. (7) Participants were nurses and (1) was a clinical officer. Their ages ranged from 25 to 45 and their work experience ranged from 5 years to 25 years. Narrative interviews were conducted by the researcher. During the interviews four major themes emerged from the discussions on factors influencing student nurse's clinical learning during their clinical practice. These included teaching and learning support provided to student nurses on attachment, integration of theory into practice by the clinical educators, interpersonal relationships among school staff, students and clinical staff and challenges affecting student learning in the clinical areas.

### **Teaching and learning support provided to students' nurses on attachment**

The support given to students by the nursing staff in the clinical setting plays an important role in the achievement of their learning objectives (Chaun and Barnett, 2012, Nash et al 2009, Dube et al, 2018). Support from nursing staff in the clinical area can be a source of motivation to nursing students as they feel welcome and apart of the team, thereby helping them with learning (Murphy et al 2012, Kelly, 2006). Many participants expressed that they provided teaching and learning support to student nurses on attachment. This is reflected in the following statements by two participants:

*"I provide support to students inform of discussing common conditions on the ward when it's not busy."* (Male participant).

*"I also observe and explain procedures for students when they are with me"*. (Female x Book

### **Integration of theory and practice**

According to Vermaak (2013), integration of theory into practice is cardinal in nursing education for the development of competences and critical thinking and it is a reason for clinical placement. However, integration cannot be possible without a conducive clinical learning environment. All the participants indicated that they integrated theory into practice by either discussing conditions or observing and demonstrating procedures when students were in the clinical areas. Bedside teaching and demonstrations on actual patients help students to integrate theory into practice as stated by one participant in this narrative:

*"When students are in the clinical areas, we conduct bedside teaching and do demonstrations on patients"*. (Female Participant).

### **Interpersonal relationship and communication between school staff, students and clinical staff**

Research has demonstrated that an effective learning environment requires good communication and collaboration between the student, mentor, unit manager, clinical facilitators (Vermark, 2013). Poor interpersonal relationships with clinical staff and preceptors can be barriers to learning within the clinical environment (Melincavage, 2011, Shabana et al, 2012, Lawal et al, 2015), however, most of the clinical supervisors in this study said that they had a good relationship with both the school staff and students. They also stated that communication was also good among the school staff and students. This is expressed in the following statement by one participant:

*"Yes, we enjoy a good relationship and communication with the school staff as well as the students."* (Female participant).

### **Challenges affecting student learning in the clinical areas**

The findings show that students face challenges during students' placements in their respective clinical sites. The main challenges include lack of medical surgical supplies,

equipment and stationery and nursing student congestion in the clinical areas. This made teaching and learning for student's difficulty. This is indicated in these responses:"

*"Okay challenges are many, for instance most of the times we lack medical and surgical supplies, stationary for recoding findings like partographs and equipment to use on the wards. Most of the times we have to improvise".* (Male participant).

*"One of the challenges is that there too many students in the on the wards coming from different schools of nursing and we are not sure if they learning anything."* (Female participant).

Existence of barriers to effective clinical practice have also been reported in other studies (Gumuhay, 2019, Awuah-Peasah et al, 2013).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Clinical practice provides opportunity for students to apply the theory to practice. Clinical experience enables nursing students to gain essential skills and provide safe and quality nursing care through real life practice. The findings showed that study participants provided teaching and learning support to student nurses on attachment and integrated theory into practice by either discussing conditions or observing and demonstrating procedures when students were in the clinical areas. They also stated that communication was also good among the school staff and students. The study revealed that students face challenges during students' placements in their respective clinical sites such as lack of medical surgical supplies, equipment and stationery and students congesting the ward coming from different schools of nursing. Taking these factors into consideration would help students develop psychomotor skills and adapt to the professional role.

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### **Authors' contribution**

BK conceptualised the study, collected data, analysed data and drafted the manuscript. CMN

supervised the research process and approved final version of the manuscript.

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